

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF
LD 1751 “An Act to Improve the Growth Management Program Laws”**

OUGHT TO PASS

DATE OF HEARING: Thursday, May 8 2025

Honorable Senator Curry, Honorable Representative Gere, and Distinguished Members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee:

My name is Amanda Bunker, I am a retired community planning consultant (having consulted in Maine for nearly 15 years previously), currently serving as the President of the Maine Association of Planners (MAP). I have been on the MAP Board in some capacity for around the last 10 years.

I offer my testimony to you in support of LD 1751 and in support of our organization, but most importantly as an individual who has worked with the professional Planners in this state for the last 25 years. I am honored to work with so many professional peers who continually reflect integrity and dedication to Maine’s communities and natural environment. Regrettably I am not able to present my testimony in person, but wish I could have expressed to you my sincere hope that you will not overlook the significance of our organization’s collective expertise in this issue.

There is no other profession in the state that works more directly with municipal Comprehensive Planning. Whether a town planner or a planning consultant, we directly experience working with Comprehensive Plans at many different levels, sometimes even as one of the volunteers on our local municipal committee. We have a deep understanding of Comprehensive Planning efforts and how the current law impacts communities of different sizes, and the very important connection to local land use ordinances; we see that they can be a burden in terms of time and funding, but also that when done right they are important in helping communities build their own future through informed decision-making and public participation. It has been known amongst Planners for some time that Maine’s Growth Management Law needed updating, but as MAP is a volunteer-run organization, it had been a difficult time commitment for us.

Earlier 2023-2024 policy efforts did indeed kick-start the process of proposing updates to the Growth Management Law, and I am grateful that this spurred serious discussion amongst Planners and has gotten us to this point. **However, it is an important fact that the Maine Association of Planners, representing the professional Planners across the state, has not at any time endorsed or supported other previous versions of proposed updates to the Growth Management Law.** As we endeavored to participate in policy efforts prior to this current legislative session, it became increasingly apparent that this policy was being discussed by most at a general or “high” level, with little understanding of the details, legal wording, and the unintended impacts to municipalities. Changes to the Growth Management Law, a law that Planners are involved with more than any other profession, are too important to the communities we work in not to commit to supporting only the best possible statutory updates and changes.

Having worked with many Planners of different backgrounds and experience levels for the past couple decades, I can tell you that Planners believe in their job to assist their communities through fair public processes to build a locally-created community visions that promote unique and sustainable places to live and work. Planners believe in Comprehensive Plans as important tools for Maine communities to plan for their future, protect their character, and implement realistic and beneficial changes and policies locally. We believe that managing growth and development as well as protecting rural lands and recreational resources is important to fostering healthy, prosperous and sustainable communities. The Growth Management Law may indeed need updating, but it is worth noting that overall it has had an important and positive impact on Maine's communities for decades. Despite the burden, Comprehensive Plans under the state statute have helped Maine communities reduce the costly results of sprawling development, establish sustainable and fair local land use ordinances, and foster character of place, community health, downtown redevelopment, resiliency, and more.

I have been very impressed by the level of work that so many of my colleagues have undertaken, committing to an extremely thorough revision and drafting process that lead to LD 1751. The efforts behind this proposed legislation have always been focused on a few essential objectives: updating Maine's Growth Management Law to be more efficient and less burdensome, reducing municipal mandates and improving flexibility, and removing legal ambiguities and inconsistencies within statutory language. And very importantly, the resulting bill includes significant portions of previously proposed Growth Management Law legislation (and the input from stakeholders in that process), retains important elements of the current Statute, and incorporates additional changes based on the professional expertise of Maine Planners, who understand in detail the impacts of statutory and rulemaking changes on local Comprehensive Planning.

MAP's policy work to review and update the Growth Management Law has involved not only seeking input and consensus from many, many Planners representing towns of different sizes and geography, but also involved working with numerous organizations, legislators, and individuals. And it is hard for me to overlook the fact that in developing LD 1751, MAP had dozens of individuals actually analyzing, writing and building consensus as a group, with extensive additional discussion and review from much of our membership – while other proposed Growth Management Law legislation was based on fewer individuals actually working directly on bill language, emphasizing advocacy of the general concepts to a broad audience rather than discussing the details of proposed changes and understanding their impact.

LD 1751 can meet the same broad claims that other proposed legislation does, and in fact we have found agreement with folks on all sides of the issue on the overall needs and intent in updating the Growth Management Law. LD 1751 does propose changes to reduce the burden of inventory and mapping in the comprehensive planning process, and promote the use of publically available data. It does seek to encourage local public participation and informed decision making. But LD 1751 goes further in its careful attention to detail in the bill language – as Planners have extensive experience with the very real legal and financial impact that poorly written laws and ordinances can have on our communities.

As someone who has assisted Maine communities as a Planner from the municipal and consultant sides, worked with Regional Planning agencies in assisting communities with Comprehensive Plans, and on a local volunteer Comprehensive Planning Committee, I strongly believe that LD 1751 deserves your support. This bill brings together the best of the current Statute, previously proposed Growth Management legislation, and well-researched revisions from professional Planners who are dedicated to supporting Maine communities as they plan for their future.

Sincerely,

Amanda Bunker
Portland, Maine