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TESTIMONY OF ERIC J. COUSENS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC SERVICES FOR THE CITY OF AUBURN TO THE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

In Support of LD 1751 – *An Act to Revise the Growth Management Program Laws*

DATE OF HEARING: May 8, 2025

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony **in strong support of LD 1751, *An Act to Improve the Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Process***. I have worked in municipal planning and economic development for over two decades, and I speak today from firsthand experience with the challenges and opportunities communities face as they strive to implement meaningful comprehensive plans.

Unfortunately, some recent commentary mischaracterizes both the current planning process and the intent of LD 1751. I'd like to address several points to clarify the purpose and importance of this bill.

LD 1751 Is a Practical and Cost-Effective Reform

LD 1751 offers a meaningful update to the Growth Management Act by eliminating the outdated, statutory inventory list and replacing it with a **tiered inventory framework**. This new approach allows communities to scale their planning efforts based on local capacity, removing unnecessary burdens and focusing resources where they are most needed.

Importantly, LD 1751 also **aligns inventory requirements with the State Goals**—the very foundation of comprehensive planning in Maine. It reinforces the idea that data collection should support these shared goals, and it ensures that baseline data is **provided by the State**, not produced independently by every municipality. This is a **significant cost savings** for local governments, especially smaller communities.

LD 1751 Supports Better, More Responsive Planning

By contrast, LR 289 creates a **rigid, prescriptive process**. It introduces unfunded mandates requiring municipalities to map data that is not maintained by state agencies—transferring cost and administrative burden to the local level. It also proposes a planning process that is **out of sequence**, requiring communities to develop a Future Land Use Map at the outset, rather than after a thoughtful public process and inventory review. This undermines public engagement and informed policy development.

Even more concerning, LR 289 allows a municipality to **remove State Goals from its plan without any review or criteria**, while simultaneously **adding more goals and statutory language** that further complicate the process. Rather than simplifying or modernizing the law, LR 289 would have the opposite effect.

LD 1751 Reflects Collaborative Work by Planning Professionals with the goal of being flexible enough to work for all communities in the State.

LD 1751 was not written in a vacuum. It was developed with input from more than 100 planners, legal experts, nonprofit organizations, and municipal officials. Just yesterday, a working group of planners with the Maine Association of Planners began comparing LR 289 and LD 1751 point by point. Their analysis reinforces what many of us already know: **LD 1751 is the bill that makes comprehensive planning more flexible, affordable, and effective** for Maine's communities.

We cannot build stronger communities by mandating a one-size-fits-all approach. We must support a planning process that is accessible, responsive, and grounded in data and public engagement. **LD 1751 delivers that solution.**

I respectfully urge this Committee to vote **Ought to Pass on LD 1751**. Thank you for your time and consideration.