

**May 8, 2025**

**RE: Testimony IN SUPPORT of LD 1940, An Act to Revise the Growth Management Law**

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

My name is Sarah Turner. I'm a Mainer, a professional planner, and someone who has worked in both the public and private sectors on comprehensive plans across the state. I also recently served on the comprehensive plan update committee in my hometown of Eliot, where we just completed our draft comprehensive plan.

I am writing in strong support of LD 1940.

This bill addresses a very real challenge I've seen again and again: the state's comprehensive planning checklist is too onerous, especially for small towns. I've worked directly on compiling these checklists, and I can tell you: it often consumes the entire planning budget that towns set aside to hire outside help. That leaves little to no funding or time for meaningful public engagement or the planning work related to development that forms the foundation for zoning and policy updates

I feel incredibly lucky that my town has a talented full-time planner who went above and beyond the checklist requirements and made sure we had strong community outreach. But many Maine towns don't have a planner who can navigate the complexity of this data collection. Without capacity or funding, many communities must rely entirely on consultants to complete the checklist. That means that outreach, the most essential work to the planning process, often gets sidelined.

The heart of any planning process should be community engagement. Towns need to hear from people about where they would like future growth to occur, what they would like future development to look and feel like, which areas are important to conserve and preserve, which roads and intersections need safety improvements, and where future open spaces and trail connections are desired. These are the conversations that shape great local plans. The more data we require up front, the less time and fewer resources towns have to engage with citizens and ask these questions.

This isn't just a budget issue. It's also about capacity and energy. Many towns rely entirely on volunteer committees to write their plans, and I've seen how hard it is for them to complete the checklist without professional support. It becomes an exercise in paperwork rather than a meaningful community process. A one-size-fits-all data mandate simply does not reflect the diversity of Maine's communities or their ability to respond. Towns should have the flexibility to decide what data matters most based on local priorities. And if certain data is required, the state should provide it in a clear, compiled, and accessible format, not through scattered portals and links.

LD 1940 also introduces a more intuitive way to talk about growth and development by using placetypes such as villages, crossroads, downtowns, and corridors to better define growth areas. These are familiar terms that reflect Maine's historic patterns of settlement and the places people already recognize and care about. Using this language helps make planning more approachable, especially for residents who may not engage with technical planning documents but know exactly what they value in their community.

In short, LD 1940 offers a more flexible, focused, and locally driven approach. It values public input, respects local capacity, and recognizes the unique character of Maine's towns. And it provides a foundation on which communities can plan for development and zoning changes that are key to unlocking more housing in Maine. I urge you to support this bill

Thank you for your time and your work.

Sincerely,  
Sarah Turner