

TESTIMONY TO THE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF LD 1751: An Act to Improve 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:

We are Susanne Paul and Noel Musson. We are professional planners living on Mount Desert Island and working throughout the State of Maine. Thank you for considering our testimony today. Between the two of us we have over 40 years of professional planning experience in both the public and private sectors, with experience ranging from small towns, to regional planning commissions, to large city government agencies. In our current roles as planning consultants, we are privileged to work with town and city managers, code enforcement officers, municipal planners, and town committees around Maine. Our current work includes projects in towns throughout Midcoast Maine, the Acadia region, Downeast, Penobscot and Franklin Counties. In the last four years we have completed work on six different comprehensive plans ranging from towns as small as Swan's Island to larger municipalities like the cities of Belfast and Rockland. Nearly every day we are immersed in comprehensive planning, including data collection and analysis, committee meeting facilitation, GIS mapping, document production, policy writing, and communication about the process of comprehensive planning.

From this perspective we offer the following reasons why we support Representative Roberts' bill **LD 1751**:

- **Managing change is contextual and temporal.** Planning at its core is about change management, not just growth management. In many of our communities, change may mean aging populations, decline in overall population, or economic shifts. How do you manage change without first measuring that change over time to better understand the scale, scope, and interrelated issues? LD 1751 asks communities to document and assess change using easily attainable data and mapping tools that are available from the state, to align their analysis to state goals, and then draw key takeaways from that analysis. Those takeaways then inform how a community determines their own policy goals, recommended action items, locally grounded implementation strategies, and priorities.
- **Future land use planning looks and means slightly different things in each community and that is ok.** Future land use planning is one of the primary elements of the comprehensive plan and flexibility is key to how communities discuss and approach this

topic. Future land use maps are not zoning maps. A future land use plan is the result of analyzing change, an understanding of a community's values, and consensus on a community's vision. Under the umbrella of meeting state goals, future land use plans provide guidance about how land use will influence what direction the community should head and how to get there using language that makes sense for that community. LD 1751 provides flexibility that gets at the heart of what the future land use plan should be – a strategic framework for land use – and offers communities the chance to map and describe their future without requiring urban design terminology or typologies that do not resonate with their town.

- **Implementation is the glue that holds it all together.** No planner, municipal staff member, or elected leader wants to spend money, time, and energy working on comprehensive plans that will just sit on a shelf. LD 1751 strengthens the connection between comprehensive planning and positive outcomes by including an implementation element. Plans that integrate measurable outcomes, policy alignment, and realistic timelines are more likely to be adopted and used in decision-making. This reduces the risk of plans becoming static or obsolete and supports the ongoing utility of the Growth Management Program.

In response to a flawed initial Growth Management Act revision process during the last legislative session, which resulted in the marginalization of the professional association most directly tied to comprehensive planning, LD 1751 was created by professional planners working every day on municipal planning and land use decision-making in Maine. This bill is not the product of a nonprofit or development firm or a professional association with paid staff. LD 1751 is a tremendous effort by people working every day at the intersection of theory and practice, where the municipal land use planning rubber hits the road.

Thank you for considering our input.

Sincerely,

Susanne Paul and Noel Musson
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