

Robert Nelson
Newcastle
LD 1940

May 8, 2025

RE: Testimony in support of LD 1940, An Act to Revise the Growth Management Program Laws

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, Members of the Committee:

My name is Robert Nelson, I live in Newcastle and I am here to testify in support of LD 1940. About a year and a half ago, I was here and testified in favor of LD 1976, a bill that was approved the legislature, but ended up in limbo. I'm here to testify again in hopes of improving the comprehensive planning process.

I've been involved with Newcastle planning since 2005 when I helped finish a comprehensive plan. After adoption, the town struggled, having a plan with good ideas, but lagging on implementing those ideas.

Just over 10 years ago, the town decided to start over. We decided to revise our comprehensive plan and land use ordinance together in one overall effort. This involved the largest public planning effort in the history of Newcastle. We ended up adopting a comprehensive plan in 2018, and, after a couple of tries, a new zoning code in 2020. The combined effort gave the town tools to guide development in ways that are beneficial to the town as a whole.

As an example, I'm currently finishing the construction of an affordable housing project, funded by MaineHousing, which is creating 16 homes on a parcel I own just off Main Street. This project would not have been possible under the old land use ordinance, but it addresses a goal in the comp plan, and is explicitly allowed under the new code.

However, 7 years later, our Comprehensive Plan still hasn't been approved by the state. The comprehensive plan that we created, that represented the goals and desires of the community and was critical to the development of our new code, did not meet the checklist required for state approval. After multiple rounds of responding to state requests for changes, we are now in limbo.

I support LD 1940 because it more closely aligns the comprehensive planning process with the implementation of the resultant plan. Much of the current planning checklist approach simply requires towns to regurgitate data provided by state agencies back to the state. I do not support LD 1751 because it does not address the problems that Newcastle has encountered. LD 1751 proposes a tiered system for the checklist, but does not define those tiers. In contrast, LD 1940 will relieve towns of the burden of the checklists and encourage towns to spent that effort creating a plan that can help the town meet its goals.

In Newcastle, we have been able to do something good - build affordable housing- but we did it in spite of the state comprehensive planning process.

I urge the committee to vote 'Ought to Pass' for LD 1940.

Thank you,

Robert Nelson
Newcastle