

7 May 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 Emilie Schmidt and I live in Brunswick. Please accept this testimony IN SUPPORT of LD 1940, An Act to Revise the Growth Management Law.

I am writing to you as a citizen of Brunswick to provide my personal thoughts on LD 1940. I also happen to be the current chairperson of the Town of Brunswick's Comprehensive Plan Update Steering Committee, and although I am not writing on behalf of the committee, in my role as a committee member, I have seen first-hand the effects of growth management laws on our local communities especially as we have been working to update our comprehensive plan. What should have been an 18–24-month process, we are now in year 7 and still have not reached a final product. As a volunteer-lead, citizen committee, we are not experts in land use nor growth management policies. However, what we are experts in is the current state of unprecedented growth in our town and the various confusing layers of zoning laws and regulations that make it extremely challenging for us to effect change as we work to fulfill the state requirement of updating our 2008 Comprehensive Plan.

There has been little to no guidance from the State other than the checklist to steer us in this process. Given that, the checklist set us out on a multi-year task in gathering the data necessary to complete the checklist. Rather than spending our time and energy into the needed discussions on growth area boundaries and density zoning changes, we spent hundreds of volunteer hours as well as thousands of consultant dollars working to satisfy the list. Our committee has gone as far as taking a vote on every single action item/strategy within the plan as we want to ensure we are following the State directive. However, in the end, it has been the late-stage discussions on the actual Land Use strategy that has been the most important. But due to volunteer fatigue and pressure to complete this project, we are in a position finding ourselves challenged to give these broader strategy discussions the merit they deserve.

Our committee has been meeting weekly since September of 2019 comprised of 9 citizens and 3 Town Councilors. We have had 5 different Planning Department Directors oversee the project, as well as 3 different consulting groups. It was not until we enlisted the assistance of our current consultant did we learn how to view the forest through the trees. Though the utilization of placetypes in our land use planning, we have been educated in a more top-down thinking strategy. Through this enlightening step, we have quickly switched gears and are now making progress to reach the end to what we believe will result in a balanced approach to growth management and natural resource preservation.

I strongly support the language in LD 1940 that clearly removes the checklist mandates from the comprehensive planning process. I also support the development of the formation of a stakeholder group to work with the Department to engage in rulemaking to help ensure that the checklist mandates don't get put in place by the State.

It is my hope that LD 1940 will make the comprehensive planning process more accessible and less challenging for citizen volunteers to complete. After all, it is the people of the town who should have the loudest voices in our land use management. This process should be easier, not harder, for people such as our faithful committee members to complete.

Thank you for your time,  
Emilie Schmidt  
Brunswick, ME

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LD 1940

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