

April 4, 2023

Testimony of: **John Eldridge, Town Manager - Town of Brunswick, Maine**

Before the: **Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement, and Business**

In Support of: **LD 941 - "An Act Facilitating the Efforts of the Midcoast Regional Redevelopment Authority and the Town of Brunswick to Design and Carry Out Improvements to the Storm Water System and Other Infrastructure at the Former Brunswick Naval Air Station"**

Senator Curry, Representative Roberts, and Members of the Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement, and Business:

My name is John Eldridge, and I am the Town Manager of the Town of Brunswick, Maine. I am pleased to be speaking today in support of LD 941, sponsored by Representative Ankeles.

In 2005, the Base Realignment and Closure Commission voted to close Brunswick Naval Air Station. In response, state and local officials rallied to establish the Brunswick Local Redevelopment Authority which was succeeded by the Midcoast Regional Redevelopment Authority (MRRRA). The last planes and military personnel left in 2011 and the transfer of Navy properties began. Those transfers included the base infrastructure - the electric distribution system; the water and sewer systems; the stormwater management systems; and the roads and sidewalks. For the most part, this infrastructure was transferred without improvement. In other words, in "as is" condition. It was left to MRRRA to devise a plan and secure funding for improvements.

As the former base has been evolving into Brunswick Landing, it has been generating jobs and taxes. Since 2013, the Town of Brunswick has allocated to MRRRA nearly 50% of the property tax revenues generated at Brunswick Landing. However, these taxes are nowhere near adequate to meet the staggering cost of the infrastructure improvements required, by some estimates more than \$20 million. As of today, MRRRA has been able to set aside only a small portion of the funds that will be required to address stormwater management and road improvements. The stormwater issues are particularly acute. In some areas of the property, groundwater, with detectable contamination, infiltrates the system by design. Most if not all this water is discharged to Harpswell Cove or the Androscoggin River. Because the stormwater collection systems are imbedded in or adjacent to the roadways, the stormwater system improvements must be addressed in coordination with roadway improvements. Otherwise, the roads will never meet Town of Brunswick's standards for acceptance. Without Town acceptance, the roads and stormwater systems will remain MRRRA's, and ultimately the State's, responsibility.

Recognizing the urgency to address these needs, we seek assistance, technical and financial. MRRRA and the Town have been working collaboratively to establish partnerships with state and federal officials. We are hopeful that our congressional delegation can secure the lion's share of the funding needed for the improvements. After all, the federal government left behind the conditions that must be addressed. However, success will depend on state participation, and that is the main purpose of LD 941. It will establish a state/local group tasked specifically with developing a plan to address these needs.

A significant portion of the local, regional, and state economies depend on the success of the redevelopment of Brunswick Landing. If the infrastructure needs are not addressed, MRRRA will not be able to continue attracting high quality investments that lead to high quality jobs. Worse, failure to collectively address the deteriorating conditions, will put in jeopardy the current investments and jobs.

The Town of Brunswick stands ready to work with MRRRA and our state and federal partners in this critical work. LD 941 acknowledges the importance of this endeavor and signals that the State is ready to engage with its partners in working for continued success of the redevelopment effort.