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**Testimony of Nancy Smith, CEO of GrowSmart Maine
In Support of LD 1787, Resolve Directing the Department of
Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to convene a stakeholder
group tasked with a Comprehensive overhaul and modernization of the
State Subdivision Statutes**

May 9, 2023

Senator Pierce, Representative Gere and Honorable Members of the Joint Select
Committee on Housing,

My name is Nancy Smith, I live in Ellsworth, and I am the CEO of GrowSmart Maine. We are a statewide non-partisan non-profit organization helping communities navigate change in alignment with smart growth. We advocate for comprehensive policies and funding for smart growth practices and outcomes.

We have partnered with Build Maine to guide a transparent crowd-sourcing of policy proposals that began a year ago, and has drawn together over a hundred people from across Maine and beyond. Policy Action 2023 has resulted in sixteen proposals from eight working groups, all addressing the shared goal, ***“to address barriers to and create incentives for equitable, sustainable growth and development that strengthens downtowns and villages of all sizes while pulling development pressure away from productive and open natural areas. We do so acknowledging that Maine has urban, rural, and suburban settings for which any solution may or may not be a fit and a variety of people who deserve to be welcomed to their communities.”***

This testimony reflects the positions of GrowSmart and Build Maine.

Eight of these bills are coming to your committee, and I am pleased to support this bill, as well as share context with an overview of Policy Action 2023 proposals. Many of these proposals offer pragmatic, incremental steps while others are provocative and will call for us to examine assumptions that have led to the unsustainable growth patterns of the past sixty years. All of them will improve economic, social, and climate outcomes across the state.

There are three goals for Policy Action 2023, and we are already seeing results in each category:

- To pass sound policy solutions to address the goal listed above
- To build advocacy capacity within the broad range of Mainers who support this goal
- To advance the provocative discussions we need to have if we are to have meaningful outcomes with long term, sustainable impacts in strengthening our downtowns and pulling development pressure away from productive and open natural areas.

Specific to this bill, as you can see in the attached Fact Sheet, LD 1787 calls on the Bureau of Resource Information and Land Use Planning to convene interested parties in coordination with Dept of Environmental Protection, to update subdivision laws in various sections of statute. **We will note one drafting error, in that Title 30-A is intended to be included**, to ensure the discussions relate to all subdivision rules in municipalities as well as the Unorganized Territories.

In addition, the report back should come to this committee as well as to the Joint Standing Committees on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry; and Environment and Natural Resources. This can be addressed by changing the language to reference “committees overseeing land use.”

Finally, on page 1, Section 1, line 8 and 9, I hope the committee will clarify that this process is intended to apply “along existing streets” AND (nor or) within designated growth areas or when neighborhood standards are in place. This change will ensure the expedited permitting process is not making it easier for sprawling development outside of areas the municipality has identified as where they want to see more development.

This is an opportunity to bring subdivision rules into this century, improving processes and refining priorities. It is urgent that these rules be updated to better direct development where it makes sense in the long term, in place of the current one-size-fits-all approach that steers development to rural lands and the fringes of villages and downtowns. This is imperative to meet our climate goals and ensure the long-term fiscal health of the state and municipalities, while also continuing to increase and streamline housing production. Addressing the housing crisis must be done without undoing the good work to address the climate crisis, and without creating the next crisis of access to farmland and food.

The attached fact sheet outlines all the positive impacts of this work, and we welcome discussion of how to improve the review process.

GrowSmart and Build Maine will assist the committee in any way that is helpful.

Nancy E. Smith