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**Testimony of Representative Traci Gere Introducing LD 1673,
An Act to Encourage Affordable Housing and Mixed-use Development by Establishing a
Thriving Corridors Program
May 12, 2023**

Good morning Senator Pierce and fellow members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing. I am Representative Traci Gere, and I represent House District 134. I am thrilled to be with you today to introduce LD 1673, which proposes the Thriving Corridors program to help our towns and cities create more livable and sustainable communities and provide the housing we all know is so direly needed. This program will be a vital tool in developing the needed housing by empowering municipalities to envision and act on plans for mixed use development in commercial corridors, while preserving what we love about Maine.

In Maine, we love our cozy towns, rustic villages, and small cities, and we are upset when the downtown grocery or favorite store closes down, but we struggle to make the logical connection that when we don't locate people, businesses, and public services together, it's hard for businesses to survive and for people to build community connections.

We complain about having to commute long distances for work, or about sitting in our cars during heavy rush hour traffic, but refuse to acknowledge that planning sustainable transportation solutions requires also planning where people will live, work, and play.

We bemoan the rising costs of utilities and municipal services, while continuing to stretch our municipal resources and staffs to cover greater distances as new housing development ranges farther and farther afield.

We worry about development encroaching on Maine's green spaces, forests, lakes, and farmland, but we don't place the blame for that squarely where it lies – on zoning and land use policies that encourage sprawl and make it impossible to build affordable and attainable homes near jobs and town centers.

And, worst of all, we have been thinking and acting as if we can't do anything to fix these problems when, in fact, it's our laws and processes that have created them in the first place. This moment is calling on us to be open-minded enough to relearn how to build communities that have a mix of homes, businesses, and public resources and activities, and bold enough to take action to change the incentives and programs that drive development, so that we get the results we want.



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When I started working on housing issues in the 130th Legislature, I was very happy to find that planners, developers, and municipal and regional officials from across the state have been working for a long time on solutions, helped by Grow Smart and Build Maine. These experts will testify after me to dive into the details, but I will provide a quick overview of the program to ground us in what it will do.

Thriving Corridors is a voluntary program whereby municipalities identify a high impact corridor, where they intend to concentrate development. Municipalities decide, but the area must already be established, near the town center, and be primarily commercial. The municipality must then develop a master plan to guide the mixed use development of the corridor, and, very importantly, align its ordinances to expedite the development of the corridor. State funding will be available to support affordable housing and mixed use development.

I am also presenting a sponsor amendment to correct a drafting error. The amendment proposes that the Thriving Corridors program be housed in the Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry, rather than the Department of Administrative and Financial Services, although my expectation is that finding the right place for the Thriving Corridors program will be part of the work session discussion.

I am available to answer any questions. I thank the Committee for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Traci Gere".

Traci Gere
State Representative