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PLANNING & CODE ENFORCEMENT

DATE: May 11, 2023

Senator Teresa Pierce
Representative Traci Gere
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing - Room 216

RE: LD 1673 An Act to Encourage Affordable Housing and Mixed-Use Development by Establishing a Thriving Corridors Program

Senator Pierce, Representative Gere and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing:

My name is Jennie Poulin Franceschi. I am the Director of Planning and Code Enforcement for the City of Westbrook. I, Daniel Stevenson, Director of Economic Development, and Rebecca Spitella, Senior Planner would like to provide testimony regarding LD 1673, An Act to Encourage Affordable Housing and Mixed-Use Development by Establishing a Thriving Corridors Program, with the recommendation of OUGHT NOT TO PASS.

Having participated in the Policy Action 2023 process over this year by attending public meetings and working groups, we can provide detailed feedback to the committee on the concerns we raised to the bill writers during this process from the perspective of a municipality and the implications of LD 1673.

The required land use standards stated in this bill are not applicable to all communities. This level of detail should not be included in any State Statute but rather more goal-oriented language with the municipality determining the details in their Master Plans based on our local conditions.

Unlimited Density with no off-street parking requirements is an irresponsible provision and not applicable in a rural state like ours. Affordable housing projects still need some level of parking as some residents will have vehicles. Reduced/No Off-Street parking requirements only work where transit and on-street/off-site parking options are available. Only in the most urban of environments could one suggest the complete removal of off-street parking requirements.

To have these criteria be the basis for **prioritization of State affordable housing funding** ties the hands of MaineHousing and would appear to limit the locations within a community for affordable housing projects.

This bill also binds these “high impact corridors” to being **given priority for future MDOT funding**. This is of concern as the criteria to be a “high impact corridors” would not be met in any of Westbrook’s districts as we require on-site parking for residential (at a reduced rate in our urban core) and have a density standard which we do not see our community supporting a complete removal of.

The writers of these bills may not be aware of the number of funding pots that MDOT already has created such as the Village Partnership Initiative, which afford funding to improve town centers and downtowns. There does not seem to be a need to create another program when there is already a program available. We feel LD 1673 is duplicative and actually limits rather than encourages affordable housing.

We thank you for your time and consideration of our comments.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jennie Poulin Franceschi, P.E.
Director of Planning
and Code Enforcement

Rebecca Spitella
Senior Planner

Daniel Stevenson
Director of Community
and Economic Development