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**Testimony of Nancy Smith, CEO of GrowSmart Maine
In Support of LD 1672, An Act To Establish An Affordable Housing Permitting Process**

January 5, 2024

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.

This testimony represents the views of GrowSmart and Build Maine.

We have partnered with Build Maine to guide a transparent crowdsourcing 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.”

One of the values of Policy Action 2023 is that we do not require all those engaged in the process to support each proposal. With this flexibility, Policy Action 2023 has resulted in some incremental steps, some complete reworkings of public policy, and some like these, that challenge conventional thinking. All are presented to Legislative committees, trusting the process will result in sound decisions and improved public policy. The two bills being heard today are provocative, as they certainly push the envelope of municipal process to achieve the Policy Action 2023 goals. **There is tremendous value in encouraging conversations we need to have about the barriers to adding affordable housing in communities across Maine.**

LD 1672 is a bipartisan proposal that **in certain cases** removes municipal oversight of affordable housing proposals, shifting that role to a state-level Review Board. There are details to be discussed, but from GrowSmart’s perspective, the most important point in this bill is WHY it is being proposed - **because resistance to affordable housing can and does overwhelm local boards, staff, and elected officials.** Each of us can name an instance where this happened, and solid proposals were swept aside. The move proposed in this bill is a very big deal and ought to be considered carefully. There is a lot at stake for Maine communities and for current and future residents of communities across Maine.

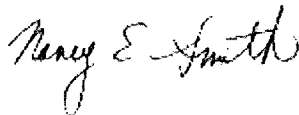
In support of the bill, I’ll quote GrowSmart board member Jeff Levine’s testimony, “***The idea of a state committee to review affordable housing development was proposed by the Commission to Increase Housing Opportunities in Maine by Studying Zoning & Land Use Restrictions. However, it did not make it into the final language in LD2003. The idea is laudable and worth implementing. It is a national practice that is adapted in this case to the specifics of Maine. Other states, such as Connecticut and Massachusetts, have versions of such a committee – in those cases, the powers of the***

committee are much broader than those proposed in LD 1672. The model in LD1672 is better suited to Maine than the models from those states.”

From my understanding, affordable housing advocates may testify that this bill does not go far enough, while municipalities may testify that it goes too far. I think that fact makes this bill worthy of consideration.

The Fact Sheet for LD 1672 is available [HERE](#) along with all Policy Action 2023 bills. It highlights the advantages and outlines details of the proposal in plain English. GrowSmart and Build Maine welcome discussion of how to improve the bill and will assist the committee in any way that is helpful.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nancy E. Smith". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "N" and "S".

CEO
GrowSmart Maine