

Serving the Municipalities of Southern Maine for Over 50 years

***Testimony of the Southern Maine Planning and Development Commission in Support of LD602
An Act to Provide Regional Support to Deliver State and Federal Programs to Cities and Towns in the
State - January 9, 2024***

Senator Pierce, Representative Gere, and members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing, it's good to see you all again and Happy New Year; My name is Paul Schumacher and as the Executive Director of the SMPDC, I am testifying in full support of LD 602, with some additional ideas for consideration.

SMPDC is a Regional Planning Organization established under Maine Statute, that has been in place since 1965. We provide technical assistance and planning support to 39 towns in York, and southern Oxford counties. It is important to note that while parts of our district consist of densely populated areas such as Biddeford, Saco and Sanford, much of our region is rural in nature, with towns populated by a few hundred to a couple of thousand residents. The technical assistance we provide covers the areas of Land Use/Housing; Economic Development; Transportation; and Sustainability and Resiliency. About 11 of these 39 towns have full time planning staff available to assist in the areas just mentioned. The rest of our region, almost exclusively, look to us to provide that support.

As a region we are fully in support of the need and call for more housing of all kinds. We look forward to providing that support and believe this bill provides a perfect on ramp for us to do just that. Our staff are fully trained in the areas of land use, housing, ordinance writing and development review. We have strong relationships with our communities and the work we have been doing on LD 2003 implementation within our region has strengthened those relationships even more – particularly with respect to housing initiatives. This bill with the focus on housing, provides a great opportunity for us to continue those efforts.

With that said, the original impetus for this effort came from a real need for additional financial resources, so it is critical that funding be included with any new responsibilities. I have attached a memo with testimony from the RPO's appearance last March in front of this Committee, which outlined state financial support of RPO's. As I looked at that again, it is clear that our normal funding allocation would not allow us to fulfill the ambitious housing goals we have outlined for ourselves. It is also a barrier to providing a holistic housing effort encompassing transportation, economic development, and sustainability – which is most crucial to making informed housing choices. The regional councils in front of you have the **capabilities** to do that work, we just do not have the **capacity** to meet these complex challenges.

Existing Maine statutes recognize RPO's as the vehicle to support many of the efforts we have discussed. This bill would provide added emphasis to the issue of the day – housing- to help us accomplish the goals that this Committee and this state have outlined as a priority. For that reason, I strongly recommend that passage of LD 602. SMPDC is fully focused on helping Maine tackle our housing and planning challenges.

Thank you for your consideration.

Paul Schumacher



March 21, 2023

Dear Members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing,

It was a pleasure to meet with you on March 7th to discuss how regional councils can help you advance statewide housing strategies. We have decades of experience working at the local level, gaining the trust of many Maine municipalities. This position of trust permits the efficient provision of local technical assistance across all land use issues. We are ideally suited to help Maine implement new state housing policies that address the housing shortage and expand all types of housing. You asked several questions after our presentation to you. Our answers are below.

1 Can you further explain the “missing puzzle piece” of how regional councils would use expanded state funding to advance housing policies?

With additional state funding, our organizations will have added capacity to provide the locally and regionally tailored support to advance housing growth and diversity through deployment of new state policies. These supports will be centered on land use and include:

- **Technical assistance** for comprehensive plans, research and data analysis, community engagement, ordinance updates, and to fill local staff capacity gaps, particularly in rural communities that are grappling with subdivision and site plan reviews, short-term rental challenges, shoreland zoning, and implementing last year’s LD2003.
- **Grant support** by identifying grant funds for local projects and infrastructure to support new housing development, providing assistance with grant writing for communities to give them access to State and Federal funds, and identifying matching fund sources.
- **GIS and data capacity** for shoreland zone mapping and land use maps, and to support a wide variety of land-use, economic development, housing, and infrastructure projects.
- **Developing and implementing intergenerational community building strategies** to better support older adults, workforce, families, and youth populations.

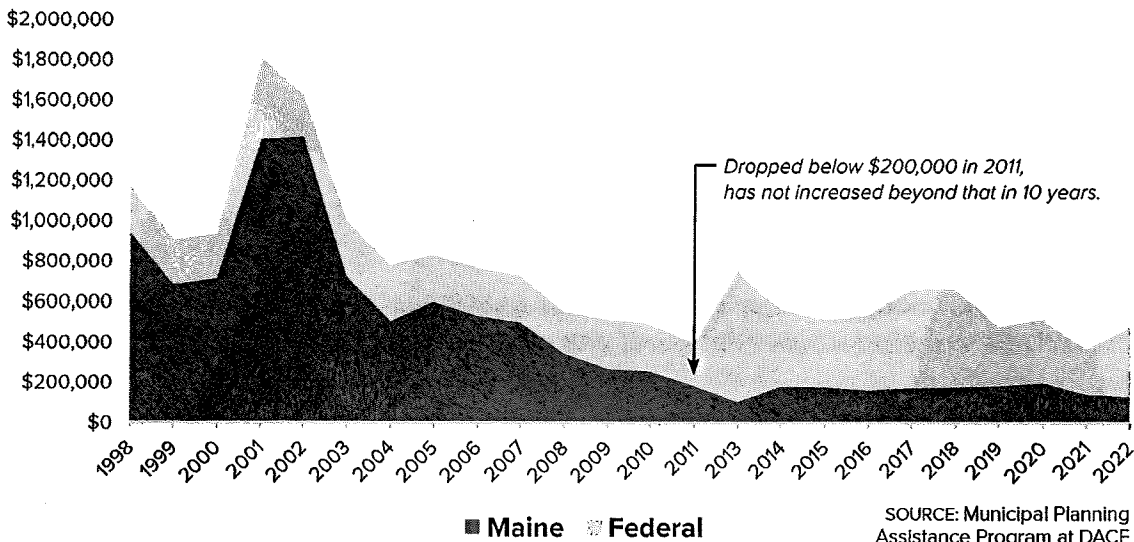
Expanding housing opportunities involves a wide variety of local planning tasks. State funding to regional councils for housing work needs to be complimented by funding for land use planning. Funding should be flexible and consistent to enable steady progress toward state housing goals.

To deliver this consistent technical assistance ***we suggest the Committee consider flexible funding for one full time planner at each regional council and one full time grant writer to ensure that municipalities maximize state and federal funds. We estimate the annual cost to be \$200,000 for each of the 10 Regional Councils in Maine, totaling \$2M in state funding.*** With that foundation in place, accompanied by reporting from each regional council on the successes made possible by the new planner and grant writer, we urge the Committee to consider additional future funding based on demonstrated need and performance. We expect that need to include further attention to housing, as well as a host of other growth management issues.

2 What have been the historic levels and trends of state planning funds for regional councils?

Paul Schumacher has provided a memo (Attachment A) which reflects our common experience of dwindling state funding over the last 20 years. Without additional state support, our ability to act as effective, efficient regional implementing partners for new state policies is deeply reduced.

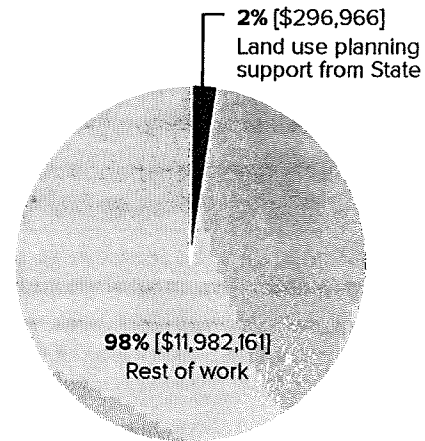
PLANNING FUNDS ADJUSTED TO 2022 DOLLARS



3 Information about each agency’s state funding levels, local dues and dues rate, and federal funding amounts.

Attachment B includes a spreadsheet and analysis that details the information you requested. The major takeaways from our perspective are:

- For this year, state funding to support land use planning is about \$150,000 total across all 10 regional councils to serve all municipalities in the state. Even with federal funds (via DACF), the funding level only rises to about \$296,000 total.
- Most of our funding is tied to existing state and federal grant programs without the flexibility to address immediate local needs, including housing, infrastructure, and associated land use issues.
- Our member dues are often largely devoted to match for federal and state funding, further reducing flexible operating funds.



STATE SUPPORT FOR LAND USE PLANNING AS A PROPORTION OF REGIONAL COUNCIL FUNDING

4 How can regions organize their work to be shared and replicated across the state?

Regional Councils in Maine have a long history of success but have been neglected more recently. With your support and encouragement every regional council in Maine is ready to expand our work together to share best practices, collaborate across regional boundaries, and grow the valuable services our members need. Strengthening regional capacity benefits housing policies, and it also makes Maine more capable of implementing transportation, economic development, land preservation, and climate action work at the regional level.

Thank you again for your time on March 7th. We look forward to continued discussion and collaboration as you shape Maine's housing policies this session, and beyond. If you have any other questions or need anything as follow up to this letter, please let us know.

Sincerely,

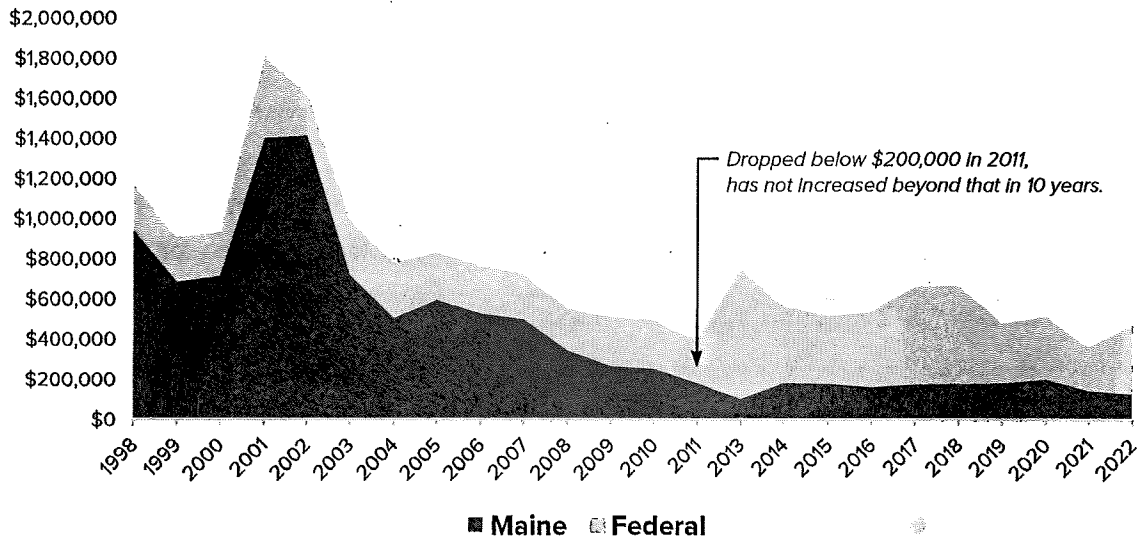
Amy Landry, Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments
Lee Umphrey, Eastern Maine Development Corporation
Kristina Egan, Greater Portland Council of Governments
James Fisher, Hancock County Planning Commission
Matt Underwood, Kennebec Valley Council of Governments
Mary Ellen Barnes, Lincoln County Regional Planning Commission
Mat Eddy, Midcoast Council of Governments
Bob Clark, Northern Maine Development Commission
Paul Schumacher, Southern Maine Planning and Development Commission
Betsy Fitzgerald, Washington County Council of Governments

ATTACHMENT A: Historical Funding Levels for Regional Planning Commissions Through the State Planning Office and DACF

Prepared by: Paul Schumacher, SMPDC

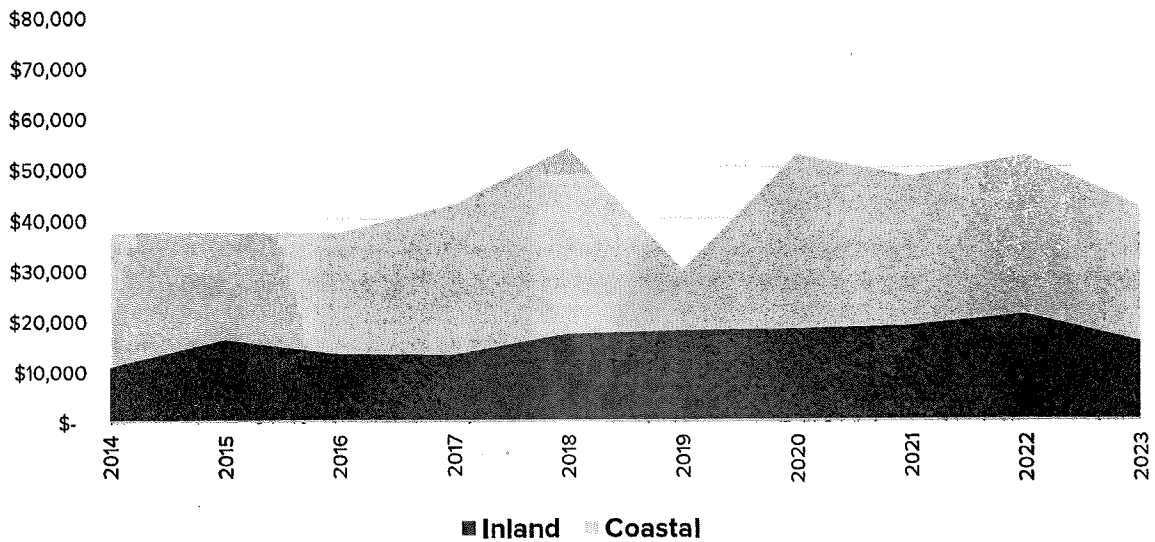
As the committee considers unmet needs of the state's Regional Councils, we were asked to share information on historic funding levels for land use planning assistance. The chart below illustrates the funding provided to Maine's Regional Councils from 1998 to present. It is important to note that the federal portion represents money allocated to Regional Councils within Maine's Coastal Zone, and those funds can only be used for coastal communities. The more significant part of the chart is the blue portion representing the funding for "inland" communities – by far the largest proportion of Maine's cities and towns. Often, these "inland" communities are those who have the least amount of professional staff or access to general land use planning assistance. A spike in funding occurred after 2000 due to a focus on smart growth technical assistance after the publication of "The Cost of Sprawl". Since then, allocations on Maine's General Fund portion have sharply dropped, and remained mostly unchanged for the last decade.

PLANNING FUNDS ADJUSTED TO 2022 DOLLARS



By way of example, this second chart represents allocations to the Southern Maine Planning and Development Commission (SMPDC) from the period 2014 on. For reference, SMPDC contains 12 coastal communities and 27 inland communities and the entire region has a population of 220,000. This funding trend would be similar for all of Maine's Regional Councils, as the funding formula is standard across the state. The average allocation for SMPDC to provide "inland" technical assistance is about \$15,000 a year to cover 27 inland communities.

SMPDC DACF ANNUAL CONTRACT AMOUNTS

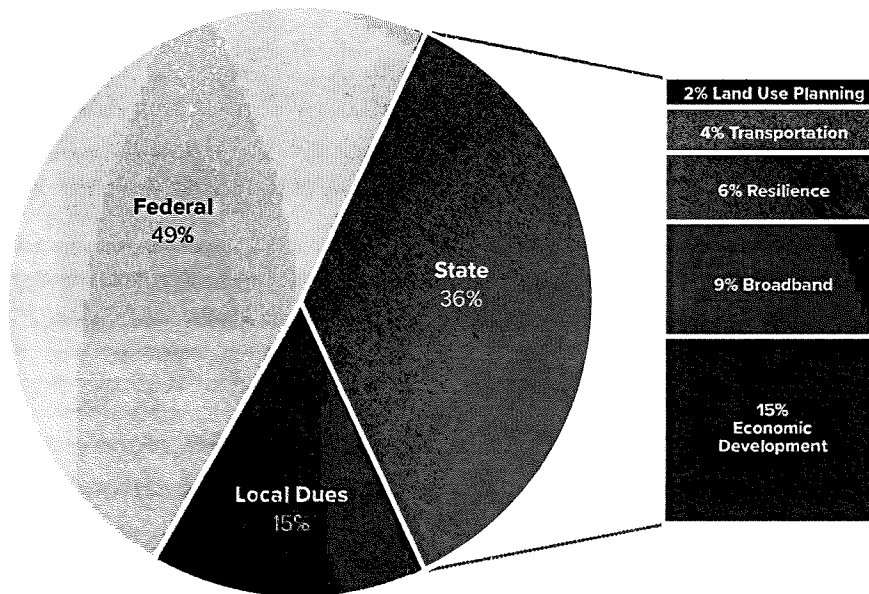


The overall technical assistance funding allocated to Maine's Regional Councils is far less than adequate to meet the needs of all communities. While this is a capacity issue for all communities, it is most acute for our inland communities, who are often smaller, more rural, and lack local staff and expertise.

ATTACHMENT B: Regional Councils' Funding Sources

For the state's 10 Regional Councils, about half of all funding comes from the federal government and another one-third from the state. Of the state funds, only 2% is for planning via the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Conservation. Economic development funds, focused mostly on small business support, is the most significant portion of state funding. Other significant funding sources have been added in the last year or so through the Governor's Office of Innovation and the Future (Resilience Partnership) and the Maine Connectivity Authority (Broadband Partnership).

FUNDING SOURCES FOR REGIONAL COUNCILS



Below is a summary of local, state and federal funding for the state's ten Regional Councils for the current year.

	AVCOG	EMDC	GPCOG	HCPC	KVCOG	LCRPC	MCOG	NMDC	SMPDC	WCOG
LOCAL DUES										
Municipal Dues	\$254,929		\$520,000	\$44,000	\$192,000		\$130,000	\$151,000	\$160,000	
County Dues	\$18,002	\$83,500	\$10,000	\$16,500		\$271,585		\$22,193		
STATE										
DACF - Inland	\$30,251	\$25,152	\$13,581	\$2,704	\$26,416	\$1,251	\$5,850	\$23,317	\$15,345	\$5,618
DACF - Coastal		\$12,883	\$18,056	\$32,292	\$13,000	\$17,996	\$22,857		\$15,687	\$14,710
MDOT - Rural Transportation	\$58,000		\$77,540	\$48,000	\$30,250	\$16,500	\$7,500	\$52,000	\$103,000	
GOPIF - Resilience Partnership	\$177,040	\$200,000	\$100,000	\$7,000		\$11,875		\$12,000	\$180,000	
MCA - Broadband Partnership	\$76,500	\$225,000	\$250,000	\$8,000	\$21,000	\$234,420		\$250,000	\$75,000	
CDBG TA/ Grants & NBRC TA	\$20,270	\$67,500			\$30,000		\$10,000	\$58,000	\$15,000	
DECD Office of Tourism	\$57,140				\$25,000			\$200,000		
DECD HUB	\$186,800	\$909,150					\$40,000			
DECD - PTAC		\$118,000								
MDOT - DBE		\$119,587								
FEDERAL										
US Department of Transportation	\$664,200	\$225,161	\$1,599,653		\$40,000				\$170,000	
Environmental Protection Agency (Brownfields)	\$27,009	\$177,910	\$100,000						\$60,000	
US Department of Energy (Transportation)			\$107,500							
US Department of Agriculture	\$87,300	\$10,588								
US Economic Development Administration	\$70,000	\$70,000	\$70,000		\$70,000		\$70,000	\$70,000	\$70,000	
US Small Business Administration	\$150,000				\$6,625			\$75,000		
US SBA & USDA Rd MicroTA	\$75,400	\$80,544			\$112,000		\$10,000	\$560,000		
Dept. of Defense/PNSY									\$200,000	
Dept. of Defense/PTAC		\$952,490								
TOTAL	\$1,952,841	\$3,277,465	\$2,866,330	\$158,496	\$616,291	\$553,627	\$296,207	\$1,473,510	\$1,064,032	
OTHER INFORMATION										
Dues used for federal match	66%		65%		24%		67%		55%	
Dues Rate			\$2/capita		Based on pop.		\$1.25/capita	1/2 pop. 1/2 val.	1/2 pop. 1/2 val.	
Total Staff	15		32	4			4	16	15	

Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments • Eastern Maine Development Corporation • Greater Portland Council of Governments
Hancock County Planning Commission • Kennebec Valley Council of Governments • Lincoln County Regional Planning Commission
Midcoast Council of Governments • Northern Maine Development Commission • Southern Maine Planning and Development Commission
Washington County Council of Governments