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November 13, 2023

**Written Testimony in Opposition to LD 1976**  
“An Act to Update the Growth Management Program Laws”

Joint Standing Committee on Housing  
Public Hearing Date: November 14, 2023

Honorable Senator Pierce, Honorable Representative Gere, Distinguished Members of the Committee on Housing:

My name is Amanda Lessard and I am the Planning Director for the Town of Windham. Planning Department staff have reviewed the proposed sponsor amendment to LD 1976 “An Act to Update the Growth Management Program Laws” and recommends a Committee vote of **Ought Not to Pass** of the bill as currently drafted.

While we recognize that improvements may be needed to modernize the Growth Management Law and Rule, this bill, as drafted, is a one-size fits all approach that is problematic and will do the opposite of what the drafter intends of lifting the burden of comprehensive planning on communities. The proposal that a designated growth area would require a municipality as part of the policy development implementation process to prepare illustrative plans and neighborhood standards would significantly add both time and cost to a municipality. Furthermore, limiting growth-related capital investment by the State to only the redevelopment of designated growth areas that have illustrative plans and adopted neighborhood standards creates an uneven playing field for those municipalities that may not have the resources to implement those policies.

The Town of Windham spent nearly three years working on our updated Comprehensive Plan that was adopted by the Town Council and found to be consistent with the Growth Management Act in 2017. The significant amount of time to complete the inventory and analysis for the Plan were requirements of the rulemaking, and not the statute. This bill does not directly alleviate those burdens. Our Comprehensive Plan has several recommended strategies to amend our land use ordinance, develop master plans for our growth areas and performance standards similar to the proposed bill. The Town recently completed a master plan for our South Windham Growth Area; it was an effort that took over a year, with costs off-set by a partnership with the Town of Gorham and funding from Cumberland County’s CDBG program. As Windham has experienced, there is a definite value to taking the time to have a more robust public participation process for neighborhood scale planning to better illustrate a community’s vision for a place. However, this approach may not be attainable for all communities as proposed if there is not adequate State funding available to municipalities to hire qualified consultants to develop appropriate performance and design standards.

The significant changes in the sponsor’s recent amendment appears to address some of our other major concerns with the bill, but it could further benefit from a collaborative process, facilitated by the Bureau of Resource Information and Land Use Planning (BRILUP) to convene a stakeholder group to review both the Growth Management Law and Rule.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our input.

Sincerely,

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