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PLANNING & CODE ENFORCEMENT

DATE: November 13, 2023

Senator Teresa Pierce

Representative Traci Gere

Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing - Room 216

RE: LD 1976 An Act to update the Growth Management Program Laws (Date of Public Hearing 11/14/23)

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 on behalf of Westbrook regarding LD 1976, An Act to update the Growth Management Program Laws, with the recommendation of **OUGHT NOT TO PASS**.

Westbrook sees the attached document LD1976 as very problematic for our current & future Comprehensive plans and the language added does not belong in State Statute. The proposal also removes "Transitional" Area as a definition and forces Rural Areas to create standards of 10-acre minimums and large frontages.

The required standards in this bill are not applicable to all communities and the use of "Placetypes" does not provide any benefit to the municipalities. The language proposed does not reduce a municipality's burden in the Comprehensive Plan process, but rather increases it with the need to conduct Master Plan processes for each of these "Placetypes" utilized. This wording is over regulating vs streamlining the Comprehensive Plan process which has been a goal of the legislature.

Further, if a municipality wishes to place several growth areas across their community in their Comprehensive Plans, they can do that now. Municipalities do not need these various "Placetype" definitions to do so. The current use of terms "Growth, Transitional & Rural Areas" works for municipalities in reference to a Municipality's future land use for a Comprehensive Plan. The definitions added are overly specific and, in some cases, provide a judgement on the area vs just cataloging an area. An example definition would be classifying all "Suburban" neighborhoods as "sprawl" when that may or may not be the case.

The most concerning piece for Westbrook is the proposed removal of "Transitional Areas", which would then force municipalities to place lands in ONLY Growth or rural status as the "Placetypes" do not work. Growth areas should not be placed over established neighborhoods and therefore a municipality places established neighborhoods in a "transitional" status, as Rural is not appropriate. The "Transitional" designation is the only other appropriate definition to designate lands in the Comprehensive Plan process. The term is broad enough to work for both small and large municipalities in a variety of circumstances.

In summary, **we join the Maine Association of Planners and the Towns of Gorham and Windham, in asking you to vote against this bill.** We would suggest that a working group made up of Municipal Planners be formed to work with the Bureau of Resource Information and Land Use Planning to pull together an amendment that Maine's municipalities can support and will achieve the goal of streamlining the Comprehensive Plan process that the legislature is looking for. Westbrook would be willing to participate in this effort.

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

Respectfully Submitted,

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Director of Planning and Codes

Rebecca Spitella, AICP
Senior Planner

Daniel Stevenson
Director of Community and Economic Development