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**Testimony in Support of LD 1976: An Act to Update the Growth  
Management Program Laws ~ November 14, 2023**

Senator **Pierce**, Representative **Gere**, and Honorable Members of the **Joint Standing Committee on Housing**, my name is Joanne Joy, I live in Bowdoinham and I am here to testify in support of LD 1976: An Act to Update the Growth Management Program Laws.

Bowdoinham is a small community in Sagadahoc County with a population of just over 3,000 people. We are in the final 6-months of completing a 10-year Comprehensive Plan. I have been the Committee Chair. We also have a Housing Action Subcommittee to take a deeper look at the housing needs and barriers in our community, including existing Land Use Ordinances, hoping to take some action on this front as soon as possible, as well as to inform the Comprehensive plan.

We hosted two Community Forums on housing in partnership with the Bowdoinham Community Development Initiative (<https://www.bcdimaine.org/>), gathered input via several surveys, solicited input at our popular Celebrate Bowdoinham September events, and recently held two Land Use Community Forums on October 11 and November 1. Land Use Ordinance recommendations for the Comprehensive Plan are on the meeting agenda for later today, in fact. But this level of community involvement is not yet expected by Maine Statutes but very beneficial to the future.

Some points of LD 1976 that are near and dear to my heart as the Comp Planning Chair

- **Visioning:** Assuring that many members of the community inform the vision and then aligning the final goals and recommendations with the vision provides more transparency and buy-in.
- **Implementation:** In this small town if there is not a specific staff position, and/or a volunteer committee, designated to oversee the goals, some slip from the top of the priorities pile. Many Mainers step up to the volunteer plate across our towns,

but implementation of often lofty goals can be dropped for any number of reasons. A greater focus on this aspect is important. Our Comp Planning Committee serves the two roles of planning and implementation oversight.

- Inventories : Some carry more weight and interest depending on the community – Bowdoinham’s population demographics, for instance, are driving a lot of the planning since we have larger percentages of over 60 and under 10-years-old community members than either the state of Sagadahoc County.

We have found in public events as well as in committee meetings we use the terms “rural character, rural areas” as well as “growth areas” without solid definitions – necessitating individuals to respond to ideas and plans using their own, often conflicting definitions. Our 2014 Comp Plan “growth areas” were represented by ovals in general areas of town, not particularly easy to establish specific guidance or boundaries.

- We have support for increased density and growth in the village districts while protecting soils and open spaces for natural habitat, the views, our much loved rural character, as well as farming in the residential/agricultural areas.
- Farming is thriving in our town; organic vegetables, and livestock are both considered in our planning, and flowers are available at several locations. So soils maps and current use maps are key to our future thinking.

I am pleased to report that Bowdoinham has a robust Comprehensive Planning process. AND I applaud LD 1976 to clarify definitions, offer best practices, and other strategies to help plan for the future including:

- Visioning with community engagement
- Focus on what people in the community care about rather than inventory lists
- With an increased focus on implementation
  - Providing best practice strategies will provide much needed guidance and support to help our towns grow with a eye to the future

In closing, I urge you to support LD 1976.

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