

November 14, 2023

Dear Senator Pierce, Representative Gere, and Members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing:

My name is Janice Avignon from the Town of Long Island, testifying in support of LD1976.

The Town of Long Island was established in 1993 after seceding from the city of Portland. We have about 230 year round residents up to 850 when seasonal residents are included. There is pride in the level of service provided with one of the lowest tax rates in the state. This has been achievable due to the willingness of community members to volunteer their time and talent. Almost all town roles are volunteer. We are capacity constrained but a very resourceful group.

I have served as Chair of the Comprehensive Plan Committee, made up of 15 members, since late 2020. I personally worked 40-50 hours a week over the 18 months the committee spent doing research, community engagement, and writing the plan.

While the process provided a fantastic opportunity to unite our community as we defined our values and vision for the future, we were absolutely writing a plan with two distinct audiences - our town and the state.

Passing LD1967 would move towards more directly aligning the priorities of small municipalities with the work required by the state in comprehensive planning. This would mean spending precious time and resources on the things that matter most to the town.

Despite Covid, we had fantastic engagement, with 400+ members of the community participating through surveys, vision workshops, and topical forums offered in both physical and virtual formats.

Our work was organized around the state's checklist to cover the required elements. Much time was spent on work not very relevant for our town. Several priority challenges raised by our community were not included in the state's checklist, but we felt compelled to include: issues around climate, community wellness and more efficient management models as examples.

We got unanimous approval at the annual town meeting in May 2022. It took another year to get through state review. Finally our plan was found complete, consistent and we got rave reviews on the work.

By the end of the process this group of highly motivated and enthusiastic individuals were burnt out. I wish we could have redirected energy to top priority actions to keep the amazing engagement and momentum going through implementation.

Thank you.

Janice Avignon, Chair, Comprehensive Plan Citizen Committee  
Town of Long Island, Maine