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**Testimony of Nancy Smith, CEO of GrowSmart Maine
In Support of the sponsor's amendment to LD 1976, And Act to Update the
Growth Management Law**

November 14, 2023

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

My name is Nancy Smith, I live in Ellsworth, and I am the CEO of GrowSmart Maine. We are a statewide non-partisan non-profit organization helping communities navigate change in alignment with smart growth. We advocate for comprehensive policies and funding for smart growth practices and outcomes.

I have included background on the origin of this bill later in my testimony, but let me first highlight our position and how we got here.

Unfortunately, what has become the norm is a comp plan process that exhausts the community, leaving no energy for implementation. That reality, plus my favorite quote from Judy East, that the Growth Management Law predates the internet, highlight the need for change.

For me, clarity in the need for this bill comes both from my experience more than twenty years ago as a volunteer member of the Monmouth Comprehensive Plan Committee, and most recently in my work with GrowSmart. While Monmouth's process was painfully prolonged and has only small successes to show, most recently I've been blown away by what I see in Bowdoinham. Since we began providing technical assistance there earlier this year, I have told others who are equally amazed, that this is the first time I have seen a municipal Comp Plan Committee continue to meet monthly even after the plan is adopted. We need this to be our new normal!

1. I have not heard from a single person that change in the Growth Management Law is NOT needed. But change is hard. GrowSmart's very mission is to help communities navigate change in alignment with smart growth.
2. As I've said in other testimony to this committee, we are all in this unique moment in time. The urgency of the housing crisis and the focus of this Joint Select Committee have brought to the forefront the damage done by decades of neglect and underfunding of land use planning at all levels of government. **Let's not forfeit the opportunity.**

3. It is clear by the testimony on this bill that there is much work to be done, even after the work within Policy Action 2023. This legislative hearing elevates the issue and creates a distinct timeline so that more people are engaging than did so in our voluntary, advisory process. That is appropriate, since it is solely the Legislature that has the authority to change the Growth Management Law. Ours has been a robust advisory role, and we will continue to serve in that way.

3. There has been much discussion about what in the bill belongs in statute, regulation, or guidance documents. This is an important discussion worthy of continued effort. It has led to the call for a stakeholder group to work through all the details before or without advancing the bill.

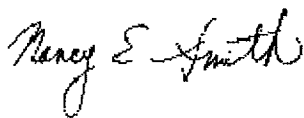
4. While we encourage more work on LD 1976, I am concerned that this will lengthen the timeline for legislative changes beyond the 131st Legislature. If that happens, the results and recommendations would be presented to a new group of legislators, following the 2024 elections. There may not be a Housing Committee at all, as it is not a standing committee and would have to be recreated by new legislative leadership. These committee members are informed and engaged. Let's not forfeit this opportunity.

5. We recommend for the committee's consideration that work continue on this bill, perhaps as committee work sessions to encourage the level of engagement we see today, with the goal of completing required legislative language changes before the 131st Legislature adjourns sine die next spring. Otherwise, we risk missing this moment in time

By way of background on the origin of this bill:

It's been a few months since we were all together, so I'll take this opportunity to remind you of the context for this bill. Beginning in March 2022, GrowSmart partnered with Build Maine to guide a transparent crowd-sourcing of policy proposals that has drawn together over a hundred people from across Maine and beyond.

Policy Action 2023 has resulted in seventeen proposals from eight working groups, all addressing the shared goal, ***"to address barriers to and create incentives for equitable, sustainable growth and development that strengthens downtowns and villages of all sizes while pulling development pressure away from productive and open natural areas. We do so acknowledging that Maine has urban, rural, and suburban settings for which any solution may or may not be a fit and a variety of people who deserve to be welcomed to their communities."***



CEO, GrowSmart Maine