
Joint Standing Committee on Housing & Economic Development
Testimony of Avesta Housing
3/10/2025
**in favor of LD128 – An Act to Support Permitting of Certain Multifamily Housing
Developments Under the Site Location of Development Laws, Sponsored by Senator Teresa
Pierce.**

Hello, Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development.

My name is Nate Howes. I am a Development Officer at Avesta Housing, one of the largest non-profit developers and managers of affordable housing in New England. We have over 100 properties and over 3,000 units across Maine and New Hampshire.

As you know, Maine is under extreme pressure to provide housing that is safe and affordable for all Maine people. Maine people are having to choose between food, medicine or housing, are living outside through cold winters, or are aging without options and are stuck in housing they can't afford to keep up. Businesses are struggling to fill positions and grow because housing isn't affordable for their workforce. **More housing is the solution to all these things.**

LD128 takes a direct step toward reducing the complexity, time and cost of the review process. Maine's investments in building multifamily affordable housing should be put to use in the most efficient route possible.

Making an amendment to an approved site plan is a needlessly lengthy process. While there are upper limits on the amount of time staff can take to review a new stormwater application, an amendment to an approved permit is not subject to the same review standard. For our affordable housing project in Farmington, ME we were quoted a year or more for department processing time; new permit applications were prioritized. After we engaged with department leadership directly, our timeline was accelerated. Likewise, for a recent Biddeford project, it took a concerted effort from Avesta and Department leadership to meet deadlines to merely amend an existing stormwater permit for the purpose of creating new senior housing.

I also want to take this opportunity to highlight another issue that is impeding our ability to develop affordable housing and is within DEP's scope to manage. Remaining sites for affordable housing are often infill and have compromised soil. The simplest way to describe the problem is that soil is either "inert" or it's "hazardous." Now of course the issue is more nuanced, but the fundamental question is: what are we supposed to do with soil between "inert" and "hazardous." Right now, we're paying \$125 to \$135 per ton to send soils to as far North as Quebec or as far West as Ohio. My understanding of the problem is limited, and I understand it's very technical in nature. However, there has to be a solution for soil in between "inert" and "hazardous" because in reality we're still paying exorbitant costs to send these soils to Norridgewock even though they're not deemed hazardous. The money that we spend on soil removal could be used to create more units. We should consider an expanded definition on what is considered "inert" soil or open up more landfill space.

Thank you for your consideration in support of LD128. We see this as a pathway to more streamlined, efficient use of state resources in the development of affordable housing in Maine so all Maine people have a home.