

Testimony in Support of An Act Regarding the Membership of the Land Use Planning Commission (LD 870)

By Sally Farrand of Beaver Cove, Maine

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Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry Committee. My name is Sally Farrand. I live in Beaver Cove, and I appreciate this opportunity to testify in support of LD 870.

As you know, the mission of the Commission is to: “extend principles of sound planning, zoning and development to the unorganized and deorganized townships of the State; specifically, to preserve public health, safety and general welfare; to support and encourage Maine's natural resource-based economy and strong environmental protections; to encourage appropriate residential, recreational, commercial and industrial land uses.

These are fundamental principles that I embraced while serving on the Commission when it was the Land Use Regulation Commission. I served on this important body for four years representing a town in the unorganized territory, Beaver Cove. Beaver Cove is small community of 133 on the eastern shore of Moosehead Lake which is at the doorstep of approximately 10 million acres that comprise the UT. Importantly, Beaver Cove is governed, if you will, by the regulations and requirements of LUPC. So, I have a direct personal interest (though no pending or planned applications) as well as knowledge of the Commission and its work.

As a LURC Commissioner, I had the privilege of serving with dedicated colleagues who shared this commitment to LURC’s mission. We wrestled with and made decisions on permits, rule changes, zoning petitions.

The global pandemic of 2020-2022 led to a dramatic influx of people seeking refuge from cities struggling with illness and overcrowding, while maintaining employment by working remotely. Parenthetically, this was not the first time the Moosehead region and the UT have been a haven for escape... Greenville, Beaver Cove and other communities near and in the UT seek and welcome new residents and businesses to sustain our livelihoods and way of life.

However, the development pressures, both residential and business or industrial, can lead to approval of unwise, scattered development based on a narrow interest that can irreversibly change the character and quality of life that attracts people here in the first place! Moreover, climate pressures are increasing and bring ecological stresses from the spruce budworm to other invasive species that impact the landscape.

The growth of an expanding array of investment-oriented landowners seeking only to maximize short-term shareholder profits vie for and can sacrifice some of the highest value areas that underlie the core value of the UT as a statewide economic engine that brings more than 15 million outdoor recreation visitors who contribute 3.7 billion dollars to Maine’s economy.

The pressures on UT development are complex and require a broader range of insight to ensure that the guiding LUPC principles of “preserving public health, safety and general welfare; and

support and encouragement of Maine's natural resource-based economy and strong environmental protections encourage appropriate development” are maintained and strengthened.

Parenthetically, I have continued to focus on and be engaged in these issues facing the UT, particularly those related to the Moosehead Lake Region. I participated in LUPC's development of a Moosehead Regional Plan in 2022, and I commend the thoughtful process that yielded a good outcome – a plan that provides increased protection for some areas and the green light for development in other areas. LUPC staff reached out to the public for input and called on the knowledge of area residents and experts in the relevant fields affected by development.

In this regard, I think the changes sought in LD 870 follow this good example. The appointment of commissioners by each county maintains the majority local representation, but the addition of individuals with specific, very relevant knowledge and experience brings broader insight. The addition of 5 members of the commission with experience in one or more of the areas of forestry, land use planning, conservation, fisheries, wildlife, outdoor recreation, and natural resources-related businesses that operate in the UT helps ensure that narrow interests, often not driven by the residents of the UT or Maine, do not overrule the principles set forth in the establishing legislation for the LUPC.

I strongly encourage the Committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD 870 and would be glad to answer any questions you may have.