
Joint Standing Committee on Housing & Economic Development

Testimony of Tyler Norod, Westbrook Development Corporation

March 25, 2025

in favor of LD970 - An Act to Prioritize Affordable Housing by Expediting Reviews for Affordable Housing Projects Applying for Funding from the Maine State Housing Authority Sponsored by Rep. Malon

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

My name is Tyler Norod, and I serve as the Development Director for Westbrook Development Corporation (WDC), a leading affordable housing developer in southern Maine. WDC has built more than 20 developments and over 800 housing units, with an active development pipeline that includes significant affordable and market-rate projects in Westbrook (176 affordable, 600 market-rate), Windham (18 affordable, 17 market-rate), and Biddeford (166 affordable). These projects represent not only much-needed housing but also hundreds of millions of dollars in community investment and tax revenue—currently slowed by delays in local and state permitting.

Maine is facing a severe housing shortage, and while recent investments in affordable housing are commendable, extended approval processes at both municipal and state levels are increasing costs and delaying critical projects. LD970 aims to eliminate unnecessary red tape, ensuring that state investments in affordable housing are deployed effectively. The 2023 HR&A housing study emphasized the need for 80,000 new homes by 2030, and streamlining approval processes was identified as a top priority. LD970 directly addresses this issue by introducing accountability and transparency to the permitting process.

Policy Recommendations

30 Day Review for Application Completeness

The 30 day review statutory timeline adds additional predictability and dovetails with Legislatures previous support for LD 722 last year. Most municipalities I have worked in do not have a problem meeting this timeline, but it does eliminate any chance for confusion and helps municipalities prioritize staff time should a situation arise that choices need to be made.

120 Day Approval Period

We also appreciate the proposed bill's provision to push municipal reviews to not linger past 120 days. I would however respectfully suggest some additional language that would allow developers to extend the 120 provision at their sole request in case they need additional time. For example, sometimes local municipalities may collaborate with developers on how to improve a project that could require additional time to work out. We would hate to see the positive intent of this bill inadvertently shut down this positive approach to creative collaboration when it presents itself.

Minimum Approval Period

Affordable housing developments often require more time than market-rate projects because they must compete for funding from MaineHousing, which is allocated annually. Many local planning board regulations require construction to begin within 1-2 years of approval, which does not always align with affordable housing funding cycles. I recommend that the state establish a minimum three-year window for

projects to begin construction following planning board approval. This adjustment would allow projects sufficient time to secure funding over multiple rounds without the risk of losing approvals.

30 Day DEP Approval for Affordable Housing

Perhaps the most impactful component of this bill is the proposed 30-day review requirement for the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). Only larger projects trigger Site Location of Development Act (SLODA) reviews, and the number of MaineHousing projects processed annually through the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit program is relatively small. Therefore, prioritizing affordable housing within DEP's review process would represent a nominal portion of its workload while significantly benefiting housing development.

Current SLODA regulations discourage density on previously developed land because amending existing permits lacks a statutory deadline, making such projects risky and unpredictable. By prioritizing DEP review, this bill would open up new opportunities for affordable housing development, encourage the use of previously disturbed land, and foster partnerships with private developers to integrate affordable housing into larger projects.

For example, we recently lost a 76-unit affordable housing project in Westbrook due to prolonged SLODA review, which resulted in a multimillion-dollar funding gap and indefinite postponement. These revisions to LD 970 would prevent similar setbacks, ensuring that Maine's investment in housing is maximized.

Thank you for your consideration in support of LD970. 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.

Sincerely,



Tyler Norod
Development Director
Westbrook Development Corporation