

City of Augusta, Maine
DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

AUGUSTA STATE AIRPORT
CODE ENFORCEMENT
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



FACILITIES & SYSTEMS
PLANNING

**TESTIMONY OF MATTHEW NAZAR TO THE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

IN FAVOR OF LD 1751

DATE OF HEARING: May 8, 2025

**Honorable Senator Curry, Honorable Representative Gere, and Distinguished
Members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee:**

My name is Matt Nazar and I'm the Director of the Development Services Department for the city of Augusta overseeing economic development, planning, and code enforcement, as well as city buildings and management of the state airport. I've been a professional planner for 33 years with the last 19 being for the city. I'm certified by the American Institute of Certified Planners, the only national credentialing body for planners, and have worked as a municipal planner, a regional land use and transportation planner, an economic development director, and a code enforcement officer. I was also a planner for the Maine State Planning Office 25 years ago with part of that time being as the Director of the Land Use Program administering the Growth Management Act. In my hometown of Readfield, a small town of 2,500 people, I've served on the planning board, the comprehensive plan committee, and the selectboard. I've written five comprehensive plans and implemented several as both a professional planner and as an elected official in Readfield.

There are a lot of planners who will very eloquently discuss comprehensive planning, so I'd like to take a slightly different approach. I love food, so I'd like to talk about the Growth Management Act by telling you a bit about my family and how food connects us. I'm mostly of Armenian and Ukrainian heritage. Both cultures are deeply rooted in the food they serve to family and to guests. Food is life and an expression of welcome. It's the most intimate way they express their warmth to their guests and connect their family to each other. There are certain dishes that nearly all families in each culture eat, but each family typically has their own personal version of those dishes. The general structure of the dish is always the same and always recognizable as borscht, holubsti, dolma, lamajoun, or any number of other traditional dishes. But each family changes the recipe to their taste – a different spice here, more meat there, a specific way to cook an item. We make the dish our own, tying our family together, but respecting the underlying foundation of the dish that connects us to everyone else in the culture. I recently met with a cousin who is here from Ukraine while she completes a degree and she insisted we have a warm bowl of borscht with bread as we talked about the things important to us, connecting us through tradition a way that the conversation couldn't.

As odd as it may seem to compare food, cooking, and sharing a meal to comprehensive planning there really are some significant similarities. The Growth Management Act is one of the foundational recipes we as Mainers are guided by, but each community is allowed the freedom to shape that recipe to their own taste, to be an expression of their community. The final dish still needs to be recognizable by respecting the broad state goals in the law. But the end result, the comprehensive plan and the policies that flow from it, have the right mix of ingredients for that community. It always contains the base requirements, but can include many enhancements that are important to that town.

Importantly, the Growth Management Act ensures that the comprehensive plan is comprehensive. The process brings together people to gain a common understanding of where the town came from, what characteristics have shaped it - population growth or decline, industrial change, environmental hazards or treasures, recreational opportunities, the transportation network and built environment that knits the community together. Together, they then work to put together a plan for the future. That plan will be the guide for municipal budgets, economic development efforts, parks and recreation plans, transportation priorities, workforce development needs and efforts, housing initiatives, social concerns surrounding homelessness and substance use, educational aspirations, and land use regulation. LD 1751 respects this broad, interconnected effort often full of contradictions and competing interests, allowing each municipality the space to figure out how to move forward in their own way. We do have some significant crises right now that the Legislature, the Administration, municipalities, and a whole host of private entities are working to address. Housing is the most critical item in my opinion because without safe, sanitary, and adequate housing, few other issues can be solved or matter. LD 1751 focuses on this issue, while reducing costs for creating the base data for decision-making. It also retains that base level recipe for the plan to tie us all together and make sure we are able to consider all aspects of our communities and what we should leave for our children and grandchildren to enjoy and build on, shaping for their families.

I also want to say that I wish my old high school friend Representative Sachs and I were on the same page on this topic. While we lost touch over the years, seeing her and other Legislators like Russell Black that I've known for 40 to 50 years and immediately reconnecting, reinforces that Maine is an intensely local and personal place that we all want to be a wonderful place to live and do business. We all love Maine. I sincerely hope I can work with her on land use legislation, but sadly I cannot support my friend's bill today. I support Representative Roberts' bill because it is the best set of changes to the Growth Management Act that you have before you. I hope you support it, too.