



**Testimony of the Maine Office of Community Affairs  
Director Samantha Horn  
May 8, 2025**

**Before the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development  
Neither For Nor Against LD 1751, An Act to Improve the Growth Management Program Laws  
and LD 1940, An Act to Revise the Growth Management Program Laws**

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and distinguished members of the joint standing committee on Housing and Economic Development, my name is Samantha Horn, Director of the Maine Office of Community Affairs. I am testifying neither for nor against LD 1751 and LD 1940, both of which propose revisions to the Growth Management Laws.

The Maine Office of Community Affairs, or MOCA, was created in 2024 to foster communication and partnerships between the State and communities in this State. Our charge is to engage with municipalities, tribal governments and regional councils to provide coordinated and efficient planning, technical assistance and financial support to better plan for challenges, pursue solutions and create stronger, more resilient communities.

Comprehensive planning is the foundation for Maine communities to consider the factors driving housing, land use, conservation, economic development, and the many other facets of community development. It gives communities a platform from which to take a proactive approach to shaping their community. How Maine law treats comprehensive planning has ramifications for towns that are social, financial and legal, and it also has substantial effects on statewide policy outcomes. This is an important topic to get right.

We are, unfortunately, at a point where there is substantial disagreement on how the state should revise comprehensive planning to make it easier to use and produce better outcomes. However, I don't think that the disagreement is as expansive as it might appear. From what I can tell there are two major policy choices that, if resolved, would allow us to frame up an overall direction and work on the details.

The first key policy choice is about whether the use of placetypes should be mandatory for all municipalities. Placetypes are a specific method of categorizing different land areas based on how they look and function, and drawing clear boundaries around those areas. Undoubtedly, placetypes are useful. This is especially true for communities that have defined neighborhoods and are experiencing growth pressure. MOCA should be working on technical assistance materials to introduce placetypes to towns that may want to use them, and we should be working with planners who are experienced in using placetypes to better assess how to incorporate them into state practices and policy. However, at this time, I believe that there are also other ways to arrive at reasonable comprehensive plan outcomes and that we

should not mandate one particular model so that communities may have choice in how they plan while we generate guidance about the use of placetypes.

The second key policy choice is about the amount and type of information that communities are required to gather and consider in their comprehensive planning process. All parties agree that the amount of information required by the combination of the current law and rule is too onerous. All parties also agree that specific information must be required to produce a comprehensive plan that protects the environment. In between those two positions there is a spectrum of choices about what type of information must be gathered, at what point in the process, and whether it must be displayed in map form. Should we require the community to gather and develop information about housing stock? Demographic trends? Capital investments? Economic trends? What type of data must be mapped, and if it isn't already available in map form, should a town be required to map it?

The information a community gathers influences what they consider in their deliberations. Required information should be brief enough that it does not weigh down the process and yet it should bubble up to the surface information about the most pressing issues that the state faces and how towns are part of that statewide policy picture. As long as any change in the law highlights the issues that are going to be the most consequential for state policy in the coming decades and requires that towns gather at least basic information about those issues, MOCA can be flexible about the specific wording.

I recognize that there are many other components of the bills that would need to be hammered out. For example, some of the changes to the state goals are worth taking substantial care with to be sure we get them right. And we need to create stronger nudges toward planning across town lines. But for the most part, I don't think that people are rowing in different directions on those issues, at least from a high-level policy perspective. The remaining issues seem solvable if we have a framework to work within.

This is a topic with a long history and a lot of strong feelings. Those strong feelings are an indication that it's an important issue that, in the long run, affects the lives of most people in Maine. We don't have to get the solution perfect in the first go – we can continue to make changes over time. But we do need to make sure that whatever is enacted is workable for all towns so that as we tie financial and development incentives to comprehensive plan outcomes every town has a fair shot, and so that we can advance statewide policy goals in critical areas such as housing provision and prevention of sprawl onto our natural and working lands.

If the move of the Municipal Planning Assistance Program to MOCA is approved by the legislature, the responsibility for implementing any statutory changes to the Growth Management laws will fall to MOCA. I take seriously the need for a robust stakeholder process in the implementation phase. We will include all voices as we move expeditiously to improve the comprehensive planning experience for communities and the outcome for public policy.

Thank you for your time and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.