

May 8, 2025

RE: Testimony IN SUPPORT of LD 1940, An Act to Revise the Growth Management Law

Dear Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and Members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing,

Please accept this testimony **IN SUPPORT of LD 1940**, An Act to Revise the Growth Management Law.

My name is Abraham Dailey, I am a self-employed Planning Consultant and resident of Raymond, where I have lived for most of my life. I was born in Portland, but I grew up in Raymond, and I have also lived in Orono, Portland, Gorham, South Portland, and Buxton. I have a master's degree in Community Planning and Development from the Muskie School of Public Service, and I have more than a decade of experience working as a planner at the regional and state level in Maine. I became a planner because I grew up in a small town in Maine that experienced rapid growth and loss of community character in the 1980s and 1990s, so this law has deep personal meaning to me.

I support LD 1940 because this bill will fix major structural flaws in Maine's 37-year-old Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act (commonly called the Growth Management Act or GMA).

As others have testified, LD 1940 is a product of collaboration between planners, municipal staff and volunteers, smart growth advocates, Maine Audubon, Maine Farmland Trust, real estate developers, and real estate agents. I know because I co-led this group in 2022. Our group submitted this bill to the 131st Legislature, where it was funded but died on the Governor's desk. I thank the sponsors for bringing it back in this session because the GMA is overdue for reform. This outdated law is holding back the growth and development in our communities while it continues to enable urban sprawl that spoils the natural beauty of Maine that is central to our way of life and our economy.

I have already submitted testimony online, and I encourage you to read this testimony. I will be glad to answer any questions you may have, but in the interest of time, I will keep my testimony brief.

Lessons Learned

I watched my own hometown go through the state's comprehensive planning process last year. I estimate Raymond spent about \$90,000 to hire a consultant, which is the average cost of meeting the state's extensive requirements these days. The end product was a plan that did not look all that different from Raymond's 2004 Comprehensive Plan, because many of the state's requirements and guidance for comprehensive planning have not been updated in 20 years.

Raymond's 2025 plan has updated data, and the consultants did a lot of great public engagement, but because the state places so much emphasis on the lengthy state checklist with mandatory policies and strategies, my town spent all of the budget on meeting the state's requirements and was not able to spend enough time on developing the vision and implementation strategies. We're left with a plan that has no clear path to implementation, and it will depend entirely on volunteers to implement the recommendations in the plan. This is what Raymond did in 2004, and the end result was a plan with hundreds of recommendations, and 80% of those recommendations were never implemented.

About a year ago there was a commercial solar farm proposed in Raymond. A few residents of Raymond had to pursue legal action against the Town to stop that development, because the Town had not implemented an ordinance change that was recommended in our 2004 plan. I'll say that again, in the two decades since Raymond adopted our 2004 plan, we did not adopt the recommendations in the plan until residents pursued legal action against the Town. This is not how planning is supposed to work.

Meanwhile, the next town over, Casco, followed the planning process in LD 1940 in their 2024 plan, and the residents of that town now have a comprehensive plan that is actionable. Unlike Raymond's plan, Casco's plan has a clear vision for the locations, types, scales and intensities of land uses the community desires as well as a clear path towards establishing efficient permitting procedures that will enable the community's desired vision, especially in Casco's designated growth areas. Casco's plan also included 85 pages of data inventories so the plan would meet the state's requirements. The money spent on those 85 pages was a complete waste of taxpayer dollars.

Why should we continue enforcing a law that requires municipalities to waste taxpayer dollars on busy work that stands in the way of implementing local goals?

A New Approach

LD 1940 proposes a new approach to local planning in Maine, an approach that was developed in Maine and has been tried in several communities across Maine, in towns like Yarmouth, Newcastle, Topsham, and Casco. These plans have enabled zoning reforms that have unlocked new housing opportunities in traditional and familiar patterns that are consistent with the vision in the locally adopted comprehensive plan.

The reason this approach works is because it asks residents to identify the neighborhoods and buildings they like in their communities, and then it helps them adopt zoning ordinances that will enable new development that looks like the places people already love in their communities. This is a clear playbook that helps small towns plan their future.

I support this bill because it will solve the big structural problems with the GMA by learning from what did not work in the past, and trying a new approach that has already been proven to work in diverse communities across Maine.

I am willing to assist the committee in any way that is helpful.

Sincerely,

Abraham Dailey
Raymond, Maine