



Environmental Priorities Coalition

Testimony in support of LD1940, *An Act to Revise the Growth Management Program Laws*

May 8, 2025

Senator Curry, Representative Gere and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development, my name is Cathy Breen. I am here today to speak on behalf of the Environmental Priorities Coalition (EPC), an inclusive statewide alliance of 39 conservation, climate action, and public health organizations that is marking its 20th anniversary this year. Each session we work together to identify a slate of policy priorities to act on the climate crisis, further environmental justice, protect land, water, and wildlife, and cultivate healthy Maine communities. This is a lengthy and rigorous process that takes place over the summer and fall before each new legislative session. For this current session, the EPC has prioritized LD1940, *An Act to Revise the Growth Management Program Laws*.

Many of us in the EPC have participated in land use planning efforts in our communities. Whether serving on a Planning Board, volunteering for our local land trust, or advocating for better bike and pedestrian options, we understand how integral Maine's Growth Management Law is to informing how our communities grow, adapt and evolve over time. A comprehensive plan is the legal and conceptual framework that guides land use ordinances and zoning policies. It outlines what a community wants to protect, like a downtown full of shops, a huge swath of agricultural land, a beloved historic homestead, a walking path that connects a library to a neighborhood, a public beach where piping plovers nest, and so on. And it outlines priorities for the future including how to manage expected population growth or decline, how to address the impacts of climate change, how to improve transportation, and so on. However, as important as this process is, the statute that guides it hasn't been updated in roughly thirty years.

LD1940 is the updated statute that communities in Maine have been waiting for. This bill is the result of several years of stakeholder input, lengthy negotiations, and genuine compromise. The goal of this bill is to revise the statute so that communities have the tools to

- Focus on local priorities
- Implement sustainable economic development
- Address affordable housing needs
- Implement development strategies that protect access to farmland and wildlife habitats

- Support public services
- Support new and heritage industries that provide good-paying jobs for local residents

While you're hearing two bills that are similar in many ways, one aspect of this bill is uniquely important to EPC members - its deliberate intention to identify rural areas where the community does not want to see development. To this end, this bill includes

- Additional definitions to distinguish levels of protection to be considered, rather than considering "rural" to be a singular feature of a community;
- Elimination of transition areas to ensure deliberate discussion of where growth should be;
- Framing discussion of growth around place types that describe existing human activity patterns. With this legislation, areas of human activity are identified by place type names that facilitate community discussions of where they want to see additional development, and what that would look like. Not all place types would be designated as growth areas, but all growth areas would be grounded in place types.

On behalf of the 39 members of the EPC, I hope that you will take up the best parts of the two bills on this topic (including the pieces I just mentioned) and move forward in the spirit of collaboration. Thank you for your consideration.

MODERNIZE MAINE'S GROWTH MANAGEMENT LAW TO CREATE A MORE FLEXIBLE AND EFFECTIVE FRAMEWORK

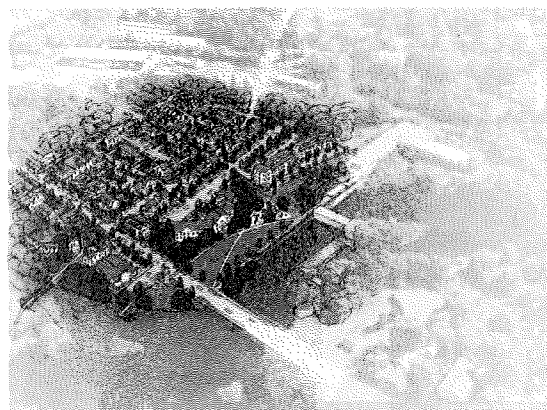
Better outcomes in land use from housing and social spaces to protected lands.

Maine communities are dealing with complex challenges.

- Many municipalities are working to rebuild their local economies to recover from long-term industry shifts and support growth, while others are working to navigate significant population growth.
- Climate change requires new thinking about infrastructure, public services, and housing.
- Housing shortages are making it difficult for people to afford to live near their jobs and almost impossible for communities to attract new workers and families.
- Social isolation is a critical public health issue, impacting physical, mental, and emotional health.

Maine's 34-year-old Growth Management Law and Comprehensive Planning requirements are not supporting communities to address these challenges.

- Comprehensive planning is the tool that Maine municipalities -- big and small -- use to plan, illustrate, and envision how they want their communities to look and function in the future.
- The current process does not provide communities the tools they need. It requires too much red tape, exhausting communities before they can reach their goals.
- Outdated requirements neither link state goals and data to desired community outcomes nor integrate designated areas for growth, conservation, and resilience within those goals.
- The current process too often leads to a lengthy document that looks good, but "sits on a shelf" and does not get implemented.



Proposed new village, Windam Comprehensive Plan

Revising the Comprehensive Plan process and requirements will lead to better outcomes.

- Maine can revise comprehensive planning to focus on local priorities and implementation strategies for sustainable economic development, community revitalization, and strategic land protection.
- This bill updates definitions of critical natural resources, protects access to farmland, and promotes the viability of agriculture to safeguard Maine's rural character, working lands, and heritage industries.



Proposed infill & street improvements, Newcastle Comprehensive Plan

- It encourages municipalities to direct new development to growth areas, making efficient use of public services and existing infrastructure while preventing development sprawl and associated traffic.
- Updating our Growth Management Law will help Maine communities address the current housing crisis without undermining climate action or creating the next crisis in access to working farmland, forests, water, and outdoor recreation spaces.

Support Maine communities. Update the Growth Management Law.

For more information, please contact
Nancy Smith, GrowSmart Maine, at (207) 250-0220 or nsmith@growsmartmaine.org



Environmental Priorities Coalition

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Conservation
Law Foundation



Solutions for a
Toxic-free Tomorrow



Friends of Casco Bay
Casco BAYKEEPER

Gateway Community Services Maine



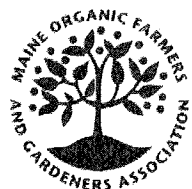
Immigrant Welcome Center
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