



# SIERRA CLUB

## MAINE CHAPTER

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To: Joint Standing Committee on Housing & Economic Development  
From: Matt Cannon, Sierra Club Maine  
Date: February 25, 2025  
Re: **Testimony in Support of L.D. 161:** *Resolve, Directing the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to Convene a Stakeholder Group Tasked with a Comprehensive Overhaul and Modernization of the State Subdivision Laws*

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Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and members of the Committee on Housing & Economic Development,

I am testifying on behalf of Sierra Club Maine, representing over 22,000 supporters and members statewide. Founded in 1892, Sierra Club is one of our nation's oldest and largest environmental organizations. We work diligently to amplify the power of our 3.8 million members and supporters nation-wide. As we seek to develop stronger towns statewide and build communities where Mainers want to live, we must update our sorely-out-of-date subdivision laws. L.D. 161 is the first and necessary step towards that goal and we urge you to support its passage, with some changes.

Everyone who interacts with our subdivision laws currently agrees that they are not working as intended. These laws are out of date and confusing, they employ a one-size-fits-all approach, and they currently do not support local community goals of steering development into designated growth areas.

The bill instructs a stakeholder group to submit a report to the Legislature by the end of this year that includes recommendations that:

1. Overhaul and modernize our subdivision laws and promote development in growth areas;
2. Reduce development pressure in rural areas;
3. Protect public health, safety and welfare;
4. Advance state goals to produce affordable housing;
5. Streamline the development review process.

Updating our state's subdivision laws through the passage of L.D. 161 will likely bring a myriad of benefits to Maine communities. Among them:

**Transportation Safety and Choice:** Current subdivision law incentivizes sprawl and development on rural land, resulting in over-dependence on roads and personal motor vehicles. People need more choice that is affordable and reliable, which can be achieved through more compact development that this bill explores.

**Climate Action:** Updating subdivision law removes barriers to development in growth areas, which will reduce vehicle miles traveled by allowing more people to live near economic centers.

**Fiscal health:** Current subdivision law pushes development out to areas where new infrastructure is needed, driving up maintenance and replacement costs for municipalities.

**Quality of Life:** A well crafted subdivision law balances increased housing in downtowns and villages, and helps preserve open spaces that are important to Maine people and wildlife. Focusing on compact development also increases social interactions and builds stronger communities.

However, this bill should be amended to: 1) ensure the group considers the “conservation of water quality, natural resources, and recreational access” and “transit options and accessibility” in their report; 2) direct the newly-established Maine Office of Community Affairs (MOCA), which is tasked with assisting municipalities in long-term planning, to convene the group; and 3) expand the group to include representation from conservation and community-based planning organizations.

As we work to balance responsible growth with ongoing protection of Maine’s treasured natural resources, updating our subdivision laws is critical. We encourage the committee to support L.D. 161, with the noted additions, and kickstart an inclusive, comprehensive look at these reforms.

Respectfully submitted,

Matt Cannon  
State Conservation and Energy Director  
Sierra Club Maine