

Elisabeth Ames
Lewiston
LD 1167

Dear Housing and Economic Development Committee members:

I am one of the new residents of the 51 Howard Street condo project spearheaded by Healthy Homeworks in Lewiston. I moved in May of 2024, having rented in Portland since 2017 and finding myself increasingly concerned about losing housing and subsequently being priced out of the city altogether. My husband and I were given 30 days' notice to vacate our rental apartment in 2018 when our landlord sold our building, and this experience has hung over our heads ever since. The lack of affordable, permanent housing is a huge barrier to the safety and security of so many people in Maine, and one that I feel very strongly about helping others overcome.

Our housing search began in late 2023, although we had been on the waitlist for one of the Maine Cooperative Development Partners' limited equity co-op units in Portland for some time prior. The only residences affordable to us within approximately 45 minutes of Portland needed significantly more work than we were able to accommodate, and we could not afford a newer build in any of the locations where we were looking. After about two months of attending showings and many more than that of keeping a close eye on real estate listings, we were ready to call a pause on the search when we toured our unit at 51 Howard. The building has been fully rehabbed, and the work we would have needed to do in any other place we had been looking at (updating the electrical and heating, general cosmetic repairs) had already been completed. The price was more than reasonable given these improvements, and the deed restrictions (profit sharing if the unit is sold within 3 years, owner occupancy for the life of the loan) only gave us a moment's pause when considering putting in an offer. To me, these requirements are a happy medium between the limited equity co-op and traditional homeownership models.

Building affordable housing is necessary given the housing shortages and insecurity in Maine, but it faces significant hurdles: funding, public opposition, and the rising cost of building materials, to name a few. Rehabilitating existing housing stock allows for historically neglected buildings to help alleviate the shortfall of housing available for first time buyers. The risk that organizations like Healthy Homeworks have taken and would take on to rehabilitate these units is priceless to a first time buyer without the financial security to fall back on. I encourage you to make this model more widely available to other first time buyers in the form of the LD 1167 grant program.

Thank you,

Beth Ames
51 Howard Street #2
Lewiston