



SIERRA CLUB

MAINE CHAPTER

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To: Joint Committee On Housing and Economic Development
From: Andrew Blunt, Sierra Club Maine
Date: May 8, 2025
Re: **Testimony in Support of L.D. 1940: *An Act to Revise the Growth Management Act Laws***

Dear Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and Members of the Joint Committee On Housing and Economic Development,

I write on behalf of the Sierra Club Maine Chapter, 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 nationwide as we work towards combating climate change and promoting a just and sustainable future for all people. To that end, we urge you to vote "Ought to Pass" on L.D. 1940.

Maine is growing and changing every day, and we need to adapt our community planning process to grow and change with it. Portland has recently earned a reputation as a coveted home for new young Mainers, and subsequently faces a severe housing shortage. Millinocket, once home to the Great Northern Paper Company, saw severe economic downturns after the mill's closure in 2014 and is working hard to pivot to new economic opportunities. Stonington, a vibrant fishing community, faces ongoing infrastructure challenges related to climate change.

Maine's communities are dealing with diverse and complex local challenges. And each community needs the ability and resources to plan for the future according to the specific challenges they face. Currently, this process is governed by the 34-year old Growth Management Act (Title 30-A), which deals with the local comprehensive planning process.

The purpose of this bill is to remove the challenging and expensive barriers in the comprehensive planning process and replace it with a more flexible, locally-led process that allows municipalities to identify their own priorities and act on them, utilizing readily available and accessible materials.

The current comprehensive planning process is not working. Of the 454 municipalities in Maine, 132 (29%) have comprehensive plans that are currently deemed consistent with the state's Growth Management Act. This is directly due to the burdensome layers of red tape that creates a process that is too challenging for many under-resourced municipalities to prioritize. Those without a comprehensive plan are most often rural communities with significant development opportunities and needs, and lower land values, which can lead to poor planning outcomes.

We support L.D. 1940 for four major reasons:

1. This bill updates definitions of critical natural resources, protects access to farmland, and provides an overall expanded focus on rural areas. We need to be thinking about where we do not want to see development, as much as we think about where we do want to see it.
2. Updated state goals that reflect today's changes facing Maine communities. This includes transportation and affordable housing challenges, as well as language to safeguard Maine's rural character and prioritize the conservation of prime agricultural lands.
3. 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.
4. It convenes a stakeholder group of diverse parties to weigh in on rulemaking required in the bill ahead of time. This way, we can ensure that new rules are informed by the experience and expertise of those working on comprehensive planning at various levels of government, as well as nongovernmental organizations.

Updating our Growth Management Act can help Maine communities address current concurrent crises of housing and economic development without undermining climate action or creating the next crisis in access to working farmland, forests, water, and outdoor recreation spaces. Our state is growing, and choosing smart growth over sprawl is one of the most powerful decisions city and other local governments can make to reduce climate emissions and air pollution, conserve local habitat, and improve the health of their communities. Sierra Club's complete policy on urban infill development and smart growth can be found [here](#).

We have to encourage more towns to engage in beneficial, long-range planning. A one-size-fits-all approach no longer suits the varied needs of towns across the state. Above all, we at the Sierra Club look forward to the beneficial outcomes of good planning decisions: strong, economically vibrant downtowns, good active and public transportation, nearby conserved lands for recreation, and community organization that facilitates long-term sustainable living.

L.D. 1940 offers a thoughtful and well-informed solution to a broken statutory framework for comprehensive planning. We encourage the Committee to consider the best aspects of both L.D. 1940 and L.D. 1751 and merge them into a single reform package that moves forward the planning outcomes that we all seek to achieve for Maine communities.

Thank you for your consideration, and we urge an 'Ought to Pass' vote on L.D. 1940.

Sincerely,

Andrew Blunt
Sierra Club Maine Chapter
Legislative and Political Strategist