

May 7, 2025

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

Senator Curry, Representative Sachs, President Daughtry, Speaker Fecteau, Representative Gere and Members of the Committee on Housing and Economic Development;

My name is Bryan Shumway, and I live in Scarborough, Maine. I am a real estate developer and owner of Melmac Properties LLC. My work focuses on social real estate (SRE) investment as well as workforce and affordable housing development. Please accept this testimony **IN SUPPORT of LD 1940**, An Act to Revise the Growth Management Program Laws.

After completing my Masters in City Planning from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), I began a twenty-four-year career developing and preserving affordable housing throughout the US. My background is in urban planning and design, statistics and economics. I am the Chair of the Scarborough Housing Alliance, a board that advises the Scarborough Town Council on matters related to housing policy and serve on several local and national non-profit boards. I am testifying today in my individual capacity and not in my capacity as Chairman or board member.

I support LD 1940 because our current approach to planning has created too many “communities” that are not communities at all. I believe it is critically important that we pivot our comprehensive planning efforts away from pedantic checklist completion and inventory analysis and toward tackling the very local and very real problems that impact Maine communities today. This change in track is critical if we’re going to improve our chances at creating more great places in Maine. It will only happen if we make it easier to build housing in Maine that meets the actual needs of our communities.

While I have professional and academic experience in the areas of housing and analytics, what I want to share today are two personal stories that highlight the importance of prioritizing the needs of actual *people* over “rules of thumb” when creating community plans.

Three years ago, I was living in a four-bedroom, single family home in Scarborough. It had a two-car garage, a well-kept lush green front yard, a swimming pool and screened-in back porch. It was set back 40-50 feet from the street, had the requisite frontage and was safely located near a fire hydrant. Half of my home’s yard was swamp, or wetlands as we politely call them here, allowed/forced my two-story home to be sited neatly in the center of its 1.44 acre lot. It sat on a street, a dead-end street – not quite a cul-de-sac, with a “hammerhead” at the end, with 12 other homes just like it. From one end to the other was

0.2 miles – a 4-minute walk. At the “live end” of the street was a connection to a 35 MPH road where drivers rarely lived within this suggested velocity restraint and along which homes were planted every 200 feet or so. This home of mine was just like almost every other home built in the early 2000’s in Scarborough. It was a technocrat’s dream; and for a while, I suppose, notwithstanding its vinyl siding and lack of meaningful character, it was my dream.

Sometimes my home would give me the opportunity to interact with my neighbors – like in the spring, summer and fall when I was meticulously grooming the lawn on my riding mower; or during a snowstorm when I was shoveling the steps and walkway (not the driveways though – we hired a plow for that...); or when one of the neighbors would, against all odds, bravely travel up the driveway to see if anyone was milling around inside the two story colonial home. More often than not though we were enjoying the solitude of our backyard, our back porch, our pool in the back and ourselves. It was quiet, it was pleasant, it was buggy and... it was isolating. Thankfully we had cars that we could drive to other people’s houses to visit with and isolate in their backyards together.

I now live in a three-bedroom townhouse in a master-planned community in Scarborough called The Downs. It has a one car garage, a front porch and a shared driveway in the back. My street is still 0.2 miles and still takes 4 minutes to walk from one end to the other. However, this street has 27 homes on it and another 36 condos at each end. Across the street there is a swamp, but now we call it a rain garden, and it has been turned into a public amenity with a walking trail around it that is well lit and used by my neighbors. My street is connected to other streets with housing at both ends and those are connected to other streets with housing – all of which have sidewalks and streetscaping. This new neighborhood of mine is connected, alive and interactive! It is not isolating; it is not lonely. And that matters.

Last week a neighbor approached me about a housing development being proposed in Scarborough that I am very familiar with. It is an affordable and workforce housing development that the Housing Alliance is reviewing. She and her husband took about 15 steps and walked over to my front door and we talked about the need for affordable and workforce housing in town. We carried on about the work of our committee and how important public input is on projects like this – almost like a textbook urban planner’s case study! We knew we were value aligned but as we talked, we discovered that we were not aligned on whether this project should proceed. I learned that she and others in town are opposed to the project because of environmental concerns. As we dug deeper on the issue together – in person – I learned more than I ever would have otherwise, and she did too. I was able to bring this knowledge to my committee work and she was able to bring her knowledge to her friends who were discussing the project. By talking through the issue, we were building community with each other and helping to create a better community for the

future. We interacted and grew and connected because our physical community allowed us to and encouraged us to; we were not relegated to the 2-dimensional antagonism of social media. This is just part of the value of well-planned communities like the one I live in now. It matters.

Just days before this interaction, I ran into another friend whose family is selling their home and thinking of moving to my neighborhood. He asked how I liked it here. I told him it was great! I shared that I thought it was the exact opposite of everything found in the cliquey, isolated backyard firepit auto-inspired mega-homes with huge yards that have popped up throughout town over the years.

At first, he sheepishly looked at me and asked, “what do you mean?” I paused, wondering whether I had just verbally assaulted his dream living environment. I then went on to describe the front porch I had, the neighbors walking through the park across the street, down the sidewalks with their dogs, the ACTIVITY and the sense of life. I described the feeling of energy that has been created by the connectedness of the streets that allows for interaction but does not force it. As I did, he seemed to understand what I was talking about and shared that his “neighborhood”, which is really just a street, now feels like a ghost town, despite each of the 8 homes on his street being full of families. The place that I described really seemed to resonate with him as being the kind of neighborhood he and his family were looking for to connect with the community again. It turns out that the “dream living environment” that he achieved may have turned into a bit of a nightmare for him, a hollow shell of an existence and he was learning that community and place really matters in making a home. **Apparently, setbacks, height limits and minimum lot sizes had failed to create a sense of place in HIS “community” just as it had in my old neighborhood.**

The contrast between our two neighborhoods illustrate the difference between what is possible and what is probable. While some enlightened developers will push the envelope on their own to develop great spaces and great places that support community building – like you find in the Eastern Village or The Downs in Scarborough - **most developers will just build what you let them build (or force them to build) and not much more.** As policymakers and leaders, we should do all we can so that we don’t have to count on good luck and enlightenment to avoid the isolation, disconnectedness and lonely places that have been left in our existing inventory of housing. The people of Maine deserve better and we know how to do better.

The Downs, where I live, was planned in a thoughtful, comprehensive manner in accordance with the needs of our community; it was not done piecemeal based on whimsy and hope and luck. We know what it takes to create a framework to plan strong communities like this; let’s use what we know to make it easier and more likely for all

Mainers to be able to enjoy connected and vibrant communities. The proposed revisions to the Growth Management Program Laws will help us do this.

Thank you for your consideration of the revisions to the Growth Management Program Laws. Your efforts will allow Maine municipalities plan for and build predictably better connected communities.