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May 11, 2023

Dear Senator Pierce, Representative Gere, and Members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing, my name is Erin Zwirko and I am the Director of Planning and Development for the Town of Yarmouth.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on LD 1673. The Town of Yarmouth has successfully implemented a form-based code for our major corridors, Main Street and Route One. The form-based code, known as the Character Based Development Code, strives to facilitate the predictable contextually-based planning and development of walkable mixed use human-scaled places, similar to the goals of the LD under consideration.

Yarmouth's code supports infill development that exemplifies the historic qualities of Yarmouth and values the healthy balance of uses that comprise the Village Center. We understand that the market is a dynamic condition, and while the code does not prescribe a proportion or mix of uses, the code enables our major corridors to grow and change with time and trends. By supporting LD 1637, there is the opportunity to assist other municipalities in the development of similar regulations that suit the needs of those cities and towns, in the same way that Yarmouth's code is tailored for Yarmouth.

The implementation of Yarmouth's Character Based Development Code has led to a number of successful infill projects, including Yarmouth Commons at 350 Route One and the Sweetser Apartments at 216 East Main Street, the expansion of the 317 Main Street Community Music Center, and smaller commercial applications such as Five County Credit Union and Cumberland County Credit Union. We are excited for the expected start of projects along Main Street including the mixed-use building at 298 Main Street and the extension of our Village Center through the Railroad Square Master Plan. These projects happened in Yarmouth and in this location because of our flexible standards that are meant to encourage development supported by the community. I have included photos of these projects at the end of my written testimony.

Route One, in particular, provides the greatest opportunity to encourage infill and redevelopment in a place that is both walkable to the Village and will result in fewer impacts than housing built in other areas of town where the protection of natural resources and rural areas are important. Although an update to our comprehensive plan is underway and may bring up new ideas for Yarmouth to consider, LD 1637 presents an opportunity to build upon important efforts such as the evolution of the Character Based Development Code and the implementation of the North of Portland Route One Complete Streets Corridor Plan and appreciate any support from the state in making critical investments to our major corridors.

Thank you for your time. I am happy to be available as a resource to help articulate the benefits of a form-based approach that encourages significant development in a way that responds to community goals.

Respectfully Submitted,
Erin Zwirko, AICP, LEED AP

"Our Latchstring Always Out"

Illustrative Images from Yarmouth's Character Based Development Code:

CD4 Village Center



CD4 Village Center. This District consists of a medium Density area that has a historic mix of Building Types and Residential, Retail, office and other commercial uses; there are shallow or no front Setbacks and narrow to medium side Setbacks; it has variable private landscaping; and it has Streets with Curbs, Sidewalks, and street trees that define small to medium Blocks.

CD4-C Route 1 Corridor



CD4-C Route One Corridor. This District consists of a medium- to-high density development with a mix of Building Types and Commercial, Retail and residential uses; it accommodates pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular activity; there are shallow or no front Setbacks and shallow or no side Setbacks; it has variable private landscaping; and it has Streets with Curbs, Bikeways, Sidewalks and street trees that define medium to large Blocks.

Yarmouth Commons, 350 Route One:



Cumberland County Credit Union, 808 Route One:



Five County Credit Union, 219 Route One:



Sweetser Village Apartments, 216 East Main Street:



"Our Latchstring Always Out"

317 Main Street Community Music Center:



298 Main Street (Rendering Prepared by Barrett Made):



Railroad Square Master Plan (Renderings Prepared by Barrett Made):



"Our Latchstring Always Out"

Erin Zwirko
Town of Yarmouth
LD 1751

Honorable Senator Curry, Honorable Representative Gere, and Distinguished Members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee:

My name is Erin Zwirko, and I have been a planner for 20 years serving as a planner in Maine and Massachusetts communities as well as in the private sector. I currently serve as the Director of Planning & Development for the Town of Yarmouth. I decided to become a planner while studying at College of the Atlantic (COA) in Bar Harbor. If you are not familiar with COA, the college offers one degree in Human Ecology. Human ecology can mean different things to different people, but for me and in my career, it means that I try to take a holistic approach to planning challenges through engaging with the various stakeholders so I can understand how they interact with the environment around them.

This approach is important to me as the community I currently serve completed a comprehensive plan in 2024. Taking a holistic viewpoint was the approach that our steering committee and consultants employed over the 18 months of learning, engaging, and synthesizing. All groups involved desired to understand how all of the elements of comprehensive planning come together and intersect with each other in positive, or negative, ways. Most importantly, how the actual people who live, work, or play in the community experience this interaction and understand their community. Those unique experiences create the foundation for the development of goals for the future. In this way, comprehensive planning can never be one size fits all because each Maine community exists in different contexts.

LD 1751 improves comprehensive planning by decreasing the municipal burden and cost while preserving the essential understanding of a community by considering the past, present, and future. It matches comprehensive planning requirements with a community's capacity, context, and need through a tiered framework. It provides guidance on strategies by place type to enable "floor model" comprehensive plans that communities can customize from rather than starting from scratch. This is especially important as LD 1751 does not mandate elements that are simply not applicable to a community.

I respectfully request your support for LD 1751 and am happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.

Respectfully submitted,
Erin Zwirko, AICP, LEED AP