

Robert Nelson
Newcastle
LD 1976

November 14, 2023

Honorable Senator Pierce, Honorable Representative Gere, Distinguished Members of the Committee:

My name is Robert Nelson, I live in Newcastle and I am here to testify in support of LD 1976.

I've been involved with Newcastle planning since 2005 when I joined the committee to help finish a comprehensive plan. After adoption, the town struggled, having a plan with good ideas, but lagging on implementing those ideas.

Almost 10 years ago, the town decided to start over. We decided to revise our comprehensive plan and land use ordinance together in one overall effort. This involved the largest public planning effort in the history of Newcastle. We ended up adopting a comprehensive plan in 2018, and, after a couple of tries, a new zoning code in 2020. The combined effort gave the town tools to guide development in ways that are beneficial to the town as a whole, that meet the community's goals.

As an example, I'm currently developing an affordable housing project creating 16 homes on a parcel I own just off Main Street. This project would not have been possible under the old land use ordinance, but it is explicitly allowed under the new code as it addresses one of the goals in the new comprehensive plan.

One wrinkle in this happy story is that, 5 years later, our Comprehensive Plan still hasn't been approved by the state. The comprehensive plan that we created, that represented the goals and desires of the community and was critical to the development of our new code did not meet the checklist required for state approval. That work has been ongoing, and was part of the reason Newcastle decided to hire a part-time planner for the first time.

I support LD 1976 because it more closely aligns the comprehensive planning process with the implementation of the resultant plan. Much of the current planning checklist approach simply requires towns to regurgitate data provided by state agencies back to the state.

A good comprehensive planning effort, engaging the community in the sometimes difficult discussions about what we want for the future of our towns, is a lot of work, but LD 1976 can help relieve towns of the burden of the responding to the current checklist. Instead it will encourage towns to spent that effort creating a plan that can help the town meet its goals.

Thank you