

January 5, 2024

Testimony in Support of LD 1672

Senator Pierce, Representative Gere and members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing:

My name is Nat Jordan and I grew up in Cape Elizabeth. I've spent the past four years closely watching Cape Elizabeth town politics.

You've probably heard of the failed attempt to put 49 affordable apartments on an empty lot in town center. Maybe you've heard about how our town council chair worried in November that if the town were to change its zoning, we might have to spend more on foreign language teachers, police, streetlights and general assistance.

Or perhaps you read about the last town council meeting, in which the new majority broke two state laws, town charter, the town zoning ordinance, town council rules, and Robert's Rules...all to repeal minimal zoning changes to comply with LD 2003. Indeed, according to our own town attorney, Cape Elizabeth's current zoning ordinance does not comply with LD 2003.

Here's my point: It's become clear to me, based on conversations with developers and others, that our regulatory environment in Cape Elizabeth — and by that I mean an exclusionary zoning code and a town council majority that will do anything it can to prevent more homes — scares builders away.

Establishing a state approval process would invite developers back to places like Cape Elizabeth by removing the daunting process of gaining approval from town councilors and planning board members hostile to affordable housing.

I am 24, a Cape High grad, and am finishing up school. When I'm done, I want to settle in Southern Maine. But the problem is that people like me — people who haven't worked in Manhattan for 10 years to save up enough to buy a McMansion — have no power and no representation in the current political setup.

The land use approval process is controlled by people who financially benefit from the housing crisis. Exhibit A: the Cape Town Council. People who own million-dollar homes don't have the right to determine whether regular people who desperately need housing can live in their town. Instead, that should be the job of this commission.

Finally, I would encourage you to strongly consider eliminating or reducing several of the review standards in Section 3.C, as others have testified. As a prospective boomerang young person scared of paying an arm and a leg for housing, I'm encouraged to see the legislature seriously addressing the problem of NIMBYism. Please keep up the good work.

