

May 13, 2021

Dear Senator Chip Curry, Representative Roberts, and respected members of the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement, and Business:

Kennebec Valley Council of Governments, representative of our membership, support LD 1694, An Act to Create the Maine Redevelopment Land Bank Authority, as a useful tool to address the converging issues of distressed property, depressed land values, discounted tax revenue, and the stress of redevelopment on low-resourced, rural Maine towns.

With this Act, regional and local entities can choose to form a land bank to address blighted or abandoned property and regain its usefulness as well as recapture lost tax revenue. Regional Planning organizations such as KVCOG play a vital role in connecting municipalities to state resources and providing technical assistance with projects that enhance the community. Our regional resilience planning focuses on ways to strengthen our vulnerabilities and identify resources to expand or preserve their economic, cultural, and historic value. While some of our larger towns may elect to form their own land bank, towns without planning capacity will need assistance to engage in land banking and to secure funding to complete these projects.

This legislation will enable small towns to overcome barriers that prevent a neglected property from being redeveloped into a useful community asset. Many examples exist of successful adaptive reuse projects, especially those that turn large commercial buildings into mixed-use condos or apartments. Often these projects are funded by well-resourced communities or private developers and cater to a select clientele. However, small-town realities include single family homes, abandoned nursing homes, and industrial facilities that need extensive work or demolition, hazardous waste mitigation, and whose titling issues make it nearly impossible for municipalities to dispose of. Many towns use the Dangerous Buildings code as a last resort, but only after decades have eroded value and stripped away historic consequence. By creating both legal procedures and funding mechanisms with which a town may engage a redevelopment project, the results will be responsive both to local needs and cultural memory.

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