



Our Katahdin
245 Aroostook Avenue
Millinocket, ME 04462

May 12, 2021

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

My name is Lucy Van Hook. I serve as the Community Development Director for a small nonprofit focused on economic and community development in the Katahdin Region. I am writing in full support of LD 1694, An Act to Create the Maine Redevelopment Land Bank Authority.

The creation of a Maine Redevelopment Land Bank Authority will provide a pathway and mechanism to address blighted and abandoned properties in our rural downtowns. Since the paper mill in Millinocket closed in 2008, there has been an economic downturn. Families left town for new work. People abandoned buildings. Half of the commercial buildings on our main street in Millinocket are empty. Some need to be torn down. Others need environmental remediation. We lack the capacity, expertise and funding to assist the municipality to act and reclaim these buildings.

With the intent of catalyzing additional investment along Penobscot Avenue, our main street, Our Katahdin purchased the largest, abandoned building that previously housed a department store. We have completed the environmental remediation and are in the process of renovating the building to create a vibrant space that supports rural entrepreneurs. LD 1694 has the potential to accelerate investment in downtown and aligns with our work of revitalizing the downtown, as well as the regional vision of having vibrant, age-friendly downtowns throughout the Katahdin Region.

Specifically, LD 1694 would facilitate the implementation of the following action items identified by community members, planners, municipal staff, non-profit organizations and business owners in the Katahdin Gazetteer, a vision and action plan for the Katahdin Region:

Grow vibrant villages that enhance the region.

01. Prioritize development in the region’s downtowns, especially Millinocket, East Millinocket, Island Falls, and Patten.

Action 01.4

Direct available infrastructure funds into downtown projects that will help support additional private investment to make the downtowns exciting, safe, and comfortable for all ages.

Who

Municipalities, State agencies, philanthropists

Cost Variable

Action 01.10

Locate and relocate area institutions into downtowns when existing buildings are up for renovation, expansion, new leases, etc. to maximize infrastructure investments and fuel growth in a revenue per acre analysis.¹

Who

Municipalities, Baxter State Park, Katahdin Higher Education Center

Cost Varies

¹ Focusing energy into village and town centers will help create critical energy that will support retail activity, housing demand, enable regional transit, and protect the limited resources that are needed to maintain current infrastructure.

Grow vibrant villages that enhance the region.

02. Preserve and advocate for new and sustainable use of local assets.

Action 02.3

Inventory available land and unused property in downtowns.

Who

Municipalities

Cost Staff and volunteer time

Action 02.4

Gain cooperation with the owners of or control of old buildings so when new business is looking for space, there is a clear and direct path forward.

Who

Our Katahdin, Northern Forest Center, Katahdin Region Development Board, municipalities

Cost Staff time and variable costs

Action 02.5

Promote available buildings in village centers to regional organizations and/or established businesses across the state through well-connected local people and organizations.

Who

Katahdin Collaborative, Northern Forest Center, Katahdin Region Development Board, municipalities

Cost

Staff and volunteer time

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important legislation that could greatly benefit the rural downtowns in Maine.

Sincerely,



Lucy Van Hook
Community Development Director
Our Katahdin