

Peter McLaughlin
Peaks Island

Thank you to the Labor & Housing Committee for letting me speak today. My name is Peter McLaughlin, I've been a resident of Portland, Maine for more than a decade. I am 33 years old and a graduate of Bowdoin College. I work multiple jobs, over full time, and have for most of my adult life. I make just over 50% of the local AMI here in Portland.

I am thrilled to see this committee taking up this act to promote energy efficient affordable housing. Many know that here in Portland we instituted a similar ordinance by referendum back in November. I was a supporter and volunteer of that campaign. I know many others will speak to the great benefits and careful design of LD 1656, so I'd like to speak briefly to some of arguments that have been raised against. Here in Portland, we saw strong opposition to our referendum from the development and real estate community writ large, as well as some of their allies in our own city government. The claim made over and over and over was that the market could simply not bear these sort of Green initiatives, that the added costs would eat too far into the profits of developers, and these very developers would simply leave town. Some members of the state-wide community of developers are likely making these same arguments about LD 1656.

While, we've only lived six months with the Portland ordinance, some things are already clear. Back during the campaign in 2020, city councilors and local developers pointed to specific projects that would not go through if this referendum were to pass. At public city council meetings and in the most well-funded opposition campaign Portland has ever seen, they said this again and again. These specific affordable housing projects were dead in the water. Well, as we know the referendum passed by a margin of over 8,000 votes in our city of 66,000. And then what happened? The councilors and developers who had been for months fear mongering about all needed development in Portland coming to a halt... They got quiet. Real quiet. And what else? The projects went through. These specific affordable housing projects, supposedly dead in the water, are going through the planning board and city council processes. This affordable housing will be built. And these projects are in good company! Despite this supposedly burdensome referendum, the projects continue to come. Some of the largest development projects the city of Portland has ever seen. They're not going to Westbrook or South Portland or Biddeford and they're certainly not leaving the state. The margins are still very good and everyone still wants to build. Projects of all types, too.

I'll end with something I think we can all agree upon. Maine is a heckuva desirable place to be. It's a desirable to live, work, and run any kind of business, big or small. For those that want to do business here, and those who want to reap great financial benefit from that business, I think in many cases we can afford to ask a bit more. And as far as others issues are concerned, as the health of our environment and the future of our planet, not to mention the needs of our workers and the needs for affordable housing... we simply can't afford to not ask for a bit more.

Thank you.