



TOWN OF GEORGETOWN

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Dear Senator Daughtry

Providing affordable housing for all Maine citizens is a very important issue and goal. It is an issue the government of Maine should address. And programs to assist Maine municipalities develop more affordable housing are needed.

However, the Georgetown Planning Board believes the bill before the 130th session of the Maine Legislature, LD 2003, *An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Commission To Increase Housing Opportunities in Maine by Studying Zoning and Land Use Restrictions*, has been drafted with Maine's larger municipalities in mind.

The large municipalities are more likely to have planning departments and more administrative staff to implement ambitious, broad programs than small communities that rely largely on volunteers for these functions. Small municipalities are more likely to rely on private water wells and septic systems. Smaller communities in general are less likely to have public transportation, shopping, and employment opportunities. For these reasons we do not feel that Georgetown and hundreds of other municipalities in Maine would be well served by the proposed bill.

It is not clear what the phrase "... *any municipality or government entity*..." in section 3 includes. It seems unlikely that that it is intended to include plantations and unorganized municipalities, but it would appear to include all 432 cities and towns in Maine, approximately 14 of which have populations of less than 100. 152 municipalities have populations of less than 1,000 and 256 have populations of less than 2,000. These smaller communities would be better served by a program that is tailored to their needs and conditions, and which would therefore be more attainable

In several sections LD 2003 allows for greater density of dwelling units. In Section 9., Definition of "affordable housing development," it provides for 2½ times the normal dwelling density for affordable housing units. Section 10., provides for four dwelling units in a structure where otherwise only one dwelling unit would otherwise be permitted. Section 11., permits accessory dwelling units on lots with a single-family structure that otherwise would have only permitted one dwelling unit.

First, availability of potable water. Based on the Maine.gov website, 41 of Maine municipalities have public drinking water systems meaning that 391, or 91%, of municipalities do not.

Many wells in Georgetown have yields of less than one gallon per minute. This would be enough for a single family but not for multifamily dwellings. Georgetown has a Minimum Lot Size Ordinance, one of the main reasons for this is availability of water. In some areas, where lots are small because they were created before the ordinance was adopted, the dwelling density is much greater than one per two acres. In some of these areas, wells dry up in the summer when seasonal homes are occupied and the demand on the aquifer is greater. If dwelling densities are increased due to mandates, wells that were adequate before may dry up because of increased demand on the aquifer. This might also become an issue due to changing weather patterns related to climate change.

There is also an issue of groundwater contamination. Bacterial contamination and chemical contamination resulting from the use of pesticides and herbicides becomes more likely with greater dwellings density. This is especially true if the only water filling the well is from near the surface.

Second, reliance on septic systems is also an issue. Georgetown, like many coastal communities, has a shallow layer of soil over bedrock. Often the soil that is there does not meet the State subsurface wastewater disposal rules. Small lots or lots with multifamily dwellings may not have an acceptable site for a septic system. If the site of the septic system is marginal or the septic system is not well maintained the system could fail, in which case there could be contamination of nearby wells and there may not another acceptable septic site on the lot.

Third, roads in Georgetown do not have shoulders. There is essentially no on-street parking, yet the bill only requires no more than two parking spaces for every three affordable housing units. It does not require any parking for accessory dwelling units. There is no public transportation in Georgetown. People living in affordable housing and accessory dwelling units will need automobiles. Even low-income families will prioritize having more than one automobile.

Finally, the financial and administrative burdens on small municipalities would be greater than most of them would be able to afford. The task of drafting new ordinances and redrafting existing ordinances will be so great that volunteers may be reluctant to undertake it. Administering proposals, applications and contracts to build affordable housing units will be beyond the time available and expertise of town clerks, especially contracts that run for 30 years.

As stated above, affordable housing for all Maine residents is something that must be addressed and this bill may be appropriate for large municipalities with the conditions required and the resources to implement it, but it is not appropriate for smaller municipalities. Therefore, the Georgetown Planning Board recommends that this bill “ought not to pass” from the Committee without being modified to take into account the needs of small, rural communities.

Respectfully,

Robert Trabona

Chair, Georgetown Planning Board