

Richard Rhames
Shady Brook Farm
LD 2003

Please consider these comments in addition to my attempted Zoom effort yesterday afternoon.

My name is Richard Rhames. My wife and I farm the place where I grew up here in Biddeford, and have for decades. I am the long-time chair of the Saco Valley Land Trust, the vice chair of the Biddeford Conservation Commission and have served twice on Biddeford's city council. I also served on Biddeford's last comp plan committee in the mid 90s. As a couple presenters testified today Maine's Growth Management Act and the State Planning Office used to guide planning rationality here. The SPO was a real resource for municipalities and was frankly invaluable in the comp planning process. It offered the legislature and the state's political subdivisions the kind of perspective and wholistic thinking that is never more needed than today.

I am pleased that the committee was urged to consult with what's left of the SPO, currently housed at DACF. I understand that the Mills administration may at least partially resuscitate the agency. I hope that is true. Giving oversight of housing and larger land use issues to the DECD seems to me to be extremely unwise. But in our market-based era perhaps it's understandable. When your only perceived tool is a hammer, everything looks like a nail.

> Several speakers suggested concern about protecting farm and forest but seemed satisfied that the bill as written was sufficient. It is not. Having had to defend our farm with respect to two proposed subdivisions on our borders—even when registered under the farmland “adjacency law” ——— let me assure you that development pressure adjacent to farm and forest land imperils these working landscapes. LD 2003 actually further opens the flood gates. We heard that it was a public good to “empower” property owners to let them do what they wanted with their land. Quadrupling the potential number of new neighbors on farm borders substantially reduces what a farmer may do with his/her land. The legislature's understanding of this issue led to the Adjacency Law and the SPO's concerns for “incompatible” uses near farms threatening those operations' viability.

Then there's PFAS. The state is facing the likely loss of substantial agricultural acreage due to rather vast state-approved land spreading of industrial wastes over decades. Maine has recognized the threat to public health this presents and has enacted stringent 20ppt limits. It will be years before the extent of the contamination is fully understood, but it is likely to be rather considerable and “forever.” If local food and fiber production is seen as a public good then perhaps promoting a new Wild West of incompatible speculative development near farms that have a shot at continuing viability is a strategic blunder.

In closing, let me say that LD 2003's stated reliance on “market forces” to provide “affordable housing” through a slavishly bipartisan “supply-side” state mandated innovation is likely to be no more successful than reliance on the Market to meet health care needs. We pay nearly twice what more enlightened societies pay and have the easily predictable declining life-expectancies, infant mortality rates, and generally poor health outcomes that attend such endemic barbarity.

<https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/fund-reports/2021/aug/mirror-mirror-2021-reflecting-poorly>

LD 2003 is apparently based on a conclusion that publicly-enacted zoning regulations are the reason people are un-housed and downwardly mobile. That premise fails close scrutiny and puts important resource-based land uses at-risk.

It ought-not-to-pass.

Respectfully submitted,

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