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Testimony of GrowSmart Maine to the Housing Commission formed
through LD 609 Resolve,
To Establish a Commission To Increase Housing
Opportunities in Maine by Studying Zoning and Land Use
Restrictions

October 7, 2021

Senator Hickman, Speaker Fecteau, and Commissioners,
I am sorry I cannot attend today's meeting of the Commission. I
have listened to your meetings and thank each of you for your
thoughtful engagement on these important issues. You may be
aware that GrowSmart Maine strongly supported LD 609, and did
so in partnership with members of the Maine Alliance for Smart
Growth listed at the end of [our testimony](#).

GrowSmart Maine board member Jeff Levine serves on this
Commission, and it makes sense for me to frame my remarks in
large part by responding to the letter he shared with fellow
commissioners last week. I'll be brief and focus on specific
recommendations for your consideration.

Though my easiest option would be to write, "what Jeff said" to
endorse his letter, I do so with the addition of several remarks
related to his recommendations and based on our testimony on
several bills this past session.

- State Action #1 seems to reflect the intent of [LD 446](#) to
reestablish the State Planning Office, and that bill died on the
Appropriations Table at the end of session. But truly, his
recommendation could and should direct additional capacity and
resources to the Department of Community and Economic

Development to address housing issues. Housing is, after all, at the core of
community and economic development. Communities across Maine would welcome
easily accessible state-level support on housing issues.

- State Action #2 supports the land bank component of LD 1694, which has been
carried over to next session. In our [testimony on this bill](#), we fully supported the

land bank framework, while outlining numerous concerns on other aspects of the bill.

In addition to Jeff's recommendations, I encourage you to consider including a recommendation to update the Growth Management Act, which dictates the purpose and content of municipal comprehensive plans. This is a key component of [LD 1240](#), which has been carried over to next session. An endorsement from this Commission would be powerful, based on the testimony you've heard regarding frustration with the irrelevance of comprehensive plans in addressing housing issues. These plans can and should be critical tools leading to prioritized implementation of key strategies. I believe that Jeff Levine's Community Action #4 is just one example of improvements that can be made to the Act.

Finally, there are other components of LD 1240 that reach beyond the targeted focus of this commission, though related directly to your goals. This commission's recognition of the value of these regional issues in addressing housing choice would be critical when this bill is considered again next session.

In addition to the Growth Management Act update, LD 1240 recommends these actions:

- An assessment of the implications of housing choices of state and regional transportation investments and policies, produced with the advice of the Department of Transportation and regional transportation agencies;
- Identification of regional approaches to address significant mill rate differentials between rural and urban service center hubs and surrounding communities that increase associated living expenses by driving housing out of established communities; and
- Strategies for offering choices to local governments about how to meet statewide housing goals through their comprehensive plans and land use codes.

Best,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Nancy E. Smith".

Nancy E Smith
Executive Director