

Legislative Update March 19, 2021

The 130th legislative session is unfolding with creative technological adaptations to COVID.

And we continue to “zoom in” from the comfort of our office desk, or our kitchen table, and maybe soon from the patio as spring weather continues to tease us.

Here’s a quick update on the legislation we are tracking and you can read all our testimony [here](#)

COMING SOON:

LR 934, A Resolve to Review Barriers to Regional Solutions for Housing Choices, legislation we’ve been working on with sponsor by Senate Majority Leader Eloise Vitelli. It will be printed soon and begin working its way through the Legislative process. We’ll share the language when it’s printed, and look forward to your support then.

We can tell you that the resolve would direct an evaluation of regional barriers to housing choices, complementing several other bills that address municipal-level constraints on housing. The proposal calls for a review of barriers to regional solutions related to making housing affordable, accessible/available, functional and compatible with Climate Action Plan strategies outlined in Maine Wont Wait. These issues include:

- update the Growth Management Act with a focus on regional solutions recognizing the interrelationships of housing, transportation, climate action and land use.

- work with MaineDOT and regional transportation agencies to address implications on housing choices of state and regional transportation investments and policies.

- identify regional approaches to address significant mil rate differentials between rural and urban service center hubs and surrounding communities that drive up associated living expenses by driving housing and out of established communities.
- strategies for offering choices to local governments about how to meet statewide housing goals, through their Comprehensive Plans and land use codes.

BILLS THAT HAVE PASSED THE HOUSE AND SENATE:

EQUITY:

[LD 2](#) "*An Act To Require the Inclusion of Racial Impact Statements in the Legislative Process*" passed by both the House and Senate, and is on its way to the Governor. There were no Roll Call votes in the House, and you can see how your Senator voted [here](#)

GrowSmart supported this bill as an actionable step in addressing systemic equity issues in Maine's statewide policies

BILLS IN THE COMMITTEE PROCESS:

HOUSING AND DEVELOPMENT:

[LD 201](#) "*An Act To Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Promote Weatherization in the Buildings Sector by Extending the Sunset Date for the Historic Property Rehabilitation Tax Credit*" finally had its public hearing on March 18th with our allies from the Maine Alliance for Smart Growth and MEREDA, along with Board Member Ethan Boxer-Macomber of Anew Development speaking in support. You can find our testimony of strong support [here](#) and the work session is March 25th.

[LD 446](#) "**An Act To Reestablish the State Planning Office**" received much support, including ours, in the public hearing. The bill sponsor, Rep.

Kyle Bailey of Gorham, is keenly interested in increasing access to state level resources for municipalities, in whatever form makes the most sense. In our testimony on this bill and [LD 462](#) "**An Act To Reexamine the Relationship among County, Municipal and State Governments**" we suggested that the bills be "worked" together, along with other bills not yet printed, including LR 1616 and LR 934. We spoke neither for nor against LR 462, which seeks to review and consider increased funding for county government. The committee is holding off on work sessions for these two bills awaiting additional bills to consider together. This is a wicked efficient way to manage the multiple bills pulling in the same direction!

[LD 609](#) "Resolve, To Establish a Commission To Increase Housing Opportunities in Maine by Studying Zoning and Land Use Restrictions" will be heard by the Housing and Labor Committee on Monday, March 22nd. We have our testimony nearly ready, and look forward to supporting this bill, as we did the earlier version in the last session. This is a priority for sponsor Speaker Justin Fecteau and aligns well with LR 934, soon to be printed, and described below.

Partnerships: In addition to the Maine Alliance for Smart Growth, we are working with two other collaborative efforts this session: We have joined Climate Maine to review and prioritize legislative proposals that fall within our policy priorities to ensure our advocacy is effectively coordinated with others. In addition we continue to lead the policy work of the [Maine Broadband Coalition](#), which will focus on several key funding and policy bills. Check out the [Broadband Policy Page](#) for testimony, value propositions for each committee, and recordings of the Broadband Caucus!

How can you engage? We'll keep you posted on bills as they are printed and work their way through the legislative session, and invite you to participate as you are comfortable. You can offer written or oral testimony for

any bill, and track its progress on the Maine Legislature's website <http://legislature.maine.gov/>

FEDERAL ADVOCACY:

GrowSmart Maine occasionally joins partners in addressing issues on the federal level. We post these items **here**

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has initiated a process to increase the minimum population of cities that constitute the core of Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) from 50,000 to 100,000. This change would mean a federal redefinition of non-metro, rural areas. It will have significant impacts on federal funding and program targeting.

This past week, we joined several other [State Rural Development Councils](#) in signing on to a letter to The Office of Budget Management to ask them to pause on a proposed change to their definition of "rural." OMB should pursue a robust, inclusive process to illuminate the full scope of potential consequences for rural communities and rural-urban regions.

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