



Legislative Update: April 16, 2021

Legislative committees are meeting over Zoom, doing the work of conducting public hearings to gain input on bills and then work sessions to take action on those bills. We continue to track about 35 bills of interest with relevance to our mission and where GrowSmart Maine's unique voice can provide meaningful content.

Here's a quick update. You can read all our testimony [here](#)

Three Public Hearings This Week:

LD 1240 Resolve, to Review Barriers to Regional Solutions for Housing Choices.

We outlined this legislation in our earlier advocacy updates, as it is a priority this session. At the April 16th public hearing, the bill was well received by the Joint Legislative Committee on Labor and Housing, with support from Maine Affordable Housing Coalition (MAHC), Maine Real Estate and Development Assn (MEREDA). and Southern Maine Regional Planning and Development Commission (SMRPDC).

Bill sponsor Sen. Eloise Vitelli laid the groundwork for support in highlighting how this bill dovetails with LD 609, also noting the importance of coordinating housing efforts with Maine's Climate Action Plan.

The Department of Economic and Community Development testified neither for nor against, though called this "a very important piece of work" and suggested the committee carry over the bill until next year to allow time to identify funding from the federal American Rescue Plan Act for consulting expertise required to do the work. The Department agrees that the Office of Community Development within DECD is a good location to house this work, noting that there currently is not a single location in state government where housing, transportation, land use, and economic development come together.

Maine Municipal Association provided written testimony neither for nor against and expressed "cautious optimism" the report would provide valuable development resources to municipalities.

In our testimony, we noted that we support policies, programs and projects that define and protect the value of Maine's unique built and natural places while supporting long term economic opportunity. It is with this intention that we have been working with Senator Vitelli on this Resolve, building on our Summit of last October. This event, "[Flexing the Power of Home Rule: Forging a Path Towards Regional Solutions](#)" encouraged building regional approaches on the strength of



home rule tradition. Three key issues were identified: climate change, housing choices, and land use regulation. [Weaving Common Threads](#) details these recommendations.

Housing Choices defined as follows: Focus on broadening the diversity of housing types. Explore rent-to-own and less conventional housing acquisition arrangements. Treat housing as a key economic development tool in both new development and adaptive reuse. Acknowledge that property ownership is an equity issue.

Working with the sponsor, the scope of LD 1240 was narrowed to only those issues not already addressed in related bills. We noted that there are several bills and resolves addressing housing issues and the committee may find it more effective to align LD1240 with another legislative proposal or to carry this proposal over until next year. GrowSmart's goal is to have these important issues addressed and we will support any effective mechanism to do so.

The Committee Work Session for this Resolve is scheduled for the afternoon of April 21st.

[LD 1246](#) "Resolve, To Study Best Practices and Different Area Needs for Development of Affordable Homes and Expanding Home Ownership in Maine Communities"

This Resolve has been described in earlier Advocacy Updates and GrowSmart Maine provided testimony in support during the April 16th public hearing. With its focus on addressing barriers to home ownerships, we see LD 1246 as compatible with LD 1240 and stated so in our testimony. We also outlined housing challenges and solutions identified as an outcome of our 2020 Summit "[Flexing the Power of Home Rule: Forging a Path Towards Regional Solutions](#)" encouraged building regional approaches on the strength of home rule tradition. Three key issues were identified: climate change, housing choices, and land use regulation. [Weaving Common Threads](#) details these recommendations and those relevant to housing choices were provided to the Committee for their consideration.

[LD 1257](#) "An Act To Encourage Inclusionary Zoning in Municipalities by Increasing Revenue Sharing"

GrowSmart Maine board member and community planner Jeff Levine submitted testimony on this bill, supporting the concept while offering nuanced suggestions to increase the likelihood of the bill achieving the sponsor's intended outcome. In his testimony for GrowSmart Maine, Jeff noted that we generally support the idea of providing additional revenue sharing for communities that help achieve state and regional housing goals. This additional revenue not only will reward communities for doing the right thing – it also will help assuage concerns that additional housing may produce additional financial needs beyond what a community might collect in property taxes.



While we support the bill and would recommend its passage, as drafted it leaves some questions that should be resolved. These included sifting away from the term of art “inclusionary zoning” to something more in line with the intention of the bill, such as “Smart and Equitable Growth district”

The bill was opposed by MEREDA, outlining some of the concerns in our testimony. The Maine Municipal Assn outlined the priority in their testimony that Maine fully fund the general revenue sharing program before creating new programs such as this. The bill will have a significant fiscal note as drafted. A work session has not yet been drafted.

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/>

Thank you,

Nancy E. Smith
Executive Director