



Legislative Update: April 23, 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:

Hearing for bond proposals began this week and will continue into next week. We are supporting investments in broadband, weatherization, and Land for Maine's Future.

LD 1094 "An Act To Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue To Reduce Homeowner and Municipal Energy Bills through Increased Efficiency and Weatherization Projects" Sponsored by Senator Matthew Pouliot

The funds provided by this bond issue in the amount of \$20,000,000, per the sponsor's amendment, will be administered by the Efficiency Maine Trust and MaineHousing and used to reduce energy costs for senior citizens, low-income residents, municipalities and schools through investments in weatherization and energy efficiency.

We testified in support of this bond, noting its focus on low-income Mainers, schools and municipalities for this investment. Given our [Energy Efficiency Community Campaign](#) in Windham and Biddeford, we know the need far exceeds Mainers' resources. Weatherization reduces heating costs for Mainers while reducing reliance on fossil fuels and the carbon emissions created. Weatherization is important and serves as an accessible entry point for climate action.

LD 1235 "An Act To Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue To Connect Maine with a World-class Internet Infrastructure" Sponsored by Senator Richard Bennett

The funds provided by this bond issue, in the amount of \$100,000,000, will be used to provide funding for a world-class affordable high-speed Internet infrastructure that will reach 98% of homes and businesses in the State within 5 years.

We testified in support of this bond, noting that Mainers must invest in ourselves as significant federal funding is on its way to support the goal of affordable high speed internet across Maine. We also make the point that communities must reduce the risk of sprawling new development while reaching this goal. Our recent forum, [More Broadband, Less Sprawl](#), delves into this issue.

**OPEGA Full Tax Expenditure Review of Maine Historic Property Rehabilitation Tax Credit
The Office of Program Evaluation and Government Accountability today presented to the**



Joint Standing Committee on Government Oversight their plans to evaluate this important tax credit; measuring its impact against its costs and reporting this information back to the committee.

Though not a bill, this process is important as a priority for Maine Alliance for Smart Growth members. Working in concert with the Maine Real Estate and Development Association, CEI, Genesis Fund, Greater Portland Landmarks, and Maine Preservation, we provided joint testimony to inform this process. There are four components of the evaluation:

1. Purpose, Intent or Goals. The purpose, intents or goals of the tax expenditure, as informed by original legislative intent as well as subsequent legislative and policy developments;
2. Intended Beneficiaries. The intended beneficiaries of the tax expenditure;
3. Evaluation Objectives. The evaluation objectives; and
4. Performance Measures for Evaluation Objectives. Performance measures appropriate for analyzing the evaluation objectives.

The coordinated testimony of our group addressed such issues as clarifying the broad range of beneficiaries of the tax credit and recommending, per our testimony in support of [LD 201](#), that climate impacts be considered as a component of the overall value of this tax credit.

Follow Up On Last Week's Hearings:

[LD 1240](#) Resolve, to Review Barriers to Regional Solutions for Housing Choices.

Sponsored by Sen. Eloise Vitelli,

This Resolve directs the Department of Economic and Community Development, Office of Community Development to conduct a review of barriers to regional solutions to making housing affordable, accessible, available, functional and compatible with strategies outlined in the December 2020 climate action plan of the Maine Climate Council, "Maine Won't Wait: A Four-year Plan for Climate Action." It directs the office to report to the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing by December 1, 2021 with a summary of these barriers, their implications and potential solutions. Specific attention is paid to updating Maine's Growth Management Act, addressing regional mil rate differentials, highlighting impact of state and regional transportation investments and the cost of living, and recommending strategies for municipalities to meet statewide housing goals through their comprehensive plans and land use codes. This is our priority bill for this session, as it is an outcome of our [2020 Summit](#), Flexing the Power of Home Rule: Forging a Path Towards Regional Solutions.

THIS WEEK: Wednesday's work session led to a strong majority vote to request this Resolve be carried over to next year. This will achieve the sponsor's intention of allowing several bills to move forward this year with focus on more immediate housing challenges as well as the intention of the Department of Economic and Community Development to secure funds to contract out this report.



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

This resolve creates the Commission to Study Best Practices and Different Area Needs for Development of Affordable Homes and Expanding Home Ownership in Maine Communities. The commission has 13 members consisting of Legislators and others with interest or experience in affordable housing and financing in the State. The commission is required to submit its report to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over labor and housing matters no later than December 7, 2022.

THIS WEEK: The sponsor of the bill offered an amendment at Wednesday's work session, addressing some of the concerns raised by MaineHousing. The committee will hold another work session on this bill to further discuss the proposal, as amended..

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

This bill creates an additional level of state-municipal revenue sharing to provide additional resources to municipalities with inclusionary zoning to increase the availability of affordable housing.

THIS WEEK: The committee work session has been scheduled for April 29th. We look forward to seeing if our suggested amendments are considered by the committee.

A Look At Next Week:

As noted above, public hearings for bond proposals will continue into next week. In addition to our support of investments in broadband and weatherization, we will be supporting [LD 983](#) **"An Act To Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue To Promote Land Conservation, Working Waterfronts, Water Access and Outdoor Recreation"** Sponsored by Senator Catherine Breen

This bill proposes \$80million be invested in recapitalizing the [Land For Maine's Future](#) program.

[LD 1312](#) "An Act To Remove Barriers to Accessory Dwelling Units and Allow Accessory Dwelling Units where Single-family Houses Are Allowed" Sponsored by Representative Valli Geiger

This bill requires municipalities to allow one accessory dwelling unit to be included within or located on the same lot as a single-family dwelling unit. It prevents municipalities from imposing certain restrictions on accessory dwelling units.

We will be submitting testimony at next Monday morning's public hearing in favor of this bill while encouraging the committee to omit two of these prohibitions and adapt another. We also recommend the committee consider allowing current ADU ordinances to remain in place. This will



accommodate the existing, working ADU provisions, which offer helpful examples, while also setting a statewide standard for broader adoption of ADU provisions.

Broadband bills: There are four public hearings on broadband bills Tuesday April 27th If you are interested in this important policy area, you can follow the work we are doing with others in the Maine Broadband Coalition, noted 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/>

Thank you,

Nancy E. Smith
Executive Director