



Legislative Update: March 26, 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. As you have no doubt heard, the House and Senate will be meeting in person early next week to conduct their business of moving bills forward, including the biennial budget.

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

THIS JUST IN: Two bills we've been tracking related to addressing barriers to housing choices were printed this week and await a public hearing.

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

Formerly LR 934, this bill is a priority for our work this session, as we work sponsor Senate Majority Leader Eloise Vitelli. As noted in our earlier update, this proposal will:

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 barriers to be addressed include:

1. Proposals to update the planning and land use regulation laws pertaining to growth management with a focus on regional solutions recognizing the interrelationships of housing, transportation, climate action and land use;
2. 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;
3. 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
4. Strategies for offering choices to local governments about how to meet statewide housing goals through their comprehensive plans and land use codes.



[LD 1246](#) "Resolve, To Study Best Practices and Different Area Needs for Development of Affordable Homes and Expanding Home Ownership in Maine Communities" Like LD 609, discussed below, this proposal also designates a Commission, though this one is directed at the challenges of securing home ownership.

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.

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" After the initial public hearing scheduled in February was postponed due to a snowstorm, this bill is coming out of committee unanimous support and will be presented in the House and Senate for consideration and final approval.

The bill proposed extending the sunset to the year 2040 to align with goals of Maine's [Climate Action Plan](#) in recognition of the significant positive impacts of rehabilitation and reuse of existing buildings on site when compared with new construction, particularly greenfield development which pulls undeveloped lands out of the natural environment.

The Taxation committee, after much discussion, voted to extend the sunset on this tax credit by an additional five years to 2030, beyond the extension granted last year. In addition, the bill sponsor [Sen. Nate Libby](#), offered a technical amendment to ensure MaineHousing's authority to approve affordable housing credits was extended to match the new sunset.

The Government Oversight Committee (GOC) will discuss proposed parameters for the full tax expenditure review of the MHRTC on April 23. The Office of Program Evaluation and Government Accountability (OPEGA) told GOC that their intent is to have the review of the MHRTC completed by the end of this calendar year. That timing dovetails perfectly with the Tax Committee's plan to review the report and reconsider the sunset next session.



We will continue to engage as necessary to support this bill as it works its way through the legislative process. With strong bipartisan support from the committee, we are confident of a positive outcome.

LD 446 "An Act To Reestablish the State Planning Office"

LD 462 "An Act To Reexamine the Relationship among County, Municipal and State Governments"

No news this week, as the committee awaits additional bills before taking this up in work session. This is a terrific move toward efficiency as compatible bills can be considered in the same context.

LD 609 "Resolve, To Establish a Commission To Increase Housing Opportunities in Maine by Studying Zoning and Land Use Restrictions"

Both public hearing and work session were held this week and the committee passed the bill as written by a vote of 12-0 with Sen. Chair Hickman in another committee at the time of the work session. We strongly supported this bill at the hearing, and offered an amendment to add two additional seats to the Commission; one for conservation and another by removing the either/or designation of one seat for a regional planning commission OR a statewide smart growth organization. We look forward to the work of this Commission and continue to support additional bills addressing housing and land use issues.

BILLS THAT HAVE PASSED THE HOUSE AND SENATE:

Nothing new on our watch this week.

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](#)

Thank you,

Nancy E. Smith
Executive Director

