



MAINE AFFORDABLE HOUSING COALITION

Joint Standing Committee on Housing & Economic Development

Testimony of Laura Mitchell, Executive Director, Maine Affordable Housing Coalition, 3.25.25

in favor of LD997 - An Act to Allow Residential Use Development in Commercial Districts

Sponsored by Rep. Malon

Hello, Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development. My name is Laura Mitchell. I am the Executive Director of the Maine Affordable Housing Coalition. MAHC is a nonprofit with 140 member organizations working to create and preserve affordable homes in our state.

MAHC is testifying in favor of LD997 that allows housing in commercial districts in Maine. Local control is a vital part of Maine's land use history. But the time and expertise to update zoning throughout Maine is lagging behind our state's dire need for housing, particularly in areas that have been identified for growth (as commercial districts have) and frequently have infrastructure like sewer and water in place. Historically, communities have overzoned for commercial due to the potential for tax revenue. LD997 provides a consistent approach to dramatically expanding access to housing in Maine that utilizes smart growth principles.

As we've seen recently in Mane, the process for housing projects to go through zone changes to allow residential can be drawn out over years and can become contentious. LD997 expedites this process to meet the State's 2030 goal of 80,000 new homes.

Allowing residential use in commercial zoning is increasingly recognized as a good land use in research for the following reasons:

- 1. Mixed-Use Development Enhances Vibrancy and Sustainability:** Helps create vibrant, walkable communities and reduces commutes, as people can live, work, and shop nearby, fostering local economies and promoting sustainability.
- 2. Increased Housing Supply and Affordability:** Enables municipalities to address housing shortages, especially in high-demand town centers or along strips on Maine roads that frequently have vacant commercial spaces. This increases the overall housing supply, which can help reduce housing costs in the long run.
- 3. Support for Small Businesses and Local Economies:** Adds potential customers for local businesses. Residents can support retail, restaurants, and other businesses, creating a more economically resilient area and helping businesses thrive.
- 4. Reduced Urban Sprawl and Environmental Benefits:** Helps curtail suburban sprawl, preserving open spaces and agricultural land. Concentrating growth in existing developed areas minimizes environmental impacts such as habitat destruction and infrastructure expansion into undeveloped areas.
- 5. Improved Public Health and Safety:** This can foster more active transportation like walking and biking, leading to improved public health outcomes. Residents can also enhance safety, as more "eyes on the street" help deter crime.
- 6. Flexibility and Adaptability for Changing Markets:** Commercial areas are facing challenges, such as vacancies or declining demand for traditional retail spaces. Allowing housing offers flexibility, allowing properties to adapt to changing market conditions and helping to maintain the economic vitality of the area.
- 7. Alignment with Smart Growth Principles:** Prioritizes the development of areas with existing infrastructure, promotes community connectivity, and encourages sustainable land use practices. This approach supports Maine's long-term goals for growth and development while maintaining environmental integrity.

LD997 is an effective way to address housing needs and support local economies.

3i Housing of Maine
55 Weston Avenue
AARP Maine
ABG Consulting, Gray
Accor Engineering, Inc.
Allied Cook Construction, Portland
Anew Development LLC, Portland
Apartments for People LLC, Belfast
Archetype Architects, Portland
Associated General Contractors of Maine
Auburn Housing Authority
Augusta Housing Authority
Avesta Housing, Portland
Bangor Area Homeless Shelter
Bangor Housing
Bangor Savings Bank
Bank of New Hampshire, Falmouth
Bath Housing
Bath Savings Institution
Bellevue Enterprise
Benchmark Construction, Westbrook
Boston Financial Investment Management
Bowman Constructors, Newport
Brunswick Housing Authority
Camden National Bank
Carpenter Associates
Catholic Charities of Maine
CEI, Brunswick
CHK Architecture, Portland
City of Portland Department of Housing
Clark Insurance, Portland
Community Concepts, Lewiston
Community Housing of Maine, Portland
Consigli Construction Co., Inc.
Cooperative Development Institute, South Freeport
Cooperative Fund of the Northeast
CREA, LLC
Credent Associates, Westbrook
Cross Financial Corp., Portland
Cumberland County
Curtis Thaxter, Portland
CWS Architects, Portland
Developers Collaborative, Portland
Development Services of New England, Freeport
Dovetail Consulting
DrummondWoodsum, Portland
ECS Construction, Inc.
Dunbar & Brown Construction
Eagle Point Development, LLC
East Peabody Consulting Group, Augusta
Eric Burmeister
Evernorth, Portland
Falmouth, Town of
Fort Fairfield Residential Development Corp.
Four Directions Development Corporation, Orono
Freeport Community Services
Freeport Housing Trust
Furniture Friends
Garrison Construction, Augusta
Gawron Turgeon Architects, Scarborough
Genesis Community Loan Fund, Brunswick
Genham Savings Bank
Great Falls Construction, Gorham
Grommes Pulaski Consulting LLC, Portland
GrowSmart Maine
Habitat for Humanity of Greater Portland
Habitat for Humanity York County
Hancock Lumber, Casco
Healthy Androscoggin, Lewiston
Hebert Construction
Home Start, Peaks Island
Homeless Voices for Justice, Portland
Housing Foundation, Orono
Housing Initiatives of New England, Portland
Housing Partnership, Portsmouth, NH
Hunt Capital Partners LLC, El Paso, TX
Island Institute, Rockland
Islesboro Affordable Property
Jensen Baird Gardner & Henry, Portland
John Anton, Consultant, Portland
Kaplan Thompson Architects, Portland
Kennebec Savings Bank, Augusta
Kennebec Valley Community Action, Waterville
Kennebunk Savings
KeyBank
Knox County Homeless Coalition
Lake City Investments, LLC
Landry/French Construction, Scarborough
Lakewood Consulting, LLC, Augusta
Lassel Architects, South Berwick
LB Development Partners, Portland
LeadingAge Maine & New Hampshire
Lewiston Housing Authority
M&T Bank
Machias Savings Bank
Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services
Maine Community Action Partnership
Maine Community Bank
Maine Department of Health & Human Services
Maine Equal Justice
Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition
Maine Public Health Association
Maine Real Estate Managers Association
Maine State Building & Construction Trades
Maine Workforce Housing LLC, Portland
Mano en Mano, Millbridge
Manna Development LLC, Yarmouth
Mascoma Bank
Midcoast Regional Housing Trust
NBT Bank
Nickerson & O'Day, Inc., Bangor
North Haven Sustainable Housing
Northeast Rental Housing
Norway Savings Bank
Old Town Housing Authority
Ois Atwell O'Kas, South Portland
Penobscot General Constructors
Penquis, Bangor
People's United Bank
PM Construction
Portland Builders
Portland Housing Authority
Preble Street, Portland
Preservation Management, South Portland
Preti Floherty, Portland
Raise-Op Housing Cooperative, Lewiston
Realty Resources Management
Rental Housing Alliance of Southern Maine
Rick Whiting
Rumford, Town of
Sanford Housing Authority
Scott Simons Architects, Portland
Sea Coast Management Company, Topsham
Shalom House, Portland
Silver Street Development Corporation, Portland
South Portland Housing Authority
Southwest Group, Yarmouth
St. Germain
Sunrise Opportunities, Machias
S.W. Cole Engineering, Gray
Szanon Company
TD Bank
Teddford Housing, Brunswick
The Cable Group, Saco
The Eagle Point Companies, South Portland
The Housing Foundation
The Park Danforth, Portland
Thornton Tomasetti, Portland
Through These Doors, Portland
Total Construction Management, Winterport
TPD Construction Co., Sanford
United Way of Greater Portland
Utile, Inc.
Veterans Inc., Lewiston
Volunteers of America of Northern NE
Washington County Assoc for Ret. Citizens
Westbrook Housing Authority
Western Maine Community Action, E. Wilton
Winton Scott Architects
Wishcamper Companies, Portland
WMC & Associates
Wright-Ryan Construction, Portland
Yarmouth Housing Collaborative
Year-Round Housing Corp., Long Island
York County Community Action, Sanford
York Housing Authority
Zachos Construction, Freeport
Zero Energy Design
Zion's Episcopal Church