

An Act to Improve the Growth Management Program Laws
Sponsored by Representative Tiffany Roberts
Introduction of bill to MMA's LPC on February 27, 2025

My name is Jennie Poulin Franceschi and I am here to introduce to you Representative Tiffany Roberts' Bill to Improve the Growth Management Program Laws.

As a means of introduction, I am the Director of Planning & Codes for Westbrook. I am also a lifelong Mainer, born & raised in Winslow, went to College in Orono and ultimately raised my family in Westbrook. I mention this to give you the basis of understanding that the folks involved in this bill represent communities all across Maine. In my capacity today, I am the Chair of the Maine Association of Planners (MAP) Growth Management Legislative Policy Committee.

As you know, Maine's Growth Management Law (GML) prescribes standards for comprehensive planning. For years, however, it has been burdened by overly specific rules administered by the State. These rules require an exhaustive list of data to be interpreted and result in lengthy and expensive comprehensive plans.

In response to this frustration in the last session, Representative Sachs introduced LD 1976 in the 131st Legislature. The bill unfortunately misdiagnosed the issues with the GML in the statutory language, instead of focusing on the rules that govern the implementation. LD1976 further mandated an inflexible process for comprehensive planning and removed important safeguards for small municipalities, like the Growth Area exemption.

In an effort to be proactive, MAP created a specific subcommittee of their LPC to work on the GML. Twenty-Five Planners from across the state participated in this process from July of last year through Dec to provide an updated version of the Sachs bill that our organization could support. Unfortunately, the bill sponsors were not open to any discussions on changing their bill.

MAP then approached Representative Roberts with our document which had been reviewed by MMA Legal and engaged in the process the State agencies of GOPIF, MOCA, and Maine Municipal Assistance Program, along with inviting GrowSmart to the table. The Roberts Bill provides the legally defensible vehicle to address communities' frustration with the Comp Plan process.

We have had our document reviewed by a private land use attorney paid for by our organization, along with the appreciative engagement of MMA's legal team to provide recommendations to create the best possible outcome for Maine communities.

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The main points in this bill to be aware of are focused on saving communities time & money and providing flexibility:

- Our Bill revises the current Inventory requirements by exchanging the one-size-fits-all thirteen topic areas with a tiered framework based on a community's capacity.
- Our Bill encouraging smaller communities to conduct multimunicipal comp plan by eliminating the barrier of having to have a multimunicipal planning board. Thus, each community can conduct planning board reviews individually, if they choose.
- Our Bill allows for the continued use of the current Growth Area Exemption which is critical to encouraging smaller communities to conduct comprehensive plans, if for no other reason than for resource protection.
- Our Bill streamlines state review timelines by requiring a shorter window of review for completeness.

In conclusion, the members of the Maine Association of Planners have written and reviewed the vast majority of the Comprehensive Plans in the state. Our members have spent many, many hours with communities preparing plans that comply with Growth Management Laws and further community goals. Through this experience, we have a deep understanding of the issues, and the solutions needed to effectively address them, and we firmly believe that Representative Roberts' Bill is the solution for Maine communities.

As a follow up, below are some [Frequently asked questions about the Roberts Bill:](#)

Who participated in this process?

Planners from across the state including Lincoln & Hancock County Planning Commission, The Musson Group representing locations like Mount Desert Island and other coastal communities, Androscoggin Valley Council of Government, Lewiston, Auburn, Bath, Saco, Deer Isle, Midcoast Council of Government, Windham, Greater Portland Council of Government, South Portland, Westbrook, Yarmouth, Cape Elizabeth, Portland, Eastern Maine Development Corp. We engaged the State agencies of GOPIF, Maine Office of Community Affairs and Maine Planning Assistance Program, along with MMA's Legal team and GrowSmart Board members.

Is the proposed statute language the only change we should be advocating for?

No, the statute is our first step, we need to have a robust Rulemaking process that must follow this bill to achieve the intended results. As part of our bill editing process, we documented the changes we were proposing to statute in a separate 11pg spreadsheet which can then be utilized to carry forward the work needed in rulemaking for streamlining and process reduction. We need to get to step two to truly achieve the change we want to occur.

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The State Bureau responsible for Comprehensive Plan review has been advocating for years for a rulemaking process to move forward but the LD1976 bill process halted their efforts from being able to move forward.

Why should Maine communities care about this?

Comprehensive plans are an important vehicle to spur economic development, housing, and resource protection, but it is a very expensive process. This bill would help reduce those costs and more importantly the time it takes to complete them.

At the end of the day, if this process does not help all of us, it does not help any of us. There are pieces of this bill that help communities of all sizes, but there was significant focus on smaller communities and the planners that participated in this bill, work with those communities every day.