

September 30, 2021

Senator Craig Hickman, Chair  
Speaker Ryan Fecteau, Chair  
Commission to Increase Housing Opportunities in Maine by Studying Zoning and Land Use Restrictions  
13 State House Station  
Cross Office Building, Room 215  
Augusta, Maine 04333-0013

Senator Hickman, Speaker Fecteau, and members of the Commission,

Please accept this letter presenting the comments of the Greater Portland Council of Governments (GPCOG) in full support of the important work the Commission is doing to increase housing opportunities in our region, and across Maine.

GPCOG serves 30 municipal members, from Sebago Lake to Casco Bay, and the County of Cumberland. We staff the region's Metropolitan Planning Organization which allocates over \$25 million dollars annually in federal transportation funds to regional priority highway and public transportation projects, extending our service territory into York County, including Saco and Biddeford.

GPCOG also serves as the Portland region's Economic Development District, as designated by the U.S. Department of Commerce, and we support numerous programs like Maine Clean Communities and the Maine Broadband Coalition, along with the ever-changing needs of our member communities.

GPCOG partners with employers, nonprofit and education leaders, federal agencies, and local, regional, and state governments to strive for greater regional prosperity and equity for everyone, while providing transportation and land use planning, racial equity, climate action, and broadband readiness services to the communities we serve.

Like the rest of the state, our region is suffering from too little housing that every member of our community can afford. Working families, retirees, young people, and everyone with low-to-moderate income are struggling to find housing they can afford in the places they want to live.

Several years ago, our municipal members identified this problem, as well as the cascade of negative effects that flow from unaffordable housing. GPCOG has commissioned studies that examine the linkage between land use policies and housing deficits – we will share those studies with you as a follow up to this testimony.

Today we need your help. Your recommendations have the power to shape legislative action that will encourage more diverse, affordable housing developments in our region.

Here's what we hope you will do:

1. Create a framework for municipal action that includes a menu of land use policy options all centered on expanding housing choices. We hope you will give municipalities several options for local action, recognizing that one policy cannot fit all the different urban, suburban, and rural needs of our region, or the state.
2. Create a clear definition of success for municipalities. While much of the housing market is outside local control, local land use policies can be changed to better support expanded housing. Focus your recommended policy outcomes on successfully advancing local land use policies that set the stage for greater housing.
3. Provide strong and continuing funding for municipal technical assistance so local efforts to improve housing choice are supported by state, regional, and consulting experts. Land use policy changes are complex undertakings that most of our members cannot successfully complete without adequate support. Make adequate funding a prerequisite for any municipal requirements.
4. Provide new revenue opportunities for municipalities that successfully complete housing expansion land use reforms. Expanded housing will generate new demands on local services. Communities that successfully expand housing should be supported with additional revenue streams to offset those additional costs.

As an aspect of considering new revenues, explore adding preferential scoring (or similar treatment) for municipalities that successfully take action to encourage housing expansion when the state is awarding economic, transportation, and sustainability programs.

We believe this Commission can set Maine on the road to resolving our housing crisis. While success will take time, progress begins with your recommendations and strong bipartisan support from the Legislature next year.

We hope you will consider our suggestions as a part of your work. I'm happy to answer your questions, and provide additional information at your request.

Sincerely,



Kristina Egan  
Executive Director  
Greater Portland Council of Governments