

POLICY ACTION 2023

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Maine's current uncoordinated approach to building places is causing real, unintended, and significant social, environmental, financial, economic, and cultural challenges and requires the creation of a cohesive approach to land development, redevelopment, and placemaking.

THE GOAL OF POLICY ACTION 2023

Our goal is to address barriers to and create incentives for equitable, sustainable growth and development that strengthens downtowns and villages of all sizes while pulling development pressure away from productive and open natural areas. We do so acknowledging that Maine has urban, rural, and suburban settings for which any solution may/not be a fit and a variety of people who deserve to be welcomed to their communities.



POLICY ACTION #1: INCREASING COORDINATION + COLLABORATION BETWEEN LOCAL, STATE + REGIONAL GOVERNMENT TO SUPPORT DEVELOPMENT IN THE RIGHT PLACES

TRAINING + EDUCATION

- Build shared understanding of what 'Right Places' means - quality of life, building/enhancing walkable communities for everyone while protecting working and natural landscapes, supporting a strong tax base, while also reducing climate impacts.
- Support training in the skilled building trades.
- Share information on new state and federal grants related to land use policy.

MODEL CODES + BEST PRACTICES FOR LOCAL CALIBRATION

- Develop model land use, zoning, and building codes as incentives to help local governments direct development to areas with existing infrastructure and protect working and natural lands.
- Provide funding for development of pattern zones, where pre-approved building types are permitted as of right in certain locally designated areas, and can apply directly for a building permit.

SUPPORT DEVELOPMENT

- Provide incentives and state funding for commercial, residential, and mixed use development in places where investments have already been made, including locations with water and sewer.
- Pursue statutory adjustments to LD 2003 to improve the clarity of the bill and revisit provisions that might potentially induce sprawl development in rural areas.



POLICY ACTION #2:

REWORK TRANSPORTATION FUNDING TO PROVIDE MORE MONEY FOR MULTI-MODAL TRANSPORTATION ACROSS MAINE

TRAINING + EDUCATION

- Identify strategies for right-sizing and siting transit based on community characteristics.
- Increase awareness in more rural communities where service is available.

SYSTEM DESIGN

- Look for funding to extend hours to cover known needs.
- Explore potential models such as light rail, rapid bus transit, and MicroRail

IDENTIFY FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

- Engage in statewide Strategic Transit Plan, and look for appropriate funding opportunities, including increasing percentage of funding directed to alternative modes and increasing discretionary funding directed to alternative modes.
- Revise local match guide to treat modes consistently & equally.
- Revise local match guide to treat communities and regions of the state consistently and equally, so that the match requirement takes into account average median income and doesn't require communities with lower incomes to provide the same match as communities that have higher incomes.

BUILD THE TEAM

- Bring in additional advocates for increased transit funding, including from other sectors, such as rural/farmland/conservation to encourage transit in built areas, but also to discuss rural transit limitations, such as ferry service to islands.



POLICY ACTION #3:

SUPPORT COMPLETE STREETS ACTION TO MAKE IT EASIER AND SAFER TO USE ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION

MOVE FROM POLICY TO ACTION

- Explore and remove barriers to advancing truly complete streets that support walkability, quality of life, and economic vitality.
- Prioritize Complete Streets principles in areas where it can make the most difference in metrics like safety connecting housing and transportation policy/ investments and walkable community development.
- Look for opportunities to maintain regional mobility while also enhancing safe opportunities for walking and biking in rural areas.

REVISE 85TH PERCENTILE RULE

- Support and help advance changes to the 85th Percentile rule so communities have more ability to lower posted speed limits in response to local safety, quality of life, and economic goals.

ADVANCE A STROADS TO STREETS PROGRAM

- Create a statewide program that provides funds, technical assistance, and guidance to redevelop low value commercial corridors (stroads) as locations for new mixed-use neighborhood development. The program can help fund street redesign from 4 to 3 lanes, to enable more street space for safe walking and biking, and help provide a more attractive location for mixed used development, including opportunities for substantial new housing.

EDUCATION

- Educate engineers on alternative transportation patterns and design techniques that can be employed using engineering judgement.



POLICY ACTION #4:

REWRITE GROWTH MANAGEMENT LAW TO CREATE A MORE FLEXIBLE + EFFECTIVE FRAMEWORK FOR ALL COMMUNITIES

CREATE A MORE FLEXIBLE FRAMEWORK

- New framework should allow for changes in best practices that evolve over time and work for communities of all sizes and types, whether urban, rural, or suburban.
- State guidance should help communities and regions create a strong vision for growth and development that connects the plan, vision, and land use decisions to local fiscal sustainability, climate, equity, housing, food production, and other state and local goals.
- Improve on designated growth area concept, and provide an alternative framework that aligns better with the kinds of places we have in Maine: crossroads, villages, downtowns, neighborhoods, corridors, rural farmsteads, working waterfronts, etc.
- Bring inventory requirements into 21st Century & reduce production of maps/data that are static snapshots in time.

CREATE MORE TOOLS + GUIDANCE

- Provide housing strategies, tools, and best practices to help municipalities meet statewide housing goals through updates to comprehensive plans and land use codes.
- Provide municipalities with strategies that support fiscal resilience, such as consideration of value per acre associated with various locations and forms of development, including attaching greater value to working lands for uses other than housing subdivisions.

STRENGTHEN THE VALUE OF AN APPROVED COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

- Offer communities in compliance better access to state funding from various state departments. For example, tie approved comprehensive plans to transportation and other state funding.
- Use state funding as a “carrot”, to encourage comprehensive plans and implementation strategies that include climate action, transportation innovations, strong fiscal strategies, and measure to achieve other key goals.



POLICY ACTION #5:

STRENGTHEN STATE HISTORIC TAX CREDIT TO FULLY REALIZE THE BENEFITS THROUGHOUT MAINE

SECURE EXISTING PROGRAMS

- Eliminate sunset provision on existing Historic Tax Credit.
- Re-examine small deal set aside program parameters.

INCREASE ACCESS TO PRESERVATION FUNDS

- Expand current or create new credit for non-income producing properties to facilitate increased investment in rural communities, incentivize appropriate weatherization work, and create new housing units. This can include renovation of barns and other agricultural buildings.



POLICY ACTION #6:

UPDATE SUBDIVISION REGULATIONS TO ENCOURAGE DEVELOPMENT IN THE RIGHT PLACES

REVISE STATE SUBDIVISION RULES

- Exempt projects within designated growth areas from subdivision rules and process that meet certain criteria.
- For projects within designated growth areas, enable projects that produce multiple units within a single building from being subject to subdivision rules and process.
- For projects within designated growth areas, exempt projects that create 2 to 4 additional buildings, including ADUs, from being subject to subdivision rules and process.
- Correctly identify the cost to municipalities of development in outlying areas, and require developers to identify life cycle costs and put funds into escrow account.
- Increase protections of high value working lands and prime soils.



POLICY ACTION #7:

EXPLORE FISCAL POLICIES TO INCENTIVIZE DEVELOPMENT IN DOWNTOWNS & VILLAGES, WHILE REDUCING SPRAWL

EXPLORE TAX POLICY

- Consider the land value tax as a way to incentivize investments in our downtowns and where there is existing infrastructure, and increase incentives for keeping rural land in productive natural resource based uses.
- Consider a tax deferral program for development in the right locations, where individuals pay their local property taxes and then apply to the state for an offset.
- Look at ways to strengthen Tree Growth and Open Space tax programs, using soil quality as another possible baseline metric.

EXPLORE POLICIES TO ASSIGN ACCURATE COSTS OF DEVELOPMENT

- Consider a policy that assigns the real cost of development to projects, via life cycle costs, where municipalities require developers to calculate maintenance and replacement costs for the life cycle of a project and put those funds into an escrow account.



POLICY ACTION #8:

MOVE TOWARD CARBON NEUTRAL BUILDINGS TO ADVANCE STATE CLIMATE GOALS

MAKE A PLAN

- Conduct a study to develop plan for decarbonizing building sector (analogous to transportation roadmap).

CHANGES TO BUILDING CODES

- Update building code to align with climate goals.
- Require wiring for EV charging as part of new building construction, especially multi-unit buildings.
- Support whole home electrification, not just room heaters.

