



# City of Auburn, Maine

Mayor Jason J. Levesque

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Testimony in support of LD 2003

Maine State Joint committee on labor and housing:

I would like to start by thanking Speaker Fecteau, Senator Hickman, Representative Arata and the rest of the Commission on Affordable Housing, for taking the time this critical issue deserves and putting forth LD 2003.

More than four years ago, Auburn – like Southern Maine - realized that it was facing a looming housing crisis; one that was driven primarily by outdated, confusing and anti-growth zoning at the local level. Zoning that did not understand basic principals of supply and demand. Zoning that was, at its best, exclusionary, and at its worst, discriminatory in its origins and implementation.

In Auburn, we started working on tearing down the barriers that were preventing people from finding attainable housing. We did this through meaningful, community-wide planning and education and a thoughtful, transparent process. We did this with a desire to *redefine* our city; to become economically sustainable; to show that Auburn cares about the workforce needs of our employers; and most importantly, to help our residents - current and future - live in either new or rehabilitated, energy efficient homes.

To be put simply, we had a vision. Then the real work began.

We eliminated single family exclusionary housing zones. We passed Maine's most flexible accessory dwelling unit ordinances. We eliminated parking minimums and put in place common sense form-based codes, which provide flexibility for property owners a focus on increasing density where infrastructure existed from 4 to 16 units per acre. We reduced the number of complicated residential zones from 32 to 8. We identified prime development areas and provided grants to help increase energy efficiency and encourage infill development We eliminated 40% of our permitting fees while simplifying the process to rehabilitate or develop new housing. And we continue to

focus on meaningful land usage reform that will help end the artificial scarcity that inflates building costs.

And I'm proud to say...it's working. We have seen *tremendous* growth in Auburn in the last 2 years. We have over 800 new market rate housing units in Auburn – either built, approved or in planning - and that number is growing weekly. Encouraging the private sector to build homes, increasing our supply, is our way forward.

I want to point out that the City of Auburn is in the process of adopting, or have already adopted most of the municipal recommendations outlined in this legislation. As for the ones we have not yet adopted...we will incorporate those into our work over the next couple of months.

Clearly, there is no "silver bullet" that will fix our statewide housing crisis. This legislation is just one piece of what is needed to be successful.

I will continue to urge my fellow municipal leaders - especially my fellow mayors – to take the needed steps, starting with the difficult - conversations about inclusivity and fairness. To advocate and promote ordinance and zoning changes that eliminate barriers to growth, both municipal growth and growth of the individual. Embrace change, put action into words, and own the issue and create additional solutions. This is not an issue that the "other towns" have. It's all OUR issue; it's Maine's issue. The word does not begin and end at our municipal borders, and this is why the Legislature needs to take action. This is not about 'infringement of home rule' this is about providing consistency and fairness so that people can have a place to live.

In closing, the future of our state, its residents and its economy will depend on the actions that our legislature and our municipalities take over the next few months. LD 2003 is a needed step towards solving our housing crisis. If we wait for someone else to solve our problems, we will fail. And as we were reminded during Maine's recent bicentennial celebration, Mainers don't have a history of failure.

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