Growth Management Law Rulemaking Stakeholder Group

March 6, 2026 - 1:30 - 3:30 PM (Virtual)
Meeting #4

Introduction:

Maine Office of Community Affairs (MOCA) convened the fourth meeting of the Growth Management Law Rulemaking Stakeholder Group on March 6, 2026. The mandate of the Stakeholder Group is to develop recommendations to update the rules that implement Maine's revised Growth Management Law. The recommendations will be a core input as MOCA leads a formal rule-making process later in 2026.

The Stakeholder Group met on Zoom. There were 10 members in attendance, along with MOCA staff, meeting facilitators from the Consensus Building Institute, and observing members of the public. Attendance is listed in Appendix A.

This meeting summary is written by the Consensus Building Institute and captures the key discussion points, stakeholder group feedback, and actions identified during the meeting. Opinions are not attributed to specific members unless there is a clear reason to do so.

The objectives of this meeting were to discuss potential rule revisions for inventory and analysis.

Welcome

Samantha Horn, MOCA, welcomed the group to the meeting, thanking them for their ongoing commitment to this conversation.

David Plumb, CBI facilitator, provided an overview of the meeting agenda and objectives. This meeting focused on approaches to inventory and data analysis, from the perspective of both municipalities and the state.

Before this meeting, a subset of the stakeholder group met to begin this conversation. A summary of this pre-meeting work session was provided to the stakeholder group, and provided a starting point for discussion.

The summary below captures key discussion themes, which identified key challenges currently faced by municipalities and the state, recommendations for rule revisions, and related suggestions for streamlining data access and analysis.

The group was generally aligned in its suggestions. Differences are noted where they emerged.

Updates from Staff

State staff provided updates on the following areas of work:

- **Rules and Guidance Determinations:** The Stakeholder group reviewed the housing section of the exercise as an illustrative example of the overall approach. In distinguishing between rule and guidance content, the exercise attempts to reduce the rule to a few key questions. These questions drive the needs assessment and data analysis, and are used to inform the future land use plan and capital improvement plan. The key questions also encourage connections between the main topic (e.g. housing) and other topic areas. On initial review, state staff suggest that about 60% of the original content will stay in the rule, with the remaining portions being moved to guidance. Stakeholder discussions, captured below, will continue to inform this exercise.

- **Results from public inventory survey:** State staff presented an initial synthesis of the results gathered from a public survey on inventory requirements. The responses demonstrate an interest in both increased flexibility, and a greater focus on data at the local level. Survey respondents also indicated recommendations for essential and non-essential data sources.

Inventory and Analysis

Current Challenges and Opportunities

The group expressed a desire to move away from data checklists and towards a more targeted and streamlined approach where data packages are tailored to community needs, and encourage making connections between topic areas.

- **Small, rural communities are suffering from data overload and overwhelm.** Stakeholders suggested that the rule should support smaller, more targeted data packages as a starting point for communities.

- **The state data portal provides a helpful starting point for communities. At the same time, the quantity of links to outside data sources is overwhelming and creates confusion.** Stakeholders suggested streamlining and consolidating the available data, and grouping in ways that are intended to spark community conversations to identify priority needs.

- **Communities need more specificity and clarity on what the minimum data requirements are.** The rule gives direction for the process, but the rule does not make determinations about data requirements.

- **The state has a role to play in making data available and digestible for communities.** There was strong support for the state (or regional councils) providing

pre-digested data packers matched to a municipality's demographics. This would allow communities to focus on *having conversations about the data,* rather than focusing on collecting it.

- **Key Tension: Communities need better and more targeted data, and also want more streamlined and simplified requirements.**
  - The inventory process should be as simple as possible. At the same time, targeted data can catalyze the ability of communities to identify their priority needs.
  - Creating targeted data packets is resource intensive. If the state takes responsibility for compiling these packets, it may require tradeoffs in other areas of support that the state offers.

Proposed Rule Framework

Stakeholders discussed shifting the rule's structure to become more evaluative and less prescriptive:

- **Instead of a data checklist, each topic area within the rule could be organized around a few core questions**. For example: *"Does the current housing stock meet the current and projected needs of your community?"*
  - Each core question should offer communities flexibility in how they respond, and how they demonstrate consistency with state goals.

- **Regional Coordination should be incorporated into each topic area.** Regional coordination can help a municipality narrate its projected needs and understand its role in meeting regional goals (e.g. for housing or transportation). At minimum, a municipality should be able to show that its plan does not negatively impact regional goals.

- **The rule should require municipalities to show their work.** Municipalities must be able to demonstrate that they have used relevant data to think through the key questions and that their conclusions and chosen priorities align with state goals.
  - **Existing maps, future land use plans, and a capital improvement plan are the tools that help municipalities show their work.**

- **Rule vs. Guidance:** Stakeholders suggested that the rule should establish the "what" (e.g. municipalities must answer these core questions), while guidance provides the "how." (e.g., tools to support communities with data navigation, analysis, and using the data to draw connections between different topic areas and regional needs)

- **Tiered framework:** There is interest in a tiered approach that outlines different requirements based on municipal capacity within a regional or state context. Stakeholders suggested tiering based on capacity rather than differentiating by population size.

Consistency Scenarios

The Stakeholder Group used hypothetical scenarios to test how a community could demonstrate consistency with state goals.

Scenario: A rural town with a declining population claims it has no need for new housing development, preferring instead to focus on forest conservation and recreation. How might this town demonstrate consistency with state housing goals?

As noted in the above section, stakeholders suggested that communities could be asked to respond to a core question: *"Does the current housing stock meet the current and projected needs of your community?"*

A community may answer this question, and demonstrate consistency in the following ways:

- **Nuancing a "lack of demand" with specific data indices:** While a community may cite population decline as a reason to opt out of housing goals, decline alone is not a causal link for no housing needs. The municipality should be expected to demonstrate a lack of demand using data such as affordable housing indices, building permit trends, and historical vs. future needs gaps.

- **Addressing existing demographic needs and realities:** A municipality must demonstrate that it is meeting the needs of current populations. For example, how is the town providing aging-in-place supports, ensuring the safety/upkeep of older housing stock, or offering options for residents looking to downsize?

- **Showing linkages with other economic strategies:** If a community pursues recreation as an economic strategy, it must demonstrate whether there will be a resulting workforce increase, where this workforce will live, and how municipal services for those residents will be funded.

- **Locating themselves in a broader regional context:** A community must demonstrate how it is located in a broader context, and ensure its local policies are not hindering regional growth or shifting a housing burden to neighboring communities.

Scenario: A coastal town is concerned that investments in coastal climate infrastructure are based on inaccurate climate models. Instead of investing in climate resilience, they want to focus on developing housing in non-riverine or coastal designated growth area. How might this town demonstrate consistency with state resilience goals?

A community may demonstrate consistency by:

- **Analyzing data on recent storm impacts alongside climate modeling data:** Municipalities should be expected to analyze current and historical storm impacts, such as roads washed out by recent storms, culvert failures, or impacts on emergency

response or school transportation pathways. This data may support the community's approach, or may underscore the need for climate resilience investments.

- Vermont's flood impacts map was noted as a helpful example of a state-provided data source: https://roadfloodresilience.vermont.gov/#/map
- MOCA is currently working on improving coastal and inland flood models, with more data coming in the next few years.

Additional considerations:

- **Comprehensive plans are a key input for the state in planning for state investments** (e.g. transportation). If municipal comprehensive plans do not accurately predict infrastructure needs, it can have a downstream impact on state investments.
- **Stakeholders suggested that analyzing flooding impacts to key transportation connections should be required in rule.** Future land use plans must consider areas that risk being cut off by flooding, not only areas directly in the flood plain or future sea level rise projections.

Closing and Next Steps

David Plumb, CBI facilitator, thanked the group for their time and participation, and outlined next steps:

- CBI will write and distribute a meeting summary
- CBI will develop a workplan leading up to the final Stakeholder Group meeting in April.
- State staff will continue to work on the rule/guidance draft.

Attendance

Member	Affiliation
Tanya Emery	Maine Municipal Association
Representative Traci Gere	Legislative Representative for Kennebunkport and parts of Kennebunk and Biddeford
Jen Ladd	Toole Design
Matt Markot	Loon Echo Land Trust
Michael Martone	Town Planner for Damariscotta and Newcastle
Steve McDermott	Individual experienced with comp planning and housing
Ben Smith	North Star Planning
Amy Tchao	Drummond Woodsum Law
Averi Varney	Hancock County Planning Commission

Sophie Wilson	Freeport Town Manager
Supporting Staff	
John Brochu	MOCA
Hilary Gove	MOCA
Samantha Horn	MOCA
David Plumb	Consensus Building Institute
Anika Reynar	Consensus Building Institute
Joan Walton	MOCA