

# Growth Management Law Rulemaking Stakeholder Group

## Meeting Summary

April 17, 2026 - 10:00-1:00 (Hybrid Format)

Meeting #5

### Introduction:

Maine Office of Community Affairs (MOCA) convened the fourth meeting of the Growth Management Law Rulemaking Stakeholder Group on April 17, 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 in person and on Zoom. There were 11 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 the initial draft of the rule revision recommendation.

### Welcome

David Plumb, CBI facilitator, provided an overview of the meeting agenda and objectives. This meeting focused a review of a draft set of recommendations, with a focus on topics that needed additional discussion. These topics included a tiered approach, consistency determinations, and developing an approach in the rule for encouraging connections between topic areas.

This is the last full meeting of the Stakeholder Group. Participants expressed a strong sense of being encouraged by the process and largely aligned as a group. Acknowledging the complexity of the work ahead, the group expressed appreciation for the shift towards a community-driven and flexible approach to comprehensive planning, while maintaining a focus on advancing state goals.

The summary below captures the key themes that arose in discussion. The group was generally aligned in its suggestions. Differences are noted where they emerged.

## Discussion Themes

### Interconnections:

- In the needs assessment moment, the **expectation is that communities are asking themselves questions that look across topic areas identified in the State Goals.**
  - The rule will outline these questions
  - Public participation is a key expectation as part of the needs assessment
- **The economic development strategy is a key connector.** Even if a community does not want to grow, they must account for how they will sustain themselves and maintain infrastructure over time.
  - Smart Growth offers a model for balancing environmental interests (ie. avoided sprawl) with prioritizing economic growth
- The work of developing interconnections between topics must happen during the **needs assessment process.** These interconnections also create the throughline - from data analysis, to policy development, to implementation.
- **Regional considerations are a key part of this process.**
  - There will be an expectation that all communities look at their role in the region, and the regional planning that already exists.
  - This is particularly important for key regional infrastructure and services: Housing, health care, emergency services, etc.
    - What is a community's role with both accessing and providing these services? Communities need to plan for the infrastructure and workforce that support these services into the future
    - There will be support for communities in mapping these questions onto/existing plans in connected topic areas
  - The state should support opportunities for cross-boundary planning. For example, the possibility of a community naming their growth area in adjacent community, and allowing the comprehensive plan to encompass both communities, even if implementation is local.
- **The state review process will assess** if the communities have asked these questions.
  - Guidance will include concrete examples and process/technical advice to ensure the state's assessment criteria is transparent.

### Scaling:

- The stakeholder groups envisions **a scaled approach** that creates **clear baseline requirements** for all communities, **while offering flexibility** for communities to adjust how they approach the core questions based on their context and capacity. The scaling approach should serve as an **equity mechanism**, ensuring that requirements are tailored to different levels of need and capacity between communities.

- Avoid rigid tiers to prevent entrenched boundaries and to avoid confusion for communities that fall between tiers. Consider asking the legislature to revise Section 4326 to remove or change the formal “tiered” language.
- **Needs assessment is key:** every community needs to ask a central set of key questions (this is the baseline for all communities). Guidance documents will:
  - Create flexibility for how deep communities go into these questions, and how they carry the questions forward into their comp plan
  - Provide tools for communities to develop topic areas further as is relevant and useful for the community.
  - The interconnections between questions becomes very important for some communities, less so for others (see above section on Interconnections)
- Use a straightforward “**if/then**” **framework** to help communities understand when they do and don’t need to focus on certain areas (e.g. communities don’t need to include waterfront/marine considerations if they are not coastal. Others topic areas will be more nuanced, and will need clearer guidance from the state)
- **Examples of specific scaling indicators include:**
  - Staff size and administrative capacity
  - Identification as a service center
  - Infrastructure (e.g. if a community doesn’t have sewer, then they don’t need to address questions specifically targeting these infrastructure considerations)
  - Presence of a single large employer (workforce vulnerability metric)

#### **Discretion on consistency determinations**

- Embed some consistency criteria in the rule, and develop a more robust set of guidance for communities on how they can demonstrate and think through consistency. Potential criteria include:
  - **Data informed:** Priorities are supported by broad data analyses across several indices, such as demographic needs
  - **Interconnected analysis:** Shows linkages with other economic strategies
  - **Regional connections:** Community has located themselves within regional context, both in the current moment, and has anticipated their desired regional position in the future
- **Legal Considerations:** Be intentional with what lives in the rule vs. guidance to minimize the risk of litigation. Litigation can jeopardize a municipality’s zoning and access to state funds.
  - Note that case law is generally deferential to municipalities; ordinances need to be in “basic harmony” with the plan. Contradictions in one area generally do not discredit broader consistency.

#### **Complementary recommendations:**

- MOCA will require additional capacity to provide additional technical assistance and support. Regional councils can also play a role in offering this support
- Incentives & Carrots:

- Create upfront guidance to help communities meet funding criteria (e.g., Identifying specific buildings/areas for redevelopment upfront in the comp plan makes developers more competitive for state funds later)
- Lower the threshold for incentives for lower-capacity communities to ensure fairness.
- Use comp plan consistency as a criteria (or as part of a scoring criteria) for state funding. The state should use their discretion in determining the forms and thresholds for this criteria
- Increase public awareness through education to shift the perception of comp planning from a bureaucratic hurdle to a useful tool for advancing community needs and goals.

## Closing and Next Steps

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

- CBI will update the draft recommendations based on stakeholder feedback
- Stakeholders will have the opportunity to review the draft recommendations before a final stakeholder meeting on May 6th.

## Attendance

| Member                    | Affiliation   |
|---------------------------|---|
| Dan Black                 | LB Development Partners   |
| Tanya Emery               | Maine Municipal Association   |
| Jennie Franceschi         | City of Westbrook Planning Department   |
| Representative Traci Gere | Legislative Representative for Kennebunkport and parts of Kennebunk and Biddeford |
| Jen Ladd                  | Toole Design  |
| Jay Kamm                  | Northern Maine Development Commission   |
| 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        |
| <b>Supporting Staff</b> |                              |
| John Brochu             | MOCA                         |
| Samantha Horn           | MOCA                         |
| David Plumb             | Consensus Building Institute |
| Anika Reynar            | Consensus Building Institute |
| Joan Walton             | MOCA                         |