

Growth Management Act Rulemaking Stakeholder Group

December 8, 2025 - 1:00 - 3:00 PM (In-Person)
Meeting #1

Meeting Summary

Introduction:

Maine Office of Community Affairs (MOCA) convened the first meeting of the Growth Management Act Rulemaking Stakeholder Group on December 8, 2025. The mandate of the Stakeholder Group is to develop recommendations to update the rules that implement Maine's revised Growth Management Act. The recommendations will be a core input as MOCA leads a formal rule-making process later in 2026.

The Stakeholder Group met in Augusta with options for in person and virtual attendance. There were 14 members in attendance, along with MOCA staff, meeting facilitators from the Consensus Building Institute, and members of the public who observed online. 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 mandate of the Growth Management Act Rulemaking Stakeholder Group and define components of a successful rulemaking process, to review and receive feedback on the workplan, and to begin an initial discussion on inventory and data.

Welcome and Introductions

Samantha Horn, Director of Maine Office of Community Affairs (MOCA), welcomed the stakeholder group and turned the meeting over to David Plumb, facilitator with the Consensus Building Institute (CBI).

Group Mandate and Defining Success

Mandate: MOCA has convened this stakeholder group to develop recommendations to update the rules that implement Maine's revised Growth Management Act. The recommendations will be a core input as MOCA leads a formal rule-making process later in 2026.

The stakeholder group will analyze needed changes to the rules so that they are aligned with the recent revisions to the act. In addition, the group might identify additional rule revisions that would improve the implementation of the act.

The stakeholder group discussed the group mandate, and raised the following comments and questions:

- **Rules vs. guidance:** While the focus on rule-making, the group may also flag associated guidance and support that is needed to make the rules work well (e.g. funding or technical assistance).
- **Rule-making goals:** Members discussed that a central goal of the rulemaking process should be to support municipalities in creating plans that align with state goals, while being completed in a reasonable time frame with manageable costs.
- **Desired outcomes:** A core challenge in the growth management process is that the existing rules and legislation are not leading to desired outcomes. Ideally, comprehensive plans will lead to measurable outcomes that align with municipal needs and state goals. How might the rules support the advancement and evaluation of desired outcomes?

The stakeholder group engaged in a brainstorming session focused on defining what success looks like at the end of the rule-making process. Themes included:

- **Clarity and simplicity:**
 - Rules, review processes, and state goals are outlined in ways that can be clearly understood and easily implemented.
 - Reduced requirements for data and inventory
- **Rules that meet both community needs and state goals**
 - Rules should reflect the diversity of needs across municipalities: not a one size fits all
 - Ideally, good rules will lead to a culture shift, where communities prioritize comprehensive plans and see these plans as advancing both community needs and state goals.
- **An increase in the utility of comprehensive plans**
 - More comprehensive plans that include capital asset and management planning
 - Comprehensive plans that solve problems and have legal clarity

Interview Themes and Key Questions

CBI provided an overview of key themes from interviews conducted with stakeholder group members in advance of the meeting, including three high level questions to guide the work of the stakeholder group:

1. How is this process and the product useful for communities?
2. How can we simplify the process for communities?
3. How do we make sure state goals are addressed in a way that also meets community needs?

The stakeholder group provided feedback on these questions:

- Question 3: Reframe to focus on community needs first and then state goals
 - There is a need to *better translate* state goals to a community level. There is currently a disconnect, where municipalities do not have a clear sense of what

- the goals are, where to find them, and to interpret how they fit with municipal priorities.
- Question 1 and 2 were affirmed by the group.

Across the interviews, stakeholders expressed hopes that the process will:

- Reduce “bulk” - making the process easier and less costly
- Include a solid approach for municipalities to address state goals
- Place greater focus on substantive, meaningful planning
- Ensure rules support strong public participation
- Address concerns about how comprehensive planning intersects with other state legislation (particularly Act 1829 and 2003)
- Note areas where rules need to be accompanied by strong financial support and technical assistance.

The stakeholder group provided feedback on interview themes:

- The group largely affirmed that these themes accurately reflected their interests.
- **Translating state goals into municipal context:** The group has a strong interest in ensuring that the state goals are effectively and clearly articulated in ways that make sense to municipalities and meet their needs.
- **Focus on municipal process, not only state goals:** Stakeholders discussed whether the evaluation of comprehensive plans could focus on how municipalities are *approaching* state goals, rather than whether municipalities have *included* state goals in their comprehensive plan. This shift may require a different review process that is not based on a checklist.
- **Flexibility vs. consistency:** The group discussed a key tension in the rulemaking process between offering *flexibility* in meeting diverse community needs and ensuring *consistency* across comprehensive plans. This tension is expected to run throughout the rulemaking process (e.g. in determining growth area designations and acceptable exemptions)
- **Anticipating unintended consequences:** How might the group assess for unintended consequences that result from changes to comprehensive planning rules and guidelines?

Reviewing the Workplan

The stakeholder group reviewed the draft workplan and provided the following feedback:

- **Address public participation earlier in the process:** Needs assessment, inventory/data, and public participation are linked.
 - Start a conversation about public participation in January in connection with the needs assessment conversations.
- **Areas for explicit focus:**
 - Explicitly address designated growth areas and their intersection with other state laws
 - Explicitly address state goals and their intersection with municipal needs and priorities

- **Allocating workload:** The work plan is a heavy lift, especially with limited meeting time.
 - Suggestion to have volunteers from the stakeholder group meet in advance of the meetings to lay the groundwork for full group conversations on focus areas.
 - Reminder that the mandate of this group is not to write the rules, but to provide recommendations on what rule changes may look like.

Inventory/Data

The Stakeholder Group began an initial conversation about the connection between inventory issues and the comprehensive planning process. Members emphasized an interest in making inventory less onerous and more easily available and letting the community lead in determining which data is most important in their context.

The discussion also included the following themes:

- **Which comes first? Inventory or needs assessments.** Some members emphasized the centrality of the needs assessments, suggesting that needs assessments should drive the collection of data. Others countered that basing planning solely on needs assessments can risk leaving important considerations off the table. Quality data can open up conversations that may not come up on their own.
- **Sequence data collection with public process:** Members suggested that the rule making process should pay attention to the order of operations, to allow for the sequencing of data collection in relation to public process and needs assessment.
- **Data analysis takes skill.** Members noted that local volunteers do not always have the capacity or skills to analyze and interpret data.
- **The state has a role to play in supporting data access and analysis.** Members agreed that the state should hold responsibility for collating data and offering it in a format that can be easily interpreted. The ideal would be to have a single dashboard for all relevant data.
- **“Comprehensive planning lite”:** In small, rural communities, offering an option for “comp planning lite” would allow for communities to focus on quality data analysis in a few priority areas, rather than becoming overwhelmed by the data needed to meet checklist requirements.

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 update the workplan and interview findings based on stakeholder feedback
- MOCA will develop a glossary, a list of state goals, and a statutory outline to assist with future conversations
- CBI will convene the stakeholders who volunteered to assist with pre-work in advance of the next meeting.
- CBI will send out a scheduling poll for the next meeting in January

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
Jay Kamm	Northern Maine Development Commission
Matt Markot	Loon Echo Land Trust
Michael Martone	Town Planner for Damariscotta and Newcastle
Steve McDermott	Genesis Community Loan Fund
Dayea Shim (online)	GrowSmart Maine
Ben Smith	North Star Planning
Amy Tchao	Drummond Woodsum Law
Averi Varney	Hancock County Planning Commission
Kara Wilbur	Build Maine
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