

Growth Management Act Rulemaking Stakeholder Group

January 16, 2026: 1:30 - 3:30 PM (Virtual)
Meeting #2

Introduction:

Maine Office of Community Affairs (MOCA) convened the second meeting of the Growth Management Act Rulemaking Stakeholder Group on January 16, 2026. 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 on Zoom. There were 13 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 develop a proposal on an overall vision for rule revisions, as well as on three specific areas: needs assessments, policy development, and implementation strategies.

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. He provided a summary of the themes that emerged from pre-meeting work sessions held with a subset of the stakeholder group. The group discussed and built on the pre-work for the rest of the session. Below is a summary of that discussion, with ideas grouped into four buckets:

- Overall vision for rule revisions
- Three specific components of comprehensive planning:
 - Needs assessment
 - Policy development
 - Implementation strategies

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

Overall Vision for Rule Revisions

During the conversation, there was broad preliminary support for the following approaches and ideas to revised rules.

- **Reduce barriers to participation:** Updating the rules is an opportunity to make comprehensive planning more accessible to all Maine communities, by reducing the volume of requirements, and associated financial and administrative burdens. To be sure, most participants said effective comprehensive planning will still require professional support from consultants and/or technical assistance programs. Strategies to reduce barriers include:
 - **Increase flexibility, reduce complexity:** Reduce the number of mandatory policies and strategies, clearly distinguishing between requirements and guidance.
 - **Action Item:** Stakeholder Group to provide input on a set of criteria to determine which strategies/policies stay in the rule and which are better suited for guidance.
 - **Offer options for policies and strategies:** Rules could provide a menu of options to help communities translate state goals into policies and strategies that are actionable in local contexts.
 - **Action Item:** Stakeholder group to develop a set of example options.
- **Consider new ways to evaluate the consistency of comprehensive plans with state goals:**
 - **Defining consistency:** Stakeholders discussed how the state might define and evaluate consistency including a potential distinction between a plan being “consistent with” versus “not in conflict with” state goals. Stakeholders noted the tension between offering communities greater discretion in priorities, while continuing to ensure that state goals are advanced.
 - **Action Item:** Stakeholder group to further discuss and develop a set of demonstrative criteria and example cases for how consistency could be assessed.
 - **Expect communities to show their work:** Communities should be able to demonstrate how their chosen policies and strategies align with their needs assessment. If a community “opts out” of creating policies and strategies around a state goal, it must be able to show how the decision is supported by data and that local ordinances / decisions do not hinder state goals.
- **Account for differences in scale and complexity:** The group discussed different ways to account for different needs and capacities between communities, even as they expressed concerns about the concept of a tiered framework. Suggestions for accounting for differences between communities included the following:
 - **“If-then” approach:** Example - If no public sewer exists or is anticipated, then no sewer planning is required.

- **Resource and population-based:** Some members suggested correlating population and revenue tiers with different levels of service responsibility. Others noted that towns of 3,000 people in Northern Maine play a very different role than a town of the same size in Southern Maine. These differences may make population-based tiers less effective.
- **Regional responsibility:** Some participants noted that even small communities have a role to play in regional issues like housing or labor, suggesting that any tiered approach should ensure that all communities take into account their roles within their broader region.
- **Minimum requirements:** The rules could establish minimum standards that all communities must meet, with additional requirements for more complex communities.

- **Encourage regional collaboration:** The rules could allow municipalities to meet some requirements of their comprehensive plan (e.g. transportation) by opting in to a broader regional plan.
 - **Action Item:** Consider this recommendation further, including potential support or incentives for regional planning that would be needed at the state level.
- **Provide structural clarity:** The rule should clearly distinguish between inventory/needs assessments (*why* issues are important), policies/objectives (*what* needs to be addressed), and strategies (*how* policies will be enacted).

Needs Assessment

During the conversation, there was broad preliminary support for the following approaches and ideas to revised rules.

- **Emphasize the process rather than a checklist:** The rule should require that communities identify their needs and priorities through public input and data analysis. The rule should not be overly prescriptive about what to include in a needs assessment.
- **Streamline data access:** The state should support communities by providing standardized data and analysis packages. Stakeholders suggested an option for an initial summary data packet to help communities identify and prioritize key issues without being overwhelmed by all the data and analysis.
- **Flexibility in timing:** Communities should have the flexibility to complete the needs assessment as a first step, or iteratively throughout the process.
- **Options for early state review:** Stakeholders suggested optional early check-ins with MOCA to ensure consistency with state goals, preventing costly rework late in the process. One specific option would be to check in with MOCA after completing the needs assessment.
- **Financial feasibility:** Needs assessments should include early conversations about financial feasibility and the capital investments required to meet community priorities.

Policy Development

During the conversation, there was broad preliminary support for the following approaches and ideas to revised rules.

- **Clarity on requirements:** The rules should explicitly name if policies are required, optional, or suggested.
- **Policies should align with needs:** The review of comprehensive plans should focus on whether policies align with the community's needs assessment, rather than whether the community has satisfied a checklist.

Implementation Strategies

During the conversation, there was broad preliminary support for the following approaches and ideas to revised rules.

- **Community ownership and realistic outcomes:** For strategies to be effective, they must be realistic, measurable, and financially feasible. Strategies that are aligned with a community's needs and policies are most likely to succeed, in contrast to strategies that are copied directly from state checklists.
- **Specific and measurable:** Strategies should be specific enough to be actionable. Stakeholders raised some concern that requiring high levels of specificity may become too burdensome for some communities.
- **Capital investment planning:** Rules should reinforce existing statutory requirements for capital investment plans to support projected growth and infrastructure.

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 convene the stakeholders who volunteered to assist with pre-work in advance of the next meeting.

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
Jen Ladd	Toole Design
Michael Martone	Town Planner for Damariscotta and Newcastle
Steve McDermott	Genesis Community Loan Fund
Dayea Shim	GrowSmart Maine
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