

LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY



Maine Real Estate &
Development Association

Supporting Responsible Development

Legislative Update – Spring 2021

May 10, 2021

While much has changed in the world in the past months, the MEREDA Public Policy Committee has continued to stay engaged on critical matters impacting our members.

MEREDA Engages in a Virtual 130th First Regular Legislative Session

The MEREDA Public Policy Committee has been meeting regularly since the start of the 130th Legislature. At our meetings, we review recently-printed legislation and discuss MEREDA's strategy for engaging on key legislation of import to MEREDA. To date, we've reviewed the nearly 700 bills that have been printed. Before the session ends, we anticipate roughly 2,000 total bills, meaning that there is still plenty of work to be done.

Much of the legislation of interest has dealt with municipal land planning or modifications to the statewide land use laws, including proposals to modify the Site Location of Development Act and the Shoreland Zone. We are closely engaged in the language development and hearing process of several of these bills – some we support, others we believe may have good intent but will cause confusion in the law where none currently exists. For example, we testified in opposition to LD 390 regarding mapping of the Shoreland Zone because it would have required municipal planners to rely solely on the National Wetlands Inventory maps, which are insufficient and inaccurate for the purposes of mapping the Shoreland Zone. We are now working with the sponsor and the committee to determine whether there might be better ways to help municipalities manage the mapping of the Shoreland Zone, which was the sponsor's intent. LD 390 is an example of what we often encounter - bills with good intent but language that could lead to unintended consequences. MEREDA's engagement at the Legislature is key to helping craft these policies to ensure a more fair, practical, and predictable environment for commercial real estate development.

In addition to those matters, we are also following the efforts of the Climate Council and potential legislation related to energy efficient building practices. To that end, we testified recently in support of legislation that would enable Maine to operate a CPACE program, as well as a bond proposal to provide funding for weatherization of residential and commercial properties. We will continue to monitor legislative and regulatory activities related to climate change and its impact on the building industry.

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We are also tracking a number of workforce development bills that could help promote the construction trades. We recently testified in support of a bill that would provide a tax credit for employers who hire apprentices, and will support an upcoming proposal to enhance the State's career and technical education programs. We will continue to advocate for important trades-related workforce development policies and incentives.

The PPC will be discussing these as well as other issues throughout the session. The PPC typically meets every-other Monday at 11:30 a.m. Our meetings are currently virtual, and we invite you to join us any time. If you are interested, please contact Shelly R. Clark at info@mereda.org.

Local Issues Committee – Portland and the Progressive Precedent

Last fall, Portland voters enacted rent control and green new deal ordinances. MEREDA opposed these proposals not just because they will devastate development in Portland, but because they have the potential to be taken up in other municipalities or at the statewide level. For example, we understand the proponents of these Portland measures may be initiating a statewide referendum question that would impose a statewide rent control policy. We know too that other municipalities may consider enacting their own version of a green new deal or inclusionary zoning.

These proposals are bad for affordable housing, bad for economic development, and bad for the State – at any level. For this reason, the Local Issues Committee has continued to stay abreast of conversations to modify or repeal provisions of the green new deal in Portland. We are also carefully monitoring legislative activities in other municipalities for similar actions.

Maine can't afford to enact ill-conceived, patchwork local land use planning laws that discourage good growth. The Local Issues Committee is committed to keeping MEREDA at the table in these conversations across the state. In coordination with the Executive Committee and the Board, the Committee will continue to engage when policies have the potential to set dangerous precedent.

The Local Issues Committee typically meets once a month at 3:00 p.m. on Thursdays. Our meetings are currently virtual, and we invite you to join us any time. If you are interested, please contact Shelly R. Clark at info@mereda.org.

MEREDA will continue to remain diligent in protecting its members' interests. Our members represent a critical pillar of the state economy, and we will continue to advocate for policies that are fair, practical, and predictable even as we navigate a new, post COVID-19 environment. We encourage all those who are interested in rolling-up their sleeves and helping to further MEREDA's mission and vision in policy-making to contact Shelly R. Clark, MEREDA's Vice President of Operations at info@mereda.org.

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