



MEREDA Advocacy Newsletter
2/22/2022

Language Now Available for Housing Commission Bill

The Public Policy Committee will be reviewing the language of the soon-to-be-printed bill to enact the recommendations of the Housing Commission. We hope to offer suggestions and changes to the proposed language in any places where recommendations might be improved upon or narrowed, and to recommend a formal policy position. While the bill hasn't yet been printed, MEREDA members can see an advance copy by reaching out to Elizabeth Frazier at efrazier@pierceatwood.com. As a reminder, the recommendations of the Housing Commission can be found in its final report, [here](#). We encourage anyone who is interested to consider attending the next public policy committee meeting on 2/28.

Governor Mills' \$840 Million Supplemental Budget Proposal Released

Governor Mills outlined her proposal for the supplemental budget in her State of the State address on February 10. Last week, she followed up the release of the supplemental budget language, available [here](#). As promised, the budget proposal would return half of the surplus to eligible Maine taxpayers in the form of a \$510 check. Under the proposal, the individual filing threshold would be \$75k, and for married individuals filing jointly, \$150k. (pgs. 21, 22 of the General Fund Language available [here](#)). Other provisions include an expanded and simplified program for the Opportunity Maine Tax Credit, which allows Mainers who make student loan payments to claim a credit on their income tax returns. This overhaul could result in a strong workforce development incentive and place Maine among the leading states for student loan repayment assistance.

MEREDA Opposes "Dark Stores" Bill to Amend Property Tax Valuation Process

MEREDA has joined with the Maine State Chamber of Commerce and the Maine Retail Association to oppose LD 1129, which attempts to address the issue of so-called dark store tax valuation. In brief, this bill stems from a problem some municipalities are having in responding to tax valuation appeals filed by big box retail stores who argue that their valuation should be the same as the fair market value of an empty big box store in a similar location. In many cases, towns have prevailed against this so-called "dark store theory," but litigating their case is costly. Accordingly, many towns have settled. Tax assessors from several municipalities have advanced this bill two sessions in a row, and this session it received approval from the Taxation Committee.



In its amended form, LD 1129 would largely codify judicial precedent regarding the proper valuation procedures for real property. However, it departs in three key places, including by requiring that tax assessors should disregard encumbrances in the valuation of any property. This poses a whole host of problems for property valuation, and could result in properties that are valued significantly less on the market due to restrictions, but which cannot be considered by an assessor.

MEREDA will be working to oppose this bill on the floor of the House and Senate, and will be asking Governor Mills to consider a veto. We encourage MEREDA members who are opposed to this proposal to reach out to their House member, who can be found [here](#) or their Senate member, who can be found [here](#).

MEREDA to Provide Comments on ReCODE Portland

Members of the MEREDA Local Issues Committee will be meeting over the next couple of weeks to form a written response to the recently completed land use code evaluation in the City of Portland. The Portland Planning Department recently released the evaluation, which goes through every aspect of land use in the City and makes recommendations for a complete re-write of the code. Given the potential opportunity for import and modernization, MEREDA will continue to be engaged in this process and will likely weigh in when the draft code is released as well. If you are interested in being part of this process, please let Shelly know and she can invite you to a Local Issues Committee meeting or our ad hoc ReCODE meetings.

