

# Commentary: Question 2 would actually achieve the opposite of what it claims

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By Carol Morris, Ethan Boxer-Macomber and Rachel Bouvier Special to the Press Herald

When it comes to planning the future of the community where you live, do you believe in fair, inclusive and transparent process?

If so, regardless of where you live in Maine, you will want to pay close attention to Portland's Question 2 on the ballot Nov. 7 and the reasons why it is opposed by a broad range of groups, including the Portland Community Chamber of Commerce, members of the affordable housing advocacy community such as Avesta Housing, Community Housing of Maine and Portland Housing, and eight of Portland's nine sitting city councilors.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Carol Morris** is board chair, **Ethan Boxer-Macomber** is vice-chair and **Rachel Bouvier** is treasurer of GrowSmart Maine, an organization that advises communities on sustainable growth.

In recent years, cities and towns across Maine have demonstrated exciting and heartening new trends in land use planning and community re-investment.

Our collective attention has moved away from patterns of suburban sprawl and back to the town and urban centers, main streets, working waterfronts, active mill complexes and compact, walkable and transit-oriented neighborhoods that have always defined our state's community character and cultural identity.

These traditional Maine patterns of growth and development improve quality of place, availability and affordability of housing, social connectivity and human and environmental health while at the same time creating new economic vitality and drawing development pressure away from our farms, waterways and forests.

However, along this path, many Maine communities must confront decades-old zoning codes put on the books in the bygone era of community disinvestment and sprawl.

Whether it's a mill redevelopment, transit-oriented affordable housing, conservation-oriented subdivisions, or waterfront reinvestment, many projects require architects and planners to seek changes to outdated zoning.

Fortunately, zoning is intentionally designed to be flexible so that they may continually evolve in response to changing community vision and need.

Moreover, when zoning is amended, state and local laws ensure broad and inclusive consultation with all stakeholders in the community.

At each step in a rezoning process, the public is formally notified and invited and encouraged to present written and/or verbal testimony; all of which is placed in the public record to ensure that all viewpoints and concerns are given fair voice and consideration.

Such transparent public participation is a cornerstone of our democracy and critical to achieving fair and balanced community outcomes.

We should all continue to have a meaningful voice in the collective decisions that affect the futures of our cities and

towns.

Portland's Question 2 campaign purports to promote the interests of those who want to "strengthen zoning protection by allowing resident participation in proposed zoning changes," which certainly sounds like something we should all get behind.

Not so fast.

Question 2 has been advanced by [a small group of neighbors](#) who were dissatisfied with the outcome of a fair and inclusive rezoning process and who now seem unwilling to accept the distinction between "not having a voice" and "not getting their way."

What Question 2 would actually achieve is the opposite of what it claims.

Question 2 would allow as few as one self-interested individual living within 500 feet of a proposed change to hold unilateral power to effectively veto Portland's entire public planning process without any cause and without any public notice, meetings or vote. That's not what we consider "allowing resident participation."

GrowSmart Maine was founded in 2003 to counteract irresponsible growth principles and sprawl in Maine. Our board includes conservationists, developers, planners and architects from across the state.

In our nearly 15-year history, GrowSmart's board has only once before voted to take a public position on a matter of local policy change.

In that instance, the proposed policy posed such a threat to progress in our state that we simply could not afford to watch from the sidelines. This referendum is equally perilous.

Portland's Question 2, if passed, would not only hit the brakes on Portland's current renaissance; it would also set a very dangerous precedent for all Maine communities.

Don't be misled. Protect democracy. Defend resident participation.

Please vote no on Portland ballot Question 2.

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