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**Testimony of Greg Paxton, Executive Director of Maine Preservation in support of funding for the
Maine Downtown Center of Maine Development Foundation for
\$25,000 as part of a \$58,000 appropriation to Maine Development Foundation for the Realize Maine Network**

Senator Breen, Representative Pierce and members of the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, my name is Greg Paxton and I am the executive director of Maine Preservation. We are a statewide non-partisan nonprofit organization that encourages and helps rehabilitation and revitalization of downtowns and neighborhoods to strengthen the economic and cultural vitality of main communities. I have been a member of the Maine Downtown Center Advisory Council since 2008.

The Maine Downtown Center of Maine Development Foundation is affiliated with the National Main Street Center of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Since 1980 this program has been the nation's leading downtown revitalization program with over 2200 communities using the strategies to revitalize and strengthen the economic vitality of their towns. In Maine 26 communities are participating in this program, which continues to show great success. In fact, communities that use this program's historic tagline, "Economic development in the context of historic preservation," have seen successful throughout the country and throughout Maine.

In communities like Biddeford, Norway and Augusta the clear tangible results of millions of dollars of investment in rehabilitating downtown buildings clearly shows the impact of this program and strategies. But in many other communities like Gardner, Belfast and Skowhegan, the consistent and focused approach practiced through this program is also producing great results.

However, COVID-19 has produced challenges in our communities statewide that not been seen for decades. The Maine Downtown Center is regularly convening these communities to discuss strategies and tactics and working on the ground to support businesses that are helping sustain vitality through this challenging time. Frankly the \$25,000 requested is not nearly enough to support the critical activities of the Main Downtown Center for its 26 communities during this period, and Maine Preservation is strongly and unreservedly supportive of this appropriation. We hope that you will continue the support of the State of Maine for this great and critical program.

I am happy to answer any questions.