

NORTHERN NEW ENGLAND
SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES
IMPLEMENTATION PROJECT:
AN EVALUATION

January, 1996

“We can’t wait on the government, we can’t wait on
somebody else to come in and do it, we have to do it ourselves”
(Magic Johnson)

For:
The Ford Foundation
The New Hampshire, Vermont,
And Main Community Foundations

By:
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NORTHERN NEW ENGLAND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES IMPLEMENTATION PROJECT: AN EVALUATION

Executive Summary

The Ford Foundation, in partnership with the New Hampshire, Maine and Vermont Community Foundations, is helping six “communities” create environmentally sound economic development and strengthen their civic societies. The specific overall project goals are to: (1) support communities in enhancing their long-term economic viability while preserving or enhancing their environmental quality; (2) expand the capacity of community foundations to partner with rural communities to achieve sustainable economic development; and (3) develop new understandings about how this kind of development can work in rural communities.

Each of the statewide community foundations in northern New England chose two “communities” for this project. They include a municipality (Hardwick, Vermont), four geographical regions (greater Farmington, Maine area; a portion of the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont in the vicinity of Concord; Mount Washington Valley, New Hampshire, which includes Conway and North Conway; and the STA-NORTH area of New Hampshire, which includes Groveton/Northumberland, Stark and Stratford), and an ecosystem (Cobscook Bay, Maine). Many (but not all) of these communities are small (populations in the hundreds and thousands), poor, rely primarily on natural resources-based economies, and have been economically depressed for some time.

The communities are in the implementation phase. A number of lessons learned are common across the six, very different, community projects and across the three community foundation experiences:

1. **For economically hard-pressed rural towns and cities, the entry point into sustainability is community betterment.** The most effective strategy for guiding actions and rallying public support is to focus on improving people’s lives, defined by the issues and priorities which are the passion of the people at the time.
2. **Excitement, volunteer support, and progress comes from working together on specific projects.** Each of the six communities participated in some form of visioning, goal-setting, committee organization, and indicators development. Yet, people seem to be most enthusiastic once specific projects are identified and initiated.
3. **Projects reflect an integration of economic, environment, and community-building components.** All six communities are investing in non-traditional economic development projects – ones which are oriented towards environmental soundness, cultural and historical heritage, and improved quality of life.
4. **Environmental values and practices come from individual participants’ beliefs and contributions.** Staff from environmental organizations tended to participate more as individuals rather than as official representatives. These participants represent environmental organizations whose mission is land acquisition and management and whose strategy is primarily based on negotiations and settlements with local landowners.

5. **Civic capacity is being created.** New leaders are emerging as strong voices for change in their communities. People are volunteering, working together, and feeling good about accomplishments. Differing perspectives, values, and strategies are being debated and confronted rather than being denied or ignored.
6. **Results are achieved in a short period of time.** Measurable improvements are being achieved, even in the first of the two years of the implementation period.
7. **Foundation funds are used to leverage additional resources.** All six communities have treasured their foundation support and chosen to leverage them into technical and financial assistance from others. The New England mentality of independent spirit draws participants to rely on the foundation “seed money” as a last resort. Self-sufficiency is an objective from the outset of these projects.
8. **A sense of hope and community identity are fashioned.** There have been and will continue to be many struggles; yet, there are sparks of hope, renewal, and opportunity. Difficulties, frustrations, and deep-seated barriers still abound, but expectations are higher and excitement is evident even at the community-scale level.
9. **Gradually, people in the affected towns and cities are demonstrating support for sustainable community projects. Local government support varies depending on the community and on the local board.** Indicators of support include local funding for the sustainable community project, town meeting votes of approval for project actions, sponsorship of grant applications, and in-kind contributions.
10. **The community foundations have played a significant role in nurturing, overseeing, guiding, and providing financial and technical assistance. The foundations chose different strategies, producing different lessons learned.** The common thread for the three foundations’ approaches is that community building must be grounded in the community. The foundation staff provided resources as desired and needed by local people. Their effectiveness depended significantly on their ability to be sensitive, responsive, and non-directive. This orientation did not deter the foundation staff from playing another critical role in educating and prodding community participants to understand and apply the concept of “sustainable community”.
11. **Building communities – sustainable communities – is not easy. It takes time, patience, effective leadership, engagement of people who have differing viewpoints and interests, and listening and responding to the different voices in the community. It also means change – pushing for new ideas and mechanisms, encouraging new leaders, and often dealing with threatened and hostile people who resist that change.**

The evaluation of the Northern New England Sustainable Communities Implementation Project was done by Ms. Elizabeth Kline from Tufts University’s Global Development and Environment Institute. Two written documents were produced. The first is a 11 page summary of key lessons learned. The second is a set of “case stories” which describe each of the six

communities. The intended audience for these materials is: funders, community participants, and other interested persons.

NORTHERN NEW ENGLAND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES IMPLEMENTATION PROJECT

By Elizabeth Kline
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January 24, 1996

Background

Through a collaboration between the Ford Foundation and the Community Foundations of Vermont, Maine and New Hampshire, six “communities” have been funded since early 1993 to invest in environmentally sound economic development and in strengthening civic societies. Each community foundation launched and is responsible for two sustainable community projects. A \$25,000 feasibility grant was followed by a \$150,000 grant and a \$625,000 implementation grant.

The specific overall project goals are to: (1) support communities in enhancing their long-term economic viability while preserving or enhancing their environmental quality; (2) expand the capacity of community foundations to partner with rural communities to achieve sustainable economic development; and (3) develop new understandings about how this kind of development can work in rural communities.

The six “communities” include a municipality (Hardwick, Vermont), a geographical region (Farmington area, Maine; a portion of the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont in the vicinity of Concord; Mount Washington Valley, New Hampshire; and the STA-NORTH area of New Hampshire, which consists of Groveton/Northumberland, Stark and Stratford), and an ecosystem (Cobscook Bay, Maine).

Many but not all of these communities are small (populations in the hundreds and thousands), poor, rely primarily on a natural resources-based economy, and have been economically depressed for some time.

Key Lessons learned

These communities are in the first of a two-year implementation period. Yet, each has already achieved measurable results which provide some useful lessons to each other and others involved and interested in experimenting with sustainable community projects. The analysis which follows is an extraction of common lessons learned across the six, very different, community projects and across the three foundation strategies.

1. **For economically hard-pressed rural towns and cities, the entry point into sustainability is community betterment.** The goal of a healthy environment is not the first priority and does not have the same level of drawing power, as does a focus on community betterment. People in these small communities are worried about the basic necessities of life: jobs, retaining trained and educated local people, acquiring basic needs (e.g. housing, health care), and a safe environment (e.g. drinking water, air quality). They value their rural and scenic landscapes and way of life.

Therefore, the most effective strategy for guiding actions and rallying public support is to focus on improving their lives, defined by the issues and priorities which are the “passion”

of the people at the time. Entry points into building more sustainable communities are different depending on each community's circumstances and vary over time. In general, each of the six communities is striving for environmentally sound and socially responsible economic development/economic security (e.g. diversified agriculture in Groveton, NH; outdoor sports clothing made from recycled plastic in Mt. Washington Valley, NH; sustainable forestry in the Concord, VT region) rather than a more traditional type of development. Each community addresses social and cultural concerns and tries to give more meaning to people's lives (e.g. Hardwick, VT's Renaissance Café; Farmington, ME's poverty project) rather than address only physical infrastructure needs. Many of the communities deal directly with ecological concerns such as clean water (e.g. Groveton, NH's water bottling project; Farmington, ME's Lands and Waters Fairs). Issues of power, governance, equity are also critical concerns in all these communities.

2. **Excitement, volunteer support, and progress comes from working together on specific projects.** Each of the six communities participated in some form "visioning", goal-setting, committee development, and indicators development. Some people gained information and understanding of this illusive concept of "sustainable community" or "community building" by hearing and talking with outside consultants and/or by attending conferences and workshops. Yet, people seem to be most enthusiastic once specific projects are identified and initiated. They need to realize the meaning of "sustainable community" through tangible projects which linked to their personal lives and to real progress.

The exercises and results of visioning, goal setting, and drafting of mission statements and work plans, encouraged by community foundation staff, created a useful framework to guide practical actions. With the promise of foundation funding, all six communities developed projects after they had progressed sufficiently to gain some understanding of their sense of direction and the type of results they want to achieve. The nature of projects (e.g. interconnections of issues; interrelationships of institutions; diversity of participants) reflect knowledge learned from the "thinking" processes (e.g. Sustain Western Maine's evolution of their health care and environment projects).

Once projects were launched, more people – particularly the doer types – had a reason to become involved or reinvolved. Over time, some participants became more strategic in deciding which projects they would invest in and which were not priority or relevant concerns (e.g. STA-NORTH/Groveton, NH people initially agreed to work on any project which seemed of interest to the affected communities; now, however, they carefully select which projects to work on).

3. **Projects reflect an integration of economic, environment, social, and community-building components.** All six communities are investing in non-traditional economic development projects. For example, the Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council in NH is creating a multi-use pedestrian and bicycle pathway as an alternative to Route 16, thereby improving air quality, enhancing the tourist industry, and providing inter-community recreational opportunities. The Clam Restoration and Management Project of the Sustainable Cobscook Community Alliance in Maine is rejuvenating an industry which is important to the economy, social fabric, and environmental quality of that region.

Some of the communities began with a traditional community economic development orientation. With some prodding from community foundation staff and others, they evolved towards a belief in environmentally sound economic development which benefits the local people (e.g. the newly created criteria for future micro business loans to be distributed in the Mt. Washington Valley region of NH are based on sustainability principles). Changes in orientation were due to many factors besides the influence of community foundation staff including face-to-face communications over time (e.g. be exposed to, hear, and understand others' viewpoints while developing personal relationships), being on "home turf" (e.g. discussions took place where people felt comfortable and can afford to let their guard down a bit), and information brought from others (e.g. conference speaker Ron Nissen's experiences with marketing local products).

The two Maine projects began and continue to be driven more by environmental, social, and quality of life concerns. In those cases, community economic development is essential but derives from a focus on other interests. A possible reason for this orientation is that key actors in this project emphasize environment and well-being concerns more than they do economic development ones. In the other communities, many of the major players have a more economic bent as their primary interest.

4. **Environmental values and practices come from individual participants' beliefs and contributions.** Individual staff from environmental organizations (e.g. Brendan Whittaker from the Vermont Natural Resources Council; Jim Dow from the Nature Conservancy; Dick Henry from the New Hampshire Audubon Society; Paul Leveille with the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests; Greg Gerritt from the Maine Green Party; Carl Powden from the Vermont Land Trust) are active and respected participants in their community projects. They have gained that credibility as individuals, willing to participate with others as equals, to attend local meetings and events, and to work hard. They are enabled by their parent organizations to spend time and offer and provide technical and (sometimes) financial assistance.

Community foundation staff exercised initiatives to bring environmentalists "to the table". For example, Tom Deans encouraged representatives of environmental organizations in New Hampshire to participate and provided limited financial inducements. Dick Henry from the New Hampshire Audubon Society was given a \$3,000 program grant from the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation to work with the Mt. Washington Valley group in order to enable his board members to feel comfortable about his commitment of time and level of effort. The Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests was also given a similar grant to enable Paul Leveille to participate in the STA-NORTH group. The actual hours of time given is equivalent to many more dollars than the grant amounts.

Maine environmental organizations were convened by Marion Kane. The Maine Natural Resources Council and the Maine Audubon Society chose not to participate. Individuals from The Nature Conservancy/Maine Chapter and some of the local land trusts are engaged in the project. Other environmental groups, such as Sierra Club, Conservation Law

Foundation, or the Appalachian Mountain Club are not involved either as entities or through staff.

Further explorations are needed to determine why some people and some environmental organizations chose to participate in this kind of project and why others did not. However, it seems plausible that groups whose mission is land acquisition and management and whose strategy is based primarily on negotiations and settlements with local landowners are more inclined to identify with sustainable community efforts. For example, the Trust for Public Land is extending its scope of activities through its “working landscapes program”. Under this program, Cobscook Bay participants were able to get TPL to purchase some historic buildings including a former smokehouse in downtown Lubec.

On the other hand, environmental advocacy organizations whose strategy is more confrontation and whose agendas tend to be more focused on non-local actions have less familiarity and less identity with working with economic interests in communities. Their missions and approaches, therefore, are less directly linked to local community efforts.

Interestingly, results to date from these six sustainable community projects are generating some interest by some staff in environmental organizations and foundations. For example, the Quebec Labrador Foundation/Atlantic Center for the Environment is meeting with people in STA-NORTH communities and elsewhere in the Androscoggin region to identify potential collaborations. Tom Deans has been approached at environmental meetings by people asking for more information.

5. **Civic capacity/social capital is being created.** These six communities are investing in finding and training new leaders and in strengthening existing organizations (e.g. Dave Sorensen and Stephen Knox with the Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council; and Kay Doherty with STA-NORTH) and in creating organizations (e.g. Debbie Burd, Scott Planting, and Warren Cook at Sustain Western Maine; Linda Fox with the Hardwick Business Community; Dianne Tilton, Will Hopkins, and Ron Kilby with Cobscook Bay; and Jim Wood with the Northeast Stewardship Project in Vermont) aimed at promoting sustainable communities.

They are creating they kind of “civic capacity” or “social capital” identified by Robert Putnam from Harvard University (author of the book Making Democracy Work and the article “Bowling Alone”) as important and declining in the United States. Besides developing leaders, these community projects are also developing and expanding networks (e.g. Farmington’s extensive partnerships; Hardwick and STA-NORTH’s business directories); improved local leadership; and increasing resources (e.g. leveraged federal, foundation, and private funds and technical assistance).

Results can be measured in the increasing number of volunteer participants, the partnerships with existing community-based organizations, and the growing number of skilled leaders. For example, the Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council began with five or six people and is now an entity of more than one hundred members. Another example is the recent award to Dianne Tilton by the Finance Authority of Maine as the developer of the year.

Change occurs, within these communities as it does throughout society, through the efforts of a few innovators, then others willing to take some risks, followed by still others who recognize the benefits of change and are drawn into taking actions themselves. For example, in Hardwick Linda Fox is the innovator. Other early advocates of a revitalized Main Street soon joined her. Eventually, business people on nearby streets wanted to participate. The small group then became the Hardwick Business Community.

Civic capacity means more than drawing on the strengths of people. It is also created as people confront and accept their differences. The tendency in community building processes is for people with different perspectives to become polarized and separate their activities. In two of these communities, Cobscook Bay and Sustain Western Maine, people are facing and moving through their differences. In the Sustain Western Maine project, for example, one board member believes that the group should play more of an environmental advocate role and is pushing others to adopt such a strategy. After some disagreements, discussions, and thinking, he understands why the group wants to play a more “neutral” role in the community and he has chosen to remain as an active participant. In the other example, the differences are still being confronted and the healing and coming together is only beginning. People are starting to express their understanding, respect, and support for each other rather than to argue and to be hostile.

6. **Results are achieved even in a short time period.** All of the six communities have already provided measurable improvements in the lives of affected persons. Some, such as Hardwick (Vermont) and STA-NORTH (NH) communities, have increased local business translations through development and publication of directories and business exchanges. Others, such as the Concord (Vermont) and Cobscook (Maine) communities, have given much needed and appreciated support to high school environmental literacy and democracy building programs through the purchase of computers and other equipment.

In many instances, short-term results indicate longer term payoffs (e.g. The Trust for Public Land’s purchase of several vacant buildings on Main Street in Lubec, ME as the prelude to economic revitalization of the downtown and to attracting tourist dollars; the first successful training of stitchers for local businesses in the Mt. Washington Valley region; the first peer lending group’s repayment on microloans administered through Sustain Western Main in Farmington).

Given the hardships these rural communities face, people have consciously chosen to turn traditional liabilities into assets. For example, the necessity of having many jobs has enabled People in STA-NORTH communities to invest in many business enterprises simultaneously, thereby intertwining people’s lives and sense of value. The orchard farmers buy compost from the dairy farmers; the dairy farmers provide the cows for breeding someone else’s distinctive cattle. Another example which pertains to all communities is the way these rural people view money: the traditional lack of money has created an independent and self-reliant lifestyle, which enables people to savor and leverage their foundation funds rather than spend it and ask for more.

Participants, whether consciously applying indicators of progress or unconsciously driven by simply a desire to produce tangible results, are eager to improve people's lives rather than finish tasks. Perhaps, their Yankee spirit, hard-working ethic, their non-bureaucratic traditions, and serious commitment to these projects combine to search for real-life changes.

7. **Foundation funds are used to leverage additional resources.** All of the six communities have chosen to view availability of the foundation funds as a "treasure" to leverage as matching funds from other sources. There are some "seed" projects (e.g. stitchers project in Mt. Washington Valley; directory in STA-NORTH; aquaculture equipment in Concord) which are aimed at jump-starting actions and/or supporting valuable on-going efforts.

However, much of the money has been used instead to entice other foundations, government agencies, non-profit organizations, and individuals to contribute funds, technical assistance, and time (e.g. Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council's \$610,000 federal ISTE A grant; Cobscook's \$60,000 from foundations for the Clam Restoration and Management Project and approximately \$1 million to remove the American Can Company building in Lubec). In these New England communities, there is a desire to be independent (e.g. not be dependent on anyone) and a need to demonstrate to community residents that hard work and not money is the key ingredient in producing successful project results.

An explanation for using foundation funds as a last resort may be an attitude of frugality and independence traditional to New Englanders. Many participants voiced their belief that they did not want to even be perceived by their peers as dependent on others. Their first inclination is to get a task done by volunteers or through local in-kind contributions before spending the foundation money. They also desired to multiply the value of those dollars through matching contributions and additional grants. In essence, these people think self-reliance always; they do not wait until near the end of a funded project to figure out how its value can be continued.

This approach does not take away from the value and necessity of outside financial and technical resources. Each community building project could not have accomplished its results without such contributions. The availability of funds provided credibility, a rallying point, and an ability to produce results. The issue is how, rather than whether, to spend outside funds.

8. **A sense of hope and community identity is being fashioned.** Many individuals and communities began with a negative image of themselves and their abilities to change circumstances. Through these sustainable community efforts, the communities all show progress moving towards constructive change. There have been and will continue to be many struggles; yet there is a real psychological feeling of renewal, hope, and opportunity. Participants' voices of excitement, their smiles when meeting each other at a workshop convened last April, their eagerness to tell their success stories, and their ability to reach further into their communities and engage the interest, support, and involvement of others are testimonies to the qualitative results of this project.

The headline of the *Bangor Daily News* of September 16-17, 1995 reads “Lubec sees glimmer beyond gloom”. Town Office Manager Victoria Dyer is quoted as saying “Lubec has had more than its share of dilemmas, but that’s the past. We’re looking in the other direction”.

Like individuals, communities have personalities. A spark of hope can infect an emotional change in a group of people. This shift in collective mentality is visible, in different ways, in each of the six communities. The actions of a few people, prodded and supported by the sustainable community efforts, are galvanizing others to begin to believe that something positive can happen. Expectations are increasing and people are wanting to join in and become part of the action.

9. **Gradually, people in the affected towns and cities are demonstrating support for sustainable community projects. Local government support varies depending on the community and on the local board.** Town meetings in Stark, Northumberland, and Stratford voted funds in 1995 for STA-NORTH’s operations. Conway Selectman voted to transfer responsibility and funds to the Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council for a revolving loan program. People in Hardwick are frequenting local stores more now that there is an increased awareness of what is available and the importance of “buying local”. These examples illustrate local support. However, by and large these community projects are still in the early phase of “reaching into” their communities. Involvement, as evidenced by growing numbers of participants is increasing but has not reached many of the affected populations.

Local support is due to many reasons and varies community-by-community. Sometimes, the credibility of participants who have long-standing stature is sufficient to attract the support of others. Certainly, visibility – through newspaper articles, meetings, speeches – gives people who are not very familiar with the projects information as well as comfort to know who is doing what with benefits to whom. Hard work which leads to results – such as more jobs, new computers in schools, and low-interest loans – give people a sound basis for support.

At the same time there are examples of hostility by local government representatives. Change can threaten people in positions of authority as new leaders in communities emerge and feel empowered to act. For example, in Concord, VT three of the five newly elected School Committee members are intent on closing the Concord High School to tuition students at two nearby private schools.

Lack of willingness to work together can be a significant barrier to success. Much of the intangible investments in these sustainable community projects is in community building – establishing and nurturing relationships, creating and expanding networks, drawing in new people and finding ways to keep the interest of early participants, and developing strategies to diffuse fear, uncertainty, and hostility.

10. **The community foundations have played a significant role in nurturing, overseeing, guiding, and providing financial and technical assistance. The foundations chose**

different strategies, producing different lessons learned. All of the six community participants expressed appreciation for direct involvement by staff from the New Hampshire, Maine and Vermont Community Foundations.

One of the most important lessons learned from the community foundations' involvement in these community-building projects is the value and necessity of providing resources, as desired and as needed by local people. The effectiveness of the community foundation staff and their resources depended significantly on their ability to be sensitive, responsive, and non-directive as they encouraged and prodded people to understand and apply the concepts of “sustainable development” and “sustainable community.” In the instances when this threshold was crossed and local people felt too much pressure from outsiders they resisted.

This lesson that community building must be grounded in the community – applies to resources supplied by any outside group, including environmental organizations who often have staff who visit but do not live in the community and who have ideas of how best to protect the community's interests.

Each community foundation staff liaison person has a different personality, style of operating, and approach. These factors influence the outcomes of the community projects. For example, the two Maine projects have consciously emphasized indicators, in large part, because of Marion Kane's belief that indicators are valuable tools to guide and evaluate actions. She has also focused considerable attention in transferring knowledge to emerging leaders (i.e. Dianne Tilton and Will Hopkins). Eddie Gale from the Vermont Community Foundation is an integral participant in the two Vermont projects – he is a “field” staffer working out of an office in Hardwick. He provides hands-on contributions through quiet conversations, meeting discussions, participating in key decisions. Pat Vasbinder's background in financial and administrative matters has oriented her contribution towards building effective and responsible organizations. She, like the other two community foundation staff, attend and participate in many of STA-NORTH's activities and shares, with Tom Deans, participation in the Mt. Washington Valley project.

The foundations chose different strategies for dispersing funds to the communities. Maine's strategy of handing over all of the funds from the outset caused some difficulties by attracting people who saw this project as a way to fund their “pet” projects rather than organizing as a new group with a sustainable community agenda. However, they have moved through this phase and, like the others, are focusing on what makes sense to invest in. The other foundations' approach of holding on to the funds and approving expenditures based on specific project work plans and budgets seems to enable participants to focus on thinking before acting.

They also selected different community institutions to invest in. Pat Vasbinder chose existing entities in New Hampshire (e.g. STA-NORTH and the Mount Washington Valley economic Council) whereas Eddie Gale helped found new organizations in Vermont (e.g. Northeast Stewardship Project and Hardwick Business Community). In Maine, Marion Kane worked with existing organizations (e.g. Western Mountains Alliance and Sunrise County Economic Development Council) to create new entities to “house” the sustainability projects (e.g.

Sustain Western Maine and Sustainable Cobscook Community Alliance and the Clam Restoration and Management Project).

There are benefits of credibility, legitimacy, financial and technical resources, and people by linking with an existing organization. On the other hand, there are stresses on parent organizations when they either expand or spin off another entity. For the Farmington, Maine project, for example, it has been a challenge to distinguish between Western Mountains Alliance and Sustain Western Maine. Some of the members are in both organizations. Some of the projects were initiated in one and then were transferred to another (e.g. Youth Rural Leaders Program).

In the case of the two Vermont projects, there were no existing organizations to join. Therefore, creation of new entities was the only option. As a result, more effort in time and resources has been devoted to start up activities. For example, the Concord project only recently hired a full-time staff person after the volunteer board realized that they were not able to achieve their desired results on their own.

Even though there are these differences, they share certain characteristics: each provides substantial personal guidance, networking connections, administrative oversight, and direct technical assistance.

In the earlier stage of this project, the Ford Foundation Project Officer Janet Maughan played a useful function in helping educate the community foundation staff participants. She sent them articles and encouraged them to attend conferences and workshops. This kind of assistance was welcomed because it can help increase the capacity of both the staff and other participants.

The current Ford Foundation Project Officer, Jeff Olson, has helped focus analysis on the role of environmental organizations and on how this kind of project can serve as a model for other foundations interested in many diverse fields including rural poverty, economic development, and health care.

- 11. Building communities – sustainable communities – is not easy. It takes time, patience, effective leadership, engagement of people who have differing viewpoint, and listening and responding to the different voices in the community. It also means change – pushing for new ideas and mechanisms, encouraging new leaders, and often dealing with threatened and hostile people who resist that change.** The six communities offer many example of the challenges, hardships and triumphs of working for change. In some, like in Hardwick and Concord, Vermont, local officials are resisting the efforts to assert new directions and make different kinds of investments. In other places, like Cobscook, Maine, tensions arise from competing viewpoints and values. Most of these rural communities face common barriers: isolation and poverty. The people participating in the community building projects are trying to turn these difficulties into opportunities – to seek ways to create locally developed niche markets, to maintain their independent spirit and leverage, rather than just spend, outside financial resources, to find common bonds which draw people together, and to

bring together communities from around the Bay which have been historically competitive rather than cooperative.

Brief Descriptions of the Six “Communities”

The six communities can be viewed as phases of community building. The Concord, Vermont project is in the early, “jump start” phase. Hardwick, Vermont and STA-NORTH, New Hampshire have progressed into the “plugging in” phase having developed a sufficient sense of direction they need to tap into more deeply the roots of their community and engage others in participation. Mt. Washington Valley, New Hampshire and Cobscook Bay, Maine are “communities in a regional context.” Their orientation is in creating a sense of identity around a broader, more ecologically defined boundary. Farthest along this continuum is the Greater Farmington/Sustain Western Maine Project which is a “community which connects”. They are able to gain value from partnerships, collaborations, associations, and other forms of connections with other institutions and individuals. Their agenda is being furthered by the actions of others.

Concord/South Essex County (Vermont)

This regionally defined community project focuses on the stewardship and economic opportunities of the natural resources of Northeastern Vermont. The “hub” of the region, Concord, has a population of approximately 1,500 people. Essex County’s population is approximately 6,000 and Caledonia County’s population is between 25,000 and 30,000. The main industry for the region is timber.

Because of the region’s poverty, lack of hope, and overuse of forest resources, this community-building project emphasizes “getting started.” A new group, the Northeast Stewardship Project, was created to support an innovative and effective “Natural Resources Program” at the Concord High School and to encourage sustainable forestry practices and marketing. The group’s mission is to “promote the stewardship and economic opportunities of the natural resources of Northeastern Vermont in order to provide a mutually healthy economy and environment for both today and for future generations” (Mission Statement).

The high school program preceded this project, but the project enhanced the program through financial, technical, and psychological support. The two key teachers are on the board of the Northeast Stewardship Project. They, with their students, have built a ropes course for leadership training, skills-building, and recreation; an aquaculture tank for raising and selling fish; and have purchased computer equipment and trained students to do water quality monitoring.

The group recently hired a full-time staff person, realizing that volunteer contributions alone could not achieve sufficient results.

Hardwick (Vermont)

This rural town of 2500 to 3,000 people is the market “hub” for the surrounding area which relies on forest products, agriculture, and tourism. Hardwick’s Main Street hit a low point in the winter of 1992 when three buildings in the center of town burned to the ground. The community had already been faced with economic hardship when the once thriving

Granite industry closed down decades earlier. The challenge is how to revitalize Main Street, retain its “sense of place”, and create employment opportunities that make sense for the natural resource-based economy.

Community-building in Hardwick has come from efforts to organize the business people. Its mission is simple: “to strengthen the downtown’s viability” (Mission Statement). In the past year, through the efforts of the project’s part-time staff person and business entrepreneur Linda Fox (manager of the Renaissance Café), the Hardwick Business Community has been created and is prospering. Merchants who once did not even know what the storeowners next to them were selling, now cooperate – they buy from each other, Market together, and participate in community festivals and events. The latest group enterprise is to make and display Christmas wreaths from local forest products.

The spirit of this core group is infecting the community with a sense of hope and an investment in the community. For example, the Renaissance Café moved in late September to more preferred quarters and its old space was rented within a few days. Several key members of the local chamber of commerce are actively involved in the Hardwick Business Community, thereby, creating a stronger force.

This is the only community of the six which has chosen not to establish a formal organization. However, the informality and inclusiveness (every business in town is a “member”) in its outreach and information sharing are paying off in terms of gathering more and more local interest and involvement in activities.

STA-NORTH/Groveton, Stark, Northumberland (New Hampshire)

This region is centered in Groveton, a village in the township of Northumberland (population 2500). An existing organization (**STA-NORTH**) in this picturesque, rural (popular of the other towns are in the hundreds of people) area has expanded through this project to “provide leadership for a community-based economic development strategy rooted in the forest, agriculture, and skilled-manufacturing heritage of the western Coos area” (Mission Statement).

STA-NORTH’s projects range from supporting businesses (e.g. Business and Service Directory; Lost Nation Cider Mill; Gray Mist Farm) to creating new business opportunities (e.g. workshops for cottage industries; study identifying ways that 13 towns can work cooperatively; Christmas 1996 catalog of local products), to reactivating a once important Business (e.g. a bottled water plant as a prelude to a mile plant). In addition, the group worked with volunteers and municipal officials in Groveton, Stark, and Stratford to designate “scenic byways” and with Groveton Youthworks to build three picnic tables to encourage tourists to stop by places of interest.

This group’s primary orientation is to buttress existing institutions and make a difference in their viability.

Mt. Washington Valley (New Hampshire)

The Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council, which houses the sustainable Community project, is a four-year-old organization that has regional (e.g. defined by the Valley) representation. The region has grown substantially in the number of four-season recreational facilities and outlet stores. Traffic congestion along Route 16 is increasing and frustrating to local people and tourists.

The project’s mission is to “improve and diversify the economic vitality in the Mt.

Washington Valley Region with a commitment to the communities and the natural environment through a structured public/private partnership” (Mission Statement). Many efforts are underway, and producing results. Based on a “Business Visitation” project, the group discovered and responded to the need for trained stitchers to produce outdoor clothing . Machines were purchased; business staff provided training; the first class of five students were trained in July, 1995; three were hired by local businesses (the other two chose to go elsewhere); and companies have taken over responsibility for this program.

Another significant project deals with transportation and air quality. The group successfully competed for federal transportation funds to begin a non-motorized alternative to Route 16 for pedestrians, bicyclists, and electrical vehicle operators. This “corridor” is designed also to connect communities in the region.

A third innovative effort will provide revolving loan funds for sustainable projects throughout the region. The Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council recently was authorized by the Selectmen from the town of Conway to receive and distribute funds repaid from their Community Block grant revolving loan program. These monies will be augmented by \$ 3 million, which the Council leveraged from local banks.

Like many of the six community projects, this one is trying to weave together a sense of identity for a region through the creation and success of projects.

Cobscook Bay (Maine)

Approximately 6,800 people live in this ecosystem community, with some towns as small as 355 people. Located in Washington County, the eastern most place in the United States, this region is comprised of nine municipalities and the Passamaquoddy Nation Reservation. They have a long history of economic dependence on natural resources. Today, salmon aquaculture, fishing, and sea urchin harvesting are significant sources of income; the largest employers, however, are in public fields and light manufacturing. Times are difficult – many people suffer from poverty, unemployment, and a chronic lack of hope.

This community building project is in the phase of facing conflicts and overcoming differences. Problems surfaced earlier in this project among individuals and perspectives. The struggle for power, control, definition of the agenda has led, for the time being, to several semi-autonomous groups and efforts. A Clam Restoration and Management Project is underway, bringing life to the revitalization of a once thriving part of the bay’s economy and heritage. This project, led by the liaison from the Environment Committee, has generated local support and outside dollars (federal government and non-profit). The Economic Development Committee has produced results in a number of projects, such as the recent purchase by the Trust for Public Land of some buildings in downtown Lubec for renovation and creation of environmentally based tourism (including a smoke house for fish raised in aquaculture pens) and local jobs. A core group of long-time residents of the bay have recently adopted bylaws and elected officers under the name “Sustainable Cobscook Community Alliance”. They intend to focus initially on improving communications, and are also interested in a number of projects, such as establishing ferry service between Eastport and Lubec to break down historical barriers and enable cooperation (e.g. shared teachers from high schools).

Dealing with differences is a critical step in community building. The Cobscook Bay group is currently moving forward while acknowledging differences. All participants share the

same mission: “To promote the present and future health of the region’s economy, environment, and communities by developing a widely accepted, long-term vision for the future of the Cobscook Bay region that acknowledges the essential link between economic prosperity and environmental quality, by promoting economic development that will meet the needs of current residents without sacrificing the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, by promoting actions by both the public and private sectors that maintain or enhance the quality of all the region’s resources, by undertaking social, cultural, and educational projects that will promote regional cooperation, and enhance s sense of community, and an understanding of our place in the world and in history among the residents of the region, and by measuring and reporting regularly on the progress made toward making the community’s vision for itself a reality” (Mission Statement).

Greater Farmington Region (Maine)

“Sustain Western Maine” (SWM) is a project of the existing Western Mountains Alliance (WMA). Its purpose is to foster a greater identity and support for the region of eight towns and five school districts. Some board members of WMA are also members of the SWM to enable closer cooperation among the two groups and to take advantage of WMA’s credibility and resources.

SWM’s mission is: “The integrity of our region can best be served by promoting and educating its citizenry about ‘best practices’ that result in a sound economy and a healthy environment. Our group can help coordinate the efforts of existing agencies and groups. It can also serve in helping to identify specific community concerns through this educational process. Success depends on the ability to continually engage the community and translate their voices into action” (Mission Station)

This group’s approach is coalition-building and collaboration with partners from existing organizations. Many of the projects have generated outside support (financial and technical assistance) by working with organizations such as the Franklin County Health Care Network and Healthy Community Coalition (e.g. local public access television project) or the Community Action Program (e.g. project aimed at getting 100 families off poverty over the next three years) or working Capital’s local affiliate (e.g. microbusiness peer lending).

Northern New England Sustainable Communities Project

Additional Key Lessons Learned

by Elizabeth Kline

Tufts University

May, 1996

Communities are at different phases of sustainable community building. By analyzing the six community projects, four phases emerged: jump start, plugging in, identity through a regional context, and strength through connections and partnerships.

A place like Concord, Vermont is in the very earliest phase of becoming a community. There is no obvious focal point – such as a core institution (e.g. a church, a school, a civic organization). The problems are systemic, long-term, debilitating. There is a sense of collective community depression – no hope that life can improve. Boys will take over the low-paying jobs from their fathers; girls will get married and have children. The leaders are not innovators or risk-takers and they resist others who try to assert new ideas.

Even the tension over whether or not to keep the Concord High School open and over the value of the school's Natural Resources Program is not sufficient to move debates beyond anger and position-taking towards resolution and healing. Instead of becoming an energy source for action, these public disagreements add to people's general frustrations and sense of doom.

Starting a community building process, especially one oriented towards a non-traditional way is thinking, is extremely challenging. In Concord, Vermont it took months just for a small group of people to gain some trust amongst themselves and to decide on a sense of purpose – to focus on stewardship of the forests in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont, centered around the Town of Concord. It took even longer for the fledging group of volunteers to realize that they did not have the time, energy, and capacity to do all of the work; that a part-time project staff person was needed.

After canvassing unsuccessfully for a local person, the NE Stewardship Project group hired a person from outside of the region. A woman, whose experience was primarily working in large cities and who lived several hours driving time away with her husband and ten year old son, was hired. Her tenure was short-lived, in large part because she could not be available and as present within the community as desired.

A lesson learned from this experience is the importance of staff being accessible, visible, on-call for unexpected happenings. Particularly when there isn't a cadre of volunteers to represent the incipient community organization, it is essential that staff be "in the field" rather than be available only during scheduled events.

The group's response to this experience was to hire their own – a person who lives in the region, has credibility as a professional forester, and has already donated significant time to this project. Why not pay Jim Wood for what he does anyway? Was the sentiment of Board Members.

At the Jackson, NH Workshop (April 26-28, 1996), Jim Wood spoke about the frustrations of getting going and finding support within the community, but he also described some project ideas to use the NE Stewardship forum to focus on local concerns, such as forest management, and to slowly build credibility. He is under no illusion that this process will be done quickly or without a lot of hard work. Yet, his low-key style, his local identity, and his willingness to take risks (as demonstrated in his public position in favor of the Concord High School) are key assets for the staff position and the NE Stewardship Project. It is critical that funding be maintained for his part-time position and for him to invest over time in building the organization.

For economically hard-pressed rural towns and cities, the entry point into sustainability is community betterment.

The two communities, Hardwick, Vermont and **STA-NORTH** (Groveton, Stark, and Stratford, New Hampshire) illustrate the point that people in these small, rural places are not initially drawn to single issues like environmental protection or even to economic development as defined by jobs. Their hardships, their reasons for staying, and their dreams are defined by many issues which can be called “community betterment”.

These two communities are in the “plugging in” phase of sustainable community building – they developed a basic core organization and group of active participants and are now beginning to reach into the community for additional participants and supporters. They started a number of projects and are beginning to see tangible results, not only in terms of specific project outcomes, but also in terms of a broader, synergistic improvement in the sense of what can be achieved.

The communities began with certain entry points. Hardwick, for example, focused on improving the economic viability of the downtown. **STA-NORTH** wanted to entice people to travel to and provide economic support for people living in their region. In creating goals, objectives, and projects, these communities ended up broadening their agendas to draw in other vital community concerns, such as maintaining a rural quality of life and natural landscape setting; providing livelihoods for people based on their skills, talents, and interests; and creating and building organizations which attract and offer a comfortable place for people who are not necessarily the traditional community leaders or conventional thinkers.

One of their successes in building a base which is now expanding may be attributable to the fact that “sustainability” is not a well-understood concept and, therefore, may not pose an immediate threat or challenge to people who are involved in economic development or environmental protection or health care service delivery. There was time to develop a new institutional structure apart from the existing entities, in part because agendas did not appear from the language or the approach to projects to fit within the people's already delineated domains.

Creating projects which truly encompass and deal with the intersection of many community concerns is most challenging. Participants in the Greater Farmington/Sustain Western Maine sustainable community project took months to brainstorm, develop ideas, and test proposals

against their mission statement, goals, and indicators. The nature of the projects changed over the months of deliberations, as they probed for desired results and consequences of options. For example, the Water Quality Project ended up including environmental education (through the teaching contributions of a university faculty person and high school teachers), youth leadership skills building (through the experience of eighth graders), civic capacity building (through the contributions and increased visibility of Sustain Western Maine), and eco-tourism/economic development (through the improvement of the local lakes from the monitoring and clean-up activities).

Excitement, volunteer support, and progress from working together on specific projects.

Most people get more excited about tangible activities more than they do about defining and creating the conceptual and institutional process. All of these community groups started out small in number. The numbers fluctuated as some doer-types dropped out for a while during the evolution of mission statements, goals, indicators, and institutional development mechanisms (such as by-laws). However, they returned and others joined them as each community group became involved in projects.

One important ingredient is that these projects were defined by people in the community, and not by funders or other outside interests (such as developers or constituency organizations). As a result, the basic notion resonates already with some people who then have a vested stake in working on the project.

Making mistakes is part of the community group's learning experience. They decide on the type of project, the action steps, and the level of financial commitment. The Community Foundation's role was to ensure that the project had been thought out and that the budget was justified; it was not to second-guess the validity or desirability of a project. This sense of responsibility and accountability was inherent from the beginning and led to participants feeling empowered and, at times, uncomfortable because they had no outsider scape goat to blame for their choices and consequences. On the other hand, the community people never developed a dependence on foundation staff.

Environmental values and practices come from individual participants' beliefs and contributions.

Advocate environmental organizations have a successful record in taking positions and pressing for actions on behalf of the "public interest". Memberships and contributions are increasing as the general public expresses its support for environmental results (like clean air and safe water) and as these advocate environmental organizations highlight the threats posed by anti-environmentalists, whether in the Wise Use Movement or in Congress. These organizations are populated with staff who are experienced, seasoned, trained, skilled, and dedicated to acting on behalf of others.

The sustainable community participants, on the other hand, have multiple issue agendas, perceive environmental quality as linked to other concerns such as natural resources-based economic development, and tend towards collaborative, coalition partnership rather than solo performances in court or in legislative arenas.

In an exercise at the Jackson, NH Workshop, the community participants were asked what they wanted from environmental organizations. Their basic response is that they want the individuals and collective entities to add value to their community-defined agendas and projects. They hope that these organizations can adjust their strategies sufficiently to fit into the circumstances of the community, while recognizing that the organizations still need to produce environmental results. For example, environmental organizations could link their policy and legislative to community-based projects and thereby help raise funds, publicize results, and advocate mechanisms which are sensitive to local variations.

Civic capacity (social and human capital) is being created and expanded.

Most of the participants – the leaders and core members – of the sustainable community projects are not the traditional movers-and-shakers. They are retired persons, small business people, community organizers, middle level managers. They may be drawn to more prominent leadership positions because they want to make a contribution and fill a leadership vacuum. For example, Will Hopkins and Dianne Tilton created the Clam Restoration and Management and downtown economic revitalization projects, respectively, which propelled them into asserting leadership because no one else filled that responsibility.

There are different kinds of leaders being created. Some, like Kay Doherty in STA-NORTH, Linda Fox in Hardwick, Jim Wood in the NE Stewardship Project/Concord, and Dave Sorensen and Steve Knox in the Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council, have risen to prominent titled positions. They are the glue that holds their growing entities together and, often, the public spokesperson.

A tangible benefit has been derived through Dave Sorensen's ability to get his professional organization (New Hampshire Cooperative Extension Service) to allocate up to 60% of his time to the Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council work. By interweaving the two group's agendas, time and funds from the Extensive Service has enabled greater capacity to be created at the MWVEC. Not only did the Council save money, they also got access to a well-connected, respected, local professional.

Sometimes, it takes a while to create civic capacity among people who have been disenfranchised for a long time. These people are accustomed to be ignored or imposed upon by outsiders and cannot initially handle responsibilities, even when power of decision-making is provided to them.

A group of people within the Cobscook Bay project initially reacted to the opportunity of designing their own mission, goals, and projects by not acting and then by criticizing those people who stepped forward. Only once the people who were the subject of their criticism absented themselves from being the target did a space get created for the others to have to fill. Pressure from the Maine Community Foundation staff person to make funders' obligations also prodded a person (Ron Kilby) to take on the role of leader and bridge person between the various factions.

There is another tier of "community leaders", like Bob Carney and Sharon White in STA-NORTH and Scott Planting in Sustain Western Maine, who play critical roles in initiating and

orchestrating specific projects. Their presence expands the capacity of the organization beyond the leader's ability to act. They also provide "bridges" into the communities to encourage other people to join in and make a contribution.

A third tier of people add social and human capital through their links to the efforts in partnerships with sustainable community projects. For example, high school teachers and a university faculty member in Kingston, Maine joined with Sustain Western Maine in a water quality project. Their scientific knowledge, teaching skills, and enthusiasm added tremendous value to the environmental education project conceived and administered by SWM. Their interest and excitement illustrates a point that each contributor needs to feel some personal satisfaction for his/her efforts.

People choose to join because they want to, not because they have to become involved. Often, the rewards are non-financial, such as developing friendships, helping young people get into similar careers, making a tangible difference in the world, or giving something back to their community.

In communities such as Concord, Vermont which are in the jump-start phase the number of people involved is likely to be small. Strategies for building civic capacity need to reflect this reality. It is important to stay focused on supporting and rewarding the few people's efforts as they evolve into a core group rather than try to strive for new participants through publicity and visibility events. Informal gatherings, discussions, celebratory activities are ways to build trust and congeniality.

As the core group becomes congealed, a staff person can be hired or donated to attract new members and increase visibility. It is not surprising that the Concord, Vermont group took months of this kind of getting itself together before deciding to hire its first part-time staff person. If they had started with such a person, that person would have probably been relied on too heavily to do all of the work. The Board would not have taken charge, but would probably have taken direction from and depended on the staff person.

In places like the Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council, New Hampshire and Western Mountains Alliance in Maine there already was an existing organization within which the sustainable community project became housed. Building civic capacity meant broadening the base, clarifying the roles and functions of the different institutions so that they could benefit from each other's strengths creating an identity based on a regional sense of place, and greatly increasing public exposure. Key staff people in these places are out-going, community out-reach types who naturally network, who enjoy working on many projects simultaneously, and who are effective in creating specific tasks for others to work on.

Results are achieved even in a short time period.

There is a misconception that results (i.e. implementation) occurs after a period of planning, as if these aspects of community building are separate and sequential. In fact, in all six communities people's practical natures and their targeted interest in producing tangible improvements drew them to interweaving planning with implementation.

For example, the STA-NORTH group decided early on to develop and publish a directory of businesses. This product was designed to find an immediate need and provide a stepping stone for longer-term action (i.e. generate new business transactions and, eventually, new business enterprises).

Given the different perspective of “sustainability” (as distinct from traditional economic development or environmental protection viewpoints), some level of thinking (i.e. visioning, developing mission statements, identifying indicators) preceded actions. When a group, Sustain Western Maine, jumped too quickly into proposing projects members realized that these project ideas did not sufficiently reflect sustainability principles; so they decided to take additional time to reconceptualize them. So, the objective was not simply to start concrete type projects in order to produce concrete results. Rather, people seem to understand the importance of acting sooner rather than later, but with forethought and ground testing against sustainability principles, community value, and/or sustainability indicators.

This realization of the importance of integrating with action may stem from the New England traditions and heritage grounded in the practical and in the results. Many people work with their hands as well as their heads. They are not satisfied with developing an elegant idea or working on a process. A visible change is often the most important contribution – a restored building, a day care center space, a vacant store rented, aquaculture pens filled with growing fish, a craft barn, or a school course applying a new curriculum.

Many of the actions chosen by the sustainable community groups ended up being both effective initial steps and also contributions which meet community needs. For example, the Stitchers Project organized by the Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council in New Hampshire responded to the expressed desires of some of the local businesspeople and it links to the organization’s broader agenda of capturing more of the wealth locally in this case by training and hiring local people to take on the work currently being done by others outside the region.

The groups did not gravitate towards the “big”, “sexy” projects which might have generated a lot of publicity, but not necessarily addressed community interests. Nor, did people defer to outside experts to define what they should do. For these reasons, the projects have legitimacy and credibility locally and are achievable within the evolving capacity of the group.

The nature of the projects stem from the nature of the different sustainable community organizations. For example, Concord, Vermont’s Northeast Stewardship Project is in the early stages of community building. Its hosting of a conference was a tangible product which had a clear time frame, understandable tasks, and a visible outcome. For a community organization such as Sustain Western Maine, which is much more sophisticated and seasoned Than is the NE Stewardship Project, participants are able to work on many projects simultaneously and produce a wide variety of results including increasing name recognition, generating microbusiness jobs, and reducing the number of poor families.

A challenge during the exit-strategy phase is for the six sustainable community groups to institutionalize their projects in various ways – some may be handed off to other organizations to take root; others may be joined with partners so that a greater sense of ownership and

responsibility is achieved; and still others may be spun off as self-standing (perhaps income-generating) projects related to the sustainable community entity.

Foundation funds are used to leverage additional resources

All six communities, from their outset, chose to use the Ford Foundation funding as an asset to leverage additional financial and non-financial contributions. Over \$1.5 million in direct dollars have been raised by the sustainable community organizations for their projects. An estimation of the in-kind contributions is now being tallied by participants, with the expectation that it will be several more than the financial contribution.

In conversation with community participants, they cite their Yankee spirit, hard-working ethic, their non-bureaucratic ways, and their serious commitment to produce real-life changes that explain why they did not become dependent on the outside dollars. All of the groups were reluctant to use the foundation funds, even when other alternatives were not yet available. For example, the NE Stewardship Project group held back on paying for a part-time staff person for months even though they had no community support and were all busy professionals.

Another reason for using the foundation funds sparingly was expressed by participants in **STANORTH**, New Hampshire. They consciously wanted to gain some local community awareness and support by getting financial contributions approved through town meeting votes. Early on, they sought to connect to and broaden support from townspeople. They did not want to create a project apart from the fabric of their communities. With this support, the group was then able to report back to the citizens what they are doing with the funds and gain further awareness, interest, and participation through other techniques such as public events and recently, through a newsletter.

In the Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council sustainable project, participants are using their presence and clout to capture major funding from other sources. The Revolving Loan Program and the federal transportation grant for the multi-use alternative to Route 16 illustrate the substantial outside funds which can be attracted if a group uses its own resources carefully and strategically. The MWVEC proved that they could position themselves to be of value to the Conway Selectmen and Office of State Planning officials for the Revolving Loan Program and that they had done their homework to justify the ISTEA grant. These outside investments were forthcoming because the group designed their actions to serve as catalysts, gap fillers, and attention-getters rather than as self-contained projects.

The challenge in the exit-strategy phase will be for each of the six sustainable community organizations to create sufficient “wealth”/value to replace the Ford Foundation dollars. The objective is not to find equivalent dollars; rather, to build the “treasure chest” of value so that others want and, in fact, are eager to share their resources.

A sense of hope and community identity is being fashioned.

Like individuals, communities have personalities. A spark of hope can infect an emotional change in a group of people. A positive feeling about one’s community can make a significant difference in the way people feel about themselves and act towards others.

Sometimes, qualitative measures such as an improved climate for community-based business or an increased sense of connection to neighbors or colleagues can be a prelude to future quantitative measures of progress, such as increased number of self-employed people earning a viable income or increased number of town meeting voters or civic organization participants. In conventional economic terms, an indicator of the climate is “consumer confidence” which translates into either products purchased or into postponed purchases.

Participants in the six community projects have a profound sense of hope – they believe that they can make a difference. They are able to draw on inner strength and support from each other to invest in change, knowing the difficulties ahead. Most express a joy in their work, rather than a frustration. Challenges are exciting. Obstacles are ever present, but their commitment carries them towards resolving problems rather than dwelling in them. Even the naysayers, if they stay involved, move on emotionally to act because they care deeply about their communities and they want to make a difference.

Several participants commented that they felt proud and had gained stature because a large funding organization (i.e. The Ford Foundation) chose to invest in their communities and in their projects. Their fledging efforts, they surmised, must be worthwhile if such a big player decided to fund them. These people understood that the actual selection of communities was made by the community foundations, but they emphasized that the source of funds came from the a large foundation with projects worldwide.

The community foundations have played a significant role in nurturing, overseeing, guiding, and providing financial and technical assistance.

The three community foundations (New Hampshire Charitable Foundation, Vermont Community Foundation, and Maine Community Foundation) have been publicly recognized by the community participants for their valuable contributions to date. The most commonly cited and welcomed assistance was person-to-person support from the foundation staff. Clearly, throughout these several years the constancy of the same staff people (no turn-over) and the perceived commitment, compassion, and as-needed support have, according to people in each of the six communities, made a major difference in their capacities to produce results.

Eddie Gale in Vermont, Marion Kane in Maine, Pat Vasbinder and Tom Deans in New Hampshire are not distant staff located in faraway offices. They have taken their roles as administrators seriously, but not forgotten the importance of the human relationship in guiding and nurturing projects. They are close enough to the situations to recognize that the Hardwick Business Community needs assistance in drafting a grant proposal whereas people within the Cobscook Sustainable Community Alliance and Sustain Western Maine can write their own grants. They seemed adept at knowing when to prod others to act and when to be patient and encouraging.

The overall game plan seems to have evolved into guiding and administering each of the six projects separately, with the use of the advisory committee to share experiences and raise common issues across communities. The role of the community foundations, therefore, tended to be enabling rather than directing actions. From the outset, the foundation staff saw their contributions as helping rather than telling people what to do or how to accomplish an objective.

This approach is consistent with the philosophy and temperament of the specific community foundation staff.

Indicators which measure the effectiveness of the community foundation's role and contributions lie more with capacity-building than in quantitative improvements in the lives of people from the participating communities. Ease in processing funding requests, availability and access to requested information, presence at meetings to provide ideas and contact, ability to make connections to outsiders on behalf of community participants' interests are the measures which evaluate the level and success of community foundation involvement.

Mostly absent in this phase of implementation is an overall definition of the project by the funders. The project's broad mission and objectives did not provide detailed guidance or coherence to the community participants. There were no explicit expectations articulated nor any criteria for evaluation identified at the start of the implementation phase. The accountability lay, primarily, on ensuring that the community projects which received foundation funding were well-thought out and had justifiable budgets.

This lack of specificity and project coherence provided useful "space" for the community participants to fill as they chose, but also probably led to some confusion and loss of cross-fertilization. Essentially, the community foundations delegated the responsibility of directing the projects to the community participants themselves. From conversations, it appears that community participants both welcomed this power and had difficulty assessing whether or not funders were pleased with their actions. At times, individuals wondered if they were doing a "good job" since feed-back was limited primarily to hearing anecdotes about their projects or to receiving requests for specific tasks. Several times, the evaluator played an intermediary role in conveying to community participants words of appreciation expressed to her from the community foundation staff about the work of those participants.

In the exit-strategy phase, it would be useful for the community foundation staff working with the advisory committee to establish clear expectations and evaluative criteria. With these guidelines in place, the philosophy of empowerment can be used by community participants to figure out what and how they want to proceed to accomplish those results.

Building communities, especially sustainable communities, takes time and is not easy

Participants commend the Ford Foundation and the three community foundations for recognizing the importance of multi-year funding and support for the evolutionary nature of community-building. At the April, 1996 Workshop Tom Deans quoted another foundation director who believes that this process may take not 5 years, but 40 or more years. At stake is a restructuring of society, based on different values, rules, and practices.

Not only are patience and long-term support required, but also necessary is incremental progress towards sustainability. Regardless of the pace of change, each step needs to represent and demonstrate sustainability. None of the projects are traditional economic development or environmental protection type efforts. Each one, to various degrees, draws upon the principles of sustainable development and on new or revised institutional structures. For example, the Revolving Loan Program via the Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council will continue and

expand what the Selectmen in Conway have been administering, but will screen future projects according to sustainable development criteria. If the criteria were the traditional economic development ones of the past, then the progress could only be measured in the potential increased capacity of the Council itself through the administrative funding. However, by changing the criteria, the Council has progressed another step further towards building a more sustainable valley region.

The challenge during the exit-strategy phase will be to ensure that this incremental process continues after the Ford Foundation funds end. This will mean institutionalizing changes through adoption of policies, guidelines, criteria, regulations, or whatever other means solidifies and provides incentives for implementation. For those projects which are still in the “seed” stage, there will need to be assurances that some entity with capacity can take on the responsibility for nurturing them until they are capable of surviving on their own merits.

CONCORD/SOUTH ESSEX COUNTY VERMONT A Community in Formation: The Jump Start Phase

By Elizabeth Kline
January, 1996

“Like it or not, change is coming to the Northern Forest. Those of us who live here must help to guide it; otherwise the land that we love and our way of life will be swept aside in the rush, as has happened so tragically in other parts of the world.” (1)

Community Setting

The rural town of Concord, Vermont with a population of approximately 1,500 people is located in south Essex County, the least populated county in the state, within the Northeast Kingdom region. Well-paying jobs are scarce and expectations are low.

Yet, the sparks of change are emerging fanned by the resources and attention of the Ford/Vermont Community Foundation’s Sustainable Communities Project. The two key action projects are providing programmatic support for the existing yet fledgling, natural resource vocational program at the Concord High School and encouraging the wise use of forest lands for economic, environmental, and social benefits by and for the peoples living in the region.

This is a case study in the early phases of community building. It is a tale of people trying to jump start a process, break from a mentality of collective depression, and confront their realities.

Community Building Focus

Like many rural towns and regions dependent on a single natural resources base, residents of the Town of Concord and South Essex County have limited control over their lives. “Some 90 percent of Northern Forest land is privately owned, with many large tracts controlled by timber and paper companies...By 1988...the Diamond International Corp, a timber company that had been taken over by a British financier, put 90,000 acres of its lands in the Northern Forest, 12,700 of them in Vermont, on the auction block. Suddenly, loggers and others whose living came from the woods wondered about the stability of the forest economy, and of their jobs. Hikers and hunters feared the Diamond sale would kick off escalating subdivision and development of the forestland.

Like nothing that had ever happened before, the Diamond sale clarified how precious a resource the Northern Forest is to residents and visitors alike. It forced people to realize that changes in ownership-whether they happen overnight or over time-might well change the forest forever.(2)

Responding to change is never easy. In places like the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont, where “outsiders” are suspect – even if they have lived in the region for 10 or 15 years, traditions are long-standing, and leaders tend to resist new ideas, change is very difficult. The thrust of this Sustainable Community Project, understandably, is on starting and fueling the change process. Its lofty and broad mission is “to promote the stewardship and economic opportunities of the natural resources of Northeastern Vermont in order to provide a mutually healthy economy and environment for both today and for future generations.” In practice, it comes down to gathering

the few forces willing to invest in change, creating an institutional base, and support the innovators.

Community Building Process

The Northeast Stewardship Project, the name and entity created to foster sustainable community actions, emerge from a number of forces. Liquidation of 8 to 9,000 acres of trees scared people. Draft recommendations from the Northern Lands Council, a four-state non-regulatory, advisory body to governors and funded by Congress, were released in March of 1995 and gave people both a sense of direction and 32 key strategies for positive action. The dedication, hard work, and commitment of several teachers at the Concord High School began paying off by engaging and teaching students about natural resources stewardship, management, and employment, and – in the process – about leadership development. About the same time, some people participated in a leadership training exercise called “Take Charge”, sponsored by the Concord Planning Commission and the Natural Resources Program at the Concord High School. Bill McMaster from the University of Vermont Cooperative Extension and Eddie Gale from the Vermont Community Foundation helped organize this event.

The outcome of these and other influences was the creation of a new organization in April of 1994, funded and supported by the Vermont Community Foundation in partnership with the Ford Foundation. The Board of the Northeast Stewardship Project includes representatives from business, environment, education, and government. (Photo of Board Members)

Name	Organization	Home Community
Brendan Whittaker	VT Nat. Resources Council	Brunswick
Carl Powden	VT Land Trust	Johnson
Jill Rogers	Guildhall Pl. Comm.	Guildhall
Will Staats	NH Fish & Game	Granby
John Irwin	Concord High School	Lydonville
Barbara Irwin		Lydonville
Tom Smith	Concord High School	Kirby
Jim Wood	Consultant Forester	Kirby
Charles Browne	Fairbanks Museum	Peacham
Len Gerardi	VT Fish & Game	St. Johnsbury
Robert Ide	Business & State Senator	Peacham

Jim Wood, a local forester, is the chair of the Northeast Stewardship Project. According to Board member Charlie Browne, Jim Wood is a “key to the success of the Northeast Stewardship Project” because of his low-key personality, local credibility, and links to the forest business community. (3)

Several “environmentalists” area members of the Board: Brendan Whittaker with the Vermont Natural Resources Council, Carl Powden with the Vermont Land Trust, and Charlie Browne with the Fairbanks Museum. They bring their viewpoints and personal energies to the project, but do not represent their institutions. According to Brendan Whittaker, “environmentalists aren’t in the Northeast Kingdom...There is a distrust of outsiders; they aren’t many yuppies around here...(He) is one of the few environmental persons who has trust because (he) has lived here 35 years and is a forester”. (4)

Eddie Gale is a non-voting member and officer (Secretary) and is also a staff person at the Vermont Community Foundation.

In October, 1995 a full-time staff person (Barbara Thomas) was hired by the Board. Until then, the project was “a quiet group, waiting for a staff person to go out into the community...it has taken a long time to come together on our mission and what we can offer...it has been a long, but necessary, process”. (5) The choice of Ms. Thomas, a resident of Essex Junction near Burlington, VT and someone accustomed to working in large cities, is a calculated risk. According to Board members’ reaction to her as their number one candidate for the staff position, “It is time to take a risk...She might light up this place. People would listen to her and she’d listen to them...An outsider might be helpful to stir things up.”(6)

The conscious strategy is to fill a vacuum: there is a “serious leadership void in southern Essex County and the Northeast Stewardship Project may fill that void.” (7) The town of Concord was chosen as one of the project’s two focal points because of the presence of the Natural Resources Program at Concord High School. Two teachers, John Irwin (a natural resources vocational teacher) and Tom Smith (a science teacher), established this program at the high school to encourage teenagers to learn more about and take responsibility for natural resources management and protection. Most of the students who volunteer for this program are not on the academic track. Many of their fathers are not foresters and many of their mothers do not have professional careers. Therefore, for these young men and women, the program offers them a window into another world – an opportunity to learn skills such as computer water quality monitoring, building aquaculture tanks and learning how to run a fish business, and leadership training.

Concord High School is the focal point of controversy in the town. “There’s a split in the community over whether or not to close the high school and the funding of students to nearby private schools ... On January 4, 1996 at the School Board meeting John Irwin presented the Natural Resources Program and its goals. Three of the five school board members entered the meeting wanting to close the program down. By the end of the meeting, they were wondering how they can use the program to attract more tuition students and, hence, use the tuition money to budget for sending their own children to one of the private schools.” (8)

Creating the entity, the Northeast Stewardship Project, was the first step. Linking to the Concord High School Natural Resources Program and to the movement to take some kind of proactive stance in dealing with forest management was another critical step. The next step was a longer time period – having many discussions to shape the nature of the project. The group got involved in visioning exercises, debating over priorities and directions, establishing a mission statement joined by specific objectives, developing three committees (e.g. Education, Community Relations, Forest Products), and hiring a full-time staff person.

This sorting out phase may seem long and somewhat frustrating to participants – more than a year – but these volunteers needed the time to get to know each other, develop some trust, set up some institutional infrastructure, and decide on an action plan. They are building from a very limited existing base. They also needed to reach the conclusion individually and then collectively that their busy lives could not deliver the results they wanted without the support of a paid professional staff person. Eddie Gale’s involvement is pivotal; yet his role is primarily as a catalyst, facilitator and coordinator. They came to realize by the end of 1995 that they needed someone upon whom they could assign tasks and could expect results within reasonable deadlines.

They also understood that, as Board members, they need to “introduce her (Barbara Thomas) to community people and stay with her” in order to help this new “outsider” gain some credibility and effectiveness in their region. Her fate is tied to theirs, and they know it. (9)

Although the group has been involved in several projects (described in the next section), their visibility in the community is low. Their priority for the near term is to become more present, more visible, more out-front. The evening of the final interview with and selection of Barbara Thomas, Board members spoke with her about creating events such as festivals, taking the time and initiative to be introduced to residents, business people, and others, and work on some tangible projects such as resource management workshops for landowners.

Community Building Results

Like the other five Sustainable Community Projects, this group has been extremely careful in spending its foundation funds. Most of the dollars are either allocated or reserved for staffing.

Some funds (approximately \$5,200) were spent attending conferences, participating in a field visit with people in the Olympic peninsula, and organizing and hosting a symposium on forest liquidation practices. These investments were used to orient Board members and Eddie Gale to the concept and practices around sustainable forestry management and to join with other organizations in educating people about the over-harvesting of trees and need for changes in policies and actions. The symposium, held in February of 1995, produced a useful mailing list for the Northeast Stewardship Project and helped get the group some visibility. Approximately 80 people attended representing landowners, town and state officials, loggers, environmentalists, and legislators.

The other focus of attention is the Concord High School. Computers were bought and donated to the school to use for teaching forest resource management (i.e. mapping and project design), creating a wood lot/forest inventory, record keeping, writing letters and articles for school and local newspapers, and for designing a greenhouse for students to build.

(photo of student looking at computer)

In addition, John Irwin and Tom Smith received emotional and financial support for their programs dealing with agriculture, aquaculture, leadership training building and using a ropes course. (2 photos: classroom and kids sitting on the rope ladder) Funds were used to purchase equipment and supplies and to leverage additional grants from other institutions. The ropes project leveraged a \$300 mini-grant through the Concord High School from a state grant program. Building materials for the greenhouse were paid for by grants from the Vermont Community Foundation and from a \$1750 grant from the Central Vermont Public Service.

The foundation grant also paid Eddie Gale to conduct a feasibility study to determine if and how the Natural Resources Program could be transferred to another school if Concord High School was closed down. The decision to spend some of the funds for this effort was a response to an immediate concern. Moreover, at that time there was no paid staff nor detailed Northeast Stewardship Project action plan to compete for funds. The choice was to take the initiative and protect the core program which is providing leadership training and natural resources management skills to local people. The alternative, had the local elections turned out otherwise, might have been the loss of the program, the two teachers, and two key Board members.

Community Building Drawbacks and Stumbling Blocks

The greatest challenge facing the Concord /Northeast Stewardship Project is how to “take root” in the community. They are forced by circumstances to create a leadership presence and to build from limited resources. Many factors make this project vulnerable.

First, there is no coherent organizational base. The new organization does not have an official office or meeting place.

Second, the mission statement and objectives are broad. The four objectives are: 1. provide programmatic support for natural resource vocational programs in Northeastern Vermont; 2. make land stewardship information available to residents in Northeastern Vermont; 3. conduct resource management workshops for landowners; and 4. research and develop natural resource-based economic development opportunities. (10). More thinking is needed to target specific objectives and priorities and establish specific activities and tasks.

Third, the staff person is new and comes from away. These may be assets, but her and the Board’s ability to be effective depend on gaining local support.

Fourth, people from Concord and the surrounding towns are not inclined to welcome change and embrace new initiatives. Finding allies and partners is critical. The Board’s desire to reach into the community and become more visible is an important step in the right direction. Building on those visits and deepening the relationships and connections will be important investments for the near term.

Special Qualities of this Community Building Project

“You can’t organize without getting out and knocking on doors, and you can’t make people get involved in a hard fight over an issue that they don’t consider important enough to fight for. This means that a good organizer has to be a good listener, capable of hearing what people want and flexible enough to abandon a bad plan without a backward glance when a better idea comes along”. (11)

One of the most unusual aspects of this project is the role and nature of the Vermont Community Foundation through Eddie Gale’s participation. He is an effective leader in a rural community. The qualities of such leadership were defined by participants of the six Ford/community foundation Sustainable Community projects at a workshop held in April 28-29, 1995.

“Curiously, conventional indicators such as ‘dynamic’ or ‘decision-maker’ didn’t arise. Instead, the group broadly defined leaders as people who help others achieve their goals. Their definition of leader included a balance of qualities that could be loosely described as: **guides** who help people see possibilities; **connectors** who bring people and resources together; and **enablers** who can both carry out an activity and encourage others to do the same.

Guides may be forward looking, but an important foundation for leadership is a knowledge base of the history of the community and an understanding of the residents. Guides have likely earned respect in the community through their past actions, and might be considered responsible risk-takers. They possess a sense of vision, ideally coupled with creativity and imagination. They are able to grasp the big picture, re-focus and re-package input, and produce tangible products. While their vision isn’t necessarily limited by the question of money,

successful leaders tend to be fiscally responsible and financially aware of the community's capabilities.

Creativity is often the answer to money questions, especially through piecing together available resources. In this regard, leaders are synthesizers and **connectors**. They are able to identify other leaders in the community and work with them to achieve positive goals. Capacity from within the community is leveraged with resources from outside, and leaders know how to access and tap into those external resources.

As **enablers**, leaders understand that leadership is not embodied in just one person. Leaders treat others with respect. They tend to be personable and approachable, good listeners and communicators, and enthusiastic yet patient. Self confidence is essential, yet leaders are able to adapt their thinking to changing circumstances and other positive input. A sense of humor is useful to defuse negativity and welcome participation. Being 'thick skinned' helps overcome inevitable abuse that could otherwise damage positive actions. Successful leaders should be able to admit mistakes and make constructive use of unsucesses. Dissension is accepted, but disagreements are depersonalized.

Other enabling characteristics include being well-organized and consistent, following through on commitments, and dedicating more than one's fair share of time. However, enablers don't monopolize leadership. They know how to delegate authority and recognize that other leaders come from all walks of life, bringing with them different skills and levels of involvement. Some are influence makers, others community builders. The key is to move an issue from person to group identify, and from there form the blocks that build community.

Most importantly, leaders are passionate about their area of interest. They become involved in activities where they themselves are stakeholders. Whatever personal agendas they may have are not hidden from the community, thereby building one of the most important leadership qualities – trust.”

Eddie Gale typifies this kind of leader. Moreover, he illustrates the kind of “outside” Resource help which meshes well with local interests. His assistance is aimed at bring added value to people in the community rather than in imposing his values or will on them.

Another special quality of this community building project is the fact that so many of the active participants grew up and have established professional careers in the area and care very much about the region's well-being. Brendan Whittaker describes this sense of identity in a message in the Vermont's Northern Forest newsletter: “The thread that has woven through all of these career changes has been our family's love for the North Country, a place where we have made our home for 34 years. When VNRC launched its Northern Forest Project in 1991, I felt that I had to be part of this effort.” (12)

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Endnotes:

1. Brendan Whittaker. "Vermont's Northern Forests: A Resource for the Future."
2. Vermont Natural Resource Council, p.3.
3. Personal conversation (September 26, 1995).
4. Personal conversation (September 26, 1995).
5. Personal conversation with Charles Browne (September 26, 1995).
6. Comments made in the author's presence at the Board meeting held on September 26, 1995).
7. Personal conversation with Charles Browne (September 26, 1995)
8. E-mail communication with Eddie Gale (January 16, 1996)
9. Comments made at Board meeting (September 26, 1995).
10. The mission statement and objectives are described in Northeast Stewardship Project documents (undated).
11. Robin Garr. Reinvesting in America . Addison-Wesley Publishing Company. Reading, MA. 1995, p. 157.
12. Vermont's Northern Forests (undated), p.2

HARDWICK, VERMONT **A Community Getting Plugged In**

By Elizabeth Kline
January, 1996

“The kinds of values which might form the bases for a genuinely public life, then, arise out of a context which is concrete in at least two ways. It is concrete in the actual things of events – the barns, the barn dances – which the practices of cooperation produce. But, it is also concrete in the actual, specific places within which those practices and that cooperation take place. Clearly, the practices which shaped the behavior and the character of frontier families did not appear out of thin air; they grew out of the one thing those people had most fundamentally in common: the effort to survive in hard country. And when the effort to survive comes to rely upon shared and repeated practices like barn raising, survival itself is transformed; it becomes inhabitation. To inhabit a place is to dwell there in a practiced way, in a way which relies upon certain regular, trusted habits of behavior.” (1)

Community Setting

Hardwick, located in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont, is the market hub for the surrounding area and is dependent on forest products, agriculture, and tourism for its economic base. The main street economy developed at the heart of a thriving granite industry in the early part of this century. Now, granite quarrying and stone cutting are all but non-existent.

Hardwick has gone through some hard times. “When Drex Wright was growing up in Hardwick, it was still the armpit of Vermont ... Hardwick always had a reputation as a lawless kind of gun slinging town, says Wright, a former social worker employed as a mechanic at his family’s auto shop.” (2) Main Street hit a low point in the winter of 1992 when three buildings in the center of town burned to the ground. Attention turned towards re-building Main Street. Although initially guided by traditional economic development ideas, this effort evolved into a broader interest in community-based economic development. (3)

Many of Hardwick’s 2,500 to 3,000 residents travel to Barre-Montpelier, Morrisville-Stowe, St. Johnsbury, or even as far as Burlington for work. The nearest interstate is 25 miles away. Given this circumstance, there is a real desire to create jobs locally. However, the core group of primarily small business people involved in the Hardwick sustainable community project are not targeting jobs per se and, certainly, are not seeking traditional employment opportunities. Rather, they define their “challenge” as “how to retain Main Street, retain the sense of place vital to the existence of rural communities, and in the long run create employment opportunities that make sense for the natural resource base of Hardwick and allow residents of

(1) Daniel Kemmis. Community and the Politics of Place University of Oklahoma Press: Norman. 1990, p.79

(2) Article by Cassandra Hemenway in the “Seven Days” newspaper from Burlington, VT (undated)

Provided to the author by Linda Fox, staff for the Hardwick Business Community.

(3) Personal communication with Linda Fox (October 26, 1995).

Hardwick the option of working within their own town.” (4)
(photo of Main Street)

Community Building Focus

Like STA-NORTH, New Hampshire, Hardwick is a case study of a community getting plugged in. Even though there was no pre-existing organization in Hardwick, this community has certainly progressed beyond the jump start phase and is well into broadening its base and producing tangible improvements not only to the lives of individuals but also to the community as a whole. “There is a new spirit in town, as evidenced by the abundance of yellow, “I love Hardwick” bumper stickers distributed by an enterprising local car dealer last summer at the Vermont Raggaie Festival...People see Hardwick as a valuable place now, not a place to get trapped.” (5)

An impetus for community building was a strategic planning process called “Take Charge”. The University of Vermont Extension System helped facilitate this event. George Lisi, one of the organizers, was paid by a Community Block Grant Program to do some strategic planning for Hardwick. Later, he secured Rural Development funds so that he would be a grassroots organizer for business startups and coordination.

Unfortunately, the fire of 1992 siphoned energy away from planning to focus on rebuilding. The gutted buildings were rebuilt with the help of a federal grant. But, the big difference affecting the town’s well-being has been approach taken to this redevelopment and the subsequent additional projects. Instead of continuing traditional economic patterns and following past economic theories, a few people – with a 1960’s outlook – decided to promote something different. As Linda Fox, the key initiator of this effort describes it, we are interested in “**building a community.**”

Community Building Process

Linda Fox’s first foray into community building began with filling a perceived vacuum – the lack of a place for social gathering. “When Fox opened the Renaissance Café in April 1993, she intended it to be a community center – or, as she puts it, a community building experiment.” (6) The best description of this remarkable place and its meaning to townspeople and visitors is found in the café’s own hand-out. “Renaissance Café is a non-profit worker cooperative. Our goal is to provide a COMMUNITY CENTER which is (a) friendly gathering place for local residents and for people visiting the area. We offer Green Mountain Coffee Roasters coffees, espresso, cappuccino, teas, juices, and homemade baked goods. We also offer music, poetry, art gallery, educational experiences, sharing times, and great conversation.

(4) Ibid.

(5) Local news article (undated) provided to the author by Linda Fox

(6) Ibid.

The café is a place to: sit and read, come in with friends, have a meeting, make new friends, hangout while your laundry is getting done, take a break, find a friendly face, have a good conversation, and slow down to enjoy life more.

The Renaissance Café is an experience in community-building. We are trying to learn how to work together, make decisions together, enhance the surrounding communities and towns, and get along with lots of different people.” (7)

“Run entirely by volunteers, the Renaissance Café operates as a coffeehouse – and art gallery – by day. Area lawmakers stop by in the early hours for legislative breakfasts. But at night, the calico-curtained meeting house attracts a broad cross-section of café society from Weight Watchers and loggers to the Hardwick Area Business Group. (2 photos of the inside of the café) ... Fox says that the café now turns a slight profit -- all of which either returns to members or goes back into the café. Members (about 25 people who donate \$25.00) used last year’s earnings to finance the move to the Centennial House (September, 1995).” (8) According to a local resident, “the café’s success has proved his theory that a new mindset has overtaken his small town. Maybe it’s something in the French Roast, but there’s no more dissing Hardwick as a cultural backwater. I think there’s a sense of pride in the community.” (9)

In November, 1994 the organizer of the Renaissance Café, Linda Fox, was hired with the sustainable community foundation funds to work part-time to help merchants capture more local dollars. She and several others, including Jim Lovinsky chair of the chamber of commerce, created the Hardwick Business Community. This organization has no by-laws, officers, or prescribed rules. Rather, by intention, representatives of business, local government, and business/industry associations are invited and encouraged to participate in any or all of the group’s activities. The philosophy is that “every business person is a member if he or she chooses to be. Notices are sent and posted for everyone to see.” (10)

The initial core group of the Hardwick Business Community were George Lisi and four women who are store owners on Main Street of the Galaxy Bookstore, Trading Center, Flower Basket, and Racette’s, a women’s apparel store. Soon, business peoples from Wolcott Street and other nearby streets asked, “What about us?” The group expanded from a focus on Main Street to the entire community and its links to neighboring communities.

Leaders of the Hardwick Business Community include some people who have assumed that kind of responsibility in the past, like Jim Lovinsky, but many are “emerging” leaders in the business community. Members include people who own stores in town, such as the managers of Buffalo Mountain Food Coop (photo of store), and people who own businesses, such as Jim Lovinsky’s Sylva Curl facility in East Hardwick (photo of Jim and Linda).

(7) Renaissance Café, Centennial House, Main Street. Hardwick, VT 05643 (undated handout).

(8) Op cit. Local news article.

(9) Ibid.

(10) Personal communication with Linda Fox (October 26, 1995).

Community Building Results

The stated mission of the Hardwick Business Community is “to strengthen the downtown’s visibility.” (11) Signals of community betterment were already evident by the time that Linda Fox was hired to work part-time for the Hardwick Business Community at the end of 1994. A sense of place and pride had set in as people flocked to the Renaissance Café and/or read about it in news articles. But, the more tangible results came afterwards.

The Hardwick Business Community has a seven pronged approach to creating and nurturing community-based economic development. The first thrust is to coordinate business. An early step was to engage in lots of informal conversations. When Linda Fox chose to locate the café on Main Street, she knew that it would give her a stake in the town and, in particular, credibility among the other business people. She spent time talking to her neighbors. (12) Another activity involved a shopping survey. In December, 1994 six hundred people returned a questionnaire describing what they had purchased and where over a week’s time period. Faculty and students at the University of Vermont are analyzing results. The survey process itself helped give visibility to the Hardwick Business Community and begin to engage people’s attention.

A second aspect is to encourage joint marketing. Many of the stores in Hardwick are small-scale. Therefore, Linda Fox and others in the Hardwick Business Community realized the economic value of linking their efforts or enabling some to advertise at all. Thirty-nine businesses now advertise together three times per year (spring, fall festival, and Christmas). Seasonal opportunities are targeted, e.g. fall foliage advertising. Managers of restaurants and other kinds of stores are working together, e.g. coupons are given out to deer hunters at restaurants for discounts at other places. (13)

A third type of activity is creative marketing. For example, the Renaissance Café sponsors free cultural events to raise funds for social causes and, in the process, draws paying customers. At one such event \$57 was generated from sales of cider and dessert in fifteen minutes at a reading event to raise funds for a local violence prevention group. (14) In another example, Christmas wreaths made from local products by local business people are being purchased by the Hardwick Business Community to decorate Main Street. A business directory of community organizations and businesses is being developed. (15)

Visibility is another critical component of the Hardwick Business Community’s activities. The group organized and developed a display of a town and area map, photo directory, and area events which is located in a prominent place on Main Street. (photo of display).

(11) Ibid.

(12) Ibid.

(13) Personal conversations with Hardwick Business Community board members (October 26, 1995).

(14) Personal conversation with Linda Fox (October 26, 1995).

(15) Ibid

Linda Fox creates and the Hardwick Business Community publishes and distributes a monthly calendar of events. These one page, brightly colored listings are paid for from a grant the Kellogg Foundation of Michigan in partnership with the UVM Environmental Programs in Communities Project (EPIC). Information for the calendar comes from many local sources, including the Historical Society and the Senior Citizens Society. Events publicized include community public meetings (e.g. Hardwick Elementary School Board meetings), community activities (e.g. JV softball/baseball games), special interest presentations (e.g. Appropriate Technology for Africa; Farmers and Environmentalists in Japan), cultural events (e.g. Dave Keller, Blues guitar and vocals), and fund-raisers. (16)

Festivals are another way to raise visibility. The Hardwick Business Community organized the Fall Festival Resource Fair the last weekend in September/early October, 1995. Held in a park on Main Street (photo of park), this event was designed to build on a pre-existing craft fair. "Downtown was packed with browsers; more people attended this fair than had come to previous craft fairs. Local organic farmers donated corn stalks to decorate the park" (17)

A fifth component of this project is to improve the quality of life of people in the community. The Renaissance Café was designed and serves as a social gathering place for companionship and business exchanges. Recently, the café moved down the street in order to take advantage of cheaper rents, more performance space, and the connections with two other businesses in the building – people can now buy food at In-a-Pig's Eye Deli and buy flowers at the Flower Basket before or after spending time at the café. Commercial values of downtown property have improved over the past few years so that the "old" space of the café was rented within weeks. Moreover, the Flower Basket is currently undergoing renovation (e.g. painting, wall papering, adding a cold storage). These are signs of investment in the future.

Another example of Hardwick's investment in the future is the town-owned depot. (photo of depot) This building is located behind the Hardwick Town House where performances are now held. (photo of Town House). That place is popular: four hundred people attended a play by a local playwright. The depot could be fixed up to provide additional public benefits. According to Town Manager Charles Safford, "We are open to ideas and glad to work with any party interested" in the building. (18) The problem is that the depot was never used for any year-round purpose and is not winterized. The Vermont Labor and Industry will sanction only limited number of people during summer months until substantial improvements are made. The town and townspeople are trying to overcome this difficulty. A grant for \$5,000 was received to provide electricity and additional financial resources are available through the town's low-interest loan program. The Town Manager and others are eager to see "a bike or snowmobile rental store, a radio station, a recreational facility, or some other viable use for that building." (19)

(16) April and October, 1995 "Town Crier: What's Happening in Hardwick?"

(17) Personal conversation with Linda Fox (October 26, 1995).

(18) Telephone conversation with Town Manager Charles Safford (January 16, 1996).

(19) Ibid.

Peer lending is a sixth aspect. \$6,000 of the Ford/Vermont Community Foundation grant was used to leverage \$40,000 from the Merck Fund to cover expenses for a Working Capital Peer Lending Program for the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont. One of the peer lending groups is starting in Hardwick.

The last piece of the Hardwick Business Community strategy deals with building local wealth. A proposal is being put together to start a local currency called “Buffalo Mountain Hours”. Rural Vermont, a farm advocacy group based in Montpelier will be the fiscal agent. Last April, the Renaissance Café hosted a presentation by Susan Leiber on “Barter Currencies and How They Work”, which described a project in Ithaca, New York. The basic concept is to create “worth” or “economic value” in terms which are not now exchanged in the formal marketplace. E.g. volunteer hours or hours devoted to activities which are given low value in the marketplace (e.g. picking up mail for an elderly person). In places such as Hardwick where people often work at many jobs simultaneously or over time, this kind of barter system fits their lifestyle and needs.

Community Building Drawbacks and Stumbling Blocks

The initial challenge to overcome in Hardwick was inertia. Now that a core group of people is organized, visible, and producing community improvements through downtown changes, the stumbling block may well be motivating some of the entrenched local officials. The type of economic development being pursued by the Hardwick Business Community is not traditional and is being generated from non-traditional sources – i.e. the business people themselves. Although Jim Lovinsky’s involvement ensures a tie to the local chamber of commerce, HBC is still challenging and, perhaps, threatening existing organizations and people in positions of authority. (20) Select Board members rejected Jim Lovinsky’s idea that they establish an advisory committee to distribute loan funds available from federal housing programs. They want to retain that power for themselves. Linda Fox had difficulty getting their approval for a \$1,000 loan even though funds were available because other people had defaulted on loans in the past and the Select Board members were hesitant to take a risk. She did, however, get the funds and repaid on schedule.

Another difficulty is safety. A person working at J. D. Elliott’s Restaurant got beaten on his birthday in the park on Main Street. He is not afraid; in fact, his reaction is to invest more time and effort into improving Hardwick. He says that he may even run for public office. (21)

Special Qualities of this Community Building Project

Two qualities of the Hardwick sustainable community project stand out. First, even more than in Concord, Eddie Gale plays a critical and valuable role. He has an office in Hardwick, knows the “territory”, and provides overall support in shaping the community’s efforts. He drafts proposals based on ideas from HBC participants;

(20) Personal conversations with members of the Hardwick Business Community and with a person at J. D. Elliott’s Restaurant (October 27, 1995).

(21) Personal conversation (October 27, 1995).

facilities networking through providing contact names, making introductions, and mentioning the community project to others; leverages additional outside contributions including technical assistance; gives psychological encouragement; and monitors progress. He is definitely an involved player, not an outsider. This role, given his low-key personality and credibility, adds value to the effectiveness of this project. The Vermont Community Foundation has a presence in the community.

The second aspect, which applies to all six sustainable community projects, is the use of the foundation grant funds to leverage other assistance. As Linda Fox told me, “We don’t want to be dependent on anyone ... perhaps it is the Yankee spirit of independence ... Vermont is different from other places where I have lived. There is a pride of independent thinking.” (22) This attitude means that funds are not even viewed as “seed money” to start a project; rather, they are a treasure to be held on to dearly and leveraged for contributions from other institutions and people.

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(22) Personal conversation with Linda Fox (October 26, 1995).

STA-NORTH REGION, NEW HAMPSHIRE A Community Getting Plugged In

By Elizabeth Kline
January, 1996

“Local self-reliance means creating an organizational system that enhances the internal economy and cohesiveness of a place, reduces entropy, and provides the base for import/export relationships with other communities. It is an integrative process that links the consumer sector of the local economy with the producer sector and through the relationship strengthens both.” (1)

Community Setting

The STA-NORTH region of northwestern New Hampshire along the Vermont border is a community building on its initial base. Unlike the Concord/South Essex County, Vermont community, this region does not need a jump start. There is a foundation, even an entity called “STA-NORTH”, which pre-existed the Ford/New Hampshire foundation Sustainable Community Project. STA-NORTH was established in 1992 by business and industry people, retirees, government officials, and citizens who want to create a regional presence in order to entice visitors and customers to travel farther north than the customary southern New Hampshire belt. The village of Groveton in the township of Northumberland and its two neighbors, Stark and Stratford, are rural places characterized by the Connecticut River Valley and the hills and mountains of the White Mountain National Forest. The elevation of the villages is about 900 feet above sea level. Farm lands, with rich agricultural soils, provided foods for the early settlers, and still continue to be farmed by a few hardy families. Flood plains abound near the rivers.

(Photo of sign of Groveton with mountain in background)

The total population of all three towns is approximately 4,000 people, with Groveton/Northumberland the largest at 2500, Stratford next at 950, and Stark the smallest at 500 people. Density is low: Stratford is the second largest township in New Hampshire with 4,000 acres. The number of acres per person is increasing as people are leaving the area. Northumberland lost population between 1980 and 1990, in part because of a more than 25% decline in jobs between 1980 and 1987 (2) These three townships are located within Coos County, which has the slowest increase in population and employment of the ten New Hampshire counties since 1920. (3)

(1) Mark Roseland. Toward Sustainable Communities. National Roundtable on the Environment and the Economy. Ottawa, Canada 1992. p.217

(2) David Auger. Supplied by Kay Doherty, STA-NORTH Board Member and staff person. January 4, 1996.

(3) Ibid.

There is a regional identity in some respects already. The three townships share a common school supervisory union. Stark does not have a middle or high school and sends most of its students to Groveton.

This is a case study, like the one on Hardwick, Vermont, of a community getting plugged in – one that has a beginning base of support from which it wants to evolve.

Community Building Focus

Like many rural New England towns and regions, STA-NORTH is a natural resource system based economy. Its skilled manufacturing base is dwindling. The state of New Hampshire's manufacturing employment dropped almost 19% since 1990, while in Coos County that figure was almost a 23% reduction. (4) To replace this loss, local people are relying even more on jobs related to forests, agriculture, and tourism. STA-NORTH's mission is "to provide the leadership for a community-based economic development strategy rooted in the forest, agriculture, and skilled manufacturing heritage of the western Coos area. STA-NORTH will endeavor to create jobs while protecting the cultural and environmental heritage of the five town area (Groveton, Stark, Stratford, plus Guildhall and Bloomfield in Vermont). The scope of STA-NORTH's involvement shall be sufficiently broad to affect positive community change by developing community self-esteem, attitude towards opportunity, entrepreneurship, natural resource-based business opportunities, skills development and small business support." (5)

Expanding a rural economy off the current beaten path is a real challenge. To foster the kind of economy which brings wealth to local people and, in addition, respects and values local cultural heritage and natural beauty is even more difficult. But, this way of thinking is embedded in the members of STA-NORTH, a breed of people most of whom have lived their entire lives in their community.

Several members of STA-NORTH are farmers. For example, Nancy and Gordon Gray are full-time dairy farmers. "The Grays are among a dwindling number of residents attempting to earn a living from the land. (The Grays can) devote as much time as they have to ...their farm because...(Nancy)teaches, thus providing the household with a steady income and benefits. (Gordon) hires out as a carpenter (among other jobs) in the short off-season to supplement their meager income from agricultural efforts...The Grays create compost from manure, food waste, card board, and town newspapers and sell it to other farmers...They also derive revenues from a farm stand selling vegetables and from participating in a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program. They are now considering developing a cross-country ski trail to attract paying customers." (6)

Another struggling farmer involved in STA-NORTH is Michael Phillips. Lost Nation Cider Mill, a business of Michael Phillips and David Craxton, is in its fourth year as a certified organic orchard. "There's only one cider for the North Country, and those boys in

(4) Ibid.

(5) Mission Statement of STA-NORTH (date).

(6) Personal communication with Kay Doherty (January 4, 1996).

Lost Nation make it.” (7) They continue to plant trees (270 more trees in 1996), yet still have to import apples from Maine for their cider business. They make ends meet by doing a lot of bartering. For example, some people label jugs, fill jugs, and dig holes in exchange for food and drink. Some money is collected (\$2,000) from people for CSA memberships. Half of those people are local and an equal amount are not but want to support local environmental businesses. “These are good examples of people sacrificing to work the land in an environmentally sound way that benefits the whole community. It is difficult to measure the community’s awareness or appreciation of their sacrifices.” (8)

(photo of Michael Phillips and his dog at his farm)

A third example is Chris Hawkins who is a member of STA-NORTH and raises a special breed of cattle called “highland cattle”. These animals initially come from Scotland. To accelerate their numbers, Hawkins is experimenting with having their embryos grown in Holstein cows owned by the Gray Mist Farm owners, who are also STE-NORTH members. One cow is due to deliver in February. The particular value of highland cattle is that they produce less fat beef, are rarely sick, eat nuisance plants and grasses, and stay outside even in snowy winter weather. (photo of highland cow)

Community Building Process

STA-NORTH Economic Development Corporation formed in 1992. The North Country Council, a regional planning agency, helped STA-NORTH write by-laws and conducted strategic planning sessions.

Prior to the Sustainable Community Project, STA-NORTH had established a Board of Directors and began to identify and support local businesses, such as farmers. Kay Doherty, a retiree, was and is the key mover and shaker as well as a gracious and friendly promoter and guide for visitors and potential investors. Under her quiet leadership along with “indispensable” (9) efforts of Sharon White and Bob Carney, the group has been given office space by the Berlin City Bank (in-kind contribution of \$500 per year), (photo of outside of bank building), has expanded its activities and visibility, and is deepening its connections among and across the townships. Kay Doherty was hired by the Board as a part-time Executive Director for the second half of 1995 and was recently voted to continue in this capacity through 1996. The office space contribution was facilitated by the bank’s manager and STA-NORTH Board of Director Lillian Landry. The office is now equipped with a computer, copier, phone, fax machine, and furniture. (photo of the office door with Kay Doherty)

Support from the affected townships is evidenced by their financial contributions and individual memberships. At the March, 1995 town meetings, STA-NORTH was approved \$350 from Stark, \$200 from Stratford, and \$400 from Groveton. Groveton had already supplied \$250 to help STA-NORTH send out mailings when the group was just beginning. Support for these warrant articles was so forthcoming that STA-NORTH members did not even need to explain how the funds would be spent. There was no opposition to these expenditures at town meetings, which is unusual in these economically pressed communities.

(7) “Growing for Market”, Vol. 4. No. 8. August, 1995, p.9.

(8) Ibid plus personal communication with Kay Doherty and Michael Phillips (September 25, 1995).

(9) Written comments from Kay Doherty (January 22, 1996).

Plans are underway to seek double the amounts provided by each town at the 1996 town meetings. One of the justifications is to transition more towards financial self-sufficiency and responsibility during the Sustainable Community Project's likely last year of foundation funding.

The scope of representation on the Board of Directors is intended to reach out and include key constituent interests and resources. (photo of some board members at restaurant)

The STA-NORTH Board of Directors for 1994-1995 are:

Gordon Armstrong	Groveton
Sue Armstrong	At Large
Scott Merrow	Groveton
Robert Carney	Groveton
(Secretary/Treasurer)	
Gregory Cloutier	At Large
Madeleine Croteau	Stark
Kay Doherty (President)	At Large
Stephen Lafrance	Stratford
Lillian Landry	Stark
Wilson McMann	Stratford
Karen Merrow	At Large
Mary Sloat	At Large
G. Sharon White (Vice President)	At Large

Broadening the basis of participation is a conscious objective of the group. One vehicle for increasing visibility, educating local people and visitors about local products and places, and explaining more about the nature of environmentally sound community economic development will be a newsletter. A quarterly newsletter is being launched this year to "share STA-NORTH's vision of the North Country's potential, encourage support of the local economy and discuss sustainable concepts. Two thousand copies of the newsletter will be distributed as a "Northern Beacon" (local newspaper) insert. The reporters, editors, and artists include STA-NORTH members Michael Phillips, and Sharon White. It will be published by a local printer, Gary Merriam." (10)

Deepening the participation of environmental organization is another desired outcome of STA-NORTH's activities. A representative of the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests (Paul Leveille) is a member, regularly participates in STA-NORTH's meetings, and brings to the group experience and knowledge about sustainable development practices and challenges. Another connection being nurtured is with the Quebec Labrador Foundation/Atlantic Center for the Environment, an non-governmental organization focused on environmental science and education, which wants to work with STA-NORTH. Jonathan Labaree from that

(10) Personal communication with Kay Doherty (September 25, 1995)

organization has met with STA-NORTH board members and is fund-raising to pay for two interns who can help develop materials including a map for tourists. (11)

In addition to the assistance from the North Country Council, STA-NORTH has benefited greatly from the support provided by Pat Vasbinder from the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation. “The willingness of both organizations to give advice and counsel, and to make available their staff, facilities, and expertise, has been an invaluable contribution to STA-NORTH’s development. For a volunteer organization to know that all that experience is only a phone call away has been very comforting. Without it we would not be where we are today!” (12)

Community Building Results

A project undertaken by STA-NORTH was a pilot effort involving Groveton Youthworks. Using materials donated by local merchants, local high school students built three picnic tables to encourage tourists to stop by specific places of interest. One table is located at the entrance of Groveton from the south (photo of table and rock); another is at the entrance from Stratford on Route 3; and the third is on Route 110 on Madeleine Croteau’s property (a board member). This project highlights the approach taken by STA-NORTH – to rely on local resources, build partnerships, expand the base of people aware of and involved, and focus on a subject which links community and regional pride (e.g. historical past, cultural identity) with economic development (i.e. tourism).

Another project involves working with volunteers and municipal officials of Groveton/Northumberland, Stark, and Stratford, to identify points of interest and scenic thoroughfares for Scenic By-Ways designation by the State of New Hampshire. (photo of sign welcoming people to Stratford) Once designated, these sites are listed on map for tourists. The entire town of Stark is designated as a scenic place, based on its historic buildings (e.g. inn, church, covered bridge) (photo of church; photo of inn/covered bridge)

A number of the projects deal with either creating or supporting locally-based, environmentally-sound economic development. An ambitious project is the development of a bottled water plant. Initially, STA-NORTH members wanted to develop a milk bottling plant to replace the local one which closed. That plant had a major economic impact, especially on the vulnerable dairy farmers since one-half of the milk it processed came from local farmers. After some investigations it became evident that a milk plant is much more difficult an enterprise than is a bottled water one. So, the idea shifted.

A feasibility study has been completed. Plans to test market water (“Waters of the Aqua-Fir”) from the identified local aquifer source but processed by a bottling facility in nearby Berlin have been developed. Butson’s store expressed an interest in carrying Waters by the Aqua-Fir in gallon containers as its brand as long as it was cost competitive with the store’s current brand product. The projected cost is higher and, therefore, this STA-NORTH effort is on hold. Pending legislation which would require the source of bottled water to be printed on the label, if enacted, may create a market for STA-NORTH’s aquifer sourced product in the future.

(11) Ibid.

(12) Written comments from Kay Doherty (January 22, 1996).

Assuming the product demand, STA-NORTH would still need to decide who will own and manage the bottling facility. The group hopes to generate some revenue from the sale of bottled water.

Another economic-driven project is to identify and publicize local products and merchants. (photo of Stark store) STA-NORTH members and volunteers invested significant time, personal capital, and foundation funds in publishing two editions of a directory titled "Reasons to...STA-NORTH: Business and Service Directory" and includes the phrase on its cover "Neighbors working and growing together". The total cost of the first issue and one-half of the second directory were paid from the foundation grant; the rest of the expenses were paid by advertisers. These directories are used by people for different reasons. For example, high school seniors used the directory to solicit ads for their year book; School-to-Work Program staff used it for their mailings; tourists use the directory to find places to buy things and visit. A person from Stratford used the directory to locate electricians and contractors whom he hired for his work. (13)

A third community business project is a Christmas 1996 catalog of North Country cottage industries . The first step was a workshop to identify interest in the project. STA-NORTH co-sponsored and co-funded (approximately \$1,000) a workshop on September 9, 1995 with the New Hampshire College's Institute for Cooperative Community Development (ICCD) and Amanuensis, a graphic design studio in Manchester, N.H. Members helped plan the workshop and coordinated advertising using \$100 donated by ICCD. Thus far, people from 30 towns have responded that they want to be included in the catalog.

From the contacts made through the catalog workshop STA-NORTH is surveying crafters and growers to determine their interest in participating in a seasonal Market Barn. Several STA-NORTH members were excited to hear a talk at the April, 1995 Northern New England Sustainable Community Workshop by Ron Nissen, a consultant who specializes in developing farm and craft markets. A site has been selected and negotiations are underway to purchase four medium-sized tents. The goal is to have the Market Barn open in the summer of 1996.

An additional economic development project is to identify ways that Groveton/Northumberland, Stark, and Stratford, and ten adjacent towns can work cooperatively together. Two student interns from the Whittemore School of Business at the University of New Hampshire helped STA-NORTH produce such a listing; town meeting vote is now necessary in order to empower selectmen to enter into regional agreements.

STA-NORTH also acts as a host, facilitator, and catalyst to help other organizations. For example, the College of Lifelong Learning conducts monthly open houses at STA-NORTH's office for adult education. A vocational technology workshop for aspiring entrepreneurs is scheduled for February 28, 1996. In another instance, Bob Carney helped the Genesis Children's Center located at the Groveton United Methodist Church get through the bureaucratic paperwork in order to get established. This place now serves 25 children ages 3 and 4, many of whose parents are poor and on welfare (photo of the day care center).

(13) Personal conversations with STA-NORTH board members (September 25, 1995).

All these projects are trying to fit into a comprehensive whole. From the beginning, STA-NORTH board members have been trying to evolve project topics based on furthering the mission statement and accomplishing six objectives. These objectives are: 1. heighten a positive sense of community/regional identity; 2. publish an area business and services directory; 3. increase adult education opportunities, working with the College of Lifelong Learning, Technical College, and local school districts; 4. sponsor a STA-NORTH Futures training program to strengthen community leadership in terms of economic development; 5. promote North Country cottage industries; and 6. publish a newsletter. Every one of these objectives is either completed or substantially underway.

Now the group is interested in developing indicators to measure progress and set new courses of direction. They are working with Maureen Hart, Massachusetts consultant who has authored of a handbook on sustainable community indicators.

Community Building Drawbacks and Stumbling Blocks

According to Kay Doherty, (14) STA-NORTH had some initial difficulties with funding from the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation. “For a while there was a great deal of confusion regarding the grant process and sorting out NHCF, NNHF, and Ford. We did not know the total amount of funds available or the purposes to which they could be applied. An Action Plan was created as a method of obtaining funds. It also took a while for our fledgling organization to get our act together, realize our own needs, and become aware of the fact that we were not limited to (a) single source of funding.”

In interviewing Patricia Vasbinder, staff for the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation and primary participant from that organization in the STA-NORTH project, it was a conscious choice to grant funds only based on a specific work plan and budget. The strategy was to encourage STA-NORTH board members to develop their own agenda and get organized before distributing funds. This approach, also used in the other New Hampshire project and in the two Vermont projects, seems to have succeeded. In the two Maine projects, a different strategy was used which did end up with people seeking initially to fund their “pet” projects. However, the Maine projects have by now shifted fully towards thinking comprehensively before funding projects.

Like the project in Hardwick, Vermont which is also in the plugging in phase of community building, STA-NORTH needs to continue broadening its linkages and connections to the diverse economic interests and to maintain its focus on nurturing a non-traditional (i.e. community-based and environmentally sound) economy. Over time, what are now scattered and fragmentary enterprises will fit together into an identifiable regional niche. The Christmas catalog project and the emerging idea of a Market Barn to promote North Country cottage products can serve as the core rallying point for creating this identity and financial gain.

This coalescing around community-based and regionally derived economic development is not only feasible, but it is happening. The choice of the water bottling plant stems, in large part, because of people’s belief that their aquifer water is “good to drink” and, like Vermont maple syrup, is a marketable “local” product.

(14) Written communication from Kay Doherty (January 4, 1996).

The idea for a market barn, too, comes from a sense that the local craftspeople and small-scale entrepreneurs exist either in reality or in spirit. Therefore, providing an outlet to showcase and sell their products is a reasonable and useful step towards strengthening local economies of the region. The idea evolved from talking to and knowing people, rather than listening to the advice of an outside marketing consultant.

Special Qualities of this Community Building Project

STA-NORTH seems to be a congenial group. Individuals have different backgrounds, interests, and expertise and yet they seem to come together well for the common good. Why has this group congealed? Perhaps, Kay Doherty's friendly and inviting personality contributes to creating a sense of place and space for everyone. Her personal dedication and hard work also provide an example of a leader who pitches in with everyone else. Perhaps, the bastion of "progressive thinking" in a state not known for its liberalness is a driving force. Perhaps, it is the low-key nature of people in small, rural communities where everyone knows everyone else.

Another distinctive aspect of the STA-NORTH sustainable community project is its converting traditional liabilities of a small rural setting into assets. The "isolation" of the towns in the STA-NORTH region, according to Kay Doherty, makes it even more important to give people a forum for gathering together, helping each other, and "getting their products out" to others. (15) The fact that Lost Nation is the only cider business in the North Country necessitated special marketing techniques. Michael Phillips described some of these efforts in an article he wrote for the "Growing for Market" a monthly publication by an organization in Lawrence, Kansas. "Our first marketing step was to create a cider label to boldly state our presence on local store shelves. None of the stock cider labels available expressed what we intended to revive in a full-bodied cider, so we bit the bullet and bought Lost Nation cider labels at about three times the cost of a generic label. The artwork we chose, of a hand picking an apple, was printed in four colors at a cost of \$1,320 for 10,000 labels. (drawing of the label)

Was it worth it? I think so, It caught the eye of the local market and told people that something new was happening in Lost Nation. It was a quality presentation that encouraged consumers to expect equally high quality in the cider...Many of us have heard the adage that farming is half about growing crops and half about marketing. I've come to recognize that a good half of that marketing effort should be about consumer education. No one else can speak with the clarity of farmers about keeping small farms viable...That is why we promote Lost Nation Orchards as a community farm. We involve people in labor swaps...Some customers hand pick wild apples in trade for cider. We encourage local investment through a farming membership programs that promises four gallons of cider from the new plantings and a free subscription to our newsletter for \$25 or more... This spring we initiated the "Hole Diggers in the Sky" club." 12 hearty souls came out on two mornings to help us dig 170 large holes in the new hillside block. Digging alone would have taken days, but in a few sociable hours, the job was done and our dozen volunteers had that much more appreciation of what's involved in farming...

(15) Personal conversation with Kay Doherty (September 25, 1995).

Efforts at consumer education need to be brief and fun. Thus was born our Lost Nation Trading Cards... We hand out the new season's card with each purchase, usually with a statement along the lines of "and here's a little something to read while you drink your cider." Past cards are available in a card rack on the wall. We offer up these cards in mail-order gift boxes as well, to go with our Organic Cider-Jelly, Yankee Apple Butter, and Cider Syrup." (16)

STA-NORTH is a group of lively and creative entrepreneurs who chose to live where they do and are determined to create reasonable livelihoods based on their personal values. They nurture each other and reach out to others.

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MT. WASHINGTON VALLEY, NEW HAMPSHIRE
A Community in a Regional Context

By Elizabeth Kline
January, 1996

“We can’t wait on the government, we can’t wait on somebody else to come in and do it, we have to do it ourselves.” (Magic Johnson) (1)

Community Setting

Mt. Washington Valley...the most popular tourist destination in northern New Hampshire and a major crossroad for tourist across northern New England.” (2)
This region, located two and one-half hours north of Boston consists of sixteen towns: Albany, Bartlett, Bean’s Purchase, Chatham, Conway, Eaton, Freedom, Hale’s Location, Hart’s Location, Jackson, Madison, Ossipee, Pinkham’s Grant, Tamworth, Fryeburg, and Brownfield. Fourteen are in eastern New Hampshire and the latter two are in western Maine.

(photo of Mt. Washington Valley welcome sign and photo of map of region)

The area’s population is approximately 35,500 people, of whom many are young (26%). The median age is 37 and the median household income is \$28,100. (3)

The region’s largest industry is tourism. Surrounded by the 750,000 acre White Mountain National Forest, the Valley is a year-round vacation place for people from many New England cities and towns as well as from Canada and other countries.

However, “unlike many resort areas, the Valley has experienced a unique trend in strong off-season businesses. The growing number of quality retail shops and name-brand factory outlets, combined with tax-free shopping, has made the Valley one of New England’s major shopping destinations.” (4)

Community Building Focus

The Mt. Washington Valley project is a regional community in the making. Although the White Mountains of New Hampshire and the Route 16 transportation corridor create visual and physical connections between towns in New Hampshire and Maine, the 16 towns which are members of the Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council are only beginning to view themselves as part of a region.

Many people “believe that Conway runs the show. We are trying to instill a sense that you are part of a region and you do have a voice.” (5)

(1) New York Times, January 8, 1996, p.8

(2) “Quality of Life” hand-out produced and distributed by the Mt. Washington Valley Economic Development Council.

(3) “Demographics” hand-out produced and distributed by the Mt. Washington Valley Economic Development Council.

(4) “Quality of Life” hand-out

(5) Dave Sorensen at a meeting in North Conway (October 17, 1995)

Community Building Process

The Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council, the entity which “hosts” the Ford/New Hampshire Charitable Foundation sustainable community project, has been in existence since 1991. MWVEC is a non-profit corporation with approximately 134 dues paying (\$10 per year) members and a board of directors of 12 town representatives, 5 members elected at large, 8 appointed by the Board, and 9 ex-officio members. There are 5 officers. The 1995 Officers and Board of Directors are:

OFFICERS

Name	Title
David Sorensen	President
Stephen Knox	Vice President
Randall Cooper	Secretary
Richard Brunelle	Treasurer
Cynthia Hall	Past President

(photo of President Sorensen and VP Knox)

TOWN REPRESENTATIVES

Name	Town
Stephen Knox	Albany
Kathlyn Nealley	Bartlett
Peter White	Brownfield
Susan W. Logan	Chatham
John A. Cuddy	Conway
Judy Fowler	Eaton
Marjorie Conrey	Freedom
Nathan Poore	Fryeburg
Diane McClave	Jackson
Beth Beyerle	Madison
Virgil Abbott	Ossipee
Susan Ticehurst	Tamworth

AT LARGE MEMBERS

Name	Organization
D. Dickinson Henry, Jr	NH Charitable Foundation
Peter Pinkham	Pinkham Real Estate
Tom Deans	NH Charitable Foundation
Kenneth Lydecker	Individual
Judith McGinty	NHEC

BOARD APPOINTMENTS

Name	Affiliation
Cynthia Briggs	Private Sector
Phil Gravink	Private Sector
Chuck Henderson	Private Sector
Harry Benson	SAU #9
Bayard Kennett	MWV Business Dev. Corp
Gary Poquette	Memorial Hospital
Gail Paine	College for Lifelong Learning

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS

Name	Affiliation
James Somerville	Conway Town Manager
John Krebs	Conway Town Manager
John Simpson	DRED
Patricia Vasbinder	NH Charitable Foundation
Joel Rhymer	Tin Mountain
Peter Benson	Nature Conservancy
Preston Gilbert	North Conway Council
Walter Graff	Appalachian Mountain Club
Sheryl Kowalik	

Susan Flynn is the Administrative Assistant.

A mission statement was adopted by the Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council to guide the sustainable community project. MWVEC hopes to: “improve and diversify the economic vitality in the Mt. Washington Valley Region with a commitment to the communities and the natural environment through a structured public/private partnership.” (6) In addition, the Board of Directors adopted an extensive set of goals, objectives and action steps. Like STA-NORTH, the other New Hampshire project, it is difficult to distinguish the organization’s goals and objectives from those pertaining to the sustainable community project. The parent organizations have, to a large degree, been adapted to fit the needs and interests of the projects.

The choice of projects is derived from this extensive and detailed list of goals, objectives, and action steps. Priority is somewhat influenced by timing, but most of the stated action steps are being systematically implemented.

At one point, the question whether or not to take an official position on a proposed Walmart was hotly debated. The group decided no to become involved as an entity because there were “sustainability” arguments for (e.g. cheap products, accessible to rural residents, jobs) and against such a discount store (e.g. low-paying jobs with little benefits, ugly building with massive parking spaces, potential to undercut local business).

(6) Mt. Washington Economic Development Council brochure (undated).

The discussions and the resolution helped shape the nature of the MWVEC. (7)

MWVEC is considering some by-law changes to provide more of a regional representation, to give more authority to the executive committee, and to change the timing of taking office to coincide with their election. (8)

President David Sorensen and Vice President Stephen Knox are the most visible and active leaders of the MWVEC. This year, 60 percent of Mr. Sorensen's professional time with the Cooperative Extension Service has been allotted to this project. (9) The interests of the two organizations are sufficiently compatible for such an arrangement.

Community Building Results

Given the extensive and organized listing of goals, objectives, and action steps adopted by MWVEC, the results will be described in those contexts.

I. To facilitate job retention, the expansion of existing business and the development of compatible, new business.

Objectives and Action Steps:

- A. Organize an effective approach to nurture compatible new businesses and existing businesses.
 - 1. Promote local, state, and federal funding and developing programs that can assist existing and new companies.
 - a) Work with the N.H. Office of Industrial Development on their business visitation program.

In its discussions with local business people, the Council discovered that eight companies which deal with outdoor clothing equipment needed more trained stitchers (Refer to Section IV A.1. for more details)

A second area of need is in better computer networking and in reduced telephone costs. The Council has allocated \$25,000 from the Ford/NH Foundation grant for Internet-related expenses and is working with private companies to create local area access for the internet. Council members believe that this kind of technology will encourage environmentally compatible jobs in the region.

(7) Personal conversations with David Sorensen, Stephen Knox, and Tom Deans
(October 17, 1995)

(8) Personal conversation with David Sorensen (October 17, 1995).

(9) Personal conversation with David Sorensen (October 17, 1995).

MWVEC members are consciously trying to create employment opportunities which do not require road travel. (10)

A third need identified from the visitation program is in start-up business loans. The Council is involved in a peer lending program (Refer to Section IV A.2. for more details)

b) Work with the North County Council, Office of State Planning, Small Business Administration and others.

The Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council is working with the North Country Council on a Route 16 corridor study (Refer to Section IV A.3 for more details)

The Council is working with the Office of State Planning on the revolving loan project (Refer to Section IV A.2 for more details)

The Council plans on working with the Small Business Administration when it creates a SCORE group (i.e. senior retired business mentors and teachers).

c) Coordinate the cooperative use of funding programs such as revolving loan funds, community block grants, and other public/private sources (Refer to Section IV A.2)

d) Encourage assistance programs and integrate with existing resources to broaden management and employment skills.

UNH Cooperative Extensive Resource Economic Department will be sponsoring with MWVEC and a local bank business a management workshop in April, 1996 for family business start-ups and newly-established businesses.

2. Implement a marketing program to attract business that is compatible with MWVEC's Mission Statement

The Council has had an intern program with the UNH School of Business to look at value-added products of local businesses.

The Mt. Washington Valley Development Corporation (a different profit-driven entity) has published a brochure and is trying to attract businesses, especially manufacturing. The President of the Corporation is on the MWVEC's Board of Directors.

(photo of handicrafts store in Chorcorua Village on Rte 16)

(10) Personal conversation with David Sorensen and Stephen Knox (October 17, 1995).

II. To support and better the transportation systems to, from, and within the MT. Washington Valley area and initiate programs to accomplish this goal.

Objectives and Action Steps:

A. Take a leadership role in addressing a regional and coordinated approach to transportation and congestion issues by:

1. Facilitate a workshop between police and other state, county, and municipal officials to identify congestion issues and coordinate problem-solving

This task is in the committee discussion phase. A workshop has been scheduled in April, 1996.

2. Identify issues and establish action plans regarding the N.H. Department of Transportation Alternative 9-A (by-pass) decision and its implementation

The chair of the Council's Transportation Committee was on the Alternative 9-A Task Force. Key issues raised by the by-pass include congestion and wetlands impacts. The decision on the route resides with federal agencies (Environmental Protection Agency, Corps of Engineers, Transportation). No decision has been made yet.

3. Participate in the Route 16 Corridor Demonstration Project

a) Facilitate the creation of a local action group to work through the North Country Council.

An Alternative Transportation Committee was established with the assistance of the Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council. Committee members were active in developing a statewide bicycle plan. The plan was completed in January, 1995, but was not accepted by the state. Department of Transportation funds were allocated, instead, for the road improvements.

4. Review and support improvements to local road systems to provide better circulation of traffic within the towns and villages

This task is being handled by the Alternative 9-A by-pass activities.

5. Establish mass and other alternative or multi-use transportation systems

a) Explore potential mass transportation ideas for local applicability

No action taken. Priority is placed, instead, on the multi-use corridor project.

b) Establish a multi-use (i.e. bicyclists, walkers, electric vehicle operators, cross-country skiers) 12 foot wide pathway paralleling Route 16. The current focus is on a three and a half mile stretch. (11)

(photo of North Conway and Route 16)

The first meeting of representatives from ten communities was organized by Dave Sorensen, UNH Cooperative Extension Service and President of the Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council, on July 15, 1993. The group adopted a mission to provide a regional network of trails and pathways for bikes, cross-country skiing, walking and jogging, from Ossipee to the Presidential Mountain range. A trail network would meet two needs: economic benefits to the region in the form of jobs created and increased tourism and environmental benefits from reduced vehicular traffic and increased environmental awareness.

By the second meeting on September 9, 1993 many of the communities had completed an inventory of community trails and pathways and had identified points of interest.

At the October 21, 1993 meeting the group discussed three alternative routes to connect all the communities (railroads, highways, and power lines).

A grant of \$4,000 was submitted to and approved by the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation to hire a designer. This effort led to the successful application for federal ISTEA transportation funds (\$610,000). The Council is currently searching for the required match of \$122,000 and easements from residents and businesses. These monies will be used to construct a portion of the multi-use trail way.

In addition, an award of \$1,000 from the American Greenways DuPont Program was received to pay for signage and maps for the bicycle path.

6. Protect and preserve railroad ROWs for rail and alternative use

Council members met with the Maine Department of Transportation in October, 1995 to seek a rail connection between Portland and Mt. Washington Valley. Negotiations are underway and the prognosis seem favorable.

(11) Information cited in this section comes from a variety of sources including written documents of MWVEC and personal conversations with Dave Sorensen and Tom Deans

B. Support the Eastern Slope Regional Airport and its improvements

1. Encourage an intra-municipal contract between the towns of Conway and Fryeburg

MWVEC helped coordinate the inter-municipal contract.

2. Encourage the implementation of the Master Plan for the Eastern Slope Regional Airport

The Federal Housing Administration provided a grant of \$63,000 to the town of Fryeburg as an adjunct to the master plan for industrial development at the airport. MWVEC wrote this grant. It will consider the feasibility of an industrial park and consider environmental aspects, such as the impacts on noise, flora, and wildlife.

III. To encourage a regional approach to planning and problem solving through inter-municipal cooperation while maintaining the independence of the individual towns

Objectives and Action Steps:

A Coordinate and encourage inter-municipal discussion and cooperation to carry out all MWVEC objectives

1. To call on, on an as-needed basis, Selectmen, Planning Boards and/or other municipal committees to ensure all Economic Council initiatives are implemented through the towns

Dave Sorensen and Steve Knox, along with appropriate MWVEC members, have been meeting with municipal officials – going to each town for official presentations and discussions. MWVEC will be asking townspeople in March, 1996 to approve funds for one-third of the operational expenses of the Council.

2. To provide the opportunity for all regional communities to participate in all Council task forces and committees

All the towns in the Mt. Washington Valley region participate in MWVEC committees and subcommittees. After one of the outreach meetings, a woman from Chatham who has marketing experience decided to participate in MWVEC activities because she was so impressed with the group's work. (12)

(12) Personal conversation with Dave Sorensen (October 17, 1995).

3. To brief annually all Boards of Selectmen on the progress of the Economic Council

A day-long workshop will be conducted in April, 1996 with Richard Gsottschneider of RKG Associates in Durham. RKG is an economic development firm.

A newsletter is being considered.

- B. To encourage a standardized regional computer-generated mapping system
 1. To ensure the mapping system be flexible and permit changes and amendments on a periodic bases

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) maps have been produced. MWVEC provided \$500 from the Ford/NH foundation grant to help pay for these maps. Dave Sorensen has presented all twelve towns with their maps at local meetings. (13)

2. To maintain the region wide Zoning Plan, Land Use Plan, and Alternative Transportation

The Federal Housing Administration provided approximately \$3,700 to create these maps to be used for zoning and land use management purposes.

IV. To develop and promote the image of the Mt. Washington Valley as a region of environmentally sensitive and compatible communities

Objectives and Action Steps:

- A. Place specific emphasis on those activities that best protect the greatest strength of the Valley – the natural environment. Work to demonstrate that our communities can maintain their economic vitality without exploiting the environment.
 1. To work with existing businesses to make them more economically and environmentally sound

The Stitchers Project is an example of real partnerships and cooperation. The idea came from discussions with local businesspeople who mentioned to MWVEC that they had to hire out-of-region stitchers to keep up with demands for their

environmentally friendly outdoor clothing products (The fleece material is made from recycled plastic bottles). MWVEC decided to invest in this project in order to support local business people, generate jobs from local people, and help the environment.

The project brings together many resources from many different places. The Ford/NH foundation grant was used to buy three stitching machines (total cost of \$6,500). MWVEC worked with faculty at the Regional Vocational Adult Education Program at Kennett High School and with the Outdoor Goods Manufacturers to develop a training program and to train students. Approximately 50 hours of hands-on training was given. The tuition cost was \$150 per student. The Vocational School provided the liability insurance, administration of the course, selection of the instructor (from Ragged Mountain) (photo of outside of Ragged Mountain), and responsibility for the equipment. Manufacturers provided three machines, materials, funds, and a course curriculum. The facility used was the Pine Tree Community Center donated by the Town of Conway officials.

The first class was held on May 22, 1995. Five students (three men and two women) were trained. Three of these people were hired by local industries (photo of stitchers). One person was hired in another manufacturing job and one person choose to leave the state.

MWVEC had some difficulty finding more students for its next course. So, the group decided to turn over the program to the businesses and let them find candidates. This shift has produced...(fill in)

2. To encourage and support new businesses that are compatible with the economic and economic and environmental goals.

MWVEC was recently approved by the Selectmen of Conway to administer its revolving loan program. The town had been awarded community block grant funds (\$100,000) from the N.H. Office of State Planning. With the state's encouragement, MWVEC (a regional entity) will be responsible for administering the funds. Once initial loans are repaid, a revolving loan fund will be established. In proving its eligibility, WMVEC was required to generate \$500,000 in additional local dollars for revolving loan projects. Three local banks each provided a letter of intent for \$1 million.

There is a possibility that some funds for this revolving loan program will enable MWVEC to pay for administration of the program.

3. To encourage energy efficiency and compatibility within the region

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency awarded a grant of \$40,000 to the New Hampshire Audubon Society in partnership with the Council to promote

efficient lighting for small businesses and public buildings in the Valley. Three demonstration sites were selected in Conway – the town library (photo of library), town's hall, and a bookstore. The cost of retrofitting the library is in the town's 1996 budget.

- B. To encourage planning and support programs that underscore the image and heritage of the Mt. Washington Valley as a highly desirable place to work and live.
 - 1. To work with the tourism industry to create viable employment

The Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council's Task Force sent out a Vision 2010 Attitude Survey. The return rate was 38%. The Task Force is now developing guidelines on the impact of future development to the image and the economy of the region

- 2. To encourage a public perception that tourism is a desirable economic base and support of employment

MWVEC is interested in doing marketing campaigns, but has not yet done so.

- 3. To work with the Chamber of Commerce and municipal officials to protect and enhance the history and character of the region.

Two of the area chamber of commerce directors (i.e. Ossipee and Mt. Washington Valley) are on the Council's Board of Directors. A marketing survey with the chamber is being conducted to learn where people are coming from, how long they stay, how many in the party, etc.

- C. Foster positive partnerships with environmental advocates and organizations
 - 1. To encourage the stewardship ethic regarding our natural environment

Several representatives of environmental organization are actively involved in MWVEC's decision-making process and committees. Dick Henry, until recently, was staff at the N.H. Audubon Society and on the Council's Board of Directors and Executive Committee. He now works for the N.H. Charitable Foundation. Peter Benson from the Nature Conservancy and Joel Rhymer from Tim Mountain (an environmental educational facility) are ex-officio members, Appalachian Mountain Club Director Walter Graff is also an ex-officio member.

- V. To support education, training, health care, housing and related social services as key components for the Valley's economic and social development.**

Objectives and Action Steps:

- A. Increase/improve communication with elected officials and professional staffs of the educational institutions affecting the area
 - 1. Meet, as necessary, with school boards and professional staff of the public school systems providing secondary and vocational education for the area

Harry Benson, Superintendent of Schools, is on MWVEC's Board of Directors. He was instrumental in establishing the stitchers project at the high school. (14)

- 2. Meet, as necessary, with the curriculum coordinators at the University of New Hampshire's College of Lifelong Learning and other post-secondary

Gail Paine from UNH College of Lifelong Learning is a member of the Board of Directors.

- B. Work with North Country Council annually to conduct the Mt Washington Valley component of the North Country Business Conditions Survey to determine the needs and requirements of area businesses and to gain an understanding of the overall economic conditions of the Valley

- 1. Review the NCC questionnaire in September
- 2. Review the mailing list
- 3. Conduct a public education and local follow-up effort to encourage business to complete and return the surveys
- 4. Review compilation of data and frame questions for more in-depth analysis, as needed.

None of these tasks have been performed as yet.

- C. Coordinate, as necessary, with the Memorial Hospital and other health care providers with respect to health care opportunities for all Valley residents

The Education Committee is working with Memorial Hospital on a survey concerning health care coverage for employees of all valley businesses.

(14) Personal conversation with Dave Sorensen (October 17, 1995).

D. Identify the Council's role in coordinating efforts of non-profit agencies in meeting the needs of our citizens

The Education Committee is investigating use of Channel 3 (local cable) to cover public events and Council meetings.

VI. To provide an accountable and effective system to achieve and measure the mission, goals, and objectives of the Council

Objectives and Action Steps:

A. The Board of Directors is responsible for implementing the Strategic Plan of the Council and involving the communities and citizens of the region

The MWVEC Mission Statement was revised over a four to five month period and completed in the fall of 1994. A brochure describing the Council, which includes the mission statement, is available and has been distributed throughout the region.

B. Fund the administrative needs of the Council

Administrative costs are covered, in part, by memberships and private donations. Communities will be asked at their upcoming 1996 town meetings to provide financial support to the Council.

MWVEC used \$5,000 in its first phase Ford/NH foundation grant for administrative purposes. A significant percent (up to 60%) of Dave Sorensen's time for MWVEC activities is paid by his place of employment, the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension Service.

MWVEC currently pays the Conway Chamber of Commerce \$50 per month to rent space and \$50 per month to use equipment. Donated space from a local bank is being sought. Grants are being written for computer, printer, and software packages.

Community Building Drawbacks and Stumbling Blocks

Because of this community's regional orientation, a difficulty is overcoming people's tendencies to focus at town level. This project is fostering inter-community discussions and actions. For example, the multi-use transportation corridor project has an added benefit of linking towns to each other physically and emotionally. The pathway will enable people to move more easily from town-to-town. Even the planning discussions have raised issues which cut across community boundaries, e.g. where should the pathway be located, how can people visiting and shopping in one town get to another one.

There is also still a perception that one town, Conway, dominates the others. One of the reasons which Dave Sorensen presented for possible by-law changes for the Council is to encourage greater involvement by people from other towns in the region. He lives in Conway, but the other officers do not.

Another challenge has been and will continue to be re-orienting thinking and actions around “community sustainability” or “community betterment”. Because of the selection of the Mt Washington Valley Economic Council by Tom Deans at the N.H. Charitable Foundation as the vehicle for the sustainable community project, there was already an economic-orientation. The group consciously sought to redefine the type of economic development desired to be more community-based and to bring in environmental and social values and interests. As Steve Knox, the Vice President, said: (We are) “intrigued with how to grow the economy compatible with the environment”. (15)

This shift will take time and is not easy. The core thrust of this project is still economic development, though aimed at regional and community improvements. Environment, social well-being, and democracy-building are related aspects, but are not separate entry points.

Special Qualities of this Community Building Project

The Mt. Washington Valley project is fortunate to have a major player like Tom Deans to bring in additional resources, promote publicity, and participate directly in the project’s activities. Mr. Dean was formerly executive director of the Appalachian Mountain Club and is now Vice President of the N.H. Charitable Foundation and President of the Northern New Hampshire Foundation. Moreover, as a consummate net- worker, he is closely tied to other environmental foundations across the United States and to groups such as the President’s Council on Sustainable Development (PCSD).

Through his efforts, this project has benefited greatly. For example, Dave Sorensen participated in a nationally televised teleconference in September, 1995 on sustainable communities sponsored by the U.S. Commerce Department and other organizations. The invitation came about because of Mr. Deans’ connections with people like Molly Hariss Olson, PCSD’s Director. In another way, Mr. Dean has made a difference – because he is a local resident and an environmentalist, he had the trust of people sufficiently to draw them “to the table”. Getting active participation from environmentalists has taken concerted effort by Mr. Deans.

Perhaps because of MWVEC’s economic orientation and/or the management style of Cynthia Hall, the immediate past president, and of David Sorensen, the current president, this project is run “more like an effective business”. A strategic plan was created, with a mission statement, goals, objectives, and action steps. Everyone knows the “game plan” and it is the basis for investments.

The organization is a strong center which reaches into the member communities. Yet, MWVEC is not set apart from communities since all officers and committee and subcommittee members live, work, and are committed to the Mt. Washington Valley region. As several commented, they choose to live there and want to stay. (16)

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(16) Personal conversations with various Board Members (October, 1995).

COBSCOOK BAY, MAINE
A Community in a Regional Context

By Elizabeth Kline
January, 1996

“Across virtually every dimension of our society—from the classroom to the community, from the workplace to city hall—Americans are giving shape to a profound new understanding of the role of everyday people in solving public problems.” (1)

Community Setting

“The waters of the Atlantic Ocean converge in Cobscook Bay, a small but significant marine ecosystem in Eastern Maine. Located just south and west of Passamaquoddy and Fundy Bays, which link Maine to New Brunswick, Canada, the Bay is formed by many smaller bays and estuaries, fed by the Dennys, Orange, and Pennamaquan Rivers. The Cobscook Bay area comprises the eastern most area of Washington County.

A total of nine communities are situated on the rim of the Bay: Eastport, Pleasant Point, Perry, Pembroke, Dennysville, Edmunds, Whiting, Trescott, and Lubec. Of these, the largest towns, Lubec and Eastport, are separated by about two miles across the Bay, and about 40 miles by land. West Quoddy Head in Lubec is the easternmost point of land in the continental United States.” (2) (photo of Lubec sign)

These communities have a long history of economic dependence upon the natural resources. Fishing, clamming, tipping, blueberry harvesting and forestry have historically been the main source of income for area residents. “Fish (is) harvested from the Bay, wild blueberries harvested from the hundreds of acres of fields in the area (photo), forest products, including logs, pulpwood and evergreen wreaths (are harvested), and tourism (is encouraged). (3)

Historically, 45-60% of all clams harvested annually in Maine came from the clam flats of Washington and Hancock Counties. But in 1992, only 23% of clams by weight originated in these counties. From 1982-92 the harvest dropped from 4.6 million to 500,000 pounds. This represents a drop in dollar value from about \$7 million to about \$1.3 million or a loss of \$5.7 million annually to a local economy. In the same period, commercial shell fish licenses dropped from 2,200 to 410, a loss of 1,800 from that industry. (4)

(1) Frances Moore Lappe and Paul Martin DuBois, The Quickening of America, p.3

(2) “New Directions: Charting a Course for a Sustainable Community on Cobscook Bay, Maine” (revised January, 1995; July, 1995), p.3

(3) Ibid, p.3

(4) Hand-out (undated) produced by Will Hopkins, Coordinator of the Cobscook Bay Clam Restoration Project.

In the early 1800's, Eastport was second only to New York City in having the busiest harbor. There were once twenty-four sardine packing plants in Eastport and Lubec. Today, there is only one. Salmon aquaculture, fishing, and sea urchin harvesting are significant sources of income, but the largest employers are in public fields and light manufacturing. The Peacock Canning Company has a sea urchin nursery and sardine factory. (photo of this company)

Eastport has a deep sea port, primarily an export service for Georgia Pacific Corporation, which is increasing its significance as it begins to diversify its export client base. Eastport will benefit from a state transportation bond which will fund a second deep water port to accommodate larger ships. A new marina is being built in Lubec near the old American Can Company building which was demolished. (photo of marina site)

The coast of Washington County is filled with scenic bays and harbors and contains some of the most productive and cleanest coastal estuaries in the Gulf of Maine. Inland, the county is dotted with lakes, scenic rivers, forest lands, blueberry barrens and cranberry bogs. (5) Many families in the Cobscook region have lived there for generations. A total of approximately 7,000 rugged, independent-minded, and resourceful people live around the Bay. Eastport is the largest town with 1,965 people. Lubec has 1,853 people and Dennysville, the smallest town, has a population of 355. (6) The fastest growing community is Pleasant Point.

“The lack of significant economic development, combined with resulting long-term reliance on government entitlement programs, threatens all the qualities the people here wish to maintain: their livelihoods, their...natural environment, their communities, their educational systems.” (7)

Community Building Focus

The Cobscook Bay sustainable community project, like its New Hampshire counterpart in the Mt. Washington Valley area, is developing a sense of community based on a regional identity. Although quite independent-minded, people who live and work in and around Cobscook Bay understand and value their historical, present, and future connections to a larger context – the Bay as a common resource and the land-based set of communities which hug the Bay. A visitor is quick to be told that a trip between Eastport and Lubec is minutes by boat, but more than an hour by car. (8)

(5) Ibid, p.3

(6) Ibid, p.3

(7) Ibid, p.4

(8) Personal conversations with participants of the Sustainable Cobscook Project (October 22 and 23, 1995).

The terms “sustainable” and “community” are woven into people’s lives by virtue of their husbanding of environmental resources, their cultural heritage and quality of life, their dependence on others to get through tough times, and the constant reminders of limited economic opportunities. Some may want to go it alone, but most realize the need to band together.

This is also a story of individuals and groups sorting out their differences, acknowledging their diverse strengths, and building a collective sense of community to enable them to hang on to their cherished rural values and to remain for many more years in the places where they and their ancestors grew up.

Creating a satisfying quality of life in rural poverty is challenging. “Statistically, Lubec’s a mess. Household income – about \$14,000 – is half of the state mean. Annual unemployment swings between 16 and 7 percent, almost always at least twice the state average. ..Tax delinquencies and liens take up six pages of the town report. One-fifth of the homeowners can’t pay their sewer bills or won’t hook up to the new system. Only two remnants of the town’s sardine empire survive, one still an active cannery, the other a processor of farmed salmon. Thirty-two babies were born here in 1993, the last year for which the state has added everything up. Fourteen were to unwed mothers, seven to teenagers.” (9)

With all this adversity, a person might give up and move away. Instead, the words of Harry Vose, an ex-Senator, are spoken: “If something is impossible, it just means that it will take a little longer.” (10)

Community Building Process

The Cobscook sustainable community project began in September, 1993 with technical assistance and coordination provided by Dianne Tilton from the Sunrise County Economic Council, a regional organization serving Washington County, Maine and with help from the Maine Community Foundation/Ford Foundation, and the Maine Development Foundation.

Marion Kane from the Maine Community Foundation chose to target foundation sustainable community project funds in the Cobscook region because of the Bay’s biological diversity and importance and because of Lubec Chamber of Commerce’s 2001 project (i.e. visioning and planning effort to improve the town). “A local ad-hoc steering committee (called the “Sustainable Cobscook” group) met regularly during the first several months of the project in order to plan public participation, and to educate themselves on the concept of sustainable economic and community development. Public meetings were held to determine commonly held values in the community, and from that input, four core categories of values were identified: Economy, Community/Cooperation, Environment, and Education.

(9) Bangor Daily News, September 16-17, 1995, p.1

(10) Personal conversation with Betty Chase, Lubec economic development person (October 23, 1995).

The committee then drafted a list of indicators that could be used to measure the condition of those values, and began to identify key projects that...promote those values. Projects discussed include alternative high school programs, clam management and research, coordination of community efforts, and others, all of which integrate the four identified value components in their planning.” (11)

Out of this informal group evolved the “Sustainable Cobscook Community Alliance”. This entity’s mission is to “promote the present and future health of the region’s economy, environment, and communities by developing a widely accepted, long-term vision for the future of the Cobscook Bay region that acknowledges the essential link between economic prosperity and environmental quality, by promoting economic development that will meet the needs of current residents without sacrificing the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, by promoting actions by both public and private sectors that maintain or enhance the quality of all the region’s resources, by undertaking social, cultural, and educational projects that will promote regional cooperation, and enhance a sense of community, and an understanding of our place in the world and in history among the residents of the region, and by measuring and reporting on the progress made toward making the community’s vision for itself a reality.” (12)

Four key goals were identified by the group: 1. educate themselves on the concept of “sustainable economic and community development”; 2. determine the community’s core values; 3. measure the condition of those values; and 4. promote the core values. (13)

Agreeing on the mission and goals was a relatively easy, especially as compared with their implementation. Two pathways have been taken, sometimes chronologically and now in parallel. The first focuses on a few priority projects, e.g. the Cobscook Clam Restoration Project and several economic development efforts. The second is more open-ended, searching for grass-roots meaning and involvement.

The first pathway is led by Will Hopkins (clam project) and Dianne Tilton (economic development projects). Both have emerged as “leaders” in the Cobscook Bay region, eager and capable of taking initiatives and producing tangible results. (14) Dianne Tilton serves as an ex-officio member of the newly revised (September 22, 1995) Sustainable Cobscook Community Alliance, Inc. and Will Hopkins remains as the coordinator of the clam project which is a part of the Alliance’s environmental agenda.

The second pathway is really just getting going. Although many of the thirteen Board of Directors elected on September 22, 1995 have been involved in the Cobscook sustainable community project from its beginning, they have distanced themselves from both Will Hopkins

(11) “New Directions: Charting a Course for a Sustainable Community on Cobscook Bay, Maine”, Abstract.

(12) Ibid, p. 2.

(13) Ibid, p. 2.

(14) Personal conversation with Marion Kane, Maine Community Foundation (October 24, 1995).

and Dianne Tilton and are charting out new territory which they see as drawing on the experience of “grass-roots” people. (15) (photo of some board members)

The Board members are:

Paul Crandall	Lubec
Marilyn Ness	Lubec
Bobby Lehigh	Eastport
Anne McGhie	
Charlie Lewis	Eastport
John Pike Grady	Eastport
Henry Merrill	
Chet Childs	Lubec
Ron Kilby	Edmunds
Nancy Nielsen	Whiting
Jim Bezanson	Lubec
Fred Hartman	Whiting
George Lehigh	Eastport
Will Hopkins	Eastport

Ex-officio members are:

Marion Kane	Maine Community Foundation
Jim Dow	The Nature Conservancy
Rick Scribner	University of Maine at Machias
Dianne Tilton	Sunrise Economic Development Council
Nate Pennel	Soil Conservation Service

Community Building Results

In the early of the sustainable community project, the local Sustainable Cobscook steering committee invited regional experts to their meetings to educate themselves about the concept of “sustainability” and to increase their understanding of how to improve economic opportunities in the region without compromising its environmental integrity. Speakers included Stewart Smith from the University of Maine on sustainable agriculture; representatives from the St. Croix Estuary project; Brian Beal from the University of Maine at Machias on restoring clam beds; and representatives from the College of the Atlantic on using the GIS mapping systems to develop and coordinate information on the region’s resources.

(15) Personal conversations with several Board of Directors at the Whiting Town Hall (October 23, 1995).

Public meetings were then held by this steering committee during the fall and winter of 1993 to find out what people cared most about. Four core values were identified: Economy, Community/Cooperation, Environment, and Education.

A list of indicators that could be used to measure progress and guide project development was drafted. The steering committee's Economic Development Action Team enlisted the help of a senior (Andrea Perry) from the College of the Atlantic to produce information documenting economic baseline data and comparisons between the Cobscook Bay area and Washington County and between the area and the state of Maine. "Sustainable Cobscook Community Alliance: Indicator Analysis" by Andrea Perry presents and analyzes indicators of sustainability in the Cobscook Bay community.

At this point, the group decided to become more of an entity. Thus, The Sustainable Cobscook Community Alliance was formed to facilitate the translation of ideas into actions. Each of the four core values are being addressed through specific projects:

Environment

The Cobscook Bay Clam Restoration Project (initially called the "Clam Restoration and Management Project") was launched by Will Hopkins. This project was originally conceived in the early days of the Sustainable Cobscook Project, but has since been spun off as a free-standing project. Links are maintained with the Sustainable Cobscook Community Alliance given Will Hopkins' role as chair on the group's Environmental Working Group.

The Clam Restoration Project calls for: (16)

1. "Local and Regional Management: Encouraging a regional approach to clam management by assisting local clam committees in towns that have them, by creating a regional management network with participants from each town around the Bay, by coordinating results of water tests and clam population surveys, by exchanging information with clammers from other places on the Maine coast and by publishing a Cobscook Bay Clam Newsletter."
"
2. "Water Sampling: Getting more flats opened by continuing to coordinate water sampling and analysis with the Department of Marine Resources and the Partners in Monitoring program which has set up a water quality laboratory at Shead High School in Eastport."
3. "Shoreline Survey: Continuing cooperation with the DMR in developing a shoreline survey program to monitor point-source pollution around the Bay, and work with municipalities to obtain funding to remove straight pipe sewage outlets and remedy leading septic systems."
4. "Re-seeding: Proving more seed clams and further training in stock enhancement and conservation techniques from the Beals Island Regional Shellfish Hatchery."
5. "Clam Farming: Exploring the economic, scientific, and legal issues surrounding private leasing of clam flats and public aquaculture opportunities, and the establishment of demonstration clam farms."

6. "Research: Cooperating with scientific researchers on solving problems of the overgrowth of clam flats by an aggressive species of green algae, declining growth rates of clams, predation control, etc. and on establishing baseline data for Cobscook Bay."

7. "Marine Resource Education: Working with a team of local teachers and environmental education specialists to produce curriculum recommendations for marine resources education in area schools and provide curriculum development materials and initial staff training."

Major highlights of results to date are described in another hand-out produced by Will Hopkins. Accomplishments include:

- ◆ **Stock enhancement and conservation efforts:** 200,000 seed clams from the Beals Island Regional Shellfish Hatchery have been planted on the flats in eight locations around the Bay. (photo of a site). More than 30 people were directly involved in planting these juvenile clams, in addition to several dozen student observers. The seed clams are protected by predator nets and are monitored monthly for survival and growth rates. This technology transfer from laboratory and hatchery to the flats is designed to prepare researchers and clambers for planting more than a million seed clams in the spring of 1996.

A Shellfish Conservation Committee and conservation ordinance was approved by the Town of Perry through the efforts of the Maine Department of Marine Resources area biologist, representatives of the Clam Project, local clambers, and citizens. Perry had been without any local conservation effort for over ten years. The final vote at a special town meeting was 59-5 in support of the ordinance.

- ◆ **Water Quality Monitoring:** An agreement with the Maine Shore Stewards Trust to create a partnership of the Clam Project and the Shead High School Science Department in Eastport has resulted in establishing a water quality laboratory at the high school. (photo of class) Thirty one students and twelve adults received training this spring in water quality monitoring and testing techniques from the University of Maine Cooperative Extension program. The water quality program is an integral part of the Marine Resource class.

Fourteen former or potential clamming sites are now being sampled on a bi-weekly basis by the Clam Project according to DMR-approved procedures. The samples are transported to the DMR Water Quality laboratory in Lamoine and tested there by DMR personnel. Sample results will be used to consider opening flats, to target polluted areas for cleanup and as a baseline with which to compare sampling results from the high school lab.

- ◆ **Shoreline Survey and Septic System Improvements:** As a result of meetings with representatives of the towns, the Maine Department of Environmental Protection and the Clam Project, the DEP has committed \$26,280 for Pembroke in 1995 to replace septic systems that pollute and close clam flats. Efforts continue to obtain funds for use in Perry and Eastport.

Americorps volunteers, local citizens, and the Clam Project student intern have compiled listings of shorefront owners back 500 feet from the shore to be entered into a database of the Department of Marine Resources in preparation for surveying the shores of Cobscook Bay for pollution sources. DMR personnel and DMR certified volunteers will conduct the survey in late 1995 and 1996. Results of the survey will be used by DEP, DMR, and the towns to target septic systems to be replaced in 1996.

- ◆ **Marine Resources Education:** “ Teachers and administrators from around Cobscook Bay have formed a Marine Resources Education Committee to develop and document innovative approaches to marine resource education. The group will distribute curriculum materials based on the efforts of Mike Tuckett at Shead High School and Rose Binda and Marty Mahar at Lubec Consolidated School. The group is also exploring ‘articulation agreements’ between local high schools and the Washington County Technical College under which high school students will receive credits at the Technical College as they demonstrate proficiency in given skills. In addition, an Apprenticeship in Marine Resources or Mariculture is being considered.”

Will Hopkins has been extremely successful in attracting financial and technical resources for the Clam Restoration Project. The Maine Chapter/Nature Conservancy provided \$5,000 for proposal writing time and Jim Dow, the Down East representative, has played a “huge role” (17) He attends most meetings; was on the steering committee and is now an ex-officio member of the Board of the Sustainable Cobscook Community Alliance; “he came through with wording for the mission statement and interim bylaws; and did not try to impose his own agenda.” (18)

The Ford Foundation funds(\$2,600 from the Environmental Working Group and \$300 from the Community/Cooperation Committee) were used to purchase the computer system for the Shead High School in Eastport. The funds are for the Partners in Monitoring water quality project and for the Shead Science Department. In addition, \$3,000 from the Shore Stewards Trust (also a part of the Maine Community Trust) was received for water quality monitoring equipment.

In conjunction with the Beals Island Regional Shellfish hatchery, the Environmental Working Group of the Sustainable Cobscook Community Alliance provided \$500 of its Ford grant for materials to protect seed clam flats in each of the nine towns around the Bay and to pay for travel expenses of Dr. Brian Beal. The hatchery donated 200,000 seed clams which is equivalent in value to \$400.

(17) Personal conversation with Will Hopkins (October 22, 1995).

(18) Ibid.

The Environmental Working Group also provided \$1,645 to develop recycling education materials to be used in classrooms in the Cobscook Bay community. All the research has been completed and books for all 12 grades are in print. The author is the person responsible for Lubec's recycling program.

Two large grants were also awarded: \$20,000 from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and \$25,000 from the Jessie B. Cox Charitable Trust.

Economic Development

The Economic Development Action Team of the Sustainable Cobscook Community Alliance has been equally productive. Under the leadership of Diane Tilton, the group has:

- ◆ **provided micro-business lending.** The Eastern Maine Development Corporation, through the city of Eastport, applied for and received a \$150,000 Maine Community Development Block Grant for a Cobscook Microloan Program. Loans of less than \$25,000 will be distributed to finance small business development in the area. One criterion for loan awards will be adherence to sustainable development principles. The interest from loan repayments must be used for regional activities.

The team is developing a relationship with Working Capital, a peer lending micro-enterprise loan program, to provide services and will provide a few hundred dollars to a local person to help generate candidates for the training and loans. (19)

- ◆ **begun rebuilding downtown Lubec.** Over a year ago, the Office of Tourism came to Dianne Tilton in her capacity as executive director of the Sunrise County Economic Development Council to create a museum in a vacant downtown building in Lubec. Working with people in the Sustainable Cobscook Community Alliance, she realized that the project had to be more multi-purpose in order to entice investors and tourists. A new local group called the "Lubec Landmarks, Inc." has been created to guide restoration and development of a smoke house, museum, and other tourist-related activities.

This creative idea is being implemented. The Economic Development Action Team endorsed the scheme. The Lubec Landmarks, Inc. group generated 30 letters of support from local business people and the Selectmen voted to approve the project.

The local chamber of commerce has made this project its number one priority. A total of \$12,000 have been invested (\$4,000 by the Office of Tourism; \$1,000 from the Economic Development Action Team; and \$7,000 from other sources) so far. The Trust for Public Land has purchased the buildings. (20) (photos of these buildings)

(19) Personal conversation with Dianne Tilton (October 23, 1995).

(20) Ibid.

- ◆ **proposed the Quoddy Maritime Museum.** Some local people approached the Economic Development Action Team with an idea to restore a run-down block of buildings in downtown Eastport and create a museum “hub” (i.e. a multi-community network of cultural, historical, and ecological sites). The team’s response was to encourage more direct linkages with jobs creation; a grant of \$1,200 was provided as seed money to evolve the concept further.
- ◆ **encouraged cranberry production.** The Economic Development Action Team provided \$2,000 to hire a person from the Eastern Maine Development Corporation to write a grant to help fishermen transition into cranberry growers. A grant of \$32,000 for outreach was leveraged through this effort.
- ◆ **sought to restore the ice house.** When a local Lubec ice-making house went bankrupt, the Economic Development Action Team provided \$700 to help reopen it. The funds used for advertising to solicit an entrepreneur willing to manage and own the only ice-making facility in Lubec. This facility is vital to the fishing and aquaculture industries. Unfortunately, no suitable person was found. The building has since been moved to another locale.

Aquaculture, especially salmon pens, are an increasing industry in Cobscook Bay. (photo of pens) “An economic mainstay in Lubec and other Down East towns, aquaculture employs some 500 people in Maine and is mentioned frequently as a possible alternative for commercial fisherman whose livelihood is in jeopardy.” (21)

Community/Cooperation

People on this committee are particularly concerned about improving the quality of life of people in the Cobscook Bay region. One of the first actions taken was a questionnaire to discover people’s key concerns (e.g. loss of a sense of community, fears of higher taxes, failure of the school systems). The newly reconstituted Sustainable Cobscook Community Alliance Board members are discussing potential responses to these concerns. Some feel strongly that maintaining the high schools in Eastport and Lubec (rather than creating a regional high school) is important for building a sense of place and belonging. Therefore, they are discussing ways to share teachers between the schools, support Pembroke’s documentation of its town history, and help deal with problems of alcoholism, drugs, incest, and violence. (22) No firm projects have yet been agreed on, but the desire is to respond to the issues which local people articulate as important to them.

(21) Associated Press article (undated, no source).

(22) Personal conversations with newly elected board members (October 23, 1995).

Another project is to develop better and faster transportation connections between Eastport and Lubec through a ferry service. A grant of \$1,000 has been given by the Community/Cooperation Committee and an additional \$5,000 has been set aside for maintenance and operation of a boat. A six person boat has been donated and has been brought to the Marine Technology Center. This boat will be used by the Lubec harbor Master.

The Committee agreed to support a third project – to study the electric communication needs and resources of the Cobscook Bay area and to provide materials and funding for a planning phase to improve telecommunications. A grant was written in partnership with the Lubec Medical Center to get access to the internet. No decision has been made as yet.

The Quoddy Spill Prevention Project also received some support, through technical assistance, from participants of Sustainable Cobscook Bay. Staff of the Maine Community Foundation, the Nature Conservancy/Maine, and Will Hopkins helped a group of volunteers so that they could be trained to act during emergencies in order to protect the aquaculture pens and the marine resources of the Bay. Oil spill containment equipment is now available in Eastport and training is underway.

Education

The Education Committee is involved in several projects:

◆ Alternative High School

The Sustainable Cobscook Community Alliance endorsed a local effort to establish a special high school targeted at 14-18 year old students at risk of dropping out of traditional high school. The alternative high school program may prove not feasible because of changes in administrative leadership in the local school district, the large cost of undertaking such a program, and the need to raise significant outside start-up funds. The Alliance contributed \$1,000 in planning funds.

◆ Adult Literacy

A few hundred dollars were provided to support attendance in an adult literacy conference in the summer of 1995 by three local adult literacy teachers (one each from Eastport, Lubec, and Pleasant Point).

Environmental Education

The Education Committee supported a project in which a local specialist in computer animation, Herrick Johnson, works with students to create a visual record illustrating how animals in tide pool at Pleasant Bay are interrelated. Funds for some equipment were provided.

Community Building Drawbacks and Stumbling Blocks

The Cobscook sustainable community project has suffered from a strategic decision by the Maine Community Foundation to award all the available first round funds

to the local organization at the beginning, as an effort to give the community an investment in, and control over, their project. Some time was lost by positioning of individuals who engaged in the process to enhance their own agendas and funding needs. However, once it was clear that funding priorities needed to be determined by the community at-large, then local control over funds worked to ensure greater ownership of the project.

Another difficulty that has emerged more in this project than in the other five is the tensions between many groups: the “transplants” versus the “home-grown” community leaders; younger versus older people; established versus emerging leaders; people from different parts of the Bay; people who live around the Bay versus those who live outside this area; and people who are comfortable working with female leadership and those who are not. Bringing these different factions together was facilitated through the help of Ron Beard from the University of Maine Cooperative Extension/Hancock County Office. From November 1994 until February 1995, he used his facilitation skills to guide discussions and create bridges. “He helped people recognize our divisions in such a way that we were able to deal with them rather than deny them.” (23)

A process of healing is underway. Overtures are being offered to link different factions together. Moreover, some of the most vocal critics are now taking responsibility for initiating projects. The Sustainable Cobscook Community Alliance group has adopted by-laws and elected new officers and a board of directors. Accountability is now placed on everyone. Board members are beginning to realize that they have some power and resources and, therefore, need to transition from opposition into management. (24)

Special Qualities of this Community Building Project

People in this project are confronting serious power struggles rather than ignoring them. Will Hopkins and Dianne Tilton have emerged as effective, hard-working, and dedicated leaders. Their projects are promoting a regional identity and improving the environmental, economic, social, and cultural quality of life of people living, working, and visiting the Cobscook Bay area. They are not engaging in confrontation tactics, but are instead, focusing on making a difference and working in parallel mostly and sometimes together with the other participants.

The newly elected board members are getting their act together, under the able leadership of Ron Kilby. They have adopted revised by-laws and elected officers. They seem to be moving from being outsiders to insiders. Because of their backgrounds, experiences, contacts, and roles in their communities (e.g. local officials, long-standing respected citizens), they may be able to touch the lives and hearts of their independent-minded peers. “I’m really excited. People are showing up at our meetings and wanting to get involved in this project.” (25)

(23) Telephone conversation with Will Hopkins (January 16, 1996).

(24) Personal conversation with board members (October 23, 1995).

(25) Telephone conversation with Ron Kilby (January 18, 1996).

Participants are pledged to promote the same mission statement, goals, and to further the same indicators of success. It will be interesting to evaluate progress a year from now and determine the degree to which they work in tandem or apart and whether they helped each other directly or indirectly address their common values and concerns.

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SUSTAIN WESTERN MAINE/GREATER FARMINGTON REGION
A Community which Connects

By Elizabeth Kline
January, 1996

“The characteristics of Western Maine most cherished by people living here are the natural beauty of this area, the friendliness of the people and the neighborly, welcoming quality of our rural small town society. People here value the simple life, a life in an unspoiled natural setting and in a community where cooperation rather than competition is the guiding principle.” (1)

Community Setting

“The western Maine mountains region consists of small typically New England towns with rolling hills,...working farms,...lakes, fertile river valleys and thick forests. Old traditions and nature’s ancient beauty merge gracefully with high tech industry, modern education and contemporary comforts. The rugged history of the land lends itself to an independent spirit in its people.” (2) In addition, recreation-based businesses and industries and light manufacturing form significant economic contributions to this region.

This large region is 12,020 square miles or almost 38% of the entire state. It comprises four counties: Oxford, Franklin, Somerset, and Piscataquis. All of Maine’s 50 highest mountains are in the region. The estimated 152,440 people living in this region in 1994 is a little more than 12% of the state’s total population. The area is growing slightly, with an increase of 1.6% since 1990, above the state growth rate of 1% during that same time period.

The primary economic activities of significance are forestry and agriculture, with the number of workers declining in both industries. (3) Outdoor recreation is increasing as an important economic activity.

This sustainable community project focuses on a portion of the western Maine region –Franklin County and adjacent towns. (photo of sign of Farmington) This region has a population of 40,000 and an area of 1,800 square miles. Its economic base, like the larger western Maine region, is in its use of natural resources. Lumbering, wood and paper products, tourism, farming, and some light manufacturing are the major industries.

(1) Vision statement for Sustain Western Maine.

(2) “A First Look: A Profile of Community Health in West Central Maine” is published by the Healthy Community Coalition in Farmington, Maine (December, 1994), p.4.

(3) Data supplied to Sustain Western Maine by Dr. Paul Frederic, Professor of Social Science and Business, University of Maine at Farmington (July 27, 1995).

The town of Farmington is the hub of this region.

(photo of downtown, Newberry’s store

At 6,000 people, it is the largest in the region. The University of Maine has a branch in Farmington. Franklin Memorial Hospital has 70 beds. Five local school districts are major service providers and cultural forces in the area, as well as being major employers. (4)

The average resident employment in Franklin County is \$13,230 (1994) and there is almost an 8% unemployment rate. (5)

Community Building Focus

Like the projects in Mt. Washington Valley, New Hampshire and Cobscook Bay, Maine, this one is trying to help create a regional identity. The mission of Western Mountains Alliance, the parent body for the Sustain Western Maine project, is to foster a political identity to accompany the geographical sense of place. (6)

However, this project is much more than that. It is also an example of a phase in community building that is beyond establishing such an identity. Sustain Western Maine is deeply involved in partnerships, collaborations, and mutually beneficial relationships with organizations and institutions outside of its own jurisdiction. Projects exemplify the interest and ability of participants to further their own mission and objectives through the results of others, not just through their own actions.

Community Building Process

In the fall of 1993 a group of “volunteers from different fields, including business, agriculture and education, came together to brainstorm what they could do for their community. They strove to identify those aspects of life in the Farmington area that are important to residents, as well as to come up with ways to maintain that way of life.” (7)

The group evolved a vision statement which seeks to “preserve our prime assets: the natural beauty and the social values that we hold dear. The vision for the future does depend on a sound economy, but not on enterprises that could put these assets at risk. And, finally, to become sustainable is to fulfill the needs of the current generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.” (8)

(4) “A First Look: A Profile of Community Health in West Central Maine”, Healthy Community Coalition, December, 1994), p. 4.

(5) Data supplied by Jeff Barum, Sustain Western Maine Steering Committee member (October 25, 1995).

(6) Personal conversation with Debbie Burd, staff for Sustain Western Maine (October 25, 1995).

(7) “Neighbors”, a Sun-Journal publication (January 12, 1995), p. 1.

(8) Adopted vision statement of Sustain Western Maine.

The mission statement, which drew on the group's vision, is: "To help the region to utilize its natural, human, and technological resources to ensure that all members of present and future generations can attain a high degree of health and well-being, economic security, and a say in shaping their future while maintaining the integrity of the ecological systems of which all life and production depends."

The group spent months thinking together, debating directions, and how to integrate issues (i.e. how does environment and economic development really fit together and how can people's lives be improved in that process). This group stayed focused on the definition of a sustainable community as the underlying foundation for all of its efforts – its vision statement, mission statement, and working committees are reflective of the group's belief that they are trying to create a community which has "economic security, ecological security, quality of life, and empowerment with responsibility." (9)

After several starts, Sustain Western Maine's Steering Committee decided on six "working committees" which now serve to host specific projects. The committees are: Economic Development, Environment, Infrastructure, Family Development Partnership, Education, and Health. The Steering Committee's role is to provide cross-committee connections as well as be responsible for planning, budgeting, communication/marketing, community assessment, project review and approval, recruitment, and evaluation. (10)

Sustain Western Maine has benefited from its links to its parent body, Western Mountains Alliance and vice versa. According to Debbie Burd, staff to both organizations, SWM has gained credibility, contacts, knowledge, and experience from its association. On the other hand, WMA has garnished funds, credibility, and a sharper sense of its own direction because of the tangible projects and visibility of SWM. (11)

There is, by design, some overlap in memberships of Western Mountains Alliance's Board of Directors and Sustain Western Maine's Steering Committee. Two of these individuals are extremely influential in both organizations: Warren Cook, President of Sugarloaf Mountain Corporation and the Sugarloaf Dorset Farm; Rev. Scott Planting. The others are: Robert Kimber, a writer and environmentalist and John Stowell, a large woodland owner and mill owner.

Additional Steering Committee members are:

Jeff Barnum	Woodsman and small businessman
Charlie Blood	Small landowner and woodbroker
David Olson	Director of the Mantor Library at the University of Maine at Farmington
Greg Gerritt	Green Party

(9) The writings and several face-to-face meetings with the author, Elizabeth Kline, influenced the group's selection of these four characteristics of a sustainable community.

(10) Chart summarizing the organizational structure (undated).

(11) Personal conversation with Debbie Burd (October 25, 1995).

Tracy Harty	Health Community Coalition
Valerie Huebner	Assistant to the President, University of Maine at Farmington
Russ Kaniuka	Retired environmental government educator and writer
Joyce Murphy	CAP Family Development Partnership
Janet Mills	Lawyer, former District Attorney
Gil Riley	Retired engineer
Doug Walrath	Retired minister and theologian
Debbie Burd	CHAIR

(photo of D. Burd in SWM Office)

This list illustrates the diversity of interests, experiences, skills, and backgrounds of members. Because they spent so much time getting to know each other and building an institutional framework, they seem to want to collaborate and help each other. (12)

Community Building Results

Each working committee has a set of goals which guides the choice of project topics and approaches.

Environment

The Environment Working Committee developed its own vision and mission statements. Their vision is “to encourage and promote natural resources use through practices that result in sound economic return while still protecting the integrity of the natural systems.” Their mission statement is: “The integrity of our region can best be served by promoting and educating its citizenry about ‘best practices’ that result in a sound economy and healthy environment. Our group can help coordinate (not duplicate) the efforts of existing agencies and groups. It can also serve in helping to identify specific community concerns through this educational process. Success depends on the ability to continually engage the community and translate their voices into action.”

The Environment Working Committee created another entity called the Foothills Lands and Waters Association. This group decided to raise awareness of local environmental concerns by hosting a large-scale fair. In October, 1994 and again in October, 1995 more than 400 people came to each day-long event held at the University of Maine at Farmington to talk with and see 20 exhibitors. The notion from the beginning was to encourage diverse displays and give any group with an environmental/natural resources interest an opportunity to showcase their materials. No judgment was made about the merits of any exhibitor.

This attitude helped create an inviting atmosphere. (13) As a result exhibitors included environmentalists, business, and government groups.

(12) Personal observation from attending two Steering Committee meetings.

(13) Personal conversation with Debbie Burd (October 24, 1995).

The Foothills Lands and Waters Association also conducted a survey of community concerns. Water quality emerged as the overwhelming priority. Given this concern, the Association joined with four other groups (i.e. Friends of Wilson Lake, Franklin County Soil and Water District, the University of Maine at Farmington, and the Mt. Blue High School) on water quality monitoring project. Eight high school students are being taught by Dan Buckley, a biology professor at the University. Sustain Western Maine paid for a display board highlighting its yearly activities, specifically the water quality project. A local photographer donated his services and SWM paid for the film and printing of photographs.

Dan Buckley described his personal excitement for this project by saying that he was once a high school teacher and is aware that the Mt. Blue High School needs additional resources. He is a believer in experiential learning. He noted that he was impressed with how well prepared the high school students are. (14)

Students offered their own reasons for choosing to become involved in this water quality monitoring project. "I was doing something good for someone...It makes science relevant...you learn. It's active. It's a hands-on experience." (15)

The Association is also interested in agriculture. The group wants to acquire a three to five acre portion of an old farm site in Farmington, now owned by the Water District (photo of site). The Water District's Business Manager is involved in the Foothills Lands and Water Association.

The idea is to use this land for community gardens and a farm stand. A volunteer architect completed plans in November. In late December the plans were reviewed by the water district. They gave SWM several months to explore possible funding sources for the project and to conduct a feasibility study. Ron Nissen of "The Windmill" Farm and Craft Market in Penn Yan, New York is meeting with the Pike Farm committee on March 4-6, 1996 to explore that kind of an enterprise. In addition, a graduate student at the University of Maine at Farmington has written a proposal to apply sustainable agricultural practices on the farm site and to develop a farmer's market. He wrote this proposal after observing SWM's Steering Committee for more than six months. (16)

In early December, 1995 a teacher from the Cascade Brook School (a 4,5,6 grade elementary school) approached SWM about its involvement in constructing a multi-use bike trail. The School District region includes eight towns. Sub-committees are being formed with teachers, students, and parents. SWM has acted as a resource of information and will become involved as the project becomes more defined. (17)

(14) Meeting at the high school (October 25, 1995).

(15) Ibid.

(16) Personal conversation with Debbie Burd (October 25, 1995).

(17) Written communication with Debbie Burd (January 15, 1996)

Economic Development

The Economic Development Working Committee chose three goals: to support existing businesses; to support new businesses; and to provide business education.

The major project of this committee focuses on peer lending. Van Perry, co-chair of the Economic Development Committee's Peer Lending Subcommittee, was trained by Working Capital and serves as the project's advisor. His employer, Key Bank, donated Mr. Perry's time (equivalent to \$800) in order for him to serve as the Enterprise Agent. (18)

In January, 1995 the first peer lending group (Franklin Trade Association) was established in Franklin. Four people received loans of \$500 each in February from Working Capital through its local affiliate, Women's Business Development Corporation. Funds were used for businesses dealing with computers, massage therapy, herbal and massage, and crafts. Each participant agreed to pay \$8 for six months as a dues to cover postage and supplies. All loans have been re-paid within the prescribed six month period and all participants have completed the required number of self-guided tutorials. Marie Pillsbury, a disabled artist on welfare, has been trained, received and repaid a loan and was elected president of the Franklin Trade Association. (19)

Two of the four entrepreneurs in the group are likely to borrow additional funds. Up to \$1000 can be loaned as long as the participants complete the next series of self-guided tutorials.

Additional funds for peer lending have been forthcoming. The People's Heritage Bank provided \$2400 and Western Mountains Alliance has given \$2400. The subcommittee applied for a three year grant of \$14,000 from the Maine Initiatives to enable three new peer lending groups to be established plus continue the existing one.

Two other agenda items which were developed by the Economic Development Working Committee of Sustain Western Maine have now been turned over to Western Mountains Alliance, the parent body. Two SWM committee members are working with the Alliance and another local economic developer to coordinate, on a regular basis, economic development organizations in the region.

The second project, a conference on value-added wood products, is being worked on by the Alliance. To gain some knowledge and understanding of what other places are doing Scott Planting, a member of both organization's boards attended a conference on this topic in Willapa Bay. In addition, a former executive of a large secondary wood products manufacturer and current consultant made a presentation to the Alliance as another step towards shaping the conference. This individual designed a data base for WMA/SWM that includes all links to the secondary, value-added market in Maine as well as other parts of the United States. (20)

(18) Personal conversation with Van Perry (October 24, 1995).

(19) Personal conversations with Van Perry and Marie Pillsbury (October 24, 1995).

(20) Written communication from Debbie Burd (January 15, 1996).

Education

The Education Working Committee has focused on two key projects. The first is public information and outreach. SWM, particularly Debbie Burd whose background is community organizing, plays a premium on visibility and education.

Brochures describing Sustain Western Maine were published and are updated. There is a speaker's bureau. In one year, Debbie Burd made fifteen speeches to groups such as the chamber of commerce, rotary club, garden club, and county-wide municipal officials.

In late May, 1993 the Western Mountains Alliance hosted a brainstorming meeting with citizens from across the greater Farmington region. Approximately 120 people attended. The intent of the meeting was to explore the concept of sustainability and begin to craft a vision for the community around issues of quality of life, the economy, and the environment. In February, 1994 another public forum was held and a vision and mission statement were created by the participants from the information obtained at the first meeting. The group divided into sub-committees to expand on the mission statement and to begin to design projects. The areas that were identified were health, infrastructure, environment, education, and economic development. On May 20, 1994 45 people gathered at the Cascade Brook School in Farmington for a report back to the larger community on the nature of possible projects and to seek volunteers.

On October 27, 1995 Debbie Burd participated in a live radio show which has a statewide audience. SWM provided several hundred dollars to help sponsor a telecommunications conference. (21) Four legislative forums were held in 1994 and 1995 on topics such as welfare, education, economic development to provide opportunities for public discussion with local government officials. An average of fifty people attended each one. In addition, SWM organized several legislative breakfasts. Up to 100 people have attended. The most recent one was held in November, 1995.

The other key project of this Committee is a Youth Rural Leaders Program. SWM is helping Randy Easter, a teacher at the Kingfield Elementary School, with a young people's leadership project. The children, parents, and teachers combine a school trip for eighth graders with leadership training. The focus for these children, most of whom have grown up together, is how to work together. This year the group went hiking on Mt. Katahdin (photo of kids on top of mountain) SWM paid for the bus so that all the people could travel together.

Lack of educational funds has led some parents to create a newsletter which SWM will help fund and distribute.

Infrastructure

This group sees the creation of a public access television station as a useful vehicle to help "the area economy to grow by spreading information about the area, assist in the educational training for those who want this opportunity, provide environmental information

(21) Personal conversations with Debbie Burd (October 24 and 25, 1995).

on vital issues and assist in delivering information to service providers”. (22) They understand how this tool can be, in the words of Scott Planting, “a truly community project run by members of the community, emphasizing community programming, empowering the community to open lines of communication and better the quality of life in western Maine.” (23)

In August, 1995 the Franklin Community Partnership, comprised of three organizations (i.e. Western Mountains Alliance, Franklin Community Health Network, and the Healthy Community Coalition) were awarded a three-year \$134,500 grant by the American Hospital Association to improve community health. SWM’s funds will be used to supplement the Ford/Maine Community foundation monies for an on-line bulletin board system. This is the first step towards a public access t.v. station. Some of the funds will also be used to contribute to the Youth Rural Leader’s Forum. (24)

SWM allocated \$6,950 of its foundation funds for this project. A contract has been signed with the Western Maine Community Action and WMA/SWM to house the public access system in available space owned by Community Action. The space will be shared with their Workforce Development Center. Support has been sought by SWM from the large surrounding towns because of their ability to negotiate with cable companies. Presentations have been made to municipal officials and their support was given without reservation. The bulletin board system should be in place by late February, 1996. (25)

The Infrastructure Committee also is involved in encouraging innovative and emerging technologies. They organized and hosted a Technology Fair on May 7, 1994 at the University of Maine at Farmington. Approximately 300 people attended. Sustain Western Maine co-sponsored a conference on November 9, 1995 held at the University of Maine at Orono on “Technology: Finding Strategies for a Sustainable Future.” Governor Angus King was a featured speaker. (26)

Health

The 100 Families Out of Poverty Project is a major project which involves people connected to SWM. It is a partnership between SWM, the regional Community Action Program (CAP), and a cooperative ministry (Mission of Eastwood). Rev. Scott Planting, a key SWM Steering Committee member, is Mission Coordinator.

(22) Sustain Western Maine’s purpose statement, quoted in the local newspaper (October 12, 1994).

(23) Ibid.

(24) Press background material from SWM (undated)

(25) Written communication from Debbie Burd (January 19, 1996).

(26) Conference brochure.

The goals of the project are: “challenge the community to help bring 100 families to Self-sufficiency in three years; develop more efficient and responsive methods of serving low income families; and evaluate the effectiveness of Family Development versus more traditional ways of serving families.” (27) The orientation is client-driven rather than service provider. A \$350,000 federal grant was received.

The project has 48 families enrolled (as of September 18, 1995); 34 in Franklin and 14 in Andoscoggin. The evaluation component is being performed by Dr. Joel King. A small sampling of results indicates that the average family size is 5.8 people. More than half of the families feel safe in areas of nutrition, adult education, transportation, and parenting. Their greatest concerns lie with employment, income/budget, shelter, health, and child care. (28)

Some of these families are being approached to join peer lending program to gain skills and start up to expand small businesses. In addition, funds to support the investigation and exploration of the parish nurse concept have been allocated by SWM. This investment will be used to leverage matching funds from other sources including local foundations and religious organizations. “A parish nurse is seen as a link between the faith community and the medical community. The parish nurse links the needs of the whole person with the resources of the church, hospital, and the community

Community Building Drawbacks and Stumbling Blocks

Sustain Western Maine members spent months and months trying to understand the concept of “sustainable community” and to advise an institutional structure. During this time some people who are more project-oriented got frustrated, though they seem to have returned once projects got organized. This circumstance raises the natural dichotomy between process and product. Some people are just more comfortable doing rather than thinking and others are more adept at the creative ideas but lack interest and skill in the follow-through. “It is difficult to get most people to think about the big picture; I don’t think this way.” (30)

Both types are essential, though community building steps could be designed consciously to draw on and appeal to specific kinds of people at specific phases. What has been demonstrated in this project is the importance of taking the time to figure out how topics interconnect and how project agendas can be interwoven. The resulting projects illustrate that each committee kept in mind and built in the interest of the other committees.

(27) Brochure published and distributed by Western Maine Community Action, with Sustain Western Maine and the Mission at the Eastwood (undated).

(28) Memorandum from Joyce Murphy, Project Coordinator to Sustain Western Maine Steering Committee (September 18, 1995).

(29) Written communication from Debbie Burd (January 19, 1996).

(30) Personal conversation with Charlie Blood, Steering Committee member (October 25, 1995).

Special Qualities of this Community Building Project

The most distinctive quality of this project is that the process and results flow from a conceptual and practical understanding of the concept of “sustainable community.” This group struggled – through discussions, debates, information and advice from outside speakers – to gain a firm grasp of this illusive concept before making decisions about structure. Even after committees were established, participants continued to talk about how the issues interconnected and how projects could be devised and evaluated to respond to these linkages. Moreover, at the end of 1995 the Steering Committee decided to meet twice per month every other month in order to focus on a cross-cutting topic. The first such meeting on education and economic development was held on November 14. The idea is to give sufficient time for broader information exchanges and learning, and to encourage non-members to join in the discussions.

As a result, the nature of the projects evolved to respond to multiple interests rather than follow the path of a particular topic area. For example, the public access t.v. station is designed to enable people to learn about and take individual and collective action around issues dealing with health, environment, and economic development.

A second consequence of sorting out the meaning of “sustainable community” was SWM’s ability to attract and partner with other organizations. Many of the Steering Committee members have links to and provide resources from these other institutions (e.g. Health Community Coalition, University of Maine at Farmington, CAP).

(photo of coalition people smiling)

Because of SWM’s inviting approach to others, people have come to them to create partnerships. For example, Bruce Hazard had an idea for several years to develop materials which further western Maine’s history, culture, and natural heritage. His Maine Mountain Counties Regional Heritage Program appeals to SWM’s parent body, the Western Mountains Alliance. That group decided to support this project and SWM has chosen to help raise funds for it. Specific products include a catalog of sources of information; a regional heritage guide of opportunities, activities, and resources; and a conference. Mr. Hazard is pleased to find support and encouragement through SWM and WMA. (31)

A third outcome of this approach is the group’s focus on sustainability indicators. Other communities such as Cobscook Bay generated a list of indicators and produced valuable data and information as reference points. SWM members, however, established a subcommittee to develop indicators appropriate both to the sustainability concept and to the western Maine region.

Led by Jeff Barnum, this group (which includes an environmentalist, a small woodlot owner, a district attorney, a forest industry representative, and a small business owner/woodsman), worked for several months. They began by identifying 16 values based on SWM’s Mission Statement and the ideas for that statement which were generated at a large public meeting. Then, they compared these values with the four characteristics of a “sustainable community” presented by Elizabeth Kline. Finally, they drafted their own set of indicators and sought feedback from the rest of the Steering Committee. The list has not yet been finalized,

(31) Personal conversation with Bruce Hazard (October 25, 1995).

but includes indicators such as: percent of posted acreage; value of agricultural land and manufactured goods sold locally; percent of community members who have sufficient resources to provide for their basic needs; percent of high school graduates remaining in the community; number of top businesses (employment) owned locally; number of floats or participants in local parades; number of people attending Maine Maple Sunday and Maine Farm Days; and number of traditional farms. (32)

Another distinctive quality is the integration of environment and economic development. This community building project even more so than the others is founded on the values of both perspectives. Objectives and projects are not just aimed at environmentally sound economic development. This group, especially embodied in Jeff Barnum and Debbie Burd, believes that “It’s not jobs versus the environment...because one doesn’t exist without the other.” (33) In the same news article which spotlighted Mr. Barnum for his recent “Environmental Hero” award from the Natural Resource Council of Maine he is quoted as saying that environmental organizations such as RESTORE The North Woods (a group based in Massachusetts that is proposing a North Woods National Park for Maine) “won’t gain public support because...its measures are too extreme. I think they are an environmental group that does not have a great deal of public support from the people that live in the area they would like to change.” (34) In contrast, SWM’s environmental values and advocacy comes from within the community and is sensitive to the views and needs of the community.

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(32) Personal conversation with and draft list supplied by Jeff Barnum (October 24, 1995)

(33) Quotation of Jeff Barnum in “Irregular” newspaper (October 18, 1995) , p. 1.

(34) Ibid, p.4.