UNIVERSITY of NEW HAMPSHIRE
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Ten Years of Community Profiles
in New Hampshire

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COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

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Photo by Ann Marie R. French.

Photo by Charlie French.

"It is people coming together and working towards common goals that reaps benefits for the wellness of a community as well as for the individual members of that community. The Community Profile is simply a process that fosters community wellness."

— Judith Bush, UNH Cooperative Extension (retired)

Introduction

Through a program called Community Profiles, the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension has helped 57 New Hampshire communities develop a vision for their future and mobilize local residents to act on that vision.

The Community Profile process is based on the premise that communities must engage members in identifying and documenting common and deeply held values from which to craft a vision for the future if they are to build and sustain community vitality. The process also helps communities find new and creative ways to pursue that vision by leveraging resources within and outside of the community. These resources include individual skills, local organizational capacity, and local, state, and regional institutional-support structures.

Since creating and pursuing a vision is a challenge for communities that often rely on volunteers, the Community Profiles program was conceived to help them achieve these functions. Community Profiles is, in essence, a process that enables community residents to take stock of current conditions, build a collective set of goals for their future, and develop an action plan for realizing that vision.

In the past 10 years, UNH Cooperative Extension has helped nearly a quarter of the state's incorporated cities and towns conduct Community Profiles. This retrospective shares with our stakeholders the various successes that communities have had as a result of the process.

This publication was inspired by stories emerging from Community Profiles conducted between 1996 and 2006 in 42 communities. The communities selected for this report were either particularly successful at carrying out the Community Profiles process, or they achieved positive outcomes as a result of the process. Through this report we will tell their stories and illustrate how these and other communities can work together to shape their future through persistence, creativity and teamwork.

Photo by Charlie French.

Photo by Jim Lambert.

Photo by Charlie French.

"The Civic Profile is a process that was designed to get communities to define what is special and unique about them, and then come up with a game plan for how to protect and promote the community attributes that they value."

— Lew Feldstein, president of the
New Hampshire Charitable Foundation

How Community Profiles Began

Economic, social and environmental changes affecting communities during the late 1980's such as the loss of manufacturing, rapid residential development in the southern tier, and the decline of certain industries, motivated former Governor Judd Gregg to form the Governor's Commission on New Hampshire in the 21st Century, in 1989. Gregg, now a U.S. Senator, was concerned that the physical assets of communities were under tremendous pressure at the time.

Gregg established the Governor's Commission to seed the development of a series of initiatives that would help communities protect and promote the characteristics that make New Hampshire a unique and special place. Co-chaired by Paul Bofinger, former president of the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, and Cotton Cleveland, daughter of former U.S. Representative James Cleveland, the Commission launched a series of initiatives aimed at identifying the characteristics and qualities intrinsic to New Hampshire's quality of life. One of these initiatives was the "Granite State Civic Profile," modeled after a program developed by the National Civic League.

Drawing on support from the Governor's Commission, statewide stakeholders, and the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation, 10 New Hampshire communities piloted the Civic Profile process from 1989 to 1990. As a result, each pilot community tackled pressing problems such as rapid growth, degradation of natural resources, loss of historic character, and economic decline. More than 720 participants across these 10 communities identified local strengths and weaknesses and developed plans to improve their community's capacity to make decisions and inspire concrete positive change.

After the pilot process, the Commission turned coordination of the program over to UNH Cooperative Extension. With a helping hand from the League of Women Voters of the Upper Valley and an organization called "Upper Valley: 2001 and Beyond," the current-day Community Profile process was forged. Other partners involved in developing the process include:

- University of Vermont Cooperative Extension
- The Center for Rural Studies at the University of Vermont
- Vermont Department of Housing and Community Affairs
- Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Regional Planning Commission
- Tufts University, Center for Environmental Management
- New Hampshire Charitable Foundation
- Vermont Community Foundation
- Sustainable Seattle
- Community Innovations
- The Upper Valley 2001 & Beyond Steering Committee

Since 1990, UNH Cooperative Extension has conducted 57 Community Profiles across the state, while Upper Valley 2001 and Beyond (now called Vital Communities), has implemented Community Profiles in 25 communities in the Upper Valley region of New Hampshire and Vermont. However, this report focuses on the 42 Community Profiles conducted by UNH Cooperative Extension since 1996, when Cooperative Extension began collecting evaluation data from each town that participated.

> *"Enormous pressures were being placed on agricultural lands, the distinct New England architecture that New Hampshire towns emulate, and the historic and cultural sites that make the state unique. These elements of communities' character were becoming homogenized into the miracle mile."*
>
> — U.S. Senator Judd Gregg, (R-NH)

Volunteers plant flowers along one of Greenville's main streets.

Photo by Jim Lambert.

The Community Profiles Process

Community Profiles is a process that takes months to plan and organize and a weekend to complete, typically a Friday evening continuing again on Saturday morning.

Steps involved in the process include:

- ***Initiating a Community Profile:***
  The Community Profile typically begins with interest from a core group of community leaders to bring the community together to create a vision of the future. UNH Cooperative Extension requires buy-in from the Board of Selectmen or City Council before agreeing to help with the process. Once the board sanctions the process, an Extension staff member meets with the core group to begin the planning process.

- ***Forming the Steering Committee:***
  Next, the core group of residents, along with local elected officials, meets to identify diverse community members to serve on a Steering Committee that will plan and carry out the Community Profile, a day-and-a-half-long community forum.

- ***Planning the Community Profile Event:***
  Planning and organizing a Community Profile typically takes from four to six months, depending on the number of individuals on the steering committee and the level of buy-in from residents and local officials. Steps in the planning process include marketing, fund-raising, coordinating with local organizations, booking a facility to hold the event, identifying local facilitators, and arranging for meals at the event.

- ***The Event:***
  The focal point of the Community Profile is a day and a half event that begins with a Friday evening potluck dinner, followed by large and small group discussions that adjourn later in the evening. The Profile then picks up again on Saturday morning and culminates with the formation of action committees by mid-afternoon. Anywhere from 50 to 250 residents typically attend the event, representing a broad cross-section of the community. Not only does the event bring residents together as a community, but it results in a plan of action and the formation of committees of local citizens committed to putting the plan into action.

- ***After the Event:***
  Community action committees typically meet monthly after the event to carry forward the projects outlined in the plan. UNH Cooperative Extension helps the action committees develop action steps, access resources, and engage volunteers throughout the process. Extension also compiles the results of large- and small-group sessions into a final report provided to the community. Extension reconvenes community residents three to six months after the Community Profile event to help the community measure its progress, help the action committees coordinate activities, and provide support to implement the plan.

Community Profiles Outcomes

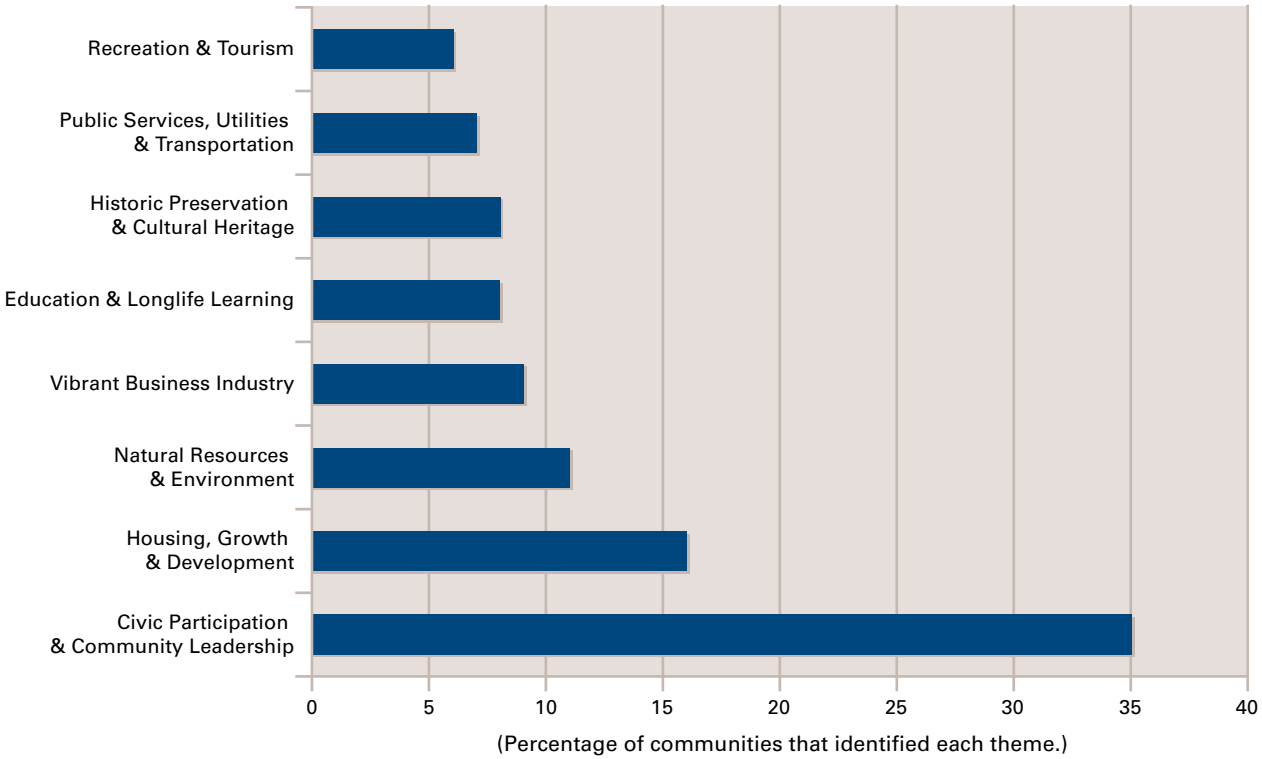
The Community Profile serves as a forum that enables community members to come together to identify attributes that make their community special and create a detailed action plan for sustaining and enhancing these attributes. As a result of Community Profiles, communities throughout the state have achieved various successes, ranging from seemingly simple outcomes of neighbors connecting with neighbors to major community projects such as the construction of a community center.

To many individuals, "success" means the achievement of physical outcomes; the creation of a community newsletter, the revision of a Master Plan, or the construction of a new community facility. For others, however, success translates to social outcomes, such as the creation of new social networks,

KEY

Recreation & Tourism	6
Public Services, Utilities & Transportation	7
Historic Preservation & Cultural Heritage	8
Education & Longlife Learning	8
Vibrant Business Industry	9
Natural Resources & Environment	11
Housing, Growth & Development	16
Civic Participation & Community Leadership	35
Total Percentage	**100**

COMMON THEMES EMERGING FROM COMMUNITY PROFILES



the cultivation of new leaders, and the fostering of a sense of community among residents

Because the term "success" means different things to different people, this publication seeks to capture the essence of Community Profile success based on the perceptions of leaders in eight New Hampshire communities. Examples of successes resulting from Community Profiles that we highlight include the creation of a community newsletter, consensus on a common community vision, emergence of new community leaders, re-energized community spirit, purchase of conservation lands, revitalization of downtown areas, and discovery of new skills, assets and resources within the community.

Characterizing Success from the Perspective of Community Profile Participants

The Community Profile process draws from a number of public participation processes developed for communities across the nation, as well as research that identifies attributes of successful civic participatory processes. This research comes from a variety of academic disciplines, including community development, community planning and deliberative democracy.

The purpose of this retrospective, however, is to define community successes from the perspectives of those who participated in the Community Profiles process, helped to coordinate the process, facilitated discussion groups, and participated in action committees that formed after the Community Profile event.

This report identifies communities that exemplified particular attributes of success. Using a Web-based survey, we asked 25 UNH Cooperative Extension staff involved with the Community Profiles over the past 10 years to identify specific attributes of success with respect to the process itself, as well as specific outcomes resulting from the process in communities.

Based on their input, we identified more than a dozen New Hampshire communities that reported various kinds of success as a result of Community Profiles, such as strong leadership, good communication, and active community volunteerism.

Because we wanted to describe success through the eyes of community participants, the authors interviewed Community Profile participants in each of these communities to gain their perceptions of the successes and challenges their communities had during and as a result of the process. Based on this information, portraits of each of these communities began to emerge, with each one highlighting unique attributes of success.

We selected eight communities to highlight. The stories that follow are based on participants' unique perspectives of what success has meant for their communities as a result of Community Profiles.

Community Success Story: **HOOKSETT**

Crafting Local Policies to Preserve Cultural and Natural Resources

Photo courtesy of UNH Cooperative Extension Archive.

Historic Robie Store in downtown Hooksett.

At a Community Profile conducted in 2001, Hooksett residents began to discuss various ways of preserving the community's natural and historic character, while still allowing for economic growth. Gradually, consensus emerged that the town really needed to institute better public policies to meet these objectives.

Three key needs emerged from the Hooksett Community Profile: historic preservation, natural resources protection, and downtown revitalization. Several action committees formed to address these issues, two of which remain active.

One committee began exploring ways to preserve the community's remaining open spaces and historic structures. In particular, committee members felt that new regulations were needed to curb sprawling development and that incentives were needed to encourage redevelopment in the Hooksett Village district. Another action committee began exploring ways to physically link the town's historic structures and its natural assets through the creation of a heritage trail corridor along the Merrimack River and through the heart of the village district.

Key accomplishments by these two committees include the re-invigoration of the Hooksett Heritage Trail project and approval of the Community Revitalization Tax Relief Incentive Program.

The first of these, the Hooksett Heritage Trail, was originally conceived as a public-private partnership to acquire the rights-of-way to develop a walkable trail along the Merrimack River and through the historic Hooksett Village. Because a partnership that originally started working on the Heritage Trail had gone dormant for a number of years, participants at the Community Profile rekindled past efforts reinvigorating the Hooksett Heritage Trail Committee.

The Heritage Trail Committee began by working with town officials to draft easement agreements with landowners along the proposed trail route. Soon after, the Kiwanis Club of Hooksett lent its support by budgeting $10,000 to complete the first section of the Heritage Trail on land donated to the town by the Manchester Sand, Gravel, and Cement Company. Because of the Kiwanis support, the Town Council authorized the organization to develop a Master Trail Plan and charged it with responsibility for developing and maintaining the Heritage Trail. Today, the Kiwanis Club continues to maintain the trail with support from grants, volunteer labor and donated services.

Another outgrowth of the Community Profile was the creation of Community Revitalization Tax Relief Incentive Program. In November 2007, the Town Council approved this incentive program to encourage

> *"Since the Community Profile, we have also been successful in getting three town-owned properties on the State Register of Historic Places Head School & Cemetery, the Arah W. Prescott Library, and the Lilac Bridge."*
>
> — Kathie Northrop,
> Hooksett Heritage Commission

property owners to make renovations to buildings located in a newly established Village District. In return, property owners would receive temporary tax relief to help offset the cost of rehabilitating older buildings. The temporary tax relief is provided during a finite period, during which the property tax on the structure doesn't increase as a result of its rehabilitation. Once the tax-relief period expires, the structure is taxed at its full market value, taking the rehabilitation into account.

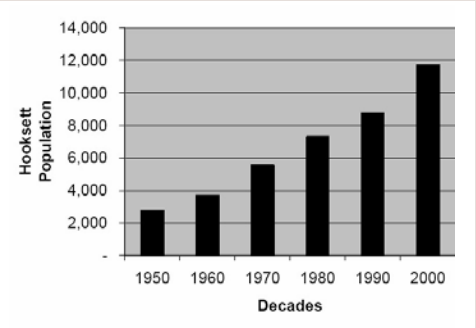
The tax-incentive program not only helps preserve the town's historic structures, it also promotes economic development and helps manage sprawl. In fact, Hooksett is one of only four towns in the state to institute an historic preservation tax incentive program (joining Manchester, Pittsfield and Berlin). Through the revitalization of the Village, Hooksett residents hope to increase their sense of community.

Through both these initiatives, the Hooksett Heritage Trail and the Tax Relief Incentive Program, Hooksett has demonstrated how historic preservation, natural resources protection, and downtown revitalization can complement each other in a way that preserves the town's physical character and enhances community vitality.

Like many towns along the Merrimack River, Hooksett developed along its western shore three centuries ago. Since then, several major events have helped to shape the town's landscape, including the mini economic boom that resulted from the Civil War; the laying of a rail line through the town in the 1840s; and rapid industrialization at the turn of the 20th century. As a result of these and other events, nearly every space along the shores of the Merrimack and along the town's many miles of road has been developed.

Then, in the latter half of the 20th century, two major highways were constructed through the community, giving rise to new commercial and industrial nodes near the interchanges. Partly as a result of this rapid commercial and industrial growth, the town experienced a four-fold population increase in the past 50 years. This resulted in the loss of thousands of acres of natural lands to development.

Today, residents worry that if this pattern of growth continues, any remaining open spaces in the community will disappear within the next 10 to 15 years, as projected in the Town's Master Plan. Likewise, residents worry that the community could lose its few remaining historic structures such as the classic Robie Store. And many contend that Hooksett's disperse pattern of development has prevented the town from establishing a well-defined downtown area, save for a small historic area known as "Hooksett Village."



New Hampshire Office of Energy and Planning.

Population growth in Hooksett from 1950 – 2000.

Community Success Story: JACKSON

New Leaders and Volunteers Emerge from Community Profile

Photo by Ann Hamilton, Carroll County Extension.

Above: Jackson's Old Town Hall, since relocated.

Left: Jackson Community Profile participants discuss local concerns.

Jackson offers a perfect example of how a Community Profile can empower local residents to become actively engaged in their community. Not only did the process galvanize strong leadership from people who had never held leadership roles in the community before, but it also gave new energy to those in the community who had been involved with community affairs, yet were frustrated by their lack of success moving issues forward.

Members of the Community Profile Steering Committee found the Profile to be a great opportunity to connect with fellow residents equally concerned about town issues. They discovered that by working together, they could overcome many barriers that had prevented them from achieving success in the past.

Ultimately, the synergy that evolved from the Steering Committee's hard work and planning became a magnet that attracted even more people. More than 200 residents turned out at the Community Profile event in May of 2002, an extraordinary occurrence, considering Jackson's total population was 829 residents.

Although fostering new leaders and getting more residents involved in community activities were the main goals of the Jackson Community Profile, they weren't the only goals. Another key objective was to restore a sense of mutual trust between elected town officials and community residents. Elected officials and residents felt this sense of trust had diminished over the years. On one side, civic leaders felt their concerns weren't being heard by elected officials. On the other, elected officials were frustrated that they met resistance from the community when attempting to implement community projects and policies.

Both parties seized on the Community Profile as an opportunity to build consensus between local officials and community residents around key issues. In fact, a number of civic leaders jumped in to help plan and implement the Community Profile, supported by local organizations such as the Jackson Community Association. However, two of the town's three Select Board members refused to participate in the Community Profile, in spite of efforts by civic leaders to get them involved.

This lack of active participation by elected officials was disappointing to many civic leaders. Yet it spurred three individuals who had been involved with the Community Profile

> *"We worked hard to get the community out to the Community Profile. We sent personal invitations to all residents, distributed fliers, and wrote articles in the local paper. And a lot of people volunteered to help."*
>
> — Betsey Harding, chair of the Jackson Community Profile Steering Committee

> *"It is community folks coming together and working toward common goals that reaps benefits for the wellness of a community and for individuals."*
>
> — Judith Bush, past coordinator of the Community Profiles Program

to run for seats on the Select Board. To the surprise of many, all three individuals were elected to the board.

Since taking office, they have made a concerted effort to engage residents in defining and furthering community goals, many of which took shape as a result of the Community Profile. For instance, Selectmen sponsored a community survey to discover residents' opinions around a range of issues and determine what residents want. Little by little, the Board is restoring residents' trust in local government and has succeeded at bringing new issues to the town agenda.

Today the Board of Selectmen continues to work with residents to pursue goals defined at the Community Profile, such as clarifying zoning regulations, improving local recycling services, and developing plans for a new community center. Many credit the Select Board's efforts to improve communication for fostering trust in local government and for helping the community mobilize around important issues.

Although there are still differences of opinion between some residents and municipal officials around issues such as the use of zoning restrictions to limit development, community residents have been able to work with local officials towards common goals. This is a testament to the new leadership that emerged from the Community Profile.

Cultivating Strong Local Leadership

Despite the fact that individuals and families have less free time today than they did a generation ago, a few recent Community Profile events, including the ones held in Jackson and Landaff, attracted nearly a quarter of community residents to participate. This is no small feat, considering that many towns find it a challenge just to get people to show up at town meeting. Perhaps equally important, Community Profiles draws participants from a broad cross section of the community.

However, one challenge communities face is getting new individuals to take on leadership roles. The same people tend to be involved with multiple local boards, committees and volunteer groups. This can cause burnout among a shrinking cadre of community leaders, and it has the effect of concentrating decision-making power. A number of communities have overcome this challenge by leveraging the Community Profiles process to get new people involved with local committees and volunteer activities.

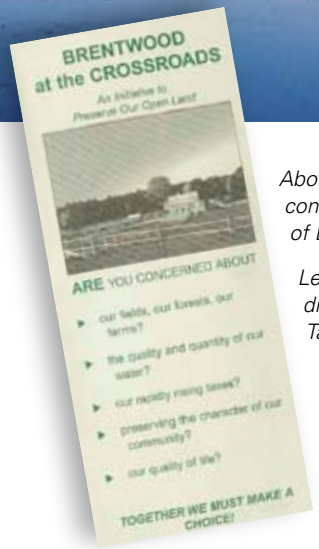
An Extension Educator who helped one town with its Community Profile noted that the process cultivates new leaders by enabling individuals to share ideas, join conversations on topics that matter to them, and organize community activities. Moreover, after each Community Profile, volunteers are charged with leading local action committees. These committees take on responsibility for carrying out projects that emerge from the Community Profile, providing action committee chairs with valuable leadership experience that they might not have otherwise gained.

Community Profile evaluations show that some of these new leaders go on to hold positions on municipal boards and committees. In Brentwood and Jackson, for example, Community Profile Steering Committee Chairs ran for and were elected to the Board of Selectmen subsequent to their Community Profiles. Other Steering Committee members were elected to the Planning Board. They mainly credit their experience in the Community Profile for giving them the confidence needed to take on formal leadership roles in the community.

Community Success Story: **BRENTWOOD**

Action Committee's Work Led to Preservation of Ecologically Significant Land

Photo by Reid Bunker.



Above: Pristine Brentwood conservation land, across from one of Brentwood's many water bodies.

Left: Brentwood Open Space Flyer distributed by the Open Space Task Force.

Over the past half-century, Brentwood has faced growth pressure resulting from an expansion of its population from 819 residents in 1950 to 3,228 in 2000. With residential development on the rise, local leaders felt a sense of urgency to strengthen public involvement in sustaining the community's natural environment, and ultimately, its economy. They pursued the Community Profile as a way to engage residents in addressing the environment and other key issues facing the community. After months of hard work and planning, the town came together for a Community Profile on a brisk October weekend in 2001.

One high-priority issue that emerged from the Community Profile was the need for growth management through education, enhanced land use regulation, and open space protection. Based on this expressed need, the Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Board of Selectmen, Town Administrators, and Community Profile participants formed a joint Open Space Task Force to establish goals, objectives and critical action steps that would help the community conserve natural lands for future generations and prevent the negative impacts of uncontrolled growth.

Local officials had projected that housing development would soon swallow up 500 to 1000 acres of Brentwood's largest land parcels. This compelled the Task Force to propose a $2 million bond to support open space protection, leveraging money from the town's Conservation Fund. To galvanize public support for the approval of the bond, the Task Force distributed informational flyers and conducted workshops to educate residents about the positive tax implications of land conservation compared to the alternative of residential development. Voters approved the bond authority at the March, 2003 meeting, enabling the town to borrow $2 million over a five-year period with repayment over a 20-year period.

Since 2003, the town has been able to acquire conservation easements on approximately 514 acres in 15 separate transactions, using bond proceeds, as well as a number of state and federal grants to protect a number of large parcels of ecologically significant land. Moreover, several abutting landowners have stepped forward and donated part or all of the value of their

> *"With strong support from the Town and from conservation organizations such as the Southeast Land Trust, the Town has been able to protect several large parcels, including a good portion of the land along the Exeter River."*
>
> — Jon Ellis, member of Brentwood's Open Space Committee

properties, putting another 276 acres under conservation easement, protecting a total of 780 acres of land since 2003. According to an article in Brentwood's online newsletter, this effort had the effect of connecting "…three benefits of open space in the public mind; using open space protection to balance new developments…protecting water supplies, forest and habitat…[and] softening long-term tax hikes by offsetting at least some development."

But the Task Force didn't stop with these major accomplishments. In 2008, residents passed a warrant article extending the five-year period of open space bonding authority so the town could attempt to further leverage the bond authority by applying for a $2.4 million Federal Coastal and estuarine Land Conservation Program grant. Although the town did not receive this funding, the Task Force continues to work diligently on other projects, making for a very green future in Brentwood.

Today, five years after the bond authority was passed, Community Profile participants interviewed feel the Task Force results have exceeded their expectations. The Community Profile event had a ripple effect that still resounds in the community seven years after the event. Aside from the impressive accomplishments in preserving land, the Community Profile gave Brentwood's citizens a chance to express their concerns about the future of their town and enabled them to work together to find realistic solutions to these concerns.

The Community Profile attracted people who might not normally get involved in community activities and it ultimately increased participation on local boards and committees. Perhaps most important, it contributed to a growing sense of community in Brentwood and succeeded at focusing local efforts on a common goal of community betterment through preservation of open lands and natural resources.

Sustaining the Natural Environment and Quality of Life

For centuries, New Hampshire residents have harvested the state's forests and fields, harnessed its waterways, and relied on its bountiful natural amenities. Today, this strong tradition of living off the land continues to define the state's scenic landscape and the way of life in New Hampshire communities. Perhaps that is why residents of New Hampshire communities have come to recognize that the community's natural, cultural and historic character hinges on the community's efforts to preserve open space.

According to the state's Office of Energy and Planning, New Hampshire has been the fastest growing state in New England for the past four decades. Between 1990 and 2004, the state's population grew by 17.2 percent, compared to 6.7 percent in Massachusetts. Most of this population growth has occurred on just 33 percent of the state's land area, largely concentrated in Rockingham, Hillsborough, Merrimack and Strafford counties.

This rapid growth, combined with large-lot zoning, has resulted in the expansion of residential development and now threatens the New Hampshire quality of life that is so deeply rooted in the state's natural character. Communities are beginning to recognize that the most direct way to manage growth is to build community consensus around policies aimed at preserving natural resources and public open spaces, and at the same time foster economic vitality and social equity.

Community Success Story: **LANDAFF**

Residents Work Together to Improve Communication

February 1, 2008
Year 2008, Issue 1

Jockey Hill Journal

News of Landaff, New Hampshire
newsletter@landaffnh.org

Landaff Creamery

Citizens of mass destruction

Several townspeople came together in mid-January to help Doug and Deb Erb's dream of a Landaff brand cheese become a reality. The first step was to prepare the property that formerly served as Doc Erb's veterinary facility. They were armed with pickaxes, sledgehammers and crowbars. Luckily, it was not as scary as it sounds. The only known casualty of the day was Harry McGovern's industrial strength extension cord.

More than ten workers answered the call to tear out floors, cut down kennels and prepare for contractors to install equipment that will eventually become the site of the Landaff Creamery. Sasquia the Dog (a lab) in the air, the warmth of their efforts prevented (coffee and doughnuts helped too). Doug and Deb had actually thought they would plug away at the job whenever they had some spare time. That idea came to a screeching halt when Deb slipped on the ice and broke her ankle while out walking in early January.

The Erbs have been toying with the cheese-making idea for quite a while. They have observed, taken classes, and experimented. Latest word is that they have settled on a goudo-like cheese as their goal. They already have some future customers who are ready to help any way they can.

At left, Jason Cartwright, among others, helped take apart the kennels to make way for big changes that will eventually house the Landaff Creamery. It will be adjacent to the Erb's Springvale Farm.

Workers included Pat and Florence Webb, Don Wharton, Frank Mellusi, Roy Lobdell, Jaye Michaelis, Harry McGovern, Marilyn Booth, Jason Cartwright, Richard Branson, and Don and Mary Beaudin.

Inside the Jockey Hill Journal:

Send news and information to:
Mary Beaudin
907 Jockey Hill Rd
Landaff, NH 03585

Or email
newsletter@landaffnh.org

Cover of February 2008 issue of The Jockey Hill Journal. *Courtesy of Mary Beaudin, Editor.*

In spite of the everyday stresses and busy lives that many Landaff residents have, they responded enthusiastically when three years ago the town clerk proposed that Landaff hold a Community Profile. In just a few weeks, residents formed a steering committee to coordinate the process, raised funds to market and conduct the Community Profile event, garnered support from local officials, and recruited a host of local volunteers to bring the Community Profile to fruition – an impressive feat, considering that some communities take more than a year to prepare for a Community Profile.

A perceived lack of communication among community residents also contributed to the enthusiasm for the Community Profile. The town meeting was the only formal opportunity for residents to come together and talk about local issues, and informal opportunities such as community celebrations and social gatherings were on the wane. Residents felt they were no longer connecting with neighbors and their fellow community members on a regular basis. In a sense, the social fabric of this once tightly knit community was beginning to unravel, not for a lack of desire to reconnect, but because of the challenges their busy lives posed.

Nearly 25 percent of Landaff's residents turned out on the evening of the Community Profile event; the highest participation rate out of the 50-plus New Hampshire communities that have held a Community Profile. Residents who turned out for the event expressed that the Community Profile was a long awaited-for opportunity to get together, build consensus around a community vision, and collectively do something to achieve that vision.

Although the Community Profile was planned and carried out without major glitches, a number of residents admitted they came to the event more out of curiosity than out of a sense of civic duty or a need to connect with fellow residents.

One resident said, "I was pretty skeptical of the Community Profile before tonight, but I left the forum as believer in what community members can accomplish by communicating and working together."

Local officials in Landaff expressed similar sentiments. Those present for the event were concerned that the process could potentially catalyze new plans and projects that conflicted with ongoing efforts. However, after the process, they realized the Profile actually provided an opportunity for residents to provide input for the community's Master Plan and other public policies. The action committees that resulted from the Community Profile have since collaborated with the Planning Board, Conservation Commission, and other local boards on a variety of matters. In fact, members of one committee are currently working in partnership with the town to move ahead with plans for a new fire station.

Another key outcome of the Community Profile was the creation of an online town newsletter called the "Jockey Hill Journal,"

Parker Hill Road Band strums it up at Landaff Old Home days. Photo courtesy of Mary Beaudin, Editor of The Jockey Hill Journal.

named for the road that leads to the center of town. The purpose of the newsletter is to keep residents informed about local events and activities, to improve the flow of information between residents and town officials, and to create a network of helpers for those in need. So far, eight issues of the journal have been published on the web. Judging from the positive feedback from those who read the newsletter, as well as those who contribute articles, the Jockey Hill Journal has become a vital channel of communication for town residents.

As a result of the Community Profile process, local residents not only had a chance to discuss important issues facing the community, but to take action that led to creation of new networks from which to launch community projects, support the activities of local Boards and Commissions, and start a town newsletter aimed at better communication. With these communication mechanisms in place, Landaff residents have discovered they can engage fellow town residents to make positive change happen.

Renewing Civic Engagement through Dialogue

Tucked away in the foothills of the White Mountains lies the hilltop town of Landaff. Some would call Landaff the quintessential small New Hampshire town: 370 residents, a one-room schoolhouse, and Holstein cows dotting the pastoral landscape. Next to Old Home Day, the biggest event of the year is town meeting.

In fact, most major decisions facing Landaff are made at town meeting, which occurs on the second Tuesday of March. This is the one time of the year when local residents and town officials come together to discuss community issues, deliberate on warrant articles, and ultimately vote on public policies that impact community.

Although town meeting typically draws a "good crowd," many Landaff residents are concerned that participation in town meeting and other community events and activities has declined over the years. The majority of the town's residents are simply hard-pressed to find the time to engage in community activities or connect with fellow residents. Between kids' soccer practice, doctor appointments, and long work weeks, it is no wonder that residents have little time to participate on local committees, work on community projects, or get involved with local government.

Community Success Story: NEW BOSTON

New Boston Speaks Draws 300 participants

Photo by Tim Hanson – Hanson Studio Charlestown, NH.

Gazebo located on the common in the center of New Boston village.

New Boston is a great example of how good planning and marketing invigorates the public to participate in a community event. In fact, the Steering Committee coined the name 'New Boston Speaks' in lieu of the Community Profile because they wanted to emphasize that the event was an opportunity for local residents to speak out about their issues, hopes, dreams, and desires; this wasn't just a canned program driven by consultants. New Boston Speaks was truly a community-based effort and the Steering Committee managed to generate a lot of interest in the event.

This strong turnout at the event, approximately 300 participants, is largely due to the fact that the Steering Committee put a lot of energy into communicating and educating local residents about the process and its potential for bringing about positive change in the community. In addition to posting flyers about the event in the school, library and town hall, they also sent out personal invitations to each resident. And they established a 'New Boston Speaks' web site where residents could find out about the event and why they should participate.

The web site not only proved to be an excellent promotional tool, but it also served as a conduit for recruiting several new volunteers to help plan the process. After the event, the web site became an effective platform for the various action committees to coordinate activities, engage new volunteers, and share their outcomes with the public.

In many regards, the success of New Boston Speaks can be attributed to the careful planning that went into the event and the expansive marketing effort that drew a broad cross-section of the community to participate.

Participants became empowered by the experience of feeling a part of the community and being listened to through the process. For the first time in a long time, residents felt a sense that they could have an impact on the community. In fact, town resident Mark Siemiesz said the process made him realize he should have gotten involved in town activities earlier. "It opened my eyes to the importance of being involved in town issues," he said.

Thanks to the hard work and expansive marketing efforts of the Steering Committee, New Boston Speaks drew participation from a large portion of the community. Without this broad-based participation, many of the outcomes attributed to the process would

> *"Our team was so excited that no one wanted to leave the planning meetings without a job to do. And we engaged some newcomers to town to help out. They found the Community Profile to be a great way to meet others in town."*
>
> — Lyn Lombard, member of New Boston Speaks Steering Committee

Photo by Brandy Mitroff.

Above: New Boston residents gather to commemorate Memorial Day.

Right: New Boston Speaks community Web site used to market the event and share the outcomes.

new boston speaks

A Community Discussion About Our Future

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New Boston Speaks - The Next Chapters

It has been a year since hundreds of New Boston residents gathered for a weekend to discuss what we wanted to see happen in our community. Several committees were formed and have been meeting regularly since that inspiring event. Receiving the Livable, Walkable Communities Program Grant was a direct outcome of the efforts of the Foot Traffic and Road Safety Committee. To learn more about ongoing activities, or to become involved, come to the next focus group meeting on Thursday, May 11 in the school library. Start time is 7PM and we're generally finished by 8:30.

Click here to read a copy of the New Boston Speaks Community Profile report prepared by the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension Service.

not have been realized, such as securing of a Livable Walkable Communities grant to make the town more friendly to non-motorized transportation options.

Equally important, the skills that Steering Committee members gained as a result of planning the process have since been used to initiate new community planning processes, such as the New Boston's Healthy Eating Active Living initiative. The planning and marketing skills gained by the organizers of New Boston Speaks have enhanced the community's capacity to chart its own course for the future and embark on new planning processes.

Good Planning and Marketing are Keys to Success

The Community Profiles process resulted in tangible outcomes for most participating towns. Outcomes include the creation of community newsletters, acquisition of conservation lands, revitalization of downtown areas, and the institution of community festivals. Yet, it is important to note that not all of the outcomes and successes attributed to Community Profiles follow the event. Evaluations of participants from 42 communities who participated in Community Profiles from 1996 to 2006 illustrate that the process itself has value.

Community Profile Steering Committee members can learn many skills: organizing community action, managing meetings, facilitating small groups, and fund-raising as a result of their work on the committee. However, one particular outcome of Community Profiles often identified in participant evaluations was learning to plan and market community events. One UNH Cooperative Extension staffer who provided support to a Community Profile Steering Committee noted, "I consider it to be a huge success when a Community Profile Steering Committee learns how to work together as a team and effectively builds awareness, enthusiasm, and participation in the Community Profile."

But such success can only be earned with hard work. Community Profile Steering Committee members often underestimate the time and effort it takes to plan and promote a community event. The groundwork that goes into planning and marketing a Community Profile includes selecting a date and a location for the event, compiling a brief on the town's history and trends, garnering support from local entities to cover food costs, posting promotional flyers, sending out invitations, and finally, pounding the streets to drum up interest in the Community Profile.

Because planning and marketing functions require long-term commitment and the development of new skills by community members, UNH Cooperative Extension staff act as advisers to Community Profile Steering Committees, providing them with guidance throughout the planning process and offering training in key planning and marketing functions. The ultimate goal is for the Steering Committee to take ownership of all planning and marketing functions. When this occurs, community members not only gain a tremendous sense of satisfaction in their work, they also enhance their capacity to engage the public in future decisions. The key to good participation is getting the word out so people are aware of, and excited about, the event.

Community Success Story: **GREENVILLE**

Recognizing the Community's Untapped Potential

Photos this page by Jim Lambert, Greenville.

Above: Volunteers plant flowers to make the downtown more welcoming.

Right: New "Welcome to Greenville" sign posted at town's main entrance thanks to efforts of Community Profile participants.

Greenville has made strides to restore civic pride by revitalizing its downtown, although many residents and visitors alike would probably admit the town has a ways to go before it becomes the quaint, picture-perfect New Hampshire town envisioned by many.

At a Community Profile conducted in 2002, residents of Greenville came together to discover that their sense of community identity is intrinsically linked to their historic downtown. Moreover, they recognized that revitalization of the downtown must be implemented in a way that maintains the town's historic integrity and allows the community to develop in a manner that reflects present day social and economic needs.

At the start of the Community Profile, participants were asked to describe how they viewed their town at that moment. Responses from participants helped to build a picture of what Greenville is like today. Foremost, they recognized that Greenville has an untapped potential in its unique, undiscovered architecture and "village-like" downtown. Residents also expressed that the downtown lacked a strong identity. When asked what they would like to see Greenville be in the future, participants enthusiastically stated they wanted to capitalize on the community's untapped historic resources, beautify the downtown, support local businesses, and strengthen the community's sense of pride.

At the end of the Community Profile, Greenville residents coalesced into small working groups to plan projects focused on community beautification, historic preservation and tax support for local businesses and residents. Most important, participants expressed that all of these efforts should serve a common goal of fostering community pride.

After the Community Profile, several working groups began tackling the projects prioritized by Community Profile participants. One of these working groups, the Beautification Committee, initiated several small projects aimed at sprucing up the downtown. In the first year after the Community Profile, this committee brought back the tradition of decorating the library and the Town Hall with festive lighting. And they began planning, designing and raising funds to erect "Welcome to Greenville" signs at the four entrances to

> *"Through the efforts of a few dedicated leaders we have made great strides in our community. We still have a long ways to go to make the downtown vibrant, but we are working hard to make that happen. The Beautification Committee has done a fantastic job in bringing people together and has made tremendous progress in building pride in the community. That we have come this far is a true testament to the Community Profile."*
>
> — Jim Lambert, Greenville resident

town. Not only did these efforts help to improve the visual and historic character of the downtown, but they fostered a sense of place and renewed civic pride among community residents. Of course, members of the committee concede that there is still a lot of work to be done and that more people need to get involved.

A Business/Tax Structure Committee also formed as a result of the Community Profile. This committee spent countless hours examining the tax structure in the community, particularly as it impacts local businesses. The committee even lobbied the New Hampshire legislature to review the effect that the state education-aid formula was having on Greenville. As a result of this committee's efforts, property taxes fell in the community. Although the issue of property taxes hasn't disappeared in Greenville, these efforts gave local residents a sense of renewed hope after years of escalating tax bills.

Another committee formed to explore the possibility of renovating the Town Hall. The committee hoped to capitalize on the building's historic significance to the community to get them to preserve it. The committee's efforts started with a great surge of energy; input was actively sought from businesses and community residents and the committee ultimately succeeded in securing town funds to work on architectural design for the building. However, like many community efforts, the committee has since faced some roadblocks that have hindered their efforts to bring the vision of a renovated Town Hall to fruition. In spite of that, they continue to move forward and build consensus in the community.

While the Community Profile outcomes may fall short of the expectations of some, perhaps due to lack of broad support and participation, the action committees did indeed mark progress. Several accomplishments were realized by the action committees, although they all recognize there is still a lot of work if they are to achieve the goals defined at the Community Profile.

Restoring Civic Pride through Downtown Revitalization

Small New Hampshire towns recognize that their sense of identity and civic pride is directly linked to their historic and natural character. Yet, certain forces of change are beginning to take their toll on the natural and historic assets many communities value. Rapid residential and commercial development threatens the historic and natural character of some communities, while others worry that loss of jobs, the changing economy, and lack of infrastructure investment have contributed to physical decline of their historic assets. In either case, it is clear that forces of change can dramatically impact the visual face of New Hampshire communities.

Aside from the visual impacts that growth or decline can have on communities, conflict can also arise as a result of differing values and visions of community members. In some communities, this conflict manifests itself as a battle between growth and preservation. In others, the conflict is centered on whether or not to preserve historic and natural assets. When there is lack of consensus over a vision for a community's future, the sense of civic pride in a community suffers.

Although this conflict has posed a major obstacle for some communities, others have discovered the inherent value of their natural and historic structures and the role that they play in maintaining community pride and stability. Over the past few years, dozens of efforts have been initiated in small towns across the state to revitalize downtown districts, preserve historic buildings, rejuvenate old neighborhoods, and beautify public spaces.

Photo by Jim Lambert, Greenville.

Town Hall decorated with holiday lights thanks to the hard work of the Beautification Committee.

Community Success Story: **RUMNEY**

Action Committee Builds Awareness of the Importance of Natural Resources

Photo by Nory Parr.

Scene of Rumney's Intervale with a backdrop of Stinson Mountain.

Rumney exemplifies how positive change begins by raising local residents' awareness of and interest in key issues and trends and their potential impact on the community. Moreover, it demonstrates how the knowledge and skills needed to build others' awareness often lie within the community and merely need a little push to be unleashed.

As a result of the Rumney Community Profile conducted in the spring of 2007, a small committee formed to address community concerns that were voiced regarding the protection and use of natural resources and the preservation of the community's rural character. The committee, called the Environment and Resources Committee, decided that the best way to mobilize local residents around these issues was through a dynamic educational outreach effort.

To leverage local resources, the committee joined forces with the Rumney Conservation Commission, the Baker River Watershed Association, UNH Cooperative Extension, and HHP, Inc., a Henniker-based forest industry, to form the Rumney Natural Resource Network. Since the summer of 2007, the Network has organized a series of workshops and activities aimed at building awareness among town residents and local officials on the role that natural resources and biological diversity play in retaining community character, preserving the integrity of natural systems, and sustaining the local resource-based economy.

Photo by Nory Parr.

Rumney Town Library.

To date, the group has held six hands-on educational sessions and field tours in Rumney. Topics addressed at these workshops include water quality, floodplain-forest ecology, forest and wildlife habitat management. Maple sugar production, woodcock habits and habitat, a tour of a hardwood sawmill, and small fruit production are additional sessions planned through the spring and summer.

More than 100 residents and visitors have participated in these workshops, a huge success considering the town only has about 1400 residents. Not only have the workshops helped build residents' awareness of the importance of natural resources and natural systems, but they encouraged a couple of participants to join the Network. Other volunteers will help put on future workshops and organize local resource conservation projects in Rumney.

The case of Rumney illustrates that effective community engagement around key issues and local concerns begins by providing residents with the knowledge, information and skills to address those issues and needs. Through workshops, collaborations and awareness/marketing, the Rumney Natural Resource Network has effectively started a "movement" of local residents concerned about the condition and conservation of the community's natural resources and prepared to do something about it.

Educational Outreach to Build Community Capacity

All communities, no matter how big or small, are comprised of individuals and groups with a wealth of skills and interests that can be leveraged to make good things happen in the community. Sometimes, however, these skills and interests need cultivation and further refinement to ensure that their efforts are effectively and efficiently implemented. The provision of education and training is one effective way to cultivate existing or potential skills that reside in communities.

UNH Cooperative Extension is in a unique position to provide such education and training to community stakeholders to enhance their skills and capacity for self-development. The mission of UNH Cooperative Extension is to provide citizens with research-based education and information, enhancing their ability to make informed decisions that strengthen youth, families and communities, sustain natural resources, and improve the economy.

To help communities address specific issues and needs, Extension provides them with a range of educational opportunities. Trainings and workshops offered by Extension include Geospatial Technologies for Community Decision-Makers, Master Gardeners, Forest Stewardship, Nutrition and Meeting Facilitation, to name a few. In some cases, Extension even helps communities to design and conduct their own workshops and training programs for local residents.

Outcomes of these workshops and trainings include increased understanding of local and regional economic, societal and environmental issues and trends, and greater awareness of alternatives for addressing these issues and trends. The workshops also improved community residents' capacity and skills to implement projects and activities to bring about positive change.

Photo by Jody Young, Rumney resident.

"Evaluating Erosion on the Baker River" workshop sponsored by the Rumney Natural Resources Network in the fall of 2007.

Community Success Story: **ACWORTH**

Residents Move Forward with Community Profile in the Wake of the 2005 Floods

Photo Courtesy of NH Department of Transportation.

Cold River floodwaters just a few miles downriver from Acworth.

Acworth is a sleepy town of about 900 residents nestled in the wooded hills of Sullivan County, a few miles to the east of the Connecticut River. Incorporated in 1772, the town is noted for its quaint, historic downtown, which boasts a picturesque federal-style Congregational Church that sits on the town common. In many respects, the pastoral landscape, historic architecture, and rich cultural history of Acworth have helped to define the community for over two centuries. Residents have worked hard to preserve this rural character and they have resisted many forces of change that the modern era has brought, such as cell phone towers and sprawling development.

However, on October 9, 2005, a force of change came to the community that local residents weren't able to withstand. Heavy rains inundated the region, causing several rivers to crest their banks. Worst hit was the Cold River, which swelled to 100-year flood stage and damaged bridges and roads as it raced along its downward course. Several sections of road leading to Acworth were either washed out or rendered impassable. Although Acworth wasn't as hard hit by the flood as some nearby communities, the flood served as a wake-up call to local residents that an emergency plan was needed in case a similar event, or an even greater catastrophe, were to befall the community in the future. Of course, a key step to creating a plan is engaging the community in developing that plan.

Coincidentally, a group of Acworth residents had already begun organizing an event to bring residents together to discuss local issues and concerns. This group had been preparing for a Community Profile for six months prior to the flood. The scheduled date of the Profile was just 12 days after the flood - good timing to initiate a community discussion about preparing for potential natural disasters. The Profile didn't turn into a response to the floods, but simply provided a needed opportunity for local residents to plan collectively for their future.

More than 80 residents turned out for the two-day Community Profile October 21-22, 2005. Both the town hall and community church where the event was held were abuzz with talk of the flood: whose basements were flooded, how the fields weathered the rains, and when the roads were going to be repaired.

Yet, as much as the informal dialogue at the pot-luck supper revolved around the flood, it wasn't the sole topic of discussion when residents began talking about the issues facing the community. In fact, participants had already begun to move beyond the floods to plan long-term projects and activities to address emerging issues before they became serious problems. These issues included lack of recreation opportunities in the community, the need for a mechanism for local residents to find out about local news and events, and, of course, the need for an emergency response plan in case of future catastrophes.

Photo by Tim Somero.

Restoration of the Acworth Meetinghouse.

Residents of the town began to plan projects and activities aimed at sustaining a vital community rather than reacting to crises that could be prevented or alleviated. Each project was spearheaded by a committee of dedicated, capable civic leaders and community volunteers. To date, the committees have embarked on a number of successful projects.

One group helped set up a town web site to enable residents to share information about local events, meetings and other happenings. Another committee worked to spruce up the town's recreation facilities, including the soccer field. The Master Plan Advisory Committee expanded to incorporate a broader spectrum of community stakeholders, including Community Profile participants. The Historical Society began working on restoring the Grange Hall. The Emergency Response Committee is working with the Regional Planning Commission and the Natural Resources Conservation Service to develop a hazard mitigation plan for the Cold River in the event of future floods.

In short, Acworth demonstrates how a community can engage strong local leaders and volunteers to plan proactively for the future. As a result of a good process and the emergence of strong leaders and volunteers, the community has been able to sustain civic participation in community activities and has thereby begun work on projects that secure a vital future.

Photo by Tim Somero.

The Cold River in the early morning mist.

Sustaining Community Involvement

A significant event in a community - such as the loss of an industry, a natural disaster, or tension over political issues - can serve as a catalyst for getting residents to engage in community affairs, attend public meetings, participate in local organizations, and volunteer for local projects and activities. However, once the significant event has been addressed, or fades into the background, participation in community activities tends to drop off. Attendance at community meetings declines, membership on local committees drops, and volunteerism in community projects wanes. This cycle from high levels to low levels of civic engagement can take anywhere from a few months to a few years, depending on the nature of the crisis and the leadership that arises in the community.

The question becomes: How can communities sustain strong civic participation in community activities? The answer is two-fold. First, a formal or informal process must be in place that enables residents to come together in an organized fashion, discuss important issues, and take action collectively to address those issues. Second, strong local leadership is needed to sustain civic momentum around manageable tasks and ensure that the burden of key community activities and functions doesn't fall upon a select few. If these criteria can be met, communities are more apt to sustain civic engagement and participation over the long term. Acworth, New Hampshire, is one town that is putting these principles to the test.

Community Profiles Challenges

Photo by Nory Parr.

The road may be long, but we keep on trudging.

Most Community Profiles emerge from the desire of town citizens to overcome challenges or problems facing their community, such as degradation of natural resources, lack of citizen participation in community activities, or insufficient local policies to address current community concerns. Although Community Profiles come together for the very purpose of addressing such community needs and concerns, the process itself can pose obstacles.

Drawing on feedback from the eight communities highlighted in this publication, as well as from Community Profile participants from other towns around the state, we discovered some common obstacles that nearly every community faces when trying to engage the public in decision-making and community action through the Community Profile process.

While these stumbling blocks usually don't pose insurmountable challenges, they do serve notice that communities will face obstacles they may find difficult to overcome. When community groups can't find creative solutions to problems that arise, they often simply have to accept their limitations. What enables one community to overcome a particular obstacle may not work for another community.

Based on feedback from evaluations completed by Community Profile participants and interviews with Steering Committee members from more than a dozen communities, the following impediments to success emerged as common themes.

Most frequently cited was the lack of civic engagement in community activities. Simply put, people in general are not as engaged in community activities, committees, local politics, and social events as they were several decades ago. Robert Putnam, author of Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of the American Community, contends that longer work weeks, more women in the workforce, over-programming of kids' lives, distraction of television and other media, longer commutes to work, and a host of other factors have cut into the time most Americans have available to dedicate to community life.

This civic decline is evident in many Community Profile communities. For instance, Community Profile steering committee members in one town said they had trouble getting people to turn out for community events, let alone volunteer

for local committees and activities. Furthermore, the same people tend to be involved with multiple community activities.

The challenge for communities is to get new leaders to take charge of local committees and recruit new volunteers to help. Communities need to find a champion who actively seeks new participants and is willing to cultivate new leaders. Without such a champion, sustaining community participation after the Community Profile is all but impossible.

Lack of resources, such as funding, technical assistance, organizational support, materials and information were identified as impediments for the vast majority of communities that have conducted Community Profiles. Of these, funding emerges as the greatest limiting factor. It can be a daunting task for communities to secure funding to initiate projects and activities. Likewise, accessing technical support, such as architectural design assistance or help in conducting a local market analysis, can be a challenge. Extension simply lacks the staff and sometimes the expertise to support the needs of all action committees that result from the Community Profile process. Without access to funding, technical support, and supporting staff, community leaders and volunteers get frustrated and often fall short of reaching their goals.

Communities can alleviate the pressure to secure resources, funding, or technical assistance by starting out with small projects that may set the stage for larger projects down the line. Besides, by working together to accomplish small tasks, community groups often build their capacity to garner resources.

Finally, the majority of communities that have conducted Community Profiles faced the age-old problem of interpersonal conflict at some point during the process. Citizens who come together invariably have different values, beliefs and notions of how to get things done. When these values come into conflict, even well-intentioned projects can be stopped in their tracks. Conflict can take time to uncover and overcome. In some cases, individuals with hidden agendas used underhanded tactics to stymie community consensus. This became evident in one community when a local organization sought to insert their constituents into small group discussions in hopes of preventing others from speaking out.

Expert facilitation can sometimes help alleviate the ill effects of such tactics, but not always. Communities simply have to be prepared to deal with conflict. This means that stakeholders have to be willing to compromise on certain issues. By working through conflict, and taking time to understand the interests and perspectives of others, community members can gain a deeper appreciation of individual values and how best to meet others' needs while satisfying the common good.

All communities that conducted a Community Profile faced hurdles at one point or another. That is simply part of the process of learning to work together as a community. The Community Profiles process has taught us that success at overcoming obstacles requires sweat-equity, creativity, commitment of resources, and leadership from within the community. Communities that meet these requirements usually find ways of avoiding pitfalls and overcoming obstacles, while building their capacity to address future challenges. The Community Profile simply gives them a place to start.

> *"I am thrilled that UNH Cooperative Extension is still involved with Community Profiles!... In New Hampshire we have a strong tradition of resolving problems, as well as helping NH communities to identify what is good about their community and, more importantly, what should be perpetuated."*
>
> — Paul Bofinger,
> past president of the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests

Looking Back and Looking Ahead

The Community Profile Program illustrates that positive change happens when people in a community come together around a common vision and common goals. The communities highlighted in this report have all achieved various levels of self-defined success.

For some of these communities, success came in the form of tangible outcomes: the number of dollars saved, acres of land conserved, or projects brought to fruition. Other communities defined success in terms of social outcomes: sharing ideas, getting to know fellow residents, cultivating new leaders, or learning how to work together collaboratively.

However participants define success, it is clear that the Community Profile process has provided residents of New Hampshire cities and towns a way to affirm community strengths, find collaborative approaches to meet challenges creatively, and manage change.

As New Hampshire moves into an era defined by an ever-increasing pace of change, communities will need to find ways to bring diverse residents together to tackle challenging issues such as the local economy, energy, and the environment. The Community Profile process is one tool communities can use to address these issues and manage change in a collaborative fashion.

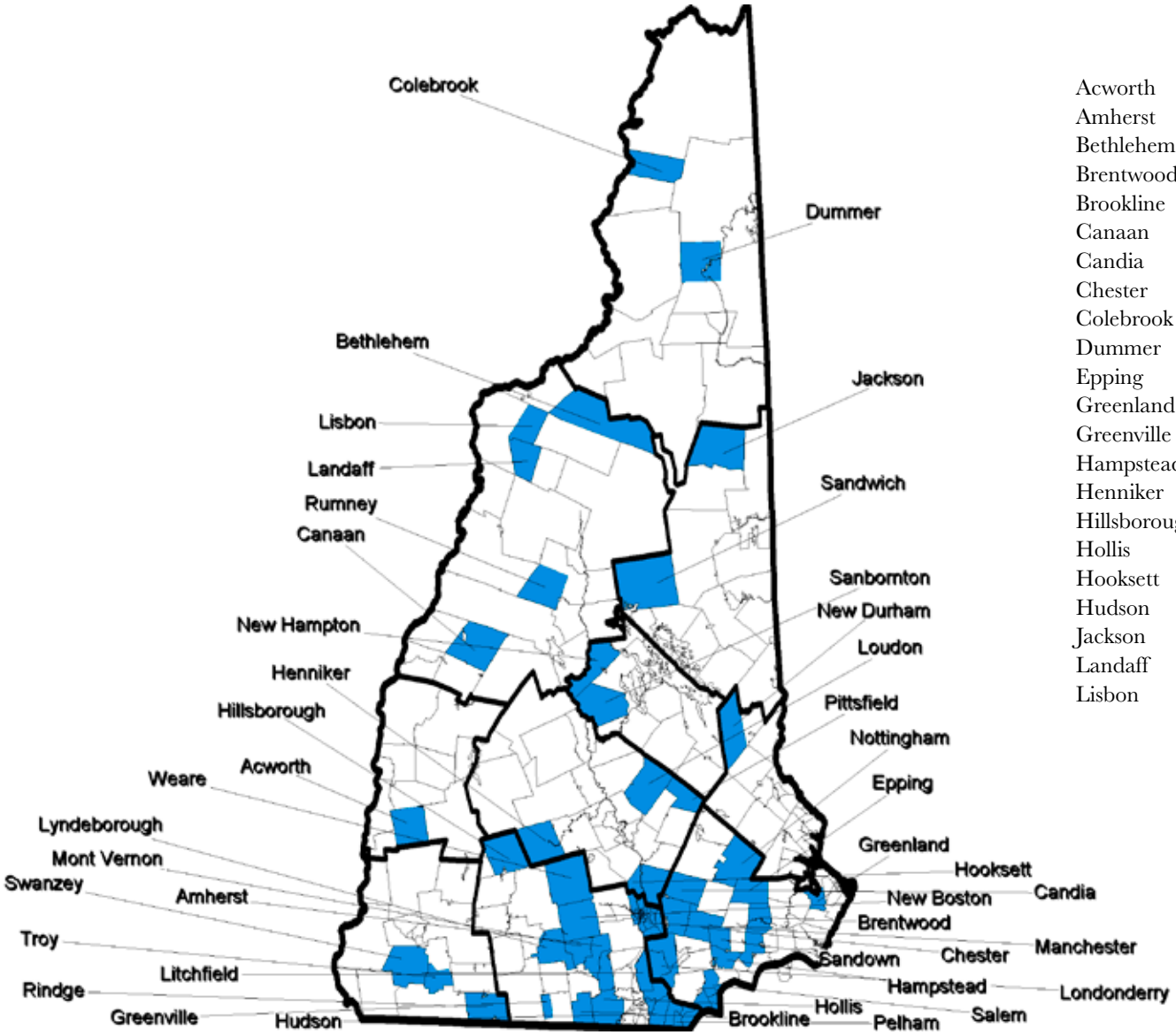
Already, one-third of the state's communities have held a Profile, and demand for the program hasn't slowed. In fact, several communities are planning for a Community Profile this year. And, for the first time in the history of the program, communities that have already conducted a Community Profile are requesting the program for a second time. Much has changed in these communities since their first Profile, and they see the process as an effective way to refocus the community's vision and mobilize its assets.

> *"The Profile process was a way to get the community together to create a shared vision for the community; a way for everyone to get on the same page. It helps the community understand its social fabric and gives them a shared point of departure to plan for their future."*
>
> — Jerry Howe, past coordinator of the Community Profiles program

While many traditional forms of citizen participation in community life have declined, the Community Profile shows that civic participation is alive and well in New Hampshire cities and towns. What started as a vision for the 21st century has indeed become reality.

Index of Community Profiles Towns

Community Profiles Conducted by UNH Cooperative Extension from 1996 to 2006



Acworth
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Swanzey
Troy
Weare

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Photo by Brandy Mitroff.

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Photo courtesy of UNH Cooperative Extension Archive.

Ten Years of Community Profiles

in New Hampshire