

NROC Community Testimonials

Candia NROC Program

During our association with NROC, the staff have shown endless patience, understanding and tenacity in guiding us through the throes of our first year. We are all basically novices, who are concerned about loss of open space, but do not come with the knowledge and skills needed to accomplish its protection. We could not have come as far as we have without their assistance.

NROC provided follow-up consultation and organizational help, walked the new Open Space Committee through a grant application and gave training for its members on various topics germane to its mission. All of the NROC staff have been a tremendous help. We are grateful for their guidance, expertise, patience and flexibility in working with us

Dover NROC Program

NROC Promotes Natural Resource-Based Planning in Dover

By Joyce El Kouarti, freelance writer and 'Growing Greener' Workshop Series Co-Coordinator Article originally published in TIDELINES.

Dover's City Hall was filled with energy when NROC came to town. The room was packed with more than 60 concerned citizens, local board members, and City officials, all there to see the first Natural Resource Outreach Coalition (NROC) public meeting on Dealing with Growth in Dover. NROC presenters addressed issues of sprawl, habitat fragmentation, water supply protection and non-point source pollution – all tied to data and examples from Dover. The presentation was eye opening, but it was the maps of Dover featuring the city's natural resources and potential build-out that brought the message home. One picture is worth 1,000 words, and the impact of five Geographic Information System (GIS) maps was tremendous. By the end of the meeting, the overall mood was one of excited anticipation. Something positive was happening to address growth in Dover, and every person in the room knew it.

The seeds that NROC planted at that September 19th meeting fell into fertile soil. In 1999-2000, the City of Dover had revised four chapters of the community's Master Plan, calling for renewed efforts to protect the City's natural resources. One recommendation involved the creation of the Open Lands Committee to identify and prioritize the community's remaining undeveloped land parcels that should be protected. In November 1999 the City Council established a Conservation Fund to direct the Change of Land Use fees collected by the City for the specific purpose of preserving conservation lands.

Dover Conservation Commission Chairman Tom Fargo recognized the need to increase public involvement in the City's efforts to protect wildlife habitat, water resources, and the other significant conservation features outlined in the Master Plan. In the fall of 2000, Tom approached NROC for assistance, and by March 2001, Dover's application for inclusion in

the Dealing with Growth program had been accepted.

“NROC has been very helpful in generating public interest in smart growth and natural resource protection initiatives in Dover,” says Fargo. “It is clear that this message is resonating with the people of Dover. Continuing assistance from the NROC partners not only facilitated the very successful ‘Growing Greener’ seminar series, but also carried over into ongoing Planning Board efforts to manage residential growth and enhance natural resource protection through changes in Dover’s zoning ordinances and subdivision regulations.”

The second Dover-NROC public meeting, on September 26th, was distinctly organizational. NROC facilitators and an auditorium filled with more than 50 residents focused upon the natural resource-related goals listed in Dover’s recently updated master plan. The group identified open space protection and minimizing the impacts of development as primary goals, and then circulated a sign-up sheet. The Dover Open Lands Committee (OLC) stepped forward to assume a leadership role in completing many of the tasks identified, including the development of a prioritized inventory of the city’s remaining open lands based upon their environmental features. The OLC subsequently reorganized into four working groups that closely resembled the tasking suggested by participants at the second NROC public meeting.

In addition, an ad hoc committee formed to address public outreach and education. Comprising members of Dover’s Open Lands Committee, Conservation Commission, and Planning Board as well as concerned citizens, the Outreach and Education group successfully applied for and received a \$5,000 grant from NH Estuaries Project to host a series of workshops focusing upon various aspects of open space protection and minimizing the impacts of development.

The first Growing Greener workshop, “Balancing Growth, Taxes and Open Space,” drew a crowd of more than 70 municipal officials and planners, environmentalists and concerned citizens despite a raging blizzard. Members of the city’s planning staff as well as seven out of eight members of the Dover Planning Board attended the workshop. Within two weeks of the event, the Dover Planning Board voted 7-1 in support of a resolution to research bond funding for the protection of open space. The Board members referenced the workshop as having been instrumental in their decision.

The second ‘Growing Greener’ workshop on “Land Protection and Estate Planning” attracted a group of 60+ area landowners and conservationists. In the seven weeks following the workshop, eight local landowners came forward to seek additional information about conservation easements and other land protection options. Open Lands Committee members responded quickly, meeting with landowners and providing additional information. As of the time of this printing, four of these landowners had taken steps to have their properties appraised to determine the land’s conservation value.

Approximately 50 local residents, realtors and area planners attended the third workshop

on “Smart Growth: Protecting Our Quality of Life.” The workshop offered concrete local examples of smart growth principles in action such as minimum impact design, mixed-use development, open space subdivisions, infill projects, public transportation planning, and walkable communities. According to the workshop survey, the majority of concerned citizens who attended the workshop left with a greatly enhanced appreciation of both smart growth principles and their community. “I was so impressed by what I heard yesterday that I took the bus to work this morning for the first time,” reported one attendee the following day.

The final workshop in the series featured well-known conservation planner Randall Arendt describing “Conservation Subdivision Design as a Tool for Building Community-wide Open Space Networks.” This workshop drew an audience of more than 110 planners, municipal board members, and developers from throughout the state of New Hampshire, many of whom requested additional information about open space subdivisions. In fact, the workshop precipitated an exchange on the NH Office of State Planning PlanLink listserv among planners who sought and shared information on zoning regulations designed to encourage the development of conservation subdivisions.

Concurrent with the ‘Growing Greener’ workshops, the Dover Planning Department established four subcommittees to suggest changes to zoning and subdivision regulations to manage residential growth, promote increased commercial/industrial base, promote open space, and address quality of life. These Planning Board subcommittees include many citizen volunteers who participated in the NROC program. “This has been a coordinated effort in which city staff and community volunteers have worked hand in hand to initiate change,” says Dover Planning Board Chair Ron Cole. “It’s good to see volunteer spirit alive and well in Dover.”

“We’ve been working on this for some time,” says Dover City Planner Steve Bird. “In fact, we tried to initiate residential zoning changes several years ago, but we were not as successful as we had hoped to be. NROC’s involvement in Dover has assisted in moving these action items forward again.”

NROC’s arrival last September helped stimulate the drive toward additional community involvement in natural resource-based planning in Dover. The full impact of that first meeting and the initiatives that it spawned cannot yet be fully measured – the waves continue to ripple throughout the city and beyond. One thing is certain: Dover will never be the same again.

Exeter NROC Program

NROC helped us see beyond our own community's boundaries and begin to recognize the importance of looking at the bigger picture and working with our neighbors to protect our valuable natural resources.

NROC was a valuable resource as we forged ahead with our mission to pass a bond issue

for the purchase of open space land. NROC provided us with answers to our legal issues, and connected us with individuals who had been successful in launching such a campaign in previous years.

Thanks to the grant program offered by NROC, we were able to apply for and receive valuable funds that allowed us to prepare a series of informational pieces on the value of open space land in our community. These mailings, combined with community information sessions, were the key to our success. As a result of the approval of the bond issue, our town has been able to buy two pieces of property and the conservation easements on six others. Two additional projects are currently being negotiated.

We are doing well in Exeter...and have been so lucky to have a fabulous group of folks working on the Open Space Committee! From one great group to the next....it makes being a part of these efforts FUN!!

Nottingham NROC Program

Thank you for everything: with NROC's assistance and guidance Nottingham now has a base line document to which we can refer when making decisions about population growth issues as they might impact the integrity and quantity of our ground water supply. The (NROC) leadership was never heavy handed, always thoughtful and attentive to the audience. Working together with the Candia-NROC group on the well water survey was good.... collaboration among communities for these types of projects is good for those issues that are shared among NH communities.

Somersworth NROC Program

NROC was a very worthwhile undertaking for the community...it heightened awareness among the land use boards and other City officials about the importance of natural resource protection and land conservation. It was a big first step and I see better things coming out of our effort. The NROC staff was knowledgeable, dedicated, and provided invaluable assistance. And you can't beat the cost!

NROC provided facilitation services which made us focus upon our goals in an effective manner. It also got non-Conservation Commission members of the community involved, and led one citizen to request joining our ranks on the Commission. We now have some technological items (e.g., digital maps) that will truly help us on our work. Thanks so much for all of your efforts and assistance!

Strafford NROC Program

Until NROC came along, I think many townspeople were frustrated. We had rewritten the master plan and did not see any of it being implemented. At the same time large parcels of property were going up for sale and by ourselves, there was nothing we could do about it. NROC brought the interested people together, organized us and showed us how to get the jobs done. Because of this, I am hopeful that our town will be a better place to live in the future. Thank you NROC!