

Community Catalyst Creates Vision 2020

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On a cold wintry weekend in January some 65 men and women from the Mid-Maine region gave up time with their family and friends to map out a vision of where they would like to see their community a dozen years from now.

From January 17 to 19 the *Energy Conservation and Sustainability* catalyst took place on the stage of the Waterville Opera House. The diverse group of people who participated included educators, college students, town managers, state legislators, engineers, civic leaders, non-profit representatives, social workers, retirees, religious leaders, and more, all from the Central Maine area.

The process was two years in the making. The dual concerns of global climate change and peak oil convinced the City of Waterville to take advantage of a grant and brought on a Colby intern during the summer of 2007. The intern helped to measure the energy usage and carbon footprint of the Waterville municipal buildings. This data was then reviewed by a newly formed City of Waterville Sustainability Committee, who made energy saving recommendations to the City Council. The following year, 2008, three interns from Colby were brought on, broadening the program to include Winslow and Fairfield.

By last fall the Sustainability Committee realized that the process needed to be expanded to the Central Maine region and that a community catalyst focusing on energy conservation and sustainability needed to take place. They hired Running Start Institute, led by facilitators Larry Lemmel and Michael T. Kelly. They facilitated a similar catalyst on community for REM on that same Opera House stage back in 1996. RSI is best known for facilitating the rebirth of Limestone after the closing of the Loring Air Force base and was instrumental in the launch of the Maine School for Science and Mathematics.

The first day of the three day process was spent creating a full page Strategic Vision statement. This was done one word at a time, projecting the creation on a big screen at the back of the stage for all to see. When the vision was modified to the point that the entire group agreed to its content, a copy was printed off and all 65 participants signed the document.

Day two and three were spent first brainstorming a list of initiatives that could be undertaken to bring about the vision, then organizing those initiatives into an action plan that included goals, priorities, constraints, projects, and milestones. Additionally, the participants were then asked to volunteer to implement the action plan.

Eight objectives were created. The group prioritized the following objectives as the top two to concentrate on: 1) Generate Renewable Energy and Promote Conservation and 2) Improve Transportation Efficiency and Choices. Topics for the six other objectives included monitoring results, rethinking waste, financial resources, educational community, local food support, and communication.

To execute such an ambitious plan will take the help and support of citizens, businesses, and government. For further information you can go to www.sustainmidmaine.org. The Strategic Vision and the Action Agenda can all be reviewed at this site. If you would like to inquire about volunteering, call Amanda Domini at 680-4204.