

## Collaborative Efforts on Sprawl and Natural Resource Protection Highlighted at UVLSRPC Programs

### I. SPRAWL

The Program Committee held two forums in November. On the 12th, Stephen Holmes of the Vermont Natural Resources Council, and Beth Humstone, Executive Director of the Vermont Forum on Sprawl, joined us at the Hotel Coolidge in downtown White River Junction for an update on the work of the Vermont Smart Growth Collaborative. The evening kicked off with some eye opening reminders of why we all in the planning community need to increase our efforts to plan for concentrated development and efficient use of land rather than continue to let growth sprawl across our landscape. Vermont Forum on Sprawl studies reveal that the percentage of land developed in Vermont between 1982 and 1997 was more than double the increase in population. The cost of sprawl compared to the cost of growth regardless of the geographic arrangement is most evident in transportation costs, including local road maintenance budgets. Eighteen percent of household costs nationwide are for transportation. Health effects are a growing concern as we now see under 20 percent of children walking to school compared with over 70 percent of their parents.

In October 2003 the Vermont Smart Growth Collaborative published an evaluation of the state's progress in meeting its state smart growth policies through its public investments, policies, and programs during fiscal years 1998-2002. Beth Humstone gave an overview of the study methodology and findings. Several Vermont agencies were found to have made a concerted effort to follow smart growth principles when siting facilities or making investments. These included capital construction overseen by the Department of Buildings and the work of the VT Housing and Conservation Board. Conversely, the expenditures of the VT Economic Development Authority, the VT Economic Progress Council, and the VT Agency of Transportation have contributed to sprawl development in various ways. The report includes a strong emphasis on recommendations for realistic steps for ensuring that public resources are used to achieve results consistent with smart growth policies. The complete results and information on other Collaborative initiatives are available at [www.vtsmartgrowth.org](http://www.vtsmartgrowth.org) or by calling 1-800-SMGRWTH.

The evening concluded with an interesting open discussion on the status of smart growth in the region and what we might learn from other states and countries. It was agreed we should not forget the importance of open space planning as an integral component of future land use planning. Without identifying special places and important resource lands ahead of time, tools such as cluster development become merely exercises in creative drawing instead of a means to ensure important agricultural lands and wildlife corridors are left intact.



## II. Resource Conservation & Development Area Councils

On November 19, interested local officials and commissioners met at the beautifully restored Lyme Center Academy Building to learn about Resource Conservation & Development Area Councils (RC&D) and what they do. The coordinators of all three RC&D areas overlapping the UVLS region came to provide overviews of current and future activities. The RC&D program was created in the early 1960s to help deliver federal assistance to rural areas. Areas organize a council of volunteer representatives to develop policies and initiatives. The federal government hires a coordinator to assist the area through the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). RC&D areas are based on partnerships among organizations sharing a common interest in wise conservation and development of regions such as ours, including conservation districts, rural development councils, and regional planning commissions. The RC&D Area Council develops a plan based on economic, social, and environmental factors and seeks to access the funding and in-kind support for projects.

Rick Demark coordinates the North Country RC&D in the four northern counties of New Hampshire. Freda Swan represents UVLSRPC on this RC&D Council. Examples of recent projects include the Beginner Farmers of NH and North Country Wood Business Assistance. Beginner Farmers of NH is a grassroots farmer-to-farmer network. RC&D organized the numerous partners and grants necessary to build the network, and provided office space and support for two AmeriCorps workers who assisted. The focus of North Country Wood Business Assistance is to provide business plan training programs for small and start-up wood-based businesses. RC&D helped conduct an assessment of training needs and secured a grant to organize the programs and provide scholarships.

Lindsey Carter coordinates the Southern NH RC&D Area Council. The Council collaborates on projects with North Country RC&D. The special needs of Southern NH access to outdoor recreation for people with disabilities. Places where small changes can make a large difference include school playgrounds and raised planters for senior facilities.

Ken Hafner coordinates the George D. Aiken RC&D Area. Neil Fulton represents UVLSRPC on this RC&D Council. Recent projects include serving as fiscal agent for the Connecticut River Birding Trail and working to connect local farmers with buyers through events and buyers' guides as part of the Randolph Area Family Farms project. The RC&D also participates in initiatives focusing on conservation education, erosion, sedimentation and flood control, recreation and watershed protection.

Both states' RC&Ds are very active in rural fire protection, including town fire protection and water supply plans, grants for dry hydrants and fire safety equipment, and technical assistance. Participating communities in the UVLS region include Springfield, Hanover, Lyme, New London, Newport, Washington, and Piermont.



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