

Citizen Engagement for Small Communities

Scott Morelli

City Manager | City of Gardiner, Maine



Citizen Engagement

- How the City of Gardiner, Maine (pop. 5,800) successfully engaged citizens over a two-year period to not only help inform our Comprehensive Plan but to learn about our community's "Heart & Soul"
 - ...or "How to cram 2+ years of work into a 15 minute presentation!"



Citizen Engagement

- Gardiner received a \$100,000 grant from the Orton Family Foundation to “change the way small cities and towns engage their citizens and plan for the future”
 - Also help inform our Comprehensive Plan

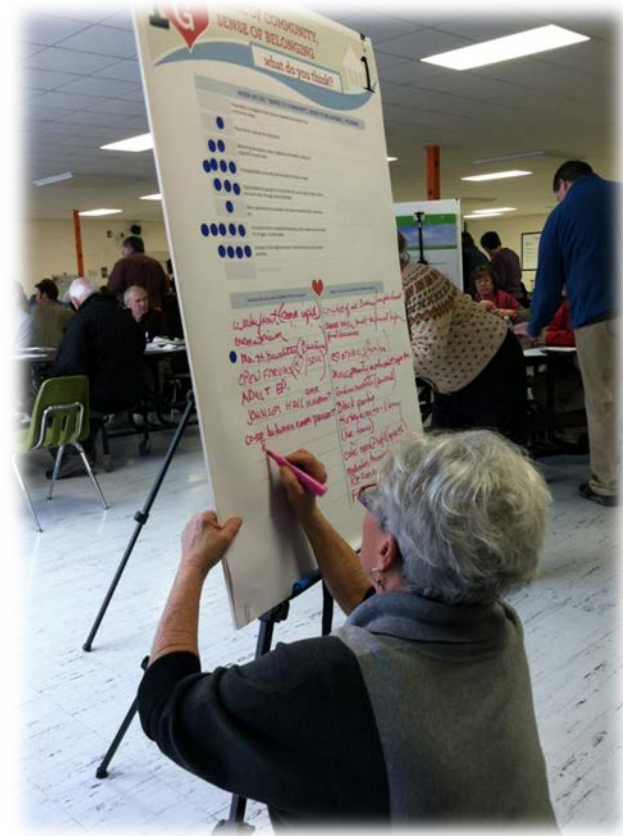


ORTON FAMILY
FOUNDATION

www.orton.org

Citizen Engagement

- Orton's "Heart & Soul" grant required a partnership with community groups
- Involved existing stakeholders & performed community network analysis
 - Also identified underrepresented groups and brainstormed as to how to better engage them



Citizen Engagement

- Once selected, the core group identified additional residents, business-owners, etc. to join the cause and/or to be “interviewed”
- Set up a Board of Trustees, Community Advisory Team, & hired P/T Coordinator
 - Councilors recommended names but did not have final say in who served on these entities
 - Community project vs. traditional “City” project

Citizen Engagement

- Several group members were designated as “Story Gatherers” and conducted one-hour interviews with over 100 members of the community over several months
 - Goal was to collect information about what people care about in their own words without any hidden agendas
 - Gleaned values from these interviews





“WTH is this...?!?”

The “Gardiner Heart & Soul” logo began randomly popping up around the city to build interest and curiosity

Citizen Engagement

- Held multiple events over two year period from January 2012 - January 2014
 - Initial events: gather values
 - Secondary events: confirm values, dig deeper
 - Wrap-up event: community action plan
 - Engaged several hundred community members during this process through various methods



Heart & Soul
Choose Your Future

List of Events

What is Heart & Soul?
Gardiner Heart & Soul is a cooperative project between the City of Gardiner, Gardiner Main Street, Gardiner Board of Trade, and the Orton Family Foundation.

Its purpose is to give the community an opportunity to shape the future of the City in a non-traditional way. The values and choices identified through this project will become the bedrock for future decisions by City Council, and will forge a path forward for non-governmental community groups to become more broadly effective and at the same time, coordinate their efforts to strengthen Gardiner.

For more information
Email: heartandsoul@gardinermaine.com
Phone: 207-582-6888
Web site: www.growwithgardiner.net
www.facebook.com/growwithgardiner

Thursday April 4, 6:00 – Lisa’s Legit Burritos, 242 Water St.
“Choose Your Future: Growing and Maintaining Gardiner’s Population; a focused discussion about how Gardiner can be more attractive to families, businesses, and people of all ages.” -Ron Trahan, Kate Willis

Thursday April 25, 6:00 – Boys & Girls Club of Greater Gardiner, 14 Pray St.
“Choose Your Future: Recreation, Sports, and Entertainment, a focused discussion about how we can use Gardiner’s assets for community, health, and wellness.” -Pat Hart, Ingrid Stanchfield

Thursday May 2, 6:00 – Dave’s Diner, 390 Brunswick Ave.
“Choose Your Future: Managing the Brunswick Ave Corridor, a focused discussion about how managing its future growth.” -Pam Mitchell and Mandy Darville

Thursday May 16, 6:00 – Location TBD
“Choose Your Future: – Revitalizing the Cobbossee Corridor, a focused discussion about breathing new life into Gardiner’s former industrial center.” -Karen Luckee, Brian Kent, Dottie Washburn

Thursday May 30, 6:00 – Johnson Hall, 280 Water St.
“Choose Your Future: Enhancing the Revitalization of Downtown, a focused discussion on the next steps for improving downtown.” -Tracey Plourde and Patrick Wright

Thursday June 6, 6:00 – Gardiner Public Library, Hazzard Reading Room, 152 Water St.
“Choose Your Future: Growing the Local Economy and Tax Base, a focused discussion about creating jobs, expanding the tax base, and fostering opportunity.” -Nate Rudy, Kirk Mohney, Phyllis Gardiner, Melonie Coutts

Thursday June 20th, 6:00 – Johnson Hall, 280 Water Street
“Choose Your Future: Capitalizing on the River & Riverfront as a Community Asset, a focused discussion about how we can better use the riverfront.” -Debby Willis and Jack Fies

Citizen Engagement

- To better engage people we...
 1. Held no events at City Hall
 - Boys & Girls Club
 - School gyms & auditoriums
 - Outdoor parks
 - Johnson Hall Performing Arts Center



Citizen Engagement

- To better engage people we...
 2. Adhered to the “Free, Fun, Food” rule
 - Multiple events on weeknights & Saturdays
 - Many family-friendly
 - Always interactive/ games
 - Free – and always *local* – food



Citizen Engagement

- To better engage people we...
 3. Piggy-backed on existing events
 - Police Department's "National Night Out"
 - Downtown Art Walks
 - Annual Riverfest, etc.



Citizen Engagement

- Also occupied a vacant store front downtown
 - Comfortable, living room set up
 - Staffed by volunteers and our H&S Coordinator
 - Displayed art, notes from meetings, flip charts with ideas, etc.
 - Again, idea is to be away from City Hall



Citizen Engagement

- Values derived from these events were taken back to the community at subsequent events to ensure we heard them correctly
 - “Nay-Sayers” specifically invited to these events



Citizen Engagement


- “Action Plan” created & final community summit held
 - Separate document from Comp Plan (for the “Community” to implement as opposed to the municipality)
 - “Duct Tape Council” formed to help address the non-City government related actions



Citizen Engagement

- Comp Plan
 - Hired a consultant to lead this process and work with the Heart & Soul group
 - Held a series of focused discussions on particular areas brought up during the story-gathering phase
 - Committee used this info when creating plan

You are invited to shape the future of Gardiner.



Gardiner Heart & Soul is a collaboration of Gardiner area organizations, the City of Gardiner, and (we hope) you.

This is our opportunity to learn from each other, work together, and build a great future for Gardiner. Please join us!

WHAT SHOULD OUR COMPREHENSIVE PLAN SAY ABOUT.....?

DISCUSSION TOPIC	DATE AND LOCATION:
Managing the Brunswick Ave Corridor	May 2, 6pm Laura B Richards School 279 Brunswick Ave
Revitalizing the Cobossee Corridor	May 16, 6pm Gardiner Reg. Middle School 161 Cobossee Avenue
Gardiner's Downtown	May 30, 6pm Johnson Hall 280 Water St.
Growing our Local Economy	June 6, 6pm Gardiner Library 152 Water St.
Capitalizing on our River & Riverfront	June 20, 6pm Johnson Hall 280 Water St.

Gardiner's new **Comprehensive Plan** will set a course for the future of our city. Join the discussions with City staff and local volunteers.

WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING? HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED?

POSSIBLE UPCOMING EVENTS	DATE AND LOCATION:
Neighborhood Outreach & Celebrations	Summer/Fall 2013
Leadership Development Program	Summer/Fall 2013
Community Action Summit	Fall 2013
Heart & Soulmate Awards*	ongoing

*Do you know a local hero who volunteers, helps neighbors, and makes Gardiner a great place to live? Nominate him or her for a Heart & Soulmate Award!

To get in touch, nominate a local hero, get involved, or find out more information about Gardiner Heart & Soul:

EMAIL: heartandsoul@gardiner.maine.com WEB: www.growwithgardiner.net PHONE: 207-582-6888 FACEBOOK: www.facebook.com/growwithgardiner

Citizen Engagement

- Means of communication used during process
 - Gathered emails at events & sent weekly email blasts
 - Created a separate website from City site for the community & to provide info about Heart & Soul process
 - Large social media push
 - Postcards sent to those without internet
 - Partner groups notified their members
 - Good coverage by local newspaper
 - *“I bugged the crap out of my friends to attend!”*



Citizen Engagement

- Results
 - Far more outreach and community engagement than would have happened with traditional comp plan process
 - Volunteers for project became even more engaged and dedicated to community while bonding with one another
 - Organizations became better partners



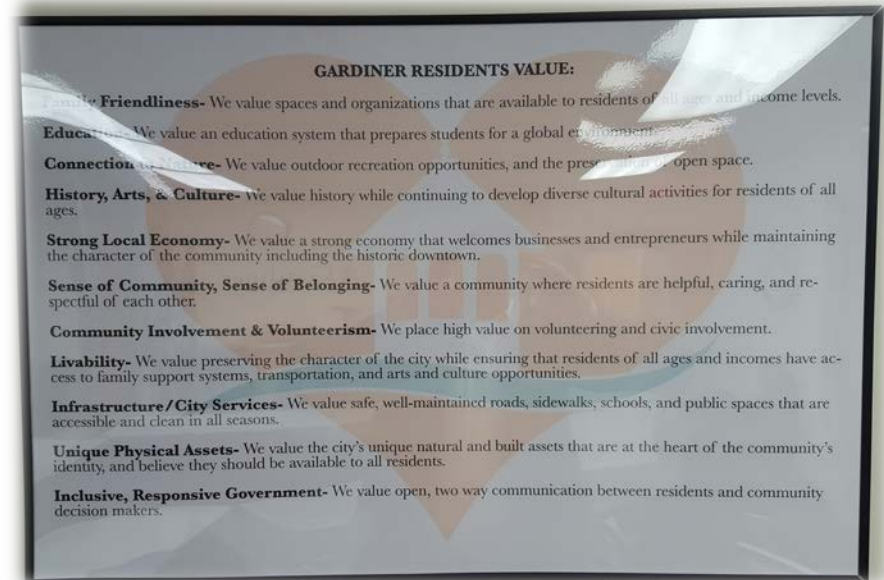
Citizen Engagement

- Results
 - Free waterfront concerts, helped establish the Gardiner Food Co-Op, temporary skate park, new resident welcome booklet, Cobbossee Trail fundraising, etc.



Citizen Engagement

- Results
 - City Council adopted values
 - Poster-sized document hangs in the Council Chambers



Citizen Engagement

- Take-Aways
 - \$100,000 helps – APPLY TO ORTON!
 - Leverage existing community groups/resources
 - Hold numerous events (“free, fun, food”)
 - Re-state what you think you heard to make sure you’re right
 - Utilize a consultant to help facilitate
 - Send people off empowered to act





“We Are Gardiner: Vision to Values” | <https://youtu.be/3Cd4M1O1DrY>

Questions/Comments?

Scott Morelli
City Manager | Gardiner, Maine

smorelli@gardinermaine.com
www.GrowWithGardiner.net





2015 SEPT 27-30
seattle
ICMA ANNUAL CONFERENCE KING COUNTY

