

# Somersworth



## Sustainability Committee

### Report on 2012 Committee Activities

December 2012

**Somersworth Sustainability Committee members:**

Liz Wilson, chair and Conservation Commission representative

Jeanette Gagne, Mayor's designee

Dave Sharples, Director of Planning and Community Development

Tom Willis, Director of Public Works

Jennifer Soldati, City Council representative

Doug Watson, Citizen-at-large representative

Kira Sawyer-Hartigan, Citizen-at-large representative

Coty Donohue, Business Community representative

Open Seat, Planning Board representative

Open Seat, High School student representative

## Introduction

The Somersworth Sustainability Committee was established formed after approval by the Somersworth City Council on February 22, 2011. The Committee formed out of a citizen-based group interested in promoting sustainability in the community, and was developed to establish city policies, plans and procedures to conform with the city's goal of becoming a sustainable community as outlined in the Master Plan. The mission of the Committee is to ensure the resilience of current and future generations in Somersworth through responsible management of natural resources; reductions in use of manmade chemicals; protection of natural areas; and building people's capacity to meet their basic needs.

General Committee responsibilities include:

- Serve as a resource for the City Council and City;
- Develop recommendations for implementing the goals in the Somersworth's Master Plan related to sustainability;
- Identify existing sustainable practices and identify areas needing improvement;
- Assist in coordinating efforts of various departments implementing sustainability projects;
- Encourage involvement of the community at large in the activities of the Committee;
- Promote public awareness;

The following report summarizes the Committee's projects over the past year and outlines upcoming projects for 2013.

## Projects During 2012

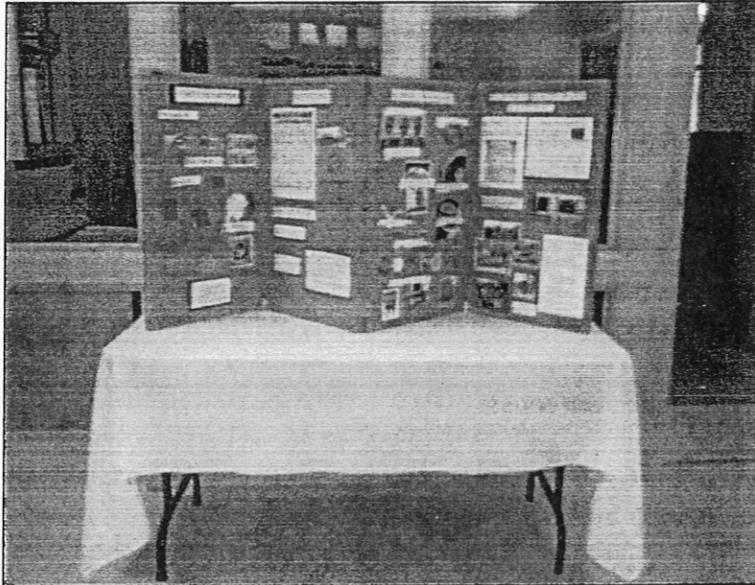
### Clean Air Cool Planet Grant

One of the goals of the 2010 Somersworth Master Plan is for the City to take a leadership role in building a sustainable community for current and future generations. Implementation of a formal recycling program in select public spaces is one way that the City can lead by example. Through a grant awarded by Clean Air Cool Planet in February 2012, the Committee established a recycling program in select public spaces. Two indoor recycling receptacles have been installed in City Hall and two outdoor receptacles were installed at the High School sports fields and/or the Noble Pines Park. The grant also provided funds for developing a traveling educational display containing information on waste reduction. In an effort to provide the public with information on ways to divert waste going to landfills, the display board illustrates the following:

- Replacing disposable products such as plastic water bottles and plastic bags with reusable alternatives
- Donating and/or swapping household items instead of buying new products

- Recycling: Residents are offered single-stream recycling, which allows paper and plastic materials to be combined into the same bins. The display board includes a complete list of acceptable and unacceptable items for recycling
- Reducing food waste, including composting
- Reducing pollutants in waterways to improve watershed health

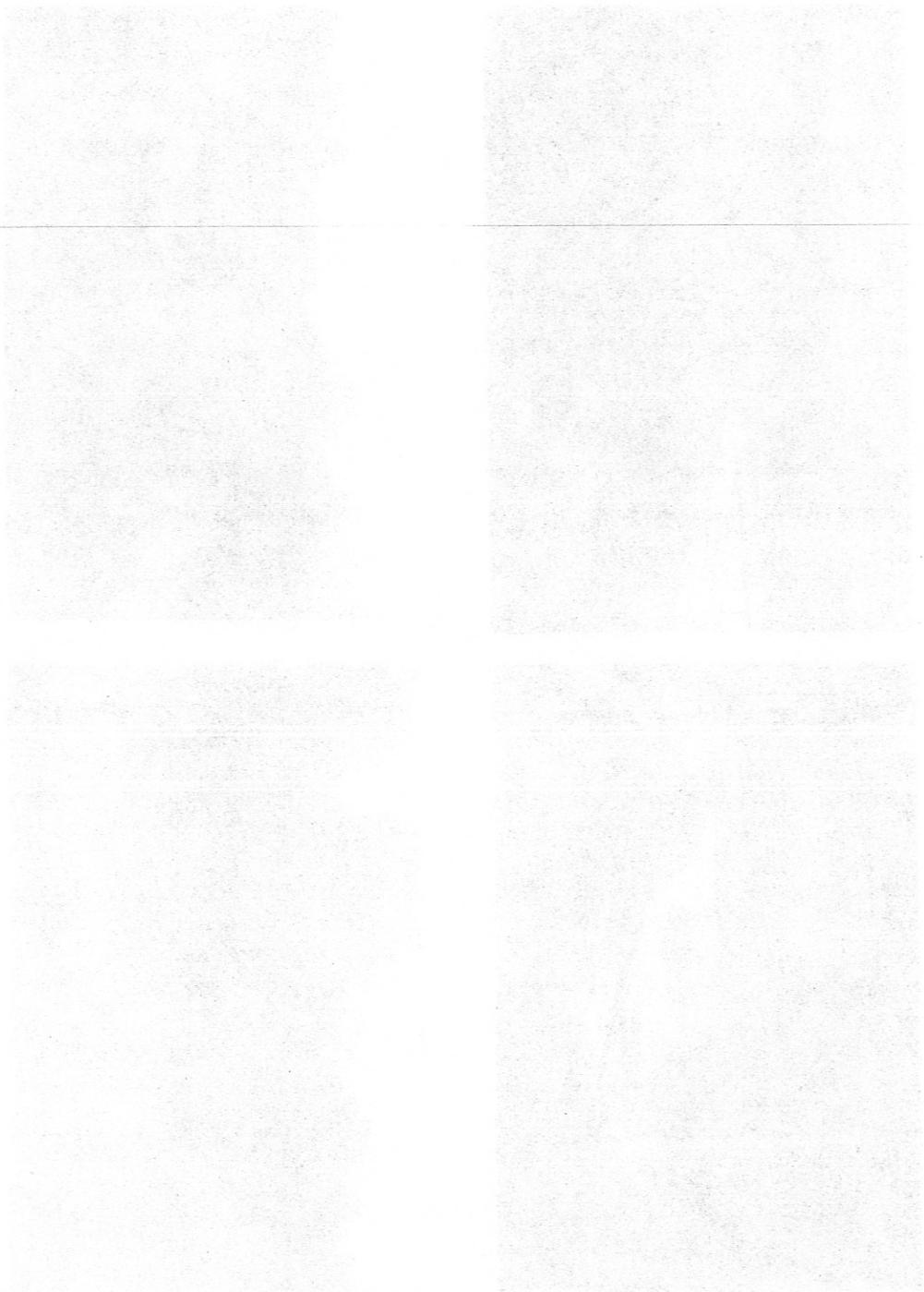
The waste reduction display board currently resides in City Hall outside the city clerk's office. In 2013, the Committee will work with the library and schools to periodically move the display board throughout the community.



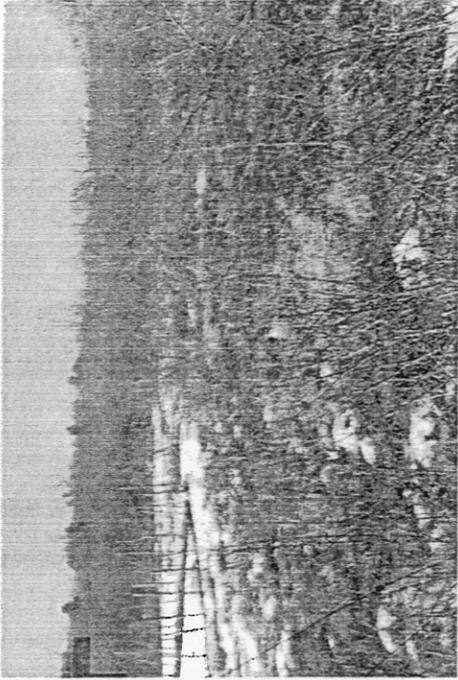
### Community Garden

Since the formation of the Committee in 2011, many discussions have centered on the formation of a community garden. In December 2011, the Committee began its search for a garden space by conducting a neighborhood survey in the area of the Ash Street Park. Although the park is an important feature of the surrounding neighborhood, inadequate sunlight and access to water proved to be significant challenges. As an alternative, the Committee decided to initiate a pilot garden project at Malley Farm where a community garden effort was made several years ago. The Malley Farm community garden was constructed in April 2012 by the Committee and Somersworth residents with significant help from the Department of Public Works and local businesses including Wentworth Greenhouses, Home Depot, and Commercial Maintenance and Landscape. Malley Farm has proven to be a great spot for a community garden with access to water and visibility to the public from the adjacent compost area and ball fields. During summer 2012, 10 of 17 plots were occupied by gardeners, and all gardeners had access to a communal herb and tomato plot.

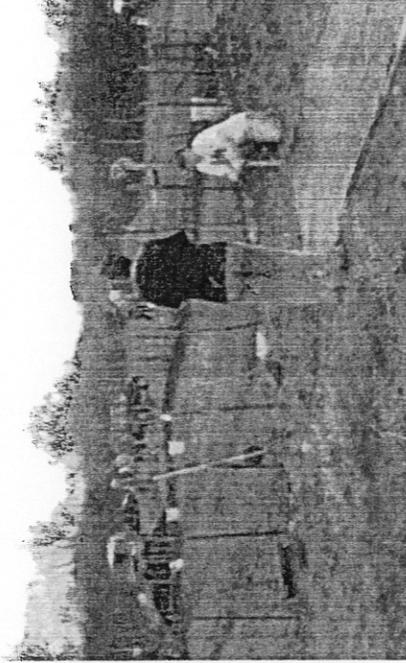
The following photographs document the garden's transformation from vegetated field to produce-bearing garden.



February 2012



April 2012

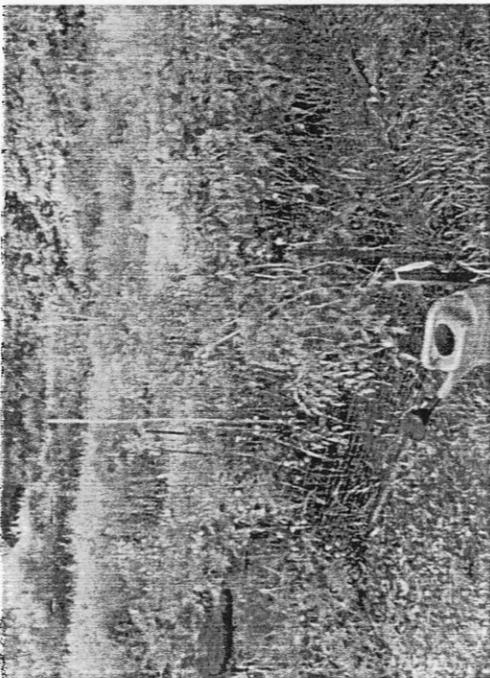
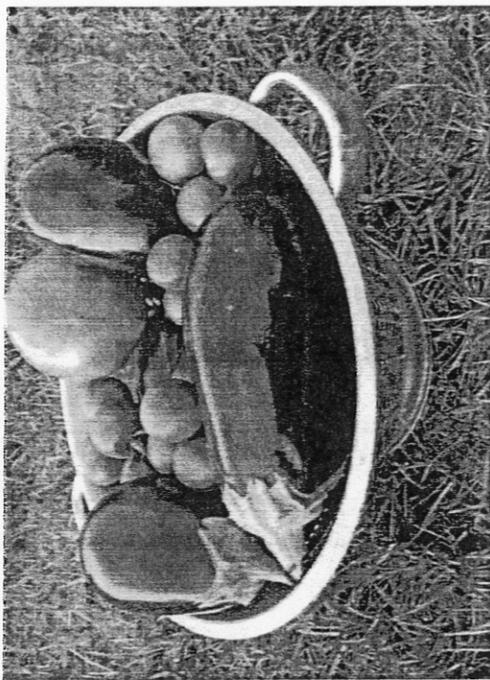


April 2012

Yin-Yang 5015



August 2012



## Community Garden as a Classroom

The practice of *permaculture* applies the ecological principles from natural ecosystems to food production to create self-maintained food systems. Somersworth resident Daniel Hartigan is currently participating in a permaculture design certification program and suggested the Committee use the community garden as an educational space. Daniel is using the principles of permaculture to design garden improvements that will help further develop and sustain the community garden for its members and the community.

## Produce Exchange

On September 9, 2012, the Committee hosted a community produce exchange with the aim of bringing together local gardeners in an informal gathering of neighbors to exchange excess produce. A handful of Somersworth residents as well as a few others from nearby communities, came together to share gardening experiences, recipes, and produce. All leftover produce at the end of the event was donated to the Somersworth food pantry. It is the Committee's hope that the produce exchange will become an annual event.



## Buy Local Campaign

The Committee is beginning to work with Seacoast Local, an organization dedicated to educating the Seacoast about the community benefits of rooting more money locally to increase our region's economic, community and environmental strength ([seacoastlocal.org](http://seacoastlocal.org)). The City of Somersworth as well as the Greater Somersworth Chamber of Commerce are both now members of Seacoast Local. The director of Seacoast Local has met with the City and the Chamber to help establish buy local campaigns. The first such campaign is *Shift Your Shopping*.

The first phase of this campaign was "Plaid Friday," a local alternative to Black Friday. Many local businesses were in support, and many saw a positive impact from increased local shopping on Plaid Friday. The Chamber sponsored a Night of Lights event that coincided with the Holiday parade. Participating businesses in the downtown area displayed special lighting outside their shops, offered refreshments and special promotions, and remained open until 8:00 p.m. to encourage local shopping. The Chamber also continued its public voting strategy for its Annual Gingerbread House competition. This activity helps attract residents and non-residents to Somersworth's downtown area during the holiday season.

David Boyton, Director of Seacoast Local, has purchased a domain name in support of the campaign, <http://www.shopsomersworth.org>. Information on the *Shift Your Shopping* campaign is available on the site, and the Committee will assist in future development and maintenance of the site, including a directory of local businesses and the services they provide. The Committee will continue to work with Seacoast Local and the Chamber of Commerce in 2013 to develop additional local campaigns.

### **Participation in Local Food Security Organization**

Committee member, Kira Sawyer-Hartigan, has been working with other seacoast area individuals to establish Food Education Network (FEN), an organization "dedicated to increasing access to healthy, local and organic foods to low income communities with the overall goal to improve nutrition knowledge and cultivate cooking skills. Through our community food guide, FEN educates people on how to choose healthy food, prepare nutritious meals for their families and to increase the availability of local foods to these communities." As a representative of the Committee, Kira Sawyer-Hartigan is working on a FEN local food guide publication that will serve as a resource to healthy local food. The FEN publication is due to be finalized by summer 2013.

### **Looking Forward to 2013**

#### **Decision Making Checklist**

In spring 2011, the Committee began developing a draft decision-making guidance document to assist City decision makers in implementing policies and procedures that employ sustainable practices. During 2013, the Committee will refine this guidance document that is currently formatted as a user friendly checklist. The goal of this checklist is to assist the City in fulfilling the sustainability goals outlined in the 2010 Master Plan.

#### **Community Garden Board of Directors**

In an effort to bolster participation and maintenance of the community garden, the Committee is currently working to establish a community garden Board of Directors, comprised of gardeners, Committee members, and other interested Somersworth residents. The Board will be responsible for managing garden memberships, seeking funding opportunities, maintaining the garden, and promoting educational opportunities.

### Enhanced Outreach

During 2013-2014, the Committee plans to further its sustainability education goal by coordinating workshops for the public, inviting guest speakers to the City, and hosting discussion groups. The Committee's hope is to partner with a variety of existing community individuals and organizations to facilitate these educational events. A small sampling of topics already discussed for workshops, speakers, and discussion groups include:

- How to make a rain barrel
- Composting
- Waste Reduction
- Energy Efficiency
- Food Security/Nutrition
- Principles of Permaculture
- Growing lawns and green spaces without chemicals
- Many more!

### Grant Opportunities

The Committee continues to look for grant opportunities to fund the community garden as well as other Committee projects. Currently, the Committee is seeking grant opportunities to develop an edible landscape garden at the Library and provide materials towards an edible landscaping/sustainable agriculture reading program at the Library.

### Solar Farm at the former municipal landfill

Across the United States, landfills are being looked at for possible reuse as solar "farms", given their typically large size and exposure to sunlight. Dave Sharples performed a preliminary site evaluation of the former Somersworth Sanitary Landfill using a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) web-based tool to determine if the site exhibits the characteristics for solar energy generation. He has also spoken with an EPA representative about the site, and the EPA appears enthusiastic about a potential solar project at the Somersworth Landfill and may have access to funding that could support a comprehensive feasibility study. The Committee is in the very preliminary stages of exploring options for solar energy at the Landfill and will continue to explore the option during the next year.

### Compost Bin Sale

For early 2013, the Committee is exploring the opportunity to purchase compost bins from the Northeast Resource Recovery Association at a discounted rate for sale to Somersworth residents at that same discounted rate. The goal of this program is to promote composting by providing convenient, affordable access to bins for Somersworth residents.

**Participate in Seacoast Grow-A-Row**

*5210 Steps Up* is an initiative that began as a coalition of local organizations and health care advocates committed to promoting healthy choices in nutrition and physical activity known as *Step It Up Seacoast* (<http://www.5210.org>). *Grow-A-Row* is a 5210-sponsored program that encourages individual and community gardeners to plant and donate an extra row of produce for local food pantries and food relief organizations (<http://www.5210.org>). Inspired by the September produce exchange event, one of the Committee's 2013 goals is to promote the *Grow-A-Row* program within the City. Additionally, the Committee hopes to facilitate donations to food pantries by designating a weekly food drop-off location to make the giving experience convenient for *Grow-A-Row* participants.

**Website**

The Committee has a designated section on the City's website to post agenda's, announcements, and links to sustainability resources. During 2013, the Committee plans to enhance the functionality and use of the website.