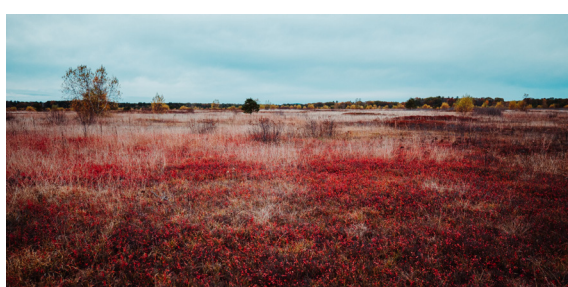




GrowSmart Maine

Annual Report: Fiscal Year 2023



JULY 1, 2022 – JUNE 30, 2023

What a year it's been! GrowSmart has broadened our partnerships and expanded our capacity to offer even more direct support to Mainers and Maine communities.

For the first ten years of my tenure leading GrowSmart Maine, my challenge was to find ways to insert smart growth and land use planning into public policy and community engagement. But that's changed in the past few years. With the significant in-migration of people choosing to live here, the impact of where we direct housing and commercial development has become top of mind for many people across the state. And GrowSmart Maine continues to facilitate policies, projects, and programs to support communities in making changes that align with their long term vision and immediate goals; to manage change in alignment with smart growth.

In July 2022, we had a staff of 1½ people. Today, we are 4½ staff with professional capacity for technical assistance in

broadband, land use planning, and farmland protection as well as our ongoing work in state-level advocacy and convening to action. We also have staff to better tell the stories of good work underway and its impact across the state.

In our role through USDA: Rural Development as Maine's State Rural Development Council, GrowSmart is positioned to connect communities with state and federal resources.

Partnerships with our longtime funders and collaborators are essential to achieving our vision that community planning and investment will support vibrant and resilient communities with a sense of place and quality of life for everyone. This year, we joined with American Farmland Trust to deploy Planning for Agriculture focus in our advocacy, convening to action, and thought leadership for an integrated approach to support farmland protection and farm viability across Maine. As one of Maine's thirteen regional and tribal broadband partners with Maine Connectivity Authority, we

are ensuring that digital equity is completely integrated into deploying federal investments in Kennebec County.

We've done our share of reflection in the past year as well. We better understand and communicate the impact of our work, knowing that by sharing the impact of this work on people's lives now and in the future, we broaden interest and appreciation for smart growth. At our spring board retreat, we dove deeply into the question, "why does smart growth matter?" until we articulated the key impact: creating places for personal connections. This led to the focus of our 2023 Annual Summit, *Creating Places Connecting People*, and remains at the core of our work.

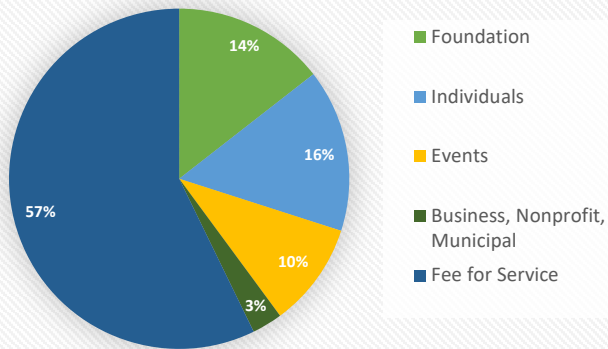
Within the tensions between statewide decision-making and municipal autonomy, this may be a once in a generation, at least once in a decade, opportunity to translate this broad new awareness of the value in planning and smart growth strategies, to add resources and change the landscape; based on long term factors we now call resilience. GrowSmart will continue to draw attention to the interconnects between all aspects of community, environment, climate, and economy.

With thanks to the board for their ideas, energy, and thoughtful support,

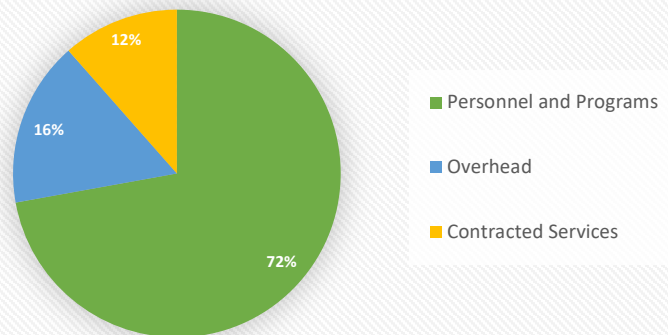



GrowSmart Maine staff, back row L to R: Amanda Vermillion, Development and Operations Associate; Aqeel (AJ) Mohialdeen, Outreach and Communications Director; Harald Bredesen, Program Director. Front row: Nancy Smith, CEO; Hildie Lipson, Kennebec Broadband Partnership Director.

FY 2023 Revenue \$331,784



FY 2023 Expenses \$265,206



Financial Report:

FY2023 was a financial success for GrowSmart Maine. Revenue and Net Income exceeded both budget and prior year figures. While other revenue streams kept pace with the prior year, Fee for Service revenue increased significantly. This is due to our community technical assistance contracts with American Farmland Trust for Planning for Ag, and Maine Connectivity Authority for Kennebec Broadband Partnership.

Shifts in percent revenue compared to prior year from Foundation to Fee for Service reflects our additional revenue from our agreements with American Farmland Trust for Planning for

Ag, and Maine Connectivity Authority for Kennebec Broadband Partnership. Increased percentage in Personnel and Programming vs. Contracted services reflects these new programs providing support to communities.

Expenses were also up with additional staff, more meetings, and needed larger office space. Much of these expenses reflect Kennebec Broadband Partnership programming.

GrowSmart Maine's equity has increased by over \$100,000 in the past two years!



GrowSmart Board and Staff, May 2023.



Sally Stockwell, Maine Audubon and GrowSmart Board Member asks a question during the 2022 Summit during panel Q&A.



GrowSmart CEO Nancy Smith (left), with U.S. Representative Chellie Pingree (center) and Rhiannon Hampson, State Director for Maine USDA, Rural Development

GrowSmart Maine Board of Directors 2023

Rebecca Casey, Board Chair
 Ethan Boxer-Macomber, Vice Chair
 Jean Claveau, Treasurer
 Maggie Fleming, Secretary
 Jon Boynton
 Kirsten Brewer
 Elizabeth Frazier
 Philip Hussey

Jeff Levine
 Carol Morris
 Lynne Seeley
 Smith, Ben
 Sally Stockwell
 Galen Weibley
 Zoe Miller

Ex Officio

Mark Wiesendanger, Maine Housing
 Rhiannon Hampson, USDA:Rural Development

Emeritus Board Members

Daniel Hildreth, Falmouth
 Anna Marie Thron, Portland
 Evan Richert, Brewer

OUR WORK AND ITS IMPACT

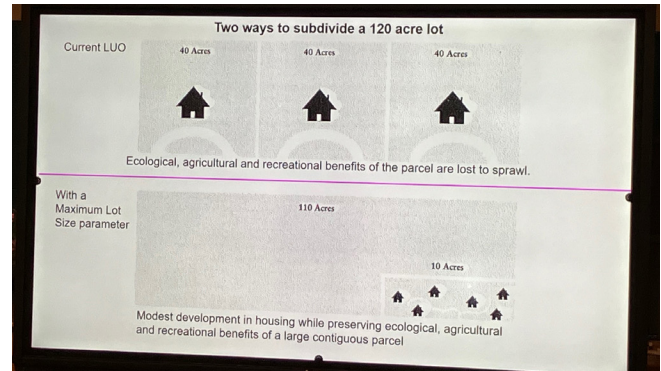
PLANNING FOR AGRICULTURE

Planning for Agriculture is a collaboration between American Farmland Trust (AFT) and GrowSmart Maine to make farm viability and farmland protection an integral part of land use planning. The initiative is a response to the alarming rate of farmland loss in Maine and across America. Maine lost almost 150,000 acres, or 10%, of its farmland between 2012 and 2017 largely due to “low-density residential development” or sprawl.

GrowSmart Maine works with local communities to limit sprawl and encourage development toward existing village centers. Smart growth allows local businesses and farmers’ markets to thrive on walkable Main Streets, communities to benefit from resilient local food networks, and families to have access to healthy, locally-grown food. Reducing sprawl has also been shown to have a positive fiscal impact on town and municipal budgets. Our efforts are focused on:

- 1) Advocacy at the local and state levels to advance legislation, planning solutions, and other measures that help safeguard farmland and farm viability.
- 2) Convening partners and channeling resources to amplify smart growth and farm community voices in town and municipal planning processes.
- 3) Enabling local communities and citizen planners to integrate farm viability and farm protection strategies in comprehensive plans and land-use ordinances by making relevant tools and guidance readily available through resources such as our online Planning for Ag Toolbox.

Importantly, support from American Farmland Trust has enabled GrowSmart Maine to secure additional resources and



The Bowdoinham Comprehensive Planning Committee presents subdivision reform ideas for rural districts.

expand our community engagement and technical assistance through three new programs outlined below:

The Community Resilience Partnership

Municipalities are seeking ways to adapt to current and projected climate change impacts to better protect lives and property and ensure they can continue to offer a good quality of life and a thriving economy now and in the future. Smart growth not only prepares a community and its residents and businesses for the impacts of climate change, but also improves everyday life.

With support from the Governor’s Office of Policy Innovation (GOPIF), GrowSmart Maine helps communities enroll in the Community Resilience Partnership. Once enrolled, communities may apply directly for grants from GOPIF to support projects that reduce energy use and costs and make their community more resilient to climate change effects, such as flooding, extreme weather, drought, and public health impacts. GrowSmart Maine is currently working with the towns of Mount Vernon and Vienna, and is available to support other towns for future rounds.



Come Give Your Opinion About Land Use! One of several land use planning forums in the Town of Bowdoinham.

OUR WORK AND ITS IMPACT

The Housing Opportunity Program

Through Planning for Ag, GrowSmart Maine has provided technical assistance to the comprehensive planning process in Bowdoinham, focused on strategies to address immediate and long term needs in housing and agriculture. Bowdoinham is situated within commuting distance to major employers and service centers and development pressure is expected to continue to increase, threatening significant farmland.

Building on this work, GrowSmart Maine was awarded a service provider grant from the Department of Economic and Community Development's Housing Opportunity Program. The grant allows GrowSmart Maine to demonstrate farmland protection as a key component of the ongoing state and federal focus on increasing affordable housing. In addition to technical assistance, GrowSmart will develop educational resources that will be available statewide. The grant will also enable us to work with the Hancock County Planning Commission (HCPC) to develop resources on Sustainable Siting of New Housing as a part of their regional planning process.

Building Community Strength: A Community Planning Capacity-Building Program

This proposed 3-year program builds on existing community strengths and will provide training, technical assistance, and grants to rural municipalities in Maine. The goal is to strengthen communities' ability to identify community priorities, develop strategic and effective plans, and access funding to implement projects. By design, this program builds local capacity that will continue to serve communities beyond the span of this program.

The proposal was submitted to USDA: Rural Development with matching funds from American Farmland Trust. Ten municipalities signed up to participate in the program. If funded, trainees from each municipality will tackle Climate Resilience, Economic Development, Farm Viability and Farmland Protection, Housing for a Well-rounded Community, and Equitable and Inclusive Community Development. Trainees will also be supported in researching and applying for state, federal, and foundation funding.

The trainings will be delivered through three platforms: 1) Joint workshops bringing together trainers and trainees from all enrolled communities to learn from each other, share resources and experiences, and solve common challenges; 2) Community visits where trainers and trainees engage the broader community and set community goals in a neutral and facilitated structure, and; 3) Ongoing learning is supported through online tools and resources, as well as a dedicated Q&A members' forum.

KENNEBEC BROADBAND PARTNERSHIP

GrowSmart Maine hosts the Kennebec Broadband Partnership, a program of the Maine Connectivity Authority. This partnership supports broadband infrastructure projects and digital equity and literacy projects to connect residents in Kennebec County. It is one of thirteen Regional and Tribal Broadband programs in the state.

The partnership seeks to create alignment and coordination between communities, regions, and the state for broadband connectivity. In addition, this program advances digital equity and literacy for people in the county. Digital equity is a condition where all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy, and economy. Digital equity is necessary for civic and cultural participation, employment, lifelong learning, and access to essential services.

With support from the Kennebec County Digital Equity Working Group, we created a regional Kennebec County Digital Equity Plan, determining the connectivity, device, and learning needs of people with low income, elders, people with different abilities, veterans, rural residents, and people with low-literacy or learning English. This plan is part of Maine's Digital Equity Plan, which serves as a five-year road map to bring the economic, health, educational, and social benefits of high-speed internet to all Mainers.

In 2024, the program will implement digital literacy programs across the region and promote access to affordable internet and devices and regional broadband solutions.



Remi French, right, helps Josh Neptune, both of Mt. Vernon, solve a tech problem at Dr. Shaw Library. Photo courtesy of Remi French.

OUR WORK AND ITS IMPACT

ADVOCACY

POLICY ACTION 2023:

Over the past year, GrowSmart launched a bold initiative in partnership with BuildMaine to create a collaborative, transparent process developing public policy around a shared goal: to address barriers to and create incentives for equitable, sustainable growth and development that strengthens downtowns and villages of all sizes while pulling development pressure away from productive and open natural areas. We are working with bipartisan sponsors and supporters over the two years of the 131st Legislature.

Advocacy has never been done like this—cross-sector, collaborative, statewide (and beyond). This means showing your work before it's done and inviting shared ownership in the final product. We are not requiring buy-in of all proposals to work on ones of interest. There will be disagreements, and we have to trust that our focus on the shared goal and the legislative process will result in meaningful outcomes.

In 2023, during the First Regular Session of the 131st Legislature, seventeen bills were proposed through eight working groups, each focused on a distinct type of solution, while acknowledging that Maine has urban, rural, and suburban settings for which any solution may or may not be a fit and a variety of people who deserve to be welcomed to their communities.

Year 1 results are mixed, with both celebration and frustration, and more work ahead.

- Four bills passed and signed by the Governor. These were incremental Improvements to funding levels and policy, as well as Resolves for additional information, in the next session.
- One bill was withdrawn and a revised proposal submitted for next session
- Four bills were voted down in committee with one piece brought into a bill that passed.
- Nine bills carried over to the next session.

Outcomes include \$5.7 million in additional funding for transit and broadening representation on the Public Transit Advisory Council, recommendations on planning assistance to Maine communities, adding safety metrics and crash data to MaineDOT's prioritization and evaluation, and establishing an energy scoring system for residential buildings.

Year 2 of Policy Action 2023 will dive deeper into significant systems changes including: how municipalities develop their comprehensive plans, broadening Maine's tax credit for historic buildings, developing pre-approved building types for single and multi-family housing, a complete rethinking of subdivision rules, and encouraging coordination between MaineDOT and community investments to bring fresh strategies to aging commercial corridors.

GrowSmart Maine continues to press for strategies that facilitate more housing without undoing the good work in response to the climate crisis and without creating the next crisis in access to food and farmland.



Policy Action 2023 discussions at Summit 2022. Photo by Dave Dostie.

OUR WORK AND ITS IMPACT

PLANNING FOR AG:

GrowSmart supported bills that protect farmland and support farm viability. Bills addressed PFAS contamination and maintaining the balance between farmland and solar and wind energy production and carbon sequestration.

SMART GROWTH and BROADBAND

We supported bills to encourage development of accessory-dwelling units, increase transportation funding, encourage safe and interconnected transportation projects, and through our policy leadership in the Maine Broadband Coalition, we advocated to secure internet privacy, and to expand broadband-related funding and technical assistance to communities.

CONVENING TO ACTION

WEBINARS

Growing Smart in Mid-Sized Cities

GrowSmart Maine presented a virtual forum “Growing Smart in Mid-Sized Cities” on May 16. The panelists were Michael Foley, Mayor of Westbrook; Jason Levesque, Mayor of Auburn; Galen Weibley, Director of Economic & Community Development, Presque Isle; and Kristina Cannon, Executive Director at Main Street Skowhegan.

Panelists discussed smart growth strategies that community members, developers, and municipal officials can put to use to address development challenges and capitalize on opportunities. They presented key initiatives in their towns including: abolishing parking minimums; form-based codes; effective permitting processes; building on your community’s assets; and how to make development work for the community.

Participants learned about smart growth strategies that community members, developers, and municipal officials can put to use to address development challenges and capitalize on opportunities. They particularly appreciated “the opportunity to hear lessons learned and what’s working in each community” from “enthusiastic panelists.”

Municipal Tools to Support Farming as a Climate Strategy

To highlight the relevance of farm viability and farmland protection to the climate agenda in Maine, GrowSmart Maine hosted a webinar on June 26th, focused on “Municipal Tools to Support Farming as a Climate Strategy.” The webinar was a part of GrowSmart Maine’s effort to raise awareness of the

role of farming in local responses to climate change and provide tangible local planning and land use strategies that towns and municipalities can use to make agriculture a part of their planning for more climate resilient communities.

The panelists were Dave Herring, executive director at Wolfe’s Neck Center for Agriculture and the Environment, Scott Vlaun, executive director at the Center for an Ecology-Based Economy, and Judy East, Director, Bureau of Resource Information and Land Use Planning, DACF. The webinar was attended by representatives from the farming community, climate resilience specialists, and municipal planners.

Both forums are available on the GrowSmart Maine YouTube channel.



GrowSmart Maine’s 2022 Summit at the Pepperell Mill Campus in Biddeford. Photo by Dave Dostie.

SUMMIT 2022

GrowSmart’s Summit 2022 was held October 13th at the anchor location in Biddeford with one satellite venue in Bangor, and included virtual participation. John Piotti from American Farmland Trust and Mike McGinn from America Walks shared their perspectives on the theme “Advocacy is Empowerment.” Rhiannon Hampson, USDA Rural Development State Director, moderated the panel and engaged in their discussion with the audience as they shared stories of how advocating for smart growth outcomes in rural and urban settings is making a difference from the local level to regional, state, and federal levels.

Following the keynotes, attendees joined Policy Action 2023 breakout groups, building on earlier work to craft legislation. The Maine Smart Growth Awards were announced followed by City Experience Walking Tours in Biddeford. 140 people attended, with 120 people at the main venue in Biddeford, ten at the Bangor satellite venue, and a dozen participating virtually.

DONORS & MEMBERS FISCAL YEAR 2023

FOUNDATIONS

Anonymous (2)
Elmina B. Sewall Foundation
Maine Community Foundation
Donor-Advised Funds
Anna Marie and
John E. Thron Fund
Buck Family Fund
Seal Bay II Fund
The Stockly Fund
Vanguard Charitable: The
Boxer-Macomber Family Fund

BUSINESS MEMBERS

Sustaining

Machias Savings Bank

Affirming

Acorn Engineering
J.B. Brown & Sons
Terrence J. Dewan &
Associates

Supporting

Alex Serra Consulting
Bateman Partners, LLC
Eaton Peabody
Gawron Turgeon Architects
Great Falls Construction
Licht Environmental Design
LK Planning
NewHeight Group
The Green Store

NONPROFIT MEMBERS

Sustaining

The Nature Conservancy

Affirming

Maine Association of Planners

Contributing

Maine Public Health
Association
Mid-Maine Chamber
of Commerce
Sunrise County Economic
Council
Two Rivers - Ottauquechee
Regional Commission
Northern Maine
Development Commission

MUNICIPAL MEMBERS

Supporting

City of Ellsworth
Town of Falmouth
Town of Gray
Town of Rumford
City of South Portland
Town of Topsham

MAJOR DONORS

Sam Hamill
Daniel Hildreth
Norton "Buzz" Lamb
Helen Norton
Thomas Rumpf

INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS

Platinum

Stephen Bamberger
Kristen Brewer
Becca Casey
Jean Grigsby
Bobbi Keppel
Lisa Miller
Sally Oldham
Evan Richert
Brian Ricks
Lynne Seeley
John Smith
David Webster

Gold

Marguerite Fleming
Andrew Glassberg
Anthony & Sally Grassi
Bryce & Sarah Hach
Eric & Sandra Hakanson
David Hediger
Theresa Kelly
David & Jane Kidder
William King
Allen Kratz
Edward Libby
Carrie Martin
Michael Martone
Kate McCarthy
Marinna Smith
Andrew Tolman
Edward Z. MD &
Candace C. Walworth, MD
John C. Watson &
Nancy R. Brain
Galen Weibley

Silver

Architectural Consulting
Services
Naomi Beal
Peter Bowman
Amanda Bunker
Lee Burnett
Hans Carlson
Patrick Conlon
Sarah Cushman
Meaghan Daly
Anthony Dater
Eliza Donoghue
Matthew Drost
Drew Dumsch
Elizabeth Frazier
Jeremy Gabrielson
Peter Garrett
Chelsea Gazillo
Tara Kelly
T.S. Koffman
Dennis Lachman
Cindy Lang
Douglas Ludewig
John McKay
Kathleen Miller
Zoe Miller
Carol Morris
Ashley O'Brien
Robert O'Brien
Keri Ouellette
Matthew Pelletier
Susan Rae-Reeves
Dan Sayre
Patricia Schwebler
Myles Smith
Scott Vlaun
Kathy White
Robin Zinchuk



www.growsmartmaine.org

227 Water Street, Suite 208, Augusta ME 04330 | (207) 250-0220



Scan to download
GrowSmart Maine's
FY2023 Annual Report