

# Community Heart & Soul®

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**Name of CHS Project/City, State:** Rockland Heart & Soul, Rockland, ME

**Population:** 7146

**Challenge:** Building Trust and Community Engagement with the Comprehensive Planning Process

**Focus:** Involving the Community in Comprehensive Planning

**Key Tool:** Community Network Analysis, Neighborhood Meetings, Story Gathering

**Brief Description/Summary of Community:**

Rockland is a MidCoast Maine service center community with a ship building, lime industry and fish processing history. After steady economic decline in the 1970's-90's, Rockland saw an economic upturn following renewed focus on the downtown, waterfront, and arts community which brought back a bustling downtown and surrounding neighborhoods. Today, Rockland is a busy coastal service center and major tourist draw with a strong arts community and several popular festivals, including the Maine Lobster Festival and the Blues Festival. Rockland is also home to the Center for Maine Contemporary Art and the Farnsworth Museum, which features the art of the Wyeth Family as part of its extensive collection. Fine restaurants and shops round out this community.

**Rockland Heart & Soul "By the Numbers":**

- 100 Percent of volunteer labor and funding for this Heart & Soul project
- 511 Thin stories gathered
- 304 Thick stories gathered
- 12 Heart & Soul statements
- 65 Action Plan items
- 8 Task Forces to carry out the Action Plan

**Local Condition:**

After a series of governmental leadership changes and a perceived lack of transparency between taxpayers and government, community members began the Rockland Heart & Soul project as an independent, volunteer-run effort to provide community input into Rockland's new Comprehensive Plan. This separation from governmental-run programs gave the Heart & Soul project increased credibility and opened the door to many more participants during the story gathering, listening and sharing phases, as well as during the continuing active stewardship of its Action Plan.

**Volunteer and Community Response:**

Rockland's Heart & Soul team was uniquely 100% volunteer, including three retired women who job-shared the role of Project Coordinator. Since transparency was so important, the Heart

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& Soul team met regularly at local coffee shops, inviting patrons to listen in and volunteer. Community members validated Heart & Soul statements at numerous public gathering places, including at polling places during the 2016 elections. Community events became Heart & Soul story-gathering venues. In an effort to find missing voices, team members listened to the stories of fellow residents at soup kitchens and food pantries. Community members also stepped up to volunteer for local projects articulated in the Action Plan during the continuing stewardship phase.

## Heart & Soul Outcomes:

The 65 Actions developed in the town's Action Plan were divided up among 8 separate Task Forces made up of individuals, organizations and businesses from the local community. Team Leaders of each Task Force were responsible for recruiting volunteers and community members to accomplish their team's Actions and project coordinators would call together Team Leaders each month to check on their progress.

Rockland Heart & Soul Coordinator Betty Long noted, *"Many of the Action Items that came up in our process are the result of lack of information. We have started providing monthly articles to the local papers to inform folks about what is happening, and our Team Leaders are working with many local organizations, the city and individuals to make sure the information gets out there. In addition, the Team Leaders are working with the disparate groups to achieve additional results."*

The team also had posters made of the 12 Community Heart & Soul Statements to hang in the City Council Chambers, reminding elected decision makers of what matters most to Rockland community members.

