

Community Heart & Soul®

— Guided by what matters most —

ROCKLAND, MAINE

Rockland is a midcoast Maine service center community with a ship building, lime industry and fish processing history. After steady economic decline from 1970's-1990, Rockland saw an economic upturn following renewed focus on the downtown, waterfront, and arts community which brought back the 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.

POPULATION:
7,146

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

Rockland “by the numbers”:

- 100% volunteer labor and funding for this Heart & Soul project
- 511 thin (short one-way) stories gathered
- 304 thick (long two-way) stories gathered
- 12 Heart & Soul statements
- 65 Action Plan items
- Eight task forces to carry out the Action Plan

Local conditions:

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 Community Heart & Soul Action Plan.

Volunteer and Community Response:

Rockland's Heart & Soul team was uniquely 100% volunteer-based, including three retired women who shared the role of Project Coordinator. Since transparency was so important, the Heart & 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 polling places during the 2016 elections. Community events became Heart & Soul story-gathering venues. To find missing voices, team members listened to the stories of fellow residents at soup kitchens and food pantries, among other places. Community members also stepped up to volunteer for local projects articulated in the Community Heart & Soul Action Plan during the continuing stewardship phase.

Heart & Soul Outcomes:

The 65 actions developed in the city's Heart & Soul Action Plan were divided up among eight 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.

