

Getting to Green
March 5, 2011
Willard School, Concord, MA

Background:

In the spring of 2010, the Concord Climate Action Network (CCAN) hosted a breakfast meeting at which the first report of the Concord Sustainable Energy Committee (CSEC) was presented. The breakfast was attended by about 85 people, and in addition to hearing the CSEC report attendees had the opportunity to talk about the concept of “sustainability” and how it might apply in Concord. There was a great deal of energy at the end of the meeting, much of which was captured on sign-up sheets where people were invited to participate in follow-up activities. One of those sign-up sheets was to plan a “Winter Festival” projected to take place in March of 2011.

Later that summer, a small committee began to meet to plan the festival. At first it was thought to model the event after the successful Global Warming Symposium held in March of 2007, with dozens of tables and displays from local groups. The idea was to celebrate progress towards sustainability and to make the event even more of a festival with food, demonstrations, and activities. However, after some discussion the focus began to change. For one thing, the envisioned festival seemed best held outdoors, and March is not a good time for an outdoor event in Massachusetts. For another, there was an interest in structuring more interaction and community-building, an event that people “participate in” rather than “go to,” and that would lead to and support action. The committee co-chairs proposed that the Festival idea be postponed, and that the March event focus on deepening connections to build a local community working together on moving towards sustainability. The committee was small and the co-chairs felt that a focused event would be more feasible as well as more effective than a big festival with multiple moving parts. The committee agreed, and after more discussion came up with the name “Getting to Green,” emphasizing that sustainability is a process as much as a goal.

The overall goals of the event were identified as:

- Showcasing what people in town are doing about sustainability
- Reinforcing/strengthening ourselves as activists
- Educating/informing ourselves and others
- Increasing/deepening the community network
- Inspiring change in behaviors
- Making resources available

The Event:

Getting to Green was held on March 5, 2011 at the recently-built “green” elementary school, Willard. The event had several components:

- Keynote speaker Dr. Halina Brown. Several CCAN members had heard Dr. Brown speak at the Massachusetts Climate Action Network conference and were quite impressed with her message. We contacted Dr. Brown and she was delighted to come to Concord and give a talk titled “From Consumer Society to Sustainable Consumption.” Her talk,

complete with Power Point presentation, was videotaped and will be available for viewing on CCTV.

- Small-group discussions with report-backs to the larger group. This was the heart of the event. The goals for this segment of the event were for each attendee to meet at least one new person, and to generate excitement and passionate conversation about sustainability in the context of local community, excitement that would inspire continuing action and connection. Publicity reached out to new people who had not been previously involved in CCAN or other groups, and the random group formation process mixed everyone up so the first goal was met. It remains to be seen whether the second goal was met, but review of the discussion group notes and the report-backs indicated that the conversations were indeed engaging and passionate.
- Table displays and exhibits from schools and youth groups in town. Exhibits included:
 - Kids Eat Smart: lunchbox menus
 - CCHS Earth Science class: use of the infrared heat detecting gun to find energy leaks
 - Concord Conserves: student demo of their online energy calculator
 - Concord Academy: installation of organic gardens
 - Thoreau 4th graders: efforts to save the habitat for Blanding's Turtles
 - Alcott Green Monsters: compost and recycle activities
 - Willard School: posters illustrating the green design school building
 - Fenn School: conversation starter posters add up your ecological footprint
- Networking and information-gathering activities intended to gather information about who was present, what their interests are, and to share that information among participants so they can continue to work together on Getting to Green. Results of the networking sheets and polls are included as appendices to this report. Several organizations and civic groups also set up networking tables to share information about their activities, and participants were invited to put their own materials related to sustainability on the table. Unstructured time was included in the program for networking.
- Lunch was provided by several of our local businesses, and child care was provided in the morning during the keynote and small-group discussions.
- At the close of the event, the Superintendent of Schools offered a tour of the Willard School, highlighting its green features.

Close to 100 people attended the keynote talk, and about 70 participated in small-group discussions. Most people came from Concord, with a few from Carlisle and a few from other towns. While the turnout was modest, this event laid a foundation of sustainable community that can be built on. The committee hopes that participants will take the initiative to contact each other and pursue the ideas that were raised.

Report prepared by Morwen Two Feathers