



## **Making Headway in Your Community**

An effective community engagement process led by the Maine Downtown Center, a program of the Maine Development Foundation and GrowSmart Maine to connect targeted towns and the community with compatible towns, existing local, regional, statewide resources, along with Maine community projects found at [makingheadway.me](http://makingheadway.me). Making Headway in Your Community (MHYC) helps the targeted towns create community-driven outcomes and build capacity based on what they value most. We provide a spark; a connection to information and inspiration.

Our goal with Making Headway in Your Community are to have more smart growth outcomes across Maine. This means more strategic land conservation, better downtown and Main Street revitalization, focusing new development where it already exists to maximize efficiency of existing infrastructure for transportation and communications, protection and reuse of existing, perhaps historic structures in a way that strengthens the community, economic development that strengthens community and environment. We offer GrowSmart Maine and Maine Downtown Center resources to do so, and focus on establishing and strengthening connections and capacity within Maine communities and across town lines.

We succeed if communities are better able to manage growth and change because we were there.

One of the best pieces of advice for community outreach is “don’t hold meetings, hold events.” Having participated in the release of the locally-produced short film “Reviving the Freedom Mill” in 2013, we engaged with Tony Grassi to bring the movie and his story to Maine communities. The Movie Night event kicks off the Making Headway in Your Community process, and is set up following discussions with engaged local leaders, both elected and appointed and “grasstops”.

## **The Making Headway in Your Community Process**

1. **Movie Night:** Showing the film, with popcorn of course, in the community or region and then guiding a conversation to identify those unique assets and current initiatives that matter in their town or area. Tony Grassi is willing to attend these movie nights as his schedule allows, and to answer questions from those who are engaged by the movie. The movie is followed by a facilitated conversation about what the community values.

Our Making Headway in Your Community one page handout provides a base for asking questions in four areas of community growth, Smart Design, Community Connections, Local Economy, and Healthy Communities with a pathway to get others involved to identify goals and on the ground projects. This connects to the online resource [www.makingheadway.me](http://www.makingheadway.me)

2. Capacity Building: Along with inspiration and information, all communities can use some nuts and bolts training for the grassroots leaders, be they volunteers, appointed, elected or staff. There are wonderful opportunities throughout Maine for this to happen and sometimes a little encouragement and MHYC covering the registration cost are all that's needed. We encourage several people from each community to go together, improving chances that the experience translates into constructive changes when they get home. This was developed from feedback from community members who find it frustrating to be the only one to have heard or learned something terrific and find that no one else in their community is particularly interested. Opportunities for the GrowSmart Summit and Annual Meeting, Maine Downtown Conference, Maine Development Foundation Annual Meeting, regional technical assistance trainings and forums are offered throughout the state.

3. Community Conversation: The second event/conversation is where the community is empowered to vote and determine how a small amount of money/budget assistance will be spent in town to raise awareness and support for a larger initiative or project in town. We contract with Friends of MidCoast Maine for facilitation and use keypad polling to choose from a short list of ideas developed that night in small group settings. Through this process we are able to identify lead and support organizations, individuals, and matching support in either in-kind or cash.

4. Projects and Initiatives: With funding and budget determined and staffing/volunteers identified for the project chosen by the participants, work begins. Our role is a balancing act of guiding the process but allowing it to go at their pace, with partnerships that make sense for them.

5. Community Closing Celebration! : Once projects are completed, we'll bring community stakeholders together one last time to celebrate, determine what they see as their next steps, and ask their advice on how to improve our process for future communities.

As part of the closing celebration the projects must be posted on [www.makingheadway.me](http://www.makingheadway.me) with resources noted, so other communities can learn from your experience.

In 2015/2016 it is our intention, with a grant from the Elmina B. Sewall Foundation, to work with two groupings of communities; Three Downeast coastal towns and rebuilding three mill towns. Each town will be stronger, with a clearer vision of their future, and better connected to Maine communities facing similar challenges.

**We look forward to working with you as Making Headway in Your Community provides the foundation for discussions and decisions about the future of your town as well as a structure to manage and connect strategic actions at the local level.**



Nancy Smith  
Executive Director



Lorain Francis  
Sr. Program Director

## GrowSmart Maine



## Maine Downtown Center

