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Serving Kennebec, Somerset, and western Waldo counties.

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## From the Interim Director

For those that may not know, I have taken over as Interim Executive Director as Laura Cyr accepted a new position at University of Maine System in Sept. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Laura for all her hard work and leaving KVCOG a much better organization after her tenure. Other transitions for KVCOG in the past few months include the departure of our Community Planner, Nick Aschauer. Nick was a tremendous asset; we are sad to lose him and wish him all the best in his future endeavors. On the other side of the ledger, we have welcomed four new staff members: Will Harper and Robyn Stanicki, have joined us as part of the CARES Act funded Program to increase Recovery and Resilience throughout our region from the continuing pandemic and other potential emergencies. Jeff Sneddon joins us as our new Economic and Community Development Specialist, and Charles Tetelman replaced Nick as Community Planner. Look out for profiles on them and their work in this newsletter and on our website!

All the new staff have done a great job of coming on board and hitting the ground running with existing and new projects. I am glad to have been able to ensure things continue to run smoothly throughout these changes at KVCOG while maintaining my Planning Director duties. We are hopeful to have a new full-time Executive Director in the new year.

Due to the rising risk levels associated with COVID-19, I am now asking staff to work from home when possible to help minimize risk within our small office, that is now at full capacity. I am confident that the level of service you receive will be unaffected as has been proven in the past.

Recently, KVCOG has been the administrative agent of the DECD Maine Economic Recovery Grant Program. Phase 1 was just completed, and we have distributed approximately \$4.5 million across the region. Phase 2 applications have closed, and we should be granting a similar amount to more of our regions' businesses soon. It was a lot of work for our small team, but I am glad we were able to play this important role in helping our regions' small businesses at this critical time.

We are in the early stages of developing an expanded Revolving Loan Program with favorable lending terms that will be available to help businesses in the new year, look out for more information about this soon.

All our other service areas are very busy, too, as we continue to work hard to help our communities through these challenging times. As always, never hesitate to contact us with any inquiries, we will be able to help!

*Joel Greenwood*  
Interim Executive Director & Planning Director

# Gearing Up!

The KVCOG Newsletter

Winter 2020

## What is Resiliency?

By William Harper, Community Resiliency Coordinator

The term resilience is fraught with meaning and burdened by diverse and disparate interpretation. It is simultaneously inclusive and exclusive in application, imparting a sense of familiarity without meaningful specificity. Like the concept 'sustainability' it raises enthusiasm among its advocates and skepticism among its critics. I think being employed as a Community Resilience Coordinator comes with a certain degree of responsibility to address this conceptual mushiness.



William Harper  
Resiliency Coordinator

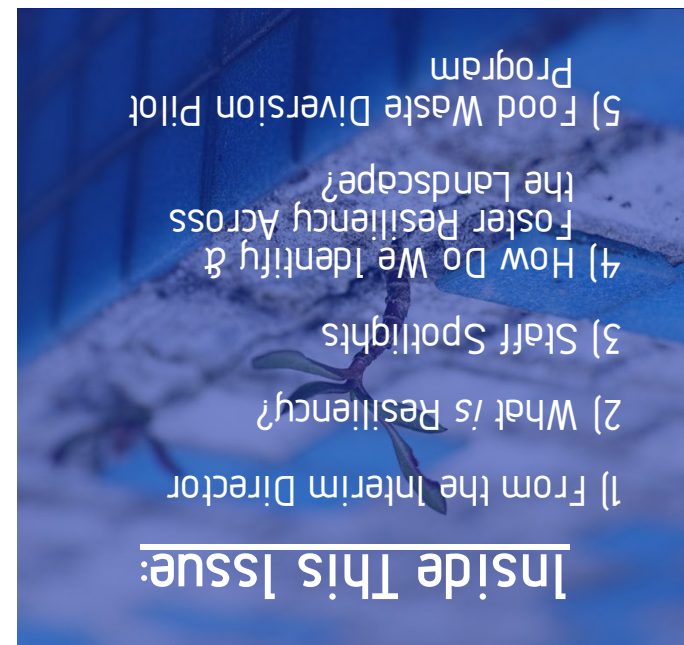
As a concept emerging from biology and ecology, the term *resilience* has held many meanings. Its use in ecological sciences refers to a system's ability to absorb change and disturbance without substantial adaptation or complete collapse. Resilience occurs when there is an equilibrium and balance among various forces. This cycle is also called a feedback loop, where inputs cause a response and return to an equilibrium. These feedback processes are often quite complex and exhibit multiple equilibrium points among many interrelated systems.

As an example, a pond ecosystem might flourish with seasonal fluctuations of algae. When the weather gets warmer more algae grow and plants and animals coexist—a form of resilience. If runoff from a nearby farm contains too much fertilizer it can cause algal blooms that kill off more susceptible pond denizens, leaving only those less sensitive to algal blooms—a form of adaptation to a new equilibrium. Finally, if a bloom is too intense and all of the oxygen is removed from the water, the pond can become a sort of aquatic desert where few species are able to survive—a form of collapse and reorientation around a new equilibrium. This pond exists in a system with many other ponds and streams, meaning that what happens in this pond may or may not impact the systems in other connected bodies of water.

Natural processes of feedback-adaptation, resilience, and collapse—may not immediately translate to human systems simply because humans exhibit agency. For example, an authoritarian dictatorship could be thought of as a resilient system. However, we can work to overthrow a dictatorship and instigate a sort of societal system collapse based on our shared value of freedom. Our ability to think critically and to act collectively—*agency*—is something unique to human systems. Utilizing an ecological framework of resiliency to describe human systems often fails to account for the fact that agency and resources are often unequally distributed. Projects emphasizing 'resilience' often don't ask whether communities and individuals are able to impart any meaningful change... whether for a lack of resources or a lack of political power.

After we acknowledge some of the shortcomings and limitations of resilience, what are its strengths?

(continued inside)



## What is Resiliency Continued

First, that resilience is useful in understanding how regions work. We understand that a neighborhood or village exists in a fabric of cities and towns and that, together, these areas share an economy, culture, government, and identity. Resilience is useful in understanding how complex systems interact and underscore the need to account for complex feedback loops.

Second, that resilience is dynamic. By engaging in diverse solutions to complicated problems, we can learn from our mistakes and reorganize around successes. If we invest too heavily in one kind of solution we risk 'path dependence' which limits any future solutions (our path forward is now dependent on previous decisions). Being open to success necessitates a certain degree of openness to failure, to adaptation, and to reorganization.

Third, that resilience is a process of change. For the sake of humanity we strive to maintain resilient systems, however change is all around us and we are compelled to respond. Success is often contingent on organization across social, political, and economic divisions. Public participation and deliberation, polycentric and multi-layered social institutions, and accountable and just practices ensure that we can achieve systems capable of responding to societal need and reinforcing our shared values.

In sum, resilience is how we begin to respond to the many needs of our constituents, our communities, and our neighbors. It begs us to think critically about local action as it relates to regional, national, and global realities. Finally, it reminds us that the rules we observe at play are human and are therefore subject to collective action... we are not bound by the laws of nature to repeat and reiterate broken or failing systems, but are instead bound by our common humanity to improve them. ✨

## Food Waste Diversion Pilot Program

By Gabe Gauvin, Environmental Planner

Up to *twenty percent* of all household trash is wasted food or food scraps that can be used in a more sustainable way. Most public or private composting operations in Maine are active in the southern portion of the State or run along the coastline, and often overlook the residential portion of food waste. Residents in every corner of the state should have access to these types of sustainable programs, and the option to do the right thing with their waste.

KVCOG Environmental Planning is partnering with the University of Maine Mitchell Center for Sustainability and the Maine Department of Environmental Protection to implement a Food Waste Diversion Pilot Program throughout the Kennebec Valley. This pilot program will target the residential segment of Food Waste generation and look to put this material to its best and highest use through composting and anaerobic digestion.

The goals of this program are to reduce food waste sent to landfill, educate the public, and do so with a long-term cost savings for all participating towns. Every community is unique, and blanket programs are not always sustainable or scalable in the long run. KVCOG and the Mitchell Center will be working closely with municipal officials in each town every step of the way to identify creative solutions, educate residents, and manage operations efficiently. This collaborative approach will ensure the pilot program is successful and the information we take away can be used in the future to help rural towns all over Maine.

If you have any questions, or want to learn more about the upcoming Food Waste Diversion Pilot, please reach out to Gabe Gauvin, Environmental Planner. 207-453-4258 ext. 220, ggauvin@kvcoq.org. ✨

## Staff Spotlights



Jeff joined the Kennebec Valley Council of Governments in October 2020. As the Community and Economic Development Specialist, he is responsible for providing analytical, administrative and specialized technical work in a program of community and economic development within the Kennebec Valley region. Jeff's role at KVCOG will include oversight and administration of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), regional technical assistance for Community Development Block Grant program (CDBG), co-management of the Brownfield program and project development from planning through implementation. Jeff comes to KVCOG with more than twenty years' experience in economic and community development, workforce training, and business assistance. Jeff graduated from the University of West Florida with an MBA and obtained his bachelor's degree from the University of Utah. ✨



Charles joined the Kennebec Valley Council of Governments in October of 2020. Charles helps regional and municipal planning efforts regarding land use, comprehensive planning, ordinance development, and GIS management and analysis. He received his Bachelor's degree in Government from Skidmore College and recently received his Master's in Policy, Planning, and Management from the Muskie School at USM. His interests include policy writing and analysis, applications of GIS, and implementing equitable and sustainable initiatives in planning. Charles lives in South Portland with his girlfriend and dog. Outside of KVCOG, Charles spends his time disc golfing, watching the NY Knicks, and cooking. ✨

## How Do We Identify & Foster Resiliency Across the Landscape?

By Robyn Stanicki, Community Resiliency Coordinator



Communities that withstand cataclysmic disasters such as an earthquake or hurricane, or even war, take from that experience a set of lessons that teach them to rebuild, to move forward rather than bouncing back, and finding new ways to take on everyday problems that better prepare us to take on the challenges we don't yet see on the horizon.

I find it is helpful to frame resilience using the lens of trauma. As a result of the global pandemic, everyone is in a heightened state of alert. Staff are worried about their jobs, how to care for children, if they or their family members will get sick. Many have learned new ways of behaving and coping, including who to trust, where to get reliable information, and where the enduring resources are. The emotional impact of this experience on ourselves and our staff depends on individual characteristics, experiences, and circumstances of their family and their community, and may be similar to responses we might see in those who have lived through other traumas such as combat, assault, or hurricanes.

As a leader, you are bending over backwards to adjust in the face of this unprecedented adversity. These efforts prompt the questions: How do we intentionally promote resilience in our organizations? How do we continue serving the community while taking care of our families, each other, and ourselves? Principles applied from a trauma-informed lens offers a foundation for answering these questions: Safety, Trust, Collaboration, Empowerment, and Peer Support.

Prioritize physical, emotional, and psychological safety as you reorganize your work, and consider how new environments impact staff contributions—including balancing responsibilities and productivity. Information is moving at the speed of light—overcommunicate if you can. Foster trust by offering opportunities to check in and talk about the pandemic and its impacts, to examine current expectations, and model vulnerability—we are all in this together.

Partnerships bloom organically from adversity. Look for processes or resources that are shared across departments, sectors, regions. Finding common experience to highlight our shared humanity can showcase opportunities to collaborate.

Explore a new asset: voice and choice—the ability of your organization to recognize and respond to diverse needs. Create space where individual contributions are welcome and use the time to explore suggestions to work together in ways that work for everyone. Learn how this may be impacting those you work with, and about how this may impact the marginalized.

Now more than ever, we rely on each other to get us through the day. Find new ways to engage peer support. You might consider creating norms within your organizations' culture to protect these needs to connect.

Building resilience is key to adapting to the challenges ahead. The good news is that there is opportunity in times of crisis that have always heightened the opportunity for bringing out the best in us. Thousands of us are acting with compassion and cooperation daily. Acknowledging and celebrating each other in these moments will allow us to emerge even stronger as a collective humanity. ✨

Adapted from: Bowen EA & Murshid NS (2016) Trauma-informed social policy: a conceptual framework for policy analysis and advocacy. Am J Public Health 106, 223-229.

### KVCOG Staff:

Joel Greenwood, Interim Director & Planning Director  
Charles Tetelman, Community Planner  
Jeff Sneddon, Community & Economic Development Specialist  
Gabriel Gauvin, Environmental Planner

Lorra-Lee Snyder, Financial Manager  
Kate Raymond, Membership Coordinator  
Brandy Sloan, Office Manager  
William Harper, Community Resilience Coordinator  
Robyn Stanicki, Community Resilience Coordinator

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