

## Fostering Young Visionaries for Community Participation

Priscilla Geigis,  
Director of Community Preservation, Executive Office of Environmental Affairs  
[priscilla.geigis@state.ma.us](mailto:priscilla.geigis@state.ma.us)

Will Snyder  
Extension Educator, University of Massachusetts Extension  
[wsnyder@umext.umass.edu](mailto:wsnyder@umext.umass.edu)

### ABSTRACT

In Spring, 2003, the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs and the University of Massachusetts launched a sustainable development pilot program for high school students, named *Community Preservation: YouthVisions*. Building off their successful collaboration with the Community Preservation Institute for adults, EOEA and UMass designed a two day interactive curriculum to help students learn and exchange ideas about balancing growth issues in Massachusetts. For the pilot, five teams of students and advisors were selected from across the state to achieve geographical diversity. Participating schools/programs included: Quabbin Regional High School, Essex Agricultural High School, the Eagle Eye Institute in Somerville, and the River Ambassadors Program from Lowell.

The 25 students took part in a diverse series of workshops, discussions and interactive activities designed to help foster leadership and team building skills and a better understanding of natural resource protection, land use and community development. Through this 2-day program, students gained a better understanding of what it means to belong to a community and the role that they can play to help preserve and shape it. Teams prepared and offered “roundtable” discussions concerning: suburban sprawl in the Quabbin area, river protection in Lowell, street tree protections in Somerville, and Marine GIS studies at the Essex Agricultural High School.

*YouthVisions* included on- and off-campus field trips. Through hands-on lab applications, students learned about the important role of Geographical Information System (GIS) in growth planning decisions. Students also toured the university’s extensive recycling facility learning about its role in ensuring a sustainable university community. Additional off-campus trips brought students to Atkins Corner to learn about its future as a smart growth designed village center, and to the Sawmill River in Montague to examine the effects of development on ecological health and water quality.

EOEA and UMass also designed the pilot to gain critical feedback from advisors. An “advisors-only” meeting on the first evening, allowed teachers/advisors to interact with counterparts from across the state to share ideas with each other and with EOEA and UMass about future offerings and integration of sustainable development principles in their secondary curriculum. These advisors now serve as curriculum advisors for EOEA and UMass efforts regarding secondary education. Teachers participating in the Community Preservation Institute (CPI) are asked, as part of their CPI coursework, to provide guidance to EOEA and UMass about improving *YouthVisions* and/or incorporating sustainable development in Massachusetts curriculum, and are then eligible to receive academic credit through UMass Amherst.

If selected, we would offer our candid critique of the pilot as a model for other institutions and integration into the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks, and our thoughts about “next steps” for transforming *YouthVisions* from a pilot to an annual program with possible connections to Earth Connection and the Massachusetts Envirothon.

To learn more about *YouthVisions* or to see images from the pilot held on April 4-5, 2003, please visit the web site at: [http://commpres.env.state.ma.us/content/cpinst\\_yv.asp](http://commpres.env.state.ma.us/content/cpinst_yv.asp)