Salem is a rural town in the center of the state, with about 8% developed land and much of the rest in forest. Salem is one of the three towns that comprise most of the Eightmile River watershed, a tributary of the Lower Connecticut River and the focus of a NEMO watershed initiative in the mid-1990’s. Although a good deal of research was done on the natural resource issues of the watershed, town decision makers also wanted to move forward on a number of other, more local land use initiatives.

**NEMO’s Role**
Accepted into the first year class of the Municipal Initiative, Salem formed a NEMO Task Force, which met with program staff in May of 2001. The town Conservation Commission had already embarked on a natural resource inventory, incorporating information from previous studies done as part of the Eightmile River project. Over the next several months, the NEMO Team conducted a number of workshops, including: Open Space Planning, Economic Development, Road Standards, Lot Size and Net Buildable Area and Forestry Practices. The NEMO Team also reviewed drafts of the town’s plans and regulations, providing advice to various land use commissions.

**Salem’s Actions**
With the help of the NEMO Team, the town adopted the resource inventory developed by the Conservation Commission. The inventory includes a comprehensive study of the natural features in Salem, and was designed to serve as a technical backdrop to future open space planning efforts. The Planning and Zoning Commission formed a separate Open Space Plan Committee to begin crafting elements of an open space plan. The committee meets monthly and is working to incorporate and prioritize the information from the resource inventory into the open space plan. Completion is expected in the summer of 2005.

In addition to open space preservation, the town was interested in maintaining its economic viability. A workshop on economic development was sponsored by the Economic Development Commission as a kick-off to the development of an economic development plan for the town. The plan is now
complete, and the commission is working to expand the town’s agricultural heritage through the encouragement of equestrian businesses. A separate “Horse Council” made up of leading business people and land owners are looking at ways to develop a system of trails that will become a part of the town’s open space plan.

The Planning and Zoning Commission was interested in investigating a number of planning and regulatory issues. In their update to the town’s Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD), the Commission focused on the need to protect water resources through the use of innovative site design and open space planning. For example, as part of this effort the Commission approved a change to their off-street parking requirements. The change allows for parking areas that are not paved, when the non-paved surface would “substantially enhance environmental quality.” The POCD also sets goals for future road improvements and aquifer protection.

The Planning and Zoning Commission is now applying regulatory techniques that better match proposed development to the capacity of the land to accept development. After a workshop by the NEMO Team, the Commission adopted changes to their zoning regulations that incorporate the concept of “net buildable area.” This regulation requires any new lot to have a total of 40,000 square-feet of land that does not contain wetlands, floodplains or steep slopes, and has soils that are suitable for on-site sewage disposal. This assures that any approved lot will meet the standards necessary for public health and the protection of water resources.

Salem’s Plan identifies the preservation of rural character and the protection of public health and the environment as a primary goal.

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