
Buffer Options *for the* Bay

HOW TO WORK WITH COMMUNITIES: HOW DO WE START A CONVERSATION ABOUT BUFFERS?

Working on buffer regulation at the municipal level is critical as it is local regulations that determine which buffers are protected and how well they are protected.

Whether you are a citizen, outreach professional, or elected official, there are things you can do to prepare yourself for a productive, locally relevant conversation. The following tips emerged from BOB's [assessment of community perspectives in the Exeter-Squamscott subwatershed](#). It would also be helpful to refresh your understanding of how to [navigate regulations](#) or review the BOB team's more extensive [policy synthesis](#).

1. **Lay the groundwork:** Ask yourself (and stakeholders you know): Who needs to be at the table for the conversation? What resources do the participants need to have on hand? What work has already been done?
2. **Begin with common values:** Decisions related to buffers are often made in the context of broader societal and personal values. In [BOB's assessment of community perspectives in the Exeter-Squamscott subwatershed](#), stakeholders identified several commonly held values that relate to efforts to conserve, restore, or manage buffers. These include:
 - Protection of property rights, privacy, and public health

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- Preservation of community character, including a sense of history, public areas for recreation, walkability, open space, town pride, engaged citizens and school system
 - Protection of the hydrological benefits of buffers (e.g., flood storage)
 - Connection of water to quality of life, which is manifested by access to water, views, and clean water for drinking water and recreation
 - Conservation of natural resources, including wildlife (e.g., loons threatened by pollution) and forests
 - Enhancement of financial vitality that is linked to adjacent water bodies, i.e, how they make communities desirable places to live and do business, enhance property values, help sustain the tax base, and contribute to avoided costs
 - Here are a few tips for learning more about community's values when embarking on buffer-related work:
 - Review the community master plan and zoning ordinances to identify descriptions of values that can be connected to buffers.
 - Gather information about relevant past votes, e.g., related to funding for land conservation.
 - Conduct informal or semi-structured interviews with a variety of local stakeholders, Ask them to describe shared values and what they value most about living in the community.
 - Host a community dialogue or conduct focus groups to get more in-depth information.

The values you identify can inform the way you communicate about buffers. For example, you can connect the values you have identified to the benefits buffers provide, or you can identify options for buffer management that connect to and help protect these values.

3. **Define “buffer.”** People often have different definitions for the word “buffer.” It’s important to clarify your meaning and assess whether education/discussion will be needed to arrive at a definition that is practical for the situation at hand and consistent with the regulatory framework in New Hampshire. See [BUFFER BASICS](#) for more information.

4. **Locate existing buffers:** Buffers throughout a subwatershed have the potential to preserve valued services, whether they are adjacent development or in forested, densely vegetated areas. Using these [maps](#), you can start to identify where buffers are located in each community and the services they provide.

5. **Ask them (and yourself) why buffers?** An initial conversation about why a community wants to address this issue will help with goal setting later on. Some questions to ask:

- What values does the community have that buffers can help to enforce? ([CLICK HERE](#) to explore the values identified in the BOB Community Assessment.)
- Which environmental issues do you hope to address through the use of buffers?
- What challenges have been encountered in the past with regard to buffers?

6. **Prepare to discuss potential barriers:** [CLICK HERE](#) to explore some of the barriers Identified in the BOB Community Assessment; many of these were confirmed by a watershed survey of stakeholders.

7. **Some helpful tips:** As you engage stakeholders in discussion, here are some things to keep in mind:

- What resonates: Water quality, community benefits, clean water, space for children to play, financial connection, local level, and a shorter-term view.

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- What does not resonate as well: Habitat, wildlife, or the inherent value of nature.
 - Focus on successes and recognize positive impacts developers have had.
 - Clarify “buffers” and “setbacks.”
 - Show photos of buffers before and after restoration.
 - Use multiple avenues for communication, e.g., social media, posters in municipal offices.
 - Incorporate buffer-related topics into school curricula.
 - Use examples from other communities, unless stakeholders tell you they are not relevant!