

Assessing the Social Landscape for Adaptation: Lessons Learned from the New England Climate Adaptation Project

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New Hampshire Climate Summit
April 10, 2014

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Because planners like plans...

- The challenge
- The New England Climate Adaptation Project (NECAP)
- NECAP findings about the social landscape of adaptation
 - ▣ Case study: Dover, NH
- Implications and next steps

The challenge

- Tendency to:
 - ▣ Think of climate change as a long term risk
 - ▣ Think of adaptation as something to be done in the future, if and when impacts manifest
- Adaptation is not just a future task
 - ▣ It is something we need to start doing today
 - ▣ Everyday decisions we make TODAY will effect the vulnerability and/or resilience of our communities
- Adaptation is basically doing “better planning”
 - ▣ Creating more resilient, less vulnerable communities and ecosystems
 - ▣ First step: taking projections of future climate into consideration in our everyday decisions about policies, regulations, investments, etc.

The challenge (cont.)

- Adaptation = a “collective risk management” challenge
 - Adaptation is not something individuals or individual groups can do on their own
 - Different stakeholders, sectors, and levels of government need to work together to prepare for and manage climate change risks
- Collective risk management = really tough
 - Different perspectives on:
 - Is climate change a risk?
 - What should be do about it, if so?
 - How much should we invest, in what efforts, and when?
 - Who pays and why?
 - Need for collective action amid different perspectives, uncertainty, and complexity
- We need to build the capacity of communities to take on this task of working together to manage current and future risks
 - “Enhancing collective readiness to adapt”

New England Climate Adaptation Project

- Testing whether **role-play simulations** can help build public readiness to undertake adaptation and engage in collective risk management



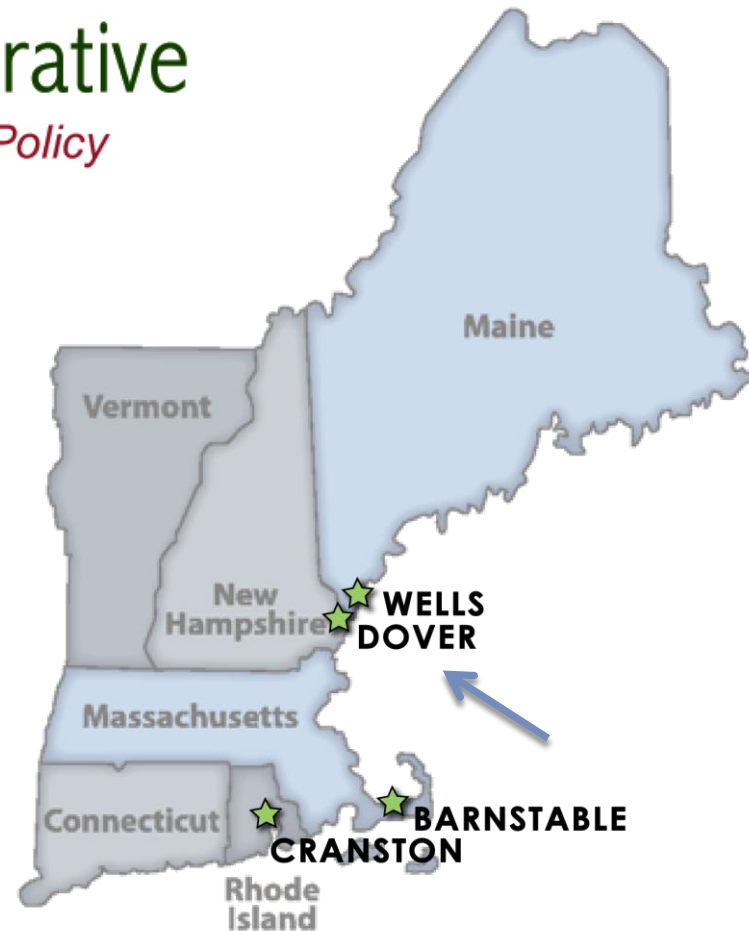
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Project design

- What are local climate change risks?
 - ▣ Summary Risk Assessment for each municipality
- What do key stakeholders think and what, if anything, are they doing to adapt?
 - ▣ Stakeholder Assessment for each municipality
- What does the public think?
 - ▣ Professional public polls before and after our intervention
- Role-play workshops
 - ▣ Developed a tailored, science-based role-play simulation for each municipality
 - ▣ Engaged 110-170 diverse people in each town in the simulation through a series of workshops
 - ▣ Data collected through before-and-after surveys and in-depth interviews

Dover findings

Stakeholder Assessment

Findings from interviews with ~20 diverse stakeholders before NECAP workshops

Level of concern

- Most if not all stakeholders have noticed a “change in the weather”
 - ▣ “Less snow” and “wetter snow”
 - ▣ “Hotter summers”
 - ▣ “Freak storms”
- Generally concerned about more extreme storms and rising temperatures
 - ▣ Often did not refer to this as “climate change”
 - ▣ Many were vague on what climate change means
- Most said they believe in climate change and are worried about it
 - ▣ Some disagreement about whether it is human caused
 - ▣ At least one person expressed concern that “sustainability” is a government pretense for limiting growth and weakening property rights

When shown climate projections...

- Other than Dover planning staff, none of the interviewees were familiar with local or regional climate projections
- When presented with actual climate change projections for Dover, people “got it” and started to identify specific risks
 - Not surprisingly, they focused on their niche areas (e.g., emergency management or water supply)
- All stakeholders noted that flooding in Dover will get worse
 - Particularly from the from the Cocheco and Bellamy Rivers during extreme storms
- Many other concerns mentioned, such as:
 - Health impacts
 - Impacts on water supply
 - Environmental impacts

Perspectives on adaptation

- General pessimism about Dover's readiness to adapt:
 - ▣ Lack of public awareness and concern and/or disbelief
 - ▣ Tax cap seen as an impediment
- Some said that climate change is not urgent enough to be a priority
 - ▣ "Will not affect me in my lifetime"
- BUT...some confidence in Dover's ability to adapt
 - ▣ Adaptation possible if the public becomes more informed
 - ▣ They were generally supportive of the City of Dover taking proactive measures, such as:
 - Public education
 - Starting to use climate change projections in today's decision-making

Dover findings

Public Poll (May 2013)

Professional, randomized phone poll with 100 Dover residents before NECAP workshops

Q: Do you ever think about whether a change in the climate could affect your community?

- Close to 50% = often
Another 22.5% = every once in a while

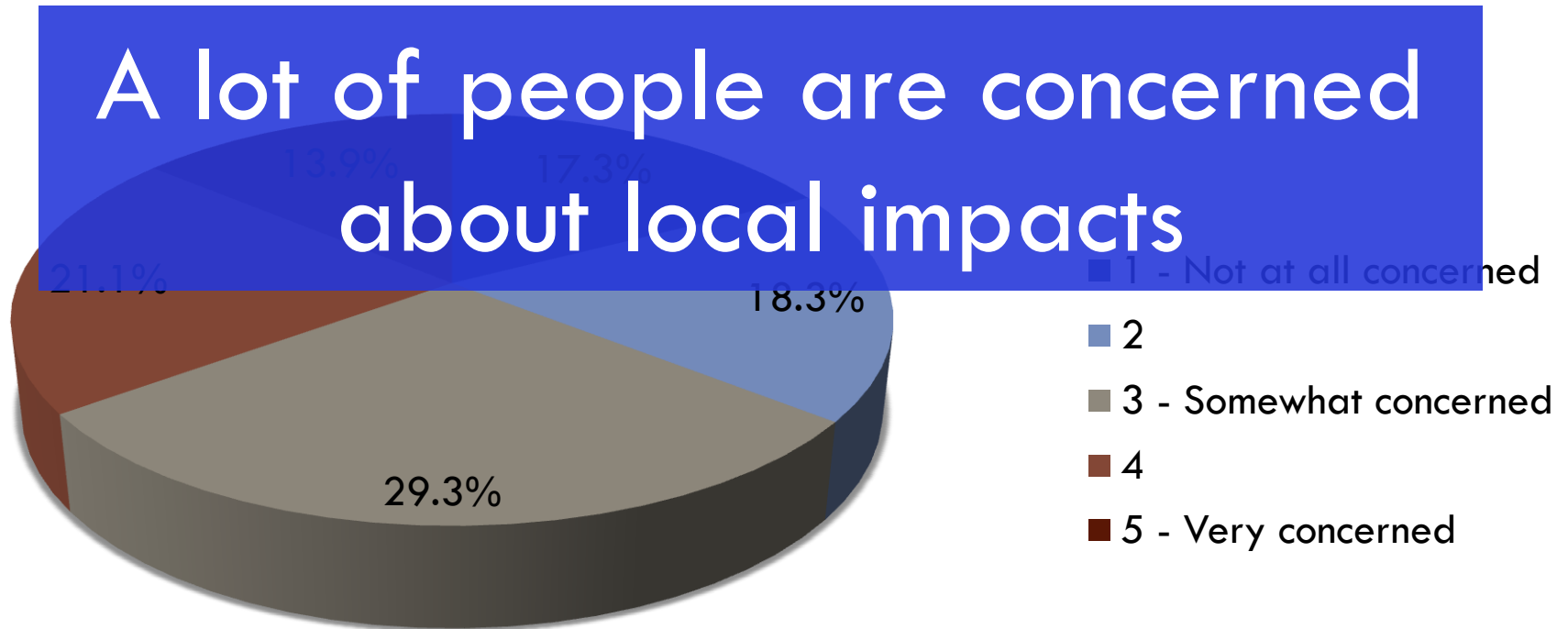
A lot of people are thinking about local climate change risks



Q: How concerned are you about the possible impacts a changing climate might have on your town?

- About 65% = somewhat to very concerned

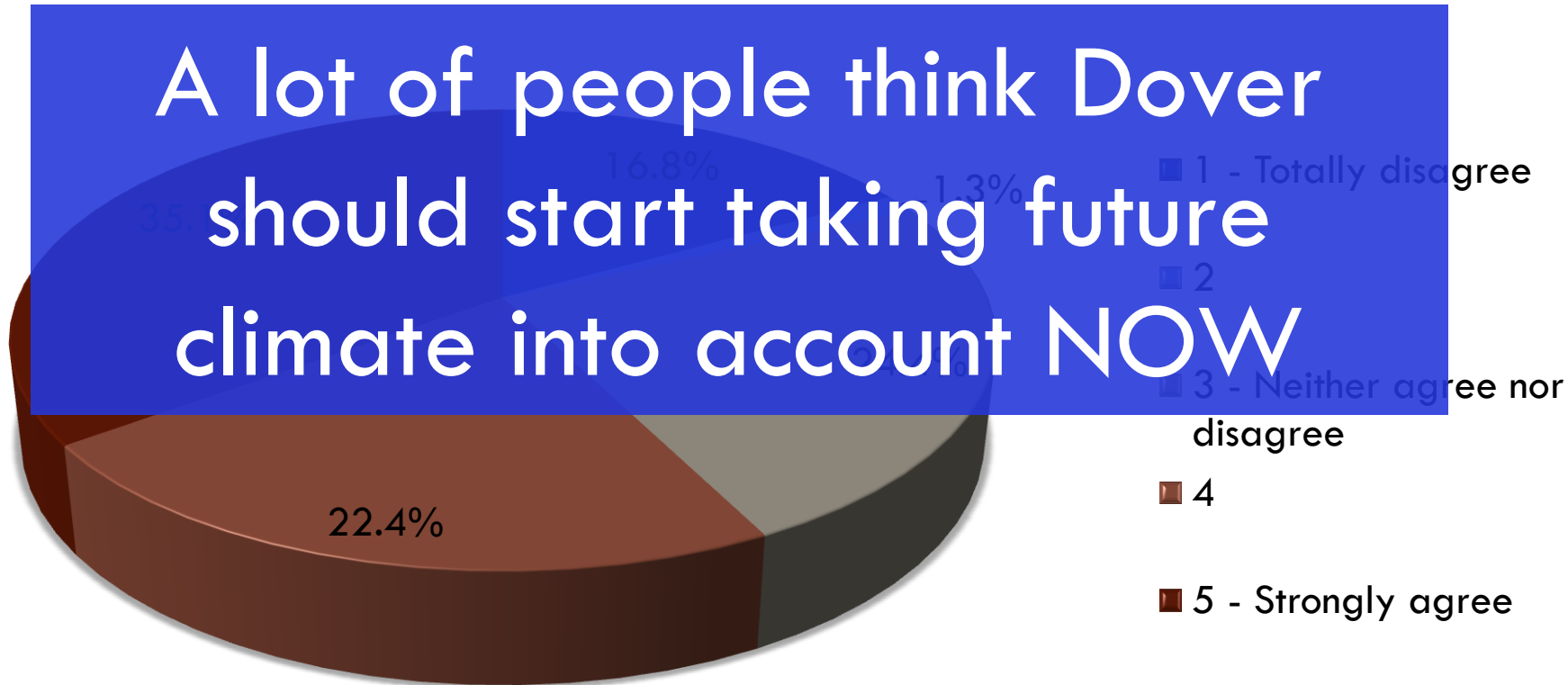
A lot of people are concerned about local impacts



Q: To what extent do you agree with the following: When making decisions today, decision-makers in my town should take into account scientific projections about what the climate might be like in 50 years.

- More than 50% = agree or strongly agree
Less than 20% = disagree

A lot of people think Dover should start taking future climate into account **NOW**



Q: How significant do you think addressing climate change risk [should be/will be] in your town's planning and decision making over the next ten years?

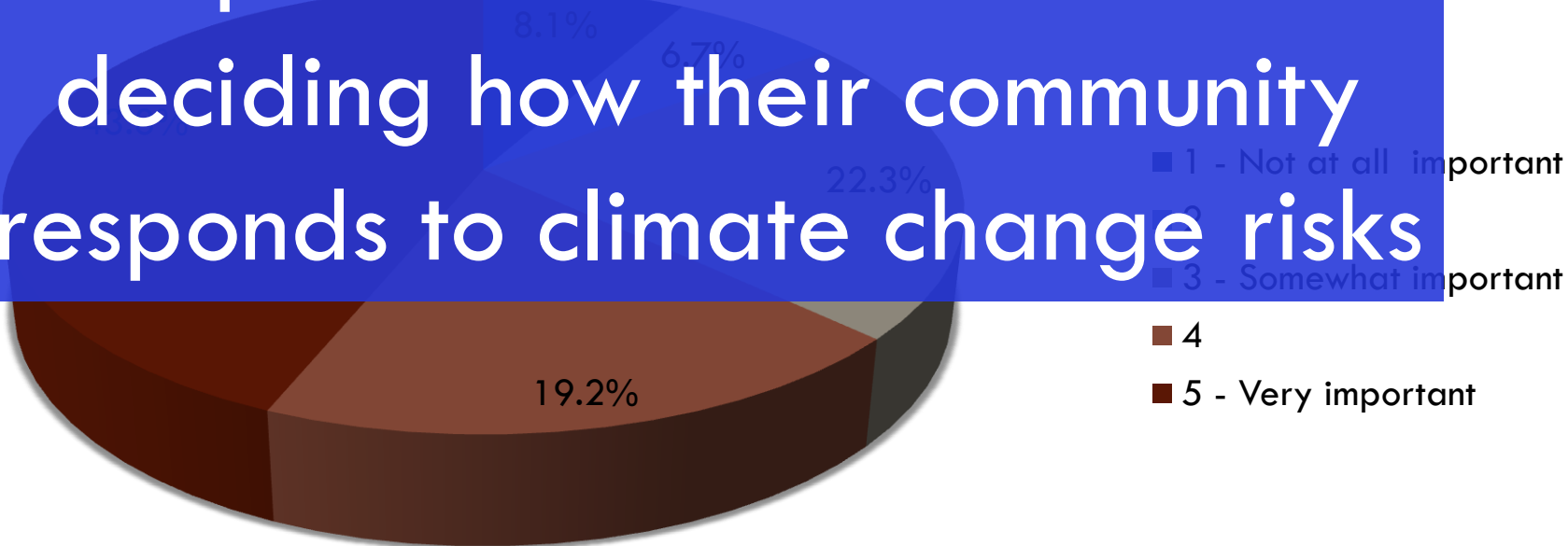
- Over 80% think Dover *should* address climate change risk



Q: How important is it that residents, local groups, and businesses be involved in deciding how to respond to climate change risks?

- More than 40% = very important
More than 80% = somewhat to very important

People want to be involved in deciding how their community responds to climate change risks



Some take aways (I)

- A surprising number of people in coastal communities are concerned
 - ▣ People are seeing and concerned about “changes in the weather”
 - ▣ Many are thinking about climate change and how it might affect their communities
- Local climate change projections, when effectively communicated, can make climate change “real”
 - ▣ They allow people to translate climate change into local impacts that mean something to them
 - ▣ They show that this is a local issue, not just a national or international issue

Some take aways (II)

- People are more ready to accept climate change adaptation as a local issue than decision-makers think
 - ▣ Many people think that local government should act
 - ▣ Not only environmentalists, but people from diverse walks of life, particularly long time residents
- However, there is an “optimism gap”
 - ▣ People are pessimistic about the prospects of effective local action
 - ▣ Tendency to see adaptation as a big, expensive undertaking; not as changing how everyday planning is done
- Stakeholders want to be engaged—people want to have a say in how their community adapts

Implications

- We need to effectively communicate risks, make them tangible
 - Local climate change projections can help
 - Tie climate change to the “changes in the weather” people are seeing
 - Tie to things they care about
- We need to show pathways forward, increase confidence and optimism about local action
 - We know that people are more likely to act when we are optimistic that we can manage risk
 - Thus, we need to convey that adaptation is about “better planning”
 - There are things we can do today to prepare, despite uncertainty
- We need to find ways to meaningfully involve stakeholders in deciding how to adapt
 - People want to have a say
- In sum: We need to actively engage people in thinking about local risks and what their community can do to adapt
 - In other words: we need to enhance collective readiness to adapt

Learn more + connect with us

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