

Portsmouth sustainability experts invited to worldwide event

Worldwide event calls local duo

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PORTSMOUTH — Two leaders in the city's ongoing sustainability efforts are heading to Sweden next week to teach the international community about what Portsmouth is doing to be more sustainable.

Bert Cohen and Skye Maher, who head up the Piscataqua Sustainability Initiative and are members of the city sustainability committee, will make a 20-minute presentation to a convention of "eco-municipalities" from around the world.

The inaugural International Eco-municipality Conference will be held May 27-29 in Helsingborg, Sweden. The primary purpose of the conference is for fellow-minded sustainable communities to teach and learn from each other.

Cohen and Maher will present on the final day of the conference a slideshow on the different initiatives the city has undertaken. But the primary purpose of the conference, they said, is to learn.

"We're going to bring back whatever we can to share with others and accelerate our movement to a community that is healthy and productive for our kids and grandkids," said Cohen, who teaches a class on sustainability at the University of New Hampshire.

"What we're doing here in Portsmouth is just the beginning of the process," said Maher. "The exciting thing about this conference is seeing what other people have done."

The pair plans to boast about the successes that culminated in April with the Sustainability Fair, which was attended by approximately 1,500 people. Cohen said they plan to emphasize the "three-legged stool" approach, in which local government, organized study circles such as Portsmouth Listens, and grass-roots movements like Piscataqua Sustainability Initiative work toward the same goal.

Cohen said both he and Maher were planning trips to Europe separately this year and decided to plan the visit around the conference. The city is not paying for the trip.