

Town of Swanzev
Economic Development Advisory Committee
March 9, 2009 meeting

Minutes are not final until reviewed and approved by the Committee. Review and approval of minutes generally takes place at the next regularly scheduled meeting of the Committee.

Attendance Art Boufford, David Cairns, Bill Hutwelker (arrived at 5:15), Greg Johnson, Mary Ryan, Eric Stanley. (Gus Lerandeau was absent.)
Town Administrator Beth Fox also was present.

Call to order Chairman Johnson called the meeting to order at 5:05.

Program

Discussion with Jack Dugan, Monadnock Economic Development Corporation (MEDC)
(5:00 - 5:50)

The group welcomed Jack Dugan, MEDC president.

By way of introduction, Johnson explained that the Board of Selectmen recently formed the EDAC; currently, group members are laying groundwork, educating themselves, and looking for advice. He said that the goal of the EDAC is to reach out to existing businesses and industry, and to reach out to attract good industry to the community.

Dugan presented an overview of the MEDC mission and activities. He said that the 23-year-old private, not-for-profit regional development corporation focuses on downtown revitalization and industrial development. Support for the organization comes from sources like rental income, management fees and interest from loan funds, and occasional developer fees. The Board is elected to three-year terms, with term limits and little turnover. A nominating committee recommends membership.

In response to questions from EDAC members, Dugan said:

- MEDC receives referrals (for example, from DRED) and keeps an inventory of business and industry prospects.
- Networking is the most effective technique for finding new businesses. If encouraged to be ambassadors for the Town, existing businesses may recommend Swanzev to their suppliers or to similar businesses. Ensure that industrial brokers are aware of Swanzev's assets.
- Swanzev representation at a statewide convention probably would best be left to DRED. Recruiting a company over distance is "an ordeal."
- The trend in New England is towards service companies rather than manufacturing companies. A past hinderance to growth has been a lack of skilled people; MEDC and the optics companies currently are forming a training program.
- New market tax credits are based on Census data; likely, the Town of Swanzev continues to be ineligible, but west Swanzev (a separate Census track) might become eligible in the future.
- A collaboration in Peterborough is an example of how to capitalize on the momentum of the new grocery store project now underway in Swanzev. The key is to "think a few steps beyond the grand opening." Promoters approached MEDC with the vision of making Peterborough the "green center" of NH. MEDC is working with a new business to help create a revolving loan fund that has led to other investment opportunities. The fund will finance improvements in energy efficiency for downtown businesses. MEDC will establish a subsidiary company to focus on "green" building; interest from the loan fund will pay for a fund manager. When the EDAC has developed its goals for the Town, Dugan can help to find sources of financing to accomplish the vision.

- MEDC doesn't own land long-term, but will purchase and develop land, independently or in partnership.
- Few other communities have the infrastructure for development now available in Swanzey. Keene has no available sites for development.
- The region's economic diversity, with its mix of insurance, medicine, education and precision optics, has protected the local economy from the worst effects of the global economic downturn.
- Creative approaches in the region have led to a healthy per capita share of block grants and rural development funding.

Johnson invited Dugan to return to the group when it has prepared its mission. Dugan offered a regular MEDC presence at EDAC meetings.

Following Dugan's departure, the group briefly discussed collaboration with MEDC. Stanley expressed his desire to have a MEDC representative at EDAC meetings to help keep the group informed of development activity in the region, and to remind MEDC of Swanzey's unique attributes, such as the airport.

Consideration of minutes

Motion by Boufford to approve the minutes of December 8, 2009. Second by Hutwelker. All in favor. EDAC members acknowledged receipt of notes from the January 12, 2009 work session.

New business

Planning Department update EDAC members acknowledged receipt of proposed zoning changes, and Town Planner Carbonneau's listing of recent development activity in the Town. Members briefly discussed the potential impact on Town roads of traffic generated by the proposed Route 10 grocery.

EDAC involvement in legislative issues Group members agreed that EDAC member and State representative Lerandeau can keep the group informed of State and County issues. Johnson said that he will ask Lerandeau to select topics of likely interest to report to the group.

EDAC website Group members discussed possibilities for the site's structure and content. Ideas included

- Meeting minutes (Town Administrator Fox advised the group that its minutes now are posted at the Town site.)
- Promotion of the Industrial Park (a site plan showing footprint of available lots, locations of existing buildings)
- Demographic information
- Cultural information, including schools and churches

Reminding the group of DRED representatives' recommendations, Fox encouraged members to consider community assets, and determine the top three identifiers that make Swanzey stand out to business and industry prospects. She said that these qualities provide a framework for structuring information and the group's message.

Members acknowledged the group's desire to avoid the appearance of singling out specific businesses for Town promotion.

Ryan advocated taking immediate action - even simple steps -- to develop an EDAC page at the Town website, and to restructure the Town site for a more businesslike representation.

Johnson said he will keep this item on the agenda until the site is established, and suggested asking the Board of Selectmen for resources to establish the site.

Progress report to the Board of Selectmen, general progress Based on the advisory nature of the EDAC's charge, and the nearly half-year existence of the Committee, Cairns raised the topic of reporting group activity and progress. Cairns said that the group's mission and objectives were identified in the Selectmen's charge. Group members agreed to invite Selectmen to attend an EDAC meeting, perhaps in June.

Johnson said that he had pushed for the committee's establishment in order to create a group of business people who could prepare a business plan to attract good business and industry to Swanzey, and to act as ambassadors for the Town. He said that he envisioned devoting the first six meetings to "due diligence;" at that point it would be appropriate to prepare a written report for Selectmen and begin meeting on an as-needed basis.

Members agreed that the group had made good progress in gaining a basic understanding of industrial development, and in gaining familiarity with development agencies and programs. Ryan encouraged EDAC members to continue meeting with groups and agencies, and to represent to townspeople how seriously the Committee takes its charge. She said that solid results of Committee work may not be apparent until well into 2010.

Guests for future meetings

Group members agreed that it would not be appropriate to meet with the ZBA, whose processes are dictated by statute. However, Hutwelker advised EDAC members that ZBA members are concerned about the status and condition of the private water company that serves west Swanzey.

Members expressed interest in meeting with Planning Board representatives.

Hutwelker recommended meeting with members of the Open Space Committee (OSC). OSC Chair Barlow said that OSC members continue their interest in conducting a co-sponsored EDAC-OSC forum to consider where in Swanzey development should best be directed.

Barlow said that new Swanzey businessman Michael O'Connell (24 Carrots Farmstand), a former marketing and branding specialist with corporate experience, is willing to donate time to the EDAC to discuss approaches to positioning the Town.

Hutwelker advised the group to meet with School Board representatives, and recommended inviting State senator Kelly and other local representatives to speak to the EDAC.

Next meeting: 5:00 to 6:00 on April 12, 2009 at Swanzey Town Hall. *SB April 13th eaf*

Adjournment

Motion to adjourn by Hutwelker. Second by Stanley. The group adjourned at 6:40.

Respectfully submitted,

Victoria Reck Barlow
Recording Secretary