

Town of Swanzey
Economic Development Advisory Committee
May 11, 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 David Cairns (left at 6:45), Bill Hutwelker, Greg Johnson, Eric Stanley (arrived at 5:10). Art Boufford, Gus Lerandeau, and Mary Ryan were absent.

Eric Smith (SWRPC planner) and Tiffany Mannion (Hannah Grimes Center coordinator) also were present.

Call to order Chairman Johnson called the meeting to order at 5:05 p.m. and welcomed Mannion and Smith. Introducing the EDAC, Johnson said that the goal of the group is function as ambassadors to seek out new businesses and encourage them to come to Swanzey. He said that the group has brought in various experts to speak about economic development. Hutwelker asked that Mannion and Smith, based on their experience working with other communities, suggest approaches for Swanzey. Hutwelker said that the EDAC seeks to clarify its purpose and refine its mission.

Group discussion

Tiffany Mannion, Hannah Grimes Center A Swanzey resident since 2004, Mannion said that she joined Hannah Grimes in 2006, just after the organization took over the MEDC incubator space – now fully rented -- on Roxbury Street. Mannion said that the Center aims to be a hub for networking of organizations in the Monadnock region, and said that programs have expanded exponentially since the fulltime hiring of Jan Risely. Most programming is free, making use of existing partnerships, and includes monthly workshops. As much as possible, Mannion said that she personally encourages businesses to explore opportunities in Swanzey; Mannion said she is the gatekeeper of the Hannah Grimes Center networking hub.

Eric Smith, SWRPC Smith, a Swanzey resident for four and a half months, formerly was Town Planner in Ashburnham, MA. Smith said that his other prior experience is mostly in municipal planning. He was hired by SWRPC to handle hazard mitigation planning and economic development. Smith described several projects underway at SWRPC:

- *Economic development planning* Smith said that inclusion in SWRPC's comprehensive economic development strategy for southwest New Hampshire helps towns qualify for grants to help fund projects like the Jaffrey wastewater treatment plant and the proposed roadway in the Swanzey Industrial Park TIF district. Smith said that he will include EDAC membership on the e-mail distribution list for the SWRPC economic development group.
- *GIS mapping for economic development* Smith said that SWRPC's GIS specialist (and Swanzey resident), Michael Blair, has been funded to work on a pilot data base that will show where land is zoned for commercial and industrial uses, which buildings are available, and the locations of municipal water and sewer service. Smith said that the goal is eventually to have a live, interactive web site. He said that Blair possibly could include Swanzey in the project. Smith asked whether the Town could provide data such as water and sewer service areas to SWRPC in GIS format. Barlow said that the Town lacks GIS capability; independent contractor Dan Zeh recently has been retained to update the Town zoning map [as well as to create a separate map of areas subject to the Shorelands Protection District, as designated by the State]. Johnson said that prospective businesses

ask for information pertaining to broadband, sewer, water, fire protection capacity, and existing available parcels of land. Johnson said that he didn't foresee the EDAC having all such information mapped by the end of 2009.

- *Broadband service* Smith said that stimulus funding may be available for expansion of broadband service. He said that SWRPC has partnered with other regional planning commissions and DRED to apply for funding to map the region's broadband service areas and underserved areas, in the hope that mapping will lay the groundwork for success with one of the likely three to four rounds of stimulus funding. Smith said that SWRPC will host a meeting with broadband providers within the next 60-90 days, and will invite Swanzezy to the meeting. Cairns stressed the importance to businesses of knowing whether broadband service is available.

EDAC website Hutwelker said that the EDAC seeks to develop a website that links to the Town website. He said that the main challenge is to communicate the purpose of the group, and said that the group seeks a motif for Swanzezy.

Johnson agreed, saying that Swanzezy lacks identification through a website. He said that the site should include links to ordinances and regulations, links to MEDC and DRED (with their loan packages), an inventory of available land, and zoning. Mannion said that the group would need to consider maintenance of the site, housing of maps, and a way to update commercial listings on a daily basis.

Promoting existing businesses to attract new businesses Stanley said that the EDAC is considering preparing a directory of local businesses to let people know what is available locally. Mannion encouraged the group to stay away from promotion. She said that new businesses are attracted by the bottom line, that the key is to differentiate Swanzezy from Keene in a way that explains the logic of investing in Swanzezy. Mannion encouraged the EDAC to make use of the Keene Chamber of Commerce, which, she said, is geared towards economic development rather than tourism, as in other regions. Smith said that a Swanzezy business association might take the place of a chamber of commerce.

Mannion said that it is a vital time to focus on what is local, and encouraged the group to make a list of the businesses that are needed in Swanzezy. Smith recommended streamlining of the permit process, removing the necessity of ZBA approval for businesses deemed most desirable by the community.

Developing Yale Forest Johnson asked whether SWRPC would be available to guide and assist if Swanzezy wanted to carve out a section of Yale Forest and create an industrial park. Smith said that federal funds might be available, but such a project would have to fit into the master plan for the entire region.

Town center The group discussed the challenge posed by the lack of a single, true town center. Mannion said that sidewalks are critical, and "make" a downtown – people have to have a place where they feel comfortable walking down a street. Smith suggested that the group explore village zoning, or creating a neighborhood heritage district. Mannion suggested that the group explore historical preservation.

Johnson said that he doubted that Swanzezy would ever develop a downtown. Smith said that the village of West Swanzezy would be most likely; perhaps a TIF district in the village could help finance sidewalks. Smith said that private enterprise allowed Mashpee, MA to create a new regional center. Hutwelker encouraged the group to take a forward-looking perspective.

Airport Mannion recommended leveraging the presence of the airport in marketing Swanzey, especially for \$1 million+ businesses. She suggested that group members contact Elizabeth Bendell.

Cheshire Medical Center Mannion said that businesses can connect to the Center's mission to make the community the healthiest community in the country by 2020. She encouraged EDAC members to contact the Cheshire Medical Center.

Public Service of New Hampshire Mannion said that PSNH actively works to bring businesses to New Hampshire, and encouraged the group to contact Pat McDermitt.

Open spaces map Mannion said that such a map would be important to potential businesses, by setting standards and painting a picture of the community's values.

Publicizing local recognition Mannion recommended that the group make a clear, comprehensive list of all awards received by the town and by businesses and other entities within the town. She said that such a list would send a message that Swanzey is doing it right. According to a social media marketing workshop she recently attended, Mannion said that people are more likely to take advice from strangers' comments in a website review than they are from neighbors.

Business incubation The group considered whether Swanzey might contain available space for start-up businesses. Barlow said that the Planning Board encourages appropriate home occupations as a way to help young businesses develop.

Quality of Swanzey schools Stanley stressed the importance of having top quality education, and asked for ideas to help in promoting the schools to the communities. Mannion praised Monadnock Regional High School and the school's new principal, Brian Pickering, who she said has set a tone of excellence. Stanley said that he has seen huge strides forward, but feels it is easy to go the other way; the greater the support, he said, the harder it is to hear the few negative voices. Cairns said that the quality of local schools is tied to property values. Barlow noted that the upcoming film, *Swanzey Rural Character*, a senior project created at the request of the Open Space Committee, is a positive example of what MRHS students are capable of, and will serve to promote the Town as well as the high school.

Stanley encouraged attendance at school board meetings, and positive statements during the public comment periods.

Next steps

Johnson said that the EDAC had now fulfilled his primary objective of bringing in many experts to talk to the group.

EDAC members discussed preparing their report to the Board of Selectmen, and scheduling its presentation. Hutwelker recommended that each member pull together information and input, and submit it to Johnson for his preparation into a draft report to serve as the basis for group discussion. Johnson said that he would send an e-mail message to members with that request, and set a two-week deadline for response. He said the group would discuss the draft at the June meeting, then invite Selectmen to attend an EDAC meeting in July, August or September (depending on vacation schedules).

Consideration of minutes Lacking a quorum, the group postponed consideration of minutes until the next meeting.

Next meeting 5:00 on June 8, 2009 at Swanzey Town Hall.

Adjournment

Motion to adjourn by Hutwelker. Second by Stanley. The meeting adjourned at 6:36 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Victoria Reck Barlow
Recording Secretary