

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

DECEMBER 12, 2011

Members present: Gus Lerandean, David Cairns, H. Gregory Johnson, Arthur Boufford, Steve Bittel and David Krisch. Also present was Town Administrator Beth Fox.

The meeting was called to order at 5:00 p.m. by Chairman Krisch.

The committee met with Doug Brown representing Homestead Mills located in the West Village. Mr. Brown advised members that the mill, like other rental facilities in our current economic climate, was struggling to remain a financially viable location. Historically small businesses have occupied their lease space and recent tenant actions (by one of the facility's larger tenants) have illustrated that it will be difficult to meet maintenance expenses with the current building occupancy and business model. The family is looking to reach out to engage others to help develop ideas for the facility's future. The family wishes to seek the location to remain active. They do not want to see it turn dark and cold, devoid of economic activity, like other of our region's historic mills. Brown advised that, in the short term, portions of the facility may be closed as heating months present a real challenge. Optimism, as the West Village is now seen as being close to Keene business market, was expressed. Brown reviewed the types of spaces available in the mill complex and some of its recent tenants. Alternative uses were discussed. Uses that bring people to the building are encouraged by the family. Need to develop a new plan for the space aimed at keeping it vibrant and productive is needed.

Committee members suggested some contacts that may assist Mr. Brown at the regional and state level. They advised they had talked about whether the facility could play a role in small business development partnering with Hannah Grimes. Krisch advised that the mill's future would be in the minds of committee members as the EDAC 2012 work plan develops advising that it fit well into Swanzey's community marketing strategy – attractive space and places, reasonably priced and close to amenities.

Committee members approved the minutes of their meeting of November 14, 2011 as written.

Budget 2012 and EDAC's funding request was reviewed. Krisch advised that Selectmen's support had been sought for an appropriation of \$2,500 based on a work plan that included development of a brochure, up to 4 open houses, newsletters and other mailings. To develop programs aimed at implementing the 2012 work plan, tasks will be divided up amongst committee members as follows:

Intergovernmental Relations/Networking: Gus Lerandean advised he would serve as state agency liaison. David Cairns indicated he would keep in touch with local and regional groups such as Hannah Grimes.

PR Brochures/Website/Newsletters: Art Boufford volunteered to focus on this effort.

Open Houses: Greg Johnson and Steve Bittel advised they would develop and organize a work plan to support this portion of the work plan reporting back to the committee with recommendations regarding the number of open houses to schedule, location, topics etc.

Mission Statement: Krisch advised he would continue work developing a mission statement for the group's consideration.

Nominations are being accepted for 2 positions on the committee. Johnson queried if term limits would be prudent for town boards and committees.

Steve Bittel expressed an interest in continuing to invite folks to meet with EDAC with the goal of "debriefing" applicants regarding the problems they may have experience setting up their business in Swanzey. His goal is to improve the process going forward. Businesses that had been through our local review process and might be in a position to give feedback were discussed. Market Basket and the sign shop under construction on Base Hill Road were suggestions.

Greg Johnson expressed support for existing local businesses and concern that a proposal to build a Dollar General store in Swanzey would have a negative impact on existing local business. He queried whether the committee should voice opposition to Dollar General. Committee members expressed concern about getting involved, as a committee, on a specific development proposal advocating for existing business versus proposed businesses. Committee participation in the land use board process with focus on vision (versus particular applications) was viewed as within the group's charge.

Johnson suggested that the Homestead Woolen Mill location might be ripe for a turn around opportunity similar to that occurring at the Warwick Mills in New Ipswich.

Economic development activity occurring in Claremont, specifically around the downtown and Common Man Restaurant, was discussed.

The board's next meeting was set for Monday, January 9th at 5 p.m.

Meeting adjourned at 6:10 p.m.

Submitted by,

Elizabeth A. Fox, Town Administrator