

## **Economic Development Advisory Committee**

### **2.11.09 Meeting minutes**

#### **Americana Room – Hampshire Hills**

##### **Present:**

Rich Ball, Cirtronics Corp.  
Tracy Bardsley, Do-it  
Brad Chappell, Chappell Tractor  
Matt Ciardelli, Ciardelli Fuel Co  
Chris Costantino, Conservation Commission  
George Infanti, Milford Paint & Wallpaper  
Heather Leach, Centrix Bank  
Tim O'Connell, Butternut Farms  
Tom Sapienza, Hampshire Hills Sports Club  
Dale White, Leighton A White, Inc

Janet Langdell, Planning Board representative  
Walter Murray Jr, Water and Sewer Commission representative  
Bill Parker, Director Community Development  
Mike Putnam, BOS representative  
John McCormack, TIFD representative

Shirley Wilson, Recording secretary

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##### **Invited:**

Marianne Carvell, Sage school  
Rosie Deloge, Director Milford Technical Center  
Bob Suprenant, School District representative

T. Sapienza called the meeting to order at 7:40AM and introduced the members. He then welcomed the representatives from the School District.

##### **Review of agenda and meeting notes:**

J. Langdell inquired if there had been any discussion on public transportation as a potential weakness. A brief discussion followed. G. Infanti noted that it should be added.

G. Infanti made a motion to accept the minutes adding public transportation as a weakness. M. Putnam seconded and all in favor.

##### **Discussion/Reports:**

###### **Brad Chappell**

B. Chappell said he had done research on several towns and in summation other towns seem to make a big marketing effort and display their openness to new businesses. Their websites “rolled out the red carpet” offering streamlined approvals, tax incentives and portals for relocation organizations. He will do a more formal presentation at the next meeting.

###### **Tracy Bardsley**

T. Bardsley distributed links to other communities by email earlier in the week; hopefully the committee has had the opportunity to look at some. She then passed out copies of the Berlin website saying that Berlin is similar to Milford in population although their situation is more precarious due to the closure of the mills. Claremont has been marketing their community heavily with incentive programs for the mill and two industrial parks. They also have a beautiful website that is slick and well done. Manchester is hard to compare because of the population size, but both they and Nashua have done a lot of economic development. Nashua's Mainstreet organization has helped to completely turn the city around since the 1980's. A discussion on the qualifications for HUD money followed. T. Bardsley said the main focus for Do-It this year is to market the downtown and also promote economic development as we have several empty spaces that need a lot of work. We have started discussion with Jack Dugan regarding the Bradler building; the former Dyers Drug building, Darlings Gift Shop or Harvey's Music. T. Bardsley then referenced a previous \$50,000 HUD grant for the Boston Shoe store that Do-It received, but unfortunately that grant was tied to the property and it literally slipped through our fingers. We had hoped to do a zero interest loan with that grant and the payback would be re-used to fund other building owners for

rehabbing their buildings. J. Langdell said there seems to be a lack of communication with owners. T. Bardsley said that even in this economy people are interested in renting buildings and storefronts, but the owners don't return phone calls. Some of the landlords aren't aware of the steps or don't want to be included in the process and we have difficulty drawing them in. Discussion followed. J. Langdell said that was one of the challenges we all face for the downtown and suggested keeping that theme to in the back of our minds as we look at strategies to engage owners in whatever bigger picture we come up with for both the Oval and across town.

R. Ball said he looked at the websites and thought they were very interesting and compared the main pages for the Berlin and Milford websites. The Berlin website is more business oriented that even links to their business plan and our page feels more "homey". R. Ball summarized Berlin's findings and recommendations from the business plan. Berlin has come together and laid out a plan; whether they succeed will depend on a lot of things.

#### Berlin, NH business plan

##### Summary of findings:

- Employment growth in Berlin and Coos County lags behind the rest of New Hampshire
- Berlin's economic base is not as diversified as the rest of New Hampshire
- Berlin's role as a regional employment center is declining
- Wage levels in Berlin grew at a slower rate than Coos County and the State
- Outstanding debt levels in Berlin are not excessive and the potential to bond remains strong
- Berlin has new opportunities but may not be ready to full realize this potential

##### Summary of major recommendations:

- Make downtown redevelopment a priority
- Continue to upgrade the housing stock
- Consolidate economic development organizations
- Continue to focus on tourism development
- Develop alternate plans for the former Fraser Mill site
- Acquire additional land for future economic development
- Set annual goals relative to the above initiatives

A lengthy discussion on the Milford's website brought out the following points.

- The website is difficult to get to. If one Googles "Milford, NH" the search brings up Do-it (milfordmainstreet.org), the community pages (milfordnh.com) and then the town's website (milfordnh.info). One cannot find milford.gov and there is also a milfordoval.net for the downtown businesses. There are too many sites and it is too confusing even for people who live in town, let alone someone from other areas.
- Combine or link the multiple websites
- The websites are not current
- The town website and links are difficult to navigate
- The website is not cosmetically attractive
- Economic development is not very prominent
- The website needs to be attractive, informative and fresh and current
- There is no clear policy on how the departments handle their web pages
- The school's website, which is focused only on the schools, was developed by one of their employees, Liz O'Hare who would probably be amenable to helping the Town
- A good website takes funding
- Dave should take a look at other communities and do some background research
- Departments should look at other communities help with background research

Website development could be a recommendation from this committee, something tangible to take back to the Selectmen possibly as a goal for 2009. The Selectmen could redirect focus to the website which has taken a back seat from the television side of PEG Access. The Selectmen could come up with a master plan for the website to include the town department participation. This committee doesn't have to redesign the website, just recognize the fact that Milford's website needs work.

T. Bardsley said looking at our trade area, where we attract business from, and the commuting patterns for our region, we found that even though Milford's population is 15,000; we're actually serving a population of about 55,000. In terms of a business relocating here we're drawing from a good customer base and a decent area, so it needs to be made very clear and defined on the website with hard data. J. Langdell added that we are a hub town and the numbers are important.

H. Leach said we need to be aware that each of the websites mentioned today has a purpose and while they should be linked we can not infringe on those other groups. As an example, she said that she uses the school website to see what's for lunch and to get her children's grades, which is very slick, while businesses probably go to the Do-it website. T. Sapienza suggested there be cooperation between the sites to get a consistent look and feel. J. Langdell said it is disconcerting that they don't seem to dovetail and many appear to be related to Do-It. There was further discussion regarding the "Community" website.

M. Ciardelli said that if we would like the website to be a key component of what this committee is trying to do, we might recommend that money be set aside to re-do the website. There was discussion pertaining to website costs and professionals versus volunteers.

J. McCormack pointed out that Berlin's website's referenced "The city that trees built" and he wasn't sure that was still congruent with their business plan. We have been talking about a more integrated appearance; however, when he thinks about Milford from a retiree standpoint he thinks Granite Town and Granite state, but does that convey the character of what we are trying to do today from a business perspective. How much of the town industry is really tied into granite? R. Ball stated that Milford used to be the hops capital of the world and that wouldn't be right either.

G. Infanti said he went to a seminar for his business yesterday and explained that all their marketing is going on-line now. The focus has changed and their websites are amazing. The days of yellow pages advertising are gone, people now "Google" for paint. T. Sapienza agreed that the focus is changing and the website can be the first impression. Of course the website should be more about substance, but form is important. We want it to be appealing. T. Bardsley said many businesses are now using *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *MySpace* as a medium for advertising. A brief discussion ensued.

H. Leach said towns have very different functionalities for businesses on their websites and it may be beneficial for the different departments within the town to look at other websites to see what can be done; from taking tax payments on line to getting assessments and comparable sales from the site. There is a wide range of functionality available and Milford is at the bottom of that range. We should think about what we want it to do from a business side. B. Chappell said that in order to do those functions, which it should, it would have to be hired out. Website development is not easy and should not be taken lightly.

R. Deloge, a member of the PEG access/Granite Town Media Committee acknowledged that they do oversee the website; however, she said it has been Dave Kirsch's responsibility to maintain and update the website so they haven't really been checking on his work, but a conversation with Guy Scaife or a recommendation from this committee saying that we need to do some coordination would be beneficial. She then asked how the recommendation or consensus of this committee would get to Guy or the Selectmen. J. Langdell said that this committee will present a final package to the Planning Board and the Selectmen in May, but near term suggestions could certainly go back through the Selectmen's representative at any time. That is why we also have representatives from the Water and Sewer Commission and the Planning Board, so that there is an avenue for communication to and from this committee. B. Parker said that Mike could certainly take this idea back to the Selectmen right away so they could get discussion started and be ready for when this committee presents its formal recommendations and to develop a policy for the departments to use. M. Putnam offered to do so and possibly suggest putting the website under the purview of the PEG Access Committee to get started on a tangible process to make things work. R. Deloge said that the PEG committee could do some beginning facilitation of how to move forward and gather the information and identify the things that need to be changed in the process of being considered and looked at.

R. Suprenant said that the school formed a sub committee when they redesigned their site and he recommended having a balance of technical people and users in terms of content for that site.

M. Putnam said based on everything he has heard today, he will go back to the Selectmen to say that the current town website needs work and maybe we put it under the PEG's purview or maybe a sub-committee will need to be set up. He then asked if everyone on this committee could submit their thoughts and suggestions for the website by email, and he will take those examples to the Board.

**Milford school district:**

R. Suprenant distributed the school district's annual report and began by saying that this committee was such a good match for what the school district is trying to do. He referenced a screening of "Communities and Consequences" at a rotary session back in November and said that the school system is a key component of attracting young families and employees to town. Milford is a vibrant community and hopefully the school district reflects that. He was surprised to see the number of cars that travel 101 East in the mornings and noted that there are many people travelling through town on their way to work or to get to work here in Milford.

We have some good things going on in terms of making that school to career connection, especially with the Sage program which is located in the Bales building. We get good utilization from that building and after studying its use, the School Board made the decision to maintain Bales. The first floor of the building houses the Sage Program; about twenty-five students from the Middle School and High School who have difficulty functioning in a mainstream environment. So rather than send them out of district to a program like RSEC in Amherst at a cost of about \$35,000 per year, we chose to educate those children in a small environment right within our community. Those students are good kids and bright kids, but they haven't had the same support system and functionality that many of us had. Some schools use adventure bound and outbound programs but we felt that the location of Bales lent itself to job shadowing experiences and internships. The second floor houses the special education offices and the long term goal for the third floor is to move the SAU offices there and free up classroom space at the high school. Currently we have five teachers at the high school that are floaters; they don't have a classroom. We have already invested some money into Bales by putting on a new roof and installing a new furnace as part of the \$4.9M renovation projects; however, the building still needs work and we have applied to be part of the stimulus project. We're not sure what "shovel ready" means, but we do have architectural plans for the entire renovation of that building. Part of the problem is that Bales building is not handicap accessible, so an elevator is a major piece of the cost.

M. Carvell explained the Sage program and said that many of their students just don't see the purpose of school and how it will benefit them in the future. Our goal is to try to give these students some experience and exposure to give them ideas on what they might want to do. We hired a job coach and developed a transitional employment program where we try to work with each student individually to learn what their interests are and match them to positions within the community that fit those interests so that they can build on that. Area businesses have been contacted to either provide job shadowing experiences or internships. Our job coach is in contact with the local businesses and the students' supervisors to assess any deficiencies and work with that student to gain the necessary skills to close that gap so that the student can feel more successful in that position. We also instituted monthly career themes such as resume writing, interview skills, and dressing for work where they earn incentives. We have also been working with the high school whereby our students are learning to take inventory on a computer based system. This week alone we have placed seven students for job shadowing or internships and two students were actually hired for paid positions. The following businesses are participating in this program: Lake Sunapee Bank, the Frame Depot, Hairforce, Trombly Farms, Happy Paws and possibly the Town Hall.

T. O'Connell said given the fact that New Hampshire will be raising the drop out age from sixteen to eighteen, how has the school district taken that on and what stage are we at? R. Suprenant said the new SB18 rule goes into effect July 1<sup>st</sup> so effective for the next school year, a student will not be able to drop out without the permission of the superintendent of schools. A lot of us were concerned when the legislature was deliberating this because it sounds very noble that all kids should stay in school, but the reality is that there are some kids that school isn't made for at this particular time in their lives. There was about \$500,000 attached to the bill and we did apply for a small grant last year, but were denied. Most of the funding went to Manchester, Nashua, Claremont, and those towns having more of a poverty element. J. McCormack asked if there will be any enforcement. R. Suprenant

replied that what we will probably have to do is to report them as truant. The enforcement piece is weak and if a seventeen year old is determined not to come to school and if we don't have parent support, it will be hard to keep them. Given that, we built in to the high school some new programs and tools to keep these kids in school.

- We just started a GED Options Program that allows a student to maintain their enrollment and do the GED classes right within our school during the day. We have four students in the program that meet certain required criteria who attend class from 9:15AM to 12:45PM. We also marketed out to the area and we have a tuition student from Wilton-Lyndeborough as well. We used grant money to hire a GED teacher from the Nashua Adult Learning Center who trains small groups of students to get their GED. They're doing great.
- We started a program last fall called credit recovery where students who are so far behind in credits can take courses after school and in the evenings to make up some of those credits. We're trying to reduce the number of kids dropping out even though we actually have a fairly good record. In the past two years 21 students have dropped out of school. That is 2.4% each year compared to the state's average of 3.6%; however, twenty-one is still too many.
- We are also following legislation pertaining to Extended Learning Opportunities (ELO). The State Board of Education has really tried to break down the classroom walls so that students can get credit for experiences they have outside of school, so we set up a whole system for extended learning opportunities. The school board has passed a policy that if a student is interning somewhere in a school related area, they might get school credit.

T. O'Connell said this is a reality and breaking down the classroom walls fits into a lot of what we have been talking about. R. Suprenant said it will always be our job to advocate and promote students to go on to advance their education. He read in yesterday's paper that people in their twenties with a four year degree have an unemployment rate of 3.8% while people in their twenties with only a high school diploma have a 12.4% unemployment rate. The reality is that the more education you have the greater your earning power and the better chance of retaining your job. We are always going to promote continuing education but obviously two year schools and technical skills are important for many of our students. Right now 75% of our students go on to post secondary education, 50% to four year institutions and 25% to two year schools which have become more popular with the cost of education. Also noted was that a lot of the technical schools are becoming community colleges and offering courses that can be applied to a four year institution.

H. Leach said that Centrix bank has donated \$2,500 for materials for a joint project with the school technology center; signage for Kaley Park. We're working with the building trades group and CAD cam who will actually be doing the signs. This is a way to leverage all our resources between businesses and the schools. The hard part is having a vehicle to get the connections made and to communicate throughout the project. There may be some really good opportunities for the students to get some good marketable skills and make connections with business people in town. We should be able to talk about how to facilitate a process to do projects where the students get to go out into the business world and use real world trades, where businesses are able to make a real contribution and the town gets ventures that otherwise couldn't be afforded.

J. McCormack said the school district brochure packed a lot of interesting information and asked for comment on the test scores. B. Suprenant said we just received the State assessment results with mixed results. Those tests were put together by educators, which they should be; however, the respective groups of teachers sometimes build their assessments on skills that they feel should be there for everybody, when in reality they are not. This was the first year for the math test listed, which was a difficult test, and from that baseline data our scores will improve as we become more familiar with what is expected. The key to any test is to make sure that each and every student is progressing each and every year. Sometimes missing one or two questions can put you into a deficient range from a partially deficient range. The test is based on the curriculum and we teach the curriculum. As for the SAT's, there are a fewer amount of students taking those tests so we have to be careful about comparing, but in general we did very well. We had a few students who did very well on the SAT's and not so well on the State assessment which we can not explain.

R. Ball addressed the issue from a different angle by saying he appreciated that our guests worked in an educational environment with rules, regulations and focuses that are different than the rest of us, but in general the quality and ability of people to function when they leave the high school whether they go into industry, college, or pursue a trade, is really important. The educational program is designed to address some of those issues in very specific ways and it has been very difficult to get young people properly oriented to function well in a work environment. Some of it has to do with all the social interaction, but the issue of training people is very

important; how to function as a group, how to meet goals, how to treat each other appropriately, how to have the math communication skills necessary so that problems can be analyzed, the ability to balance a checkbook, to understand loans, as well as some of the technical issues and tools that require special training. He was involved personally with the schools for many years and Cirtronics is fairly altruistic and realistic in that we know the kids are the future. So to make a point without being critical, we gave all our three year old IBM type computers to the high school; however, we found it difficult to get the computers into the school and there didn't seem to be any good industrial interaction. We've also tried unsuccessfully to get the local school to provide us with young people that we could bring in to work as interns. The Manchester Technical School with whom he is currently working with has had problems with the guidance counselors looking down their noses at manufacturing. We have a lot of students that graduate from our high school and stay in the local community to work in stores or become electricians and carpenters, all the things necessary to support this town as it presently exists and to move forward. It is really important for the local industries and businesses to be more interactive especially with the technical aspect of the school so we can share experiences and help educate the kids as to what is really expected of them in the work environment because you can't get that out of a book. What he would like to propose is that the school system and the local industry work closely together referencing Junior Achievement or coordinate local business leaders' visits to the school so kids have an idea of the possibilities and expectations when they leave the school system. Also, entrepreneurial courses and concepts taught at the school would be interesting and very beneficial for our future society, just ask the many people at this table who somehow started their own businesses in the local environment. R. Ball asked that when this ad hoc committee ends, the school system and business community do a better job to integrate the needs of industry in the town with the desires and goals of the young people so they become more fruitful and happier adults as they move into their next environment.

R. Suprenant asked if Mr. Ball had gotten any students for internships. R. Ball replied not from Milford and said it has been very difficult to get anything going. R. Suprenant said the comments on profiling young workers was interesting because that is something we've attempted to address for quite some time. Contemporary classrooms today have a lot of activity and movement with kids working in groups. He cited a 1999 BIA report that stated the number one reason people are terminated from positions is not that they don't do the work but because they can't get along others. R. Ball added that soft skills are very important.

R. Deloge said they are doing a number of things at the technology center and will make her presentation at the March 4<sup>th</sup> meeting. B. Suprenant said that we could arrange for our career counselor and the job coach with the Sage program to come as well.

B. Parker distributed copies of the CIP Report to the members.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:15AM.

**Next meeting:**

Wednesday February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2009 in the American Room at Hampshire Hills

**Actions items:**

- M. Putnam to take website issues to BOS
- B. Chappell to summarize information collected
- B. Parker to summarize and group today's ideas
- B. Parker to get feedback from Northeastern University program
- TIF minutes of the LandQuest proposal
- Invite a representative from FairPoint to speak
- Website development
- BOS directive to town departments
- Staff to provide package with aerials and maps of identified properties
- Schedule site visits
- Provide updated information from Northeastern University partnership
- Invite Don Zizzi, Northeastern University to a future meeting