



CITY OF CONCORD

REPORT TO THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Christopher Carley, AIA, Chairman of EDAC

DATE: December 4, 2015

SUBJECT: EDAC Suggestions for Business Development Strategies

Recommendation

Accept this report.

Background

At its September 2015 meeting, Mayor Bouley tasked EDAC with providing the City Council with suggestions as to business development strategies. EDAC convened on October 2nd, October 16th, November 6th, November 20th and December 4th to accomplish this task. This report is the culmination of that work plan.

Discussion

As part of the fact-finding portion of its work plan, EDAC surveyed a sample of Concord-based CEOs, commercial lenders, and senior executives. The respondents were also invited to attend a business roundtable hosted by EDAC on October 16th. The roundtable participants were:

Chris Brown, New Hampshire Distributors
Don Castle, Express Employment Professionals
Andrew Ramsdell, TD Bank
Christopher Maurer, Graphic Packaging
Brian Lavoie, Eastern Bank
Rolf Gesen, Phenix Mutual
Ed Caron, Merrimack County Savings Bank
Andrew Grosvenor, Orr and Reno

Invitees, unable to attend but who completed the survey were:

Aryn Marsh, Live Juice
Gerry Blanchette, HL Turner Inc.
Jerry Kingwill, Cobb Hill
Ken Holmes, North Branch Construction
Ken Koornneef, Nobis Engineering
Walter Chapin, Company C

EDAC asked the roundtable participants and survey respondents the following questions:

- Why is your business in Concord?
- What are the challenges of running a business in Concord?
- What do you like about Concord?
- What would make it more attractive to you and your employees?
- What would make Concord a better place for you?
- If you could change one thing about Concord, what would it be?
- What would you tell the Mayor if he were here?
- What can the City do better?

The roundtable discussion and survey responses were very informative and demonstrated key common themes. Among the most consistently mentioned were:

- The quality of life in Concord is excellent. The City is safe, attractive, centrally located, home to a good medical facility, and generally well run.
- Prospective employees from elsewhere usually know little of the City and are surprised by what it offers when they get here.
- Cultural life (music, art, theatre) is strong, but should not be taken for granted.
- The current public transportation system is not useful to most people. Downtown “feels” remote from other business centers in the City (Horseshoe Pond, the Heights, the South End commercial area).
- Downtown parking is perceived to be difficult.
- Skilled labor, both technical and professional, is in short supply.
- Downtown is one of Concord’s best assets and the recent improvements are a big boost.

Based on its findings, EDAC concluded that there were two foundational elements for economic development upon which other strategies could be built.

1. Create and implement a 3-5 year economic development plan for the City that would provide the roadmap for the City’s efforts to enlarge its tax base, create high quality employment, and foster general prosperity.
2. Create an economic development director position, which would be charged with implementing the City’s economic development strategy in accordance with best practices. Duties would include, but not be limited to, business retention, development, and recruitment. The office should receive adequate financial resources and be sufficiently empowered to carry out its mission. EDAC was undecided as to whether this function should be part of City government or provided by an outside entity.

The following chart outlines EDAC’s recommended goals and strategies:

<p>Goal #1:</p> <p><i>Attract Regional and Out-of-State Businesses and Start-Up Entrepreneurs</i></p> <p>Strategies to accomplish Goal #1:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Invest in technology such as business recruitment software and development website 2. Review zoning for greater flexibility 3. Develop more attractive commercial real estate “product” (i.e. industrial parks with utilities) 4. Promote expansion of housing across all price points 5. Position the City as a regional leader rather than focus simply within Concord’s municipal boundaries 6. Seek to retain a communications officer/expert to promote all City endeavors 7. Conduct a business incubator needs assessment 8. Create a “brand” or “identity” to promote Concord’s assets 9. Improve Concord’s “front door” on I-93 	<p>Goal #2:</p> <p><i>Retain Businesses and Encourage Growth in Place</i></p> <p>Strategies to Accomplish Goal #2:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Continue Mayor’s Business Visitation Program 2. Seek to provide flexibility in zoning and development regulations 3. Develop more attractive commercial real estate “product” (i.e. industrial parks with utilities) 4. Create depth to downtown by extending Main Street’s “retail/restaurant experience” to side streets/alleys 5. Foster stronger relationships with anchor institutions such as Concord Hospital, NHTI, and University of New Hampshire Law School 6. Pursue extension of Storrs Street North 7. Implement the Opportunity Corridor Master Plan particularly in the South End Rail Yard 8. Conduct a regular review of the City’s development review process 	<p>Goal #3:</p> <p><i>Keep Concord as the Leader in Quality of Life</i></p> <p>Strategies to Accomplish Goal #3:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop cultural, recreational, and entertainment opportunities. 2. Implement projects that improve efficiency of transportation into and within the city and which address safety and traffic concerns in neighborhoods 3. Pursue greater connections to the river 4. Improve pedestrian and bicyclist opportunities 5. Explore developing public transit as an economic development tool in addition to CAT’s current purpose of providing transportation for those with limited resources 6. Invest in place-making projects and public infrastructure even when short-term costs may be high (i.e. burying overhead lines on South Main Street) 7. Improve the safety and appearance of areas such as Storrs Street in the vicinity of the Legislative Parking Garage to avoid resistance to redevelopment
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