

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

July 8, 1992

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PRESENT: Chairman Shirley Ganem, Barbara Jackson, Andy Milligan, Bob Murphy, Paul Kimball, Joan Lovering, Eric Piper; Town Planner Amanda Simpson, ex officio, and Rosemary Arctander, Secretary

GUEST SPEAKER: Verne Crosier, Business Visitation Program Coordinator, New Hampshire Department of Resources and Economic Development

The Committee met at 7:30 p.m. in the Whittier Room at the Wolfeboro Inn to learn about the State's Business Visitation Program.

While waiting for the full group to arrive, Bob Murphy started by describing to Crosier Wolfeboro EDC's efforts to attract new business. 7000 pieces of literature have been distributed in the community and so far there has been one inquiry. They hope to do a follow-up mailing of 500 in the fall, especially targeting high-income summer residents.

Crosier reported that Dunn & Bradstreet on a Data Base lists the CEOs of all major companies. This can be cross-referenced against the property owners to find any who live in Wolfeboro. His office has New Hampshire Dunn and Bradstreet which shows CEOs of all manufacturers in New Hampshire. He said he had run the list the previous night and came up with 10 in Wolfeboro. Committee members named some out-of-state CEOs who own property in Wolfeboro--Black & Decker, Breck Seeds, Marriott, Pepsi Cola.

Barbara Jackson introduced the speaker, who said that his office's program focuses on retention and expansion of existing business already in the State. It has been running since January of this year. Studies have shown that the cost of creating one job by out-of-state recruitment is at least 100 times what it costs to create a new job by helping businesses already in the State.

Business visitation is a locally-implemented program, which is diagnostic in nature. They want to find out what is going on in the business community of the town. It's an on-going process. It sends out a very clear message to the business community that this town supports business expansion and retention, and local business. They look for very fundamental base-line data for a business--who are you, how long have you been here, what do you buy, what do you sell, how many employees do you have or hope to have, do you export, are there agencies you're having difficulties with, assistance you're looking for, etc. It provides an objective and systematic method of gathering this data. He trains the interviewers for a very structured interview. It creates a quality dialogue between local business and government, by finding out what the real issues are, and improves the climate for local business. Sometimes during a visitation it's possible to spot a potential business move, or a failure, and you might be able to prevent it, or prevent a similar problem in the future.

This is a very labor-intensive program. You have to organize a local task force, and then recruit a group of motivated volunteers. Using his questionnaire, they conduct a structured interview to gather the data. He trains the volunteers. If they find a pressing local issue, the task force

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needs to respond immediately, with appropriate resources. They develop a plan to improve the local business climate. They follow up to evaluate the effectiveness.

This questionnaire may point out specific local issues--like high energy costs, difficult financing, zoning ordinances, workers comp rates. If there are specific problems like this, the Small Business Development Center will come in and do a packaged one-day workshop on the problem. Associated with the Business Visitation Program is Gretchen Stewart, the Rapid Response System Coordinator, whose job is to take the data from the questionnaire, and where there are specific inquiries to make sure that they are referred to the appropriate resource, and that the resource responds directly to that business. (She is the computer-based nagger. Crosier is the community-based nagger.)

Members of the Committee assured Crosier that they did want to do a visitation program, and had 400 businesses to survey. He responded that you need about half as many volunteers as businesses. It takes about 45 minutes per visit. There are probably about 200 businesses with employees. Crosier said that once his office gets the Chamber of Commerce list of businesses into their computer and creates a data base they can produce all the necessary materials--customized cover letters, envelopes, customized questionnaires all bundled and ready to go. Volunteers just have to sign them, put in envelopes, and mail. The questionnaires are mailed to the businesses.

BVP churns the data, brings it back to the community and helps write a public report and helps frame a plan for the response.

The program often starts with a round-table for CEOs, so they'll be expecting the questionnaire, will try to answer it, and wait for the visitor to show up. Wolfeboro is planning for the Business Visitation Program to be done in September.

There was discussion of how to find enough volunteers, and Crosier suggested going through the representative list of businesses and doing every other one. If each visitor did 3 businesses, we'd need 33 visitors. A visitor's commitment is 6 hours over a 4-week period--2 1/2 hours for training, and 2 visits of 45 minutes each,

Crosier said there are four different kinds of businesses: manufacturing, service, retail, and miscellaneous. Maybe we'd just do one kind first. But the surveying should be done in a confined period of time, because the business attitudes may change from September to October. He feels if we miss doing this in September, nothing happens until after the holidays, and then it's too cold to do anything until March. And businesses planning to move are usually making that decision in November.

In response to a question about state assistance for funding, Crosier said that the governor has threatened to move State deposit funds from banks that aren't helping local businesses. He also said that SBA loans are 95% guaranteed, and are not that hard to get. Banks have the money if you can prove you can repay it. But a business that does not make a business plan won't survive, even if it's a solid business.

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He recommended the Small Business Development Center. Jan Kitchen does free business counseling. SCORE does too, especially the Laconia group.

We will organize a Business Visitation Program, sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce, the Town of Wolfeboro, and Economic Development Committee. We'll have a Round Table for CEOs to get the business community together and develop community support. Crosier will make a new letterhead, and personalized cards and letters to get people to the meetings. The theme will be "What can we together do to help you?"

OUR SCHEDULE

1. The next EDC meeting will be at 7:30 a.m. on July 22. Each person present this evening is to bring a list of at least 3 visitor-volunteers. We should have more people than we think we'll need.
2. The training of the visitors will be done on September 14 at 7 p.m. at the Wolfeboro Library, so we can use the new projection screen TV, etc. Everyone involved in this (both the task force and the visitors) signs an oath of confidentiality. The visitors will be trained on how to do the visit, how to deal with hostility, make the phone call, etc, the step-by-step procedure. Two Selectmen should be involved as visitors.
3. The CEO Round Table will be held on Wednesday, September 16, perhaps at the Pinckney Boathouse and probably also in the evening.

Respectfully submitted,

*Rosemary Arctander*

Rosemary Arctander, Secretary

