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HEADLINE: Schools, town will meet on luring new industry

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BODY:

The School Department has been asked to participate in an economic development plan aimed at luring more industry to the city.

Over the last year, the city has received \$ 115,000 in federal grants to prepare the plan, which was recommended in response to the closing of the General Electric steam turbine plant on Boulder Drive.

As part of the process, the School Department has scheduled a conference for April 13 to help determine how local schools can work with business leaders to make the city more attractive to industry.

"We want to reach out and look at ideas that we can bring together to help people know about the school system and how it fits with plans for the 21st century," Schools Superintendent Philip M. Fallon said.

The conference will be held from 7:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. April 13, at the Best Western Royal Plaza Hotel and Conference Center off Route 2 in Fitchburg.

The topics to be discussed include using public schools as community learning centers, marketing local public schools, and building relationships between the school system and the business community.

"This is really a way to integrate education, the faculty and the students, with the business community," said Michael A. Lanava, executive director of the Fitchburg Redevelopment Authority. "It's one of seven or nine core areas we're concentrating on. "

Lanava, who is overseeing the planning effort, said the city has hired **Mt. Auburn Associates** of Somerville to prepare the plan. Besides education, he said, the plan will include proposals on infrastructure improvements, downtown development, minority participation, and the development of a technology mall on North Street.

The technology mall, which would involve a collaboration between the city and Fitchburg State College, was proposed last spring. The proposal calls for using old and new buildings as "incubator space" to encourage the creation of high-tech industries.

Michael Kane, a senior associate at **Mt. Auburn**, said education must be part of the economic development plan because industry demands for work force training are changing.

He said communities need trained or trainable workers to attract new industries, and a good school system is the best place to start.

"There are several reasons for focusing on the schools," he said.

"Clearly, a good school system means a lot for the image of a community and means a lot for attracting new industries. "

Kane said public schools should be viewed as centers for teaching new technologies.

The April 13 conference will include a presentation from representatives from the Foundation for Excellent Schools, a national network that has nearly 100 participating school systems.

Kane said the economic development plan, which will open the door for more federal funding for the city, will be completed by the beginning of May.

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