

Officials seek ways to boost economy

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SEYMOUR — As with countless cities and towns, Seymour has struggled to shore up its economic base since the decline of domestic manufacturing. The effort includes a major initiative under way to bring together community and business leaders to create a blueprint for a brighter economic future. The Board of Selectmen last week awarded Mt. Auburn Associates, a Massachusetts planning firm, a \$45,000 contract to create a 10-year Municipal Master Economic Development Plan for the town. The planning process is expected to take seven to eight months and involve stakeholders throughout the community. When finished, it will identify the town's assets and weaknesses, business trends and policies and infrastructure that help or hinder development. The plan is one of several efforts by the Economic Development Commission to rejuvenate the economy. The EDC is also finalizing a survey and a video to distribute to businesses shopping for new locations. EDC Chairman Jon Szuch said future development would maintain "respect for the environment and the town's historic character."

Michael Kane, of Mt. Auburn Associates, said other communities, after creating their master plans, found ways to foster growth by changing land-use policies, creating industrial parks and identifying all funding resources for redevelopment. "There are many things that government can do to nurture business growth," Kane said. "When the plan is done, the town will get a pretty good idea of its economic development assets and how competitive they are in the region." The plan for Seymour will include an examination of the visual strengths of the downtown and opportunities for new retail businesses. Naugatuck created a master economic development plan with Mt. Auburn in 2001 in an attempt to deal with its industrial decline. As part of the plan, the city bought together civic and business leaders to create the Naugatuck Economic Development Corp., which has helped bring new life to a dormant industrial park.

Dave Prendergast, the corporation's chief executive officer, said about \$15 million in expansions and property sales have taken place at the park in the past three years.

"He really can bring a group through the planning process," Prendergast said of Kane. "The plan brought the town and business community to think about what the town could be and what they needed to do in face of losing of significant manufacturers."