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Strategic Plan For The Economic Re-Development Of Sprague

Introduction

In 2011 the Town of Sprague will celebrate the 150th anniversary of its founding. Based on the strength of the mills within its borders, the town's first 100 years saw a thriving industrial community emerge from its rural farmlands. Around these mills grew the villages of Baltic, Hanover and Versailles. The neat rows of duplex structures that housed its mill workers are still the dominant styles in each of these villages today, while 18th and 19th century period architecture is still clearly evident its private and commercial structures around town.

However, the last half-century saw the decline of the New England textile and other mill-based industries. Like many New England factory towns, Sprague's once thriving employers closed down or moved out as the national economy shifted, leaving the mills empty. Many structures suffered eventual destruction either through neglect or fire. As the mills declined and companies disappeared, Sprague's economic tax based also eroded, as did much of the town's village-based social and recreational lifestyles.

A recent news article described Sprague as a "classic New England mill town." For many years, this description typically characterized a community in decline—a 19th century economic dinosaur. This does not need be true today, given what has been called "restorative development" within an emerging "restoration economy." * Other New England industrial cities and mills towns—Lowell, Massachusetts being an oft-cited example—have reversed their economic fortunes and "bounced back" by adapting old

* *Restorative Development.* A mode of economic activity that returns property, structures or objects to an earlier condition, transforms them into a healthier and more functional condition, or replaces an unsalvageable structure without consuming more land." **The Restoration Economy: The Greatest New Growth Frontier**, Storm Cunningham, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, San Francisco, 2002.

communities to new economic conditions. Communities experiencing such rebounds have taken many proactive restorative development approaches.

Successful restorative approaches include:

- Valuing economic history and traditions
- Protecting architectural integrity
- Leveraging waterfront assets
- Promoting and developing community arts and cultural venues
- Planning for people to work, live and recreate in the community
- Working on neighborhood development
- Recognizing cultural and ethnic diversity in their communities.

How was this accomplished? It did not occur in a vacuum. Success requires a collective community vision, public-private leadership, and a healthy and enthusiastic participation by the public. Success also requires *strategic planning* that can provide direction and clear guidelines for implementation.

Strategic planning is a management tool that enables communities to envision their future and design appropriate steps to achieve that future, given existing resources and the potential for generating new resources. A strategic planning process includes:

A Vision – How a community sees its future, encompassing a set of goals and values it believes are worthy and important.

A Strategic Plan – A planning framework consisting of broad strategic objectives.

Findings – Recommendations for specific actions and future planning.

Implementation – Action plans that seek to realize the Vision goals and matches available resources to the Strategic Plan's objectives.

The Sprague Economic Development Commission (SEDC) has prepared a 10-year strategic plan for the economic revitalization of the Sprague. The Plan represents the results of a 2-year strategic planning process conducted by the Sprague Economic Development Commission, in cooperation with

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numerous town boards, commissions and individual Sprague citizens. This strategic plan—a plan based on a collective vision of a thriving 21st century community, grounded in, and proud of, its 19th century industrial and rural roots—is presented in this report.

**PART I:
STRATEGIC PLAN FOR ECONOMIC REDEVELOPMENT OF SPRAGUE**

Sprague's New Economic Vision

In 2002 the SEDC began developing a "Vision" for the long-term redevelopment of Sprague. Why a Vision? A vision focuses on future development goals providing, in short, a 'signpost' pointing to an economic future where the town wants to go. A vision is a first critical step to realizing actual economic redevelopment.

Sprague Economic Vision

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Sprague will develop town resources and assets as a means to achieve the following economic goals:

- Expand our commercial sector and broaden our commercial tax base, while achieving a balanced growth of the grand list and stable mill rates.
- Leverage and develop natural waterways for recreation use; and promote Sprague as a 'destination.'
- Promote a stable school-age population, affordable single-family housing and provide a safe and secure environment for our citizens.
- Preserve and celebrate our rural community values and 19th Century industrial heritage for the benefit of present and future citizens of Sprague.



Sprague's Economic Vision

How did the Vision develop? During the Summer and Fall of 2002, SEDC members met with other town committees and commissions to conduct a

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joint assessment of Sprague's economic strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for growth. We also looked at possible weaknesses that might become barriers to development. The assessment looked at town utilities and transportation infrastructure, environmental conditions, land use, tax policies, education systems and recreation facilities. These are all factors that potential investors and developers would look at before investing in our community.

These meetings provided valuable inputs and helped build consensus on what our Vision should be.

Sprague's Strategic Economic Development Planning Process

If the Vision for Sprague's economic redevelopment is a 'signpost' to the future, a strategic plan provides a 'roadmap' to that future.** Strategic planning is a management tool that enables communities to envision their future and design appropriate steps to achieve, given existing resources and the potential for generating new resources. Strategic planning is designed to:

- Shape the community's future
- Provide a structure for mutually acceptable goals and agendas
- Define purposes of the community group
- Balance community goals with realistic local resources

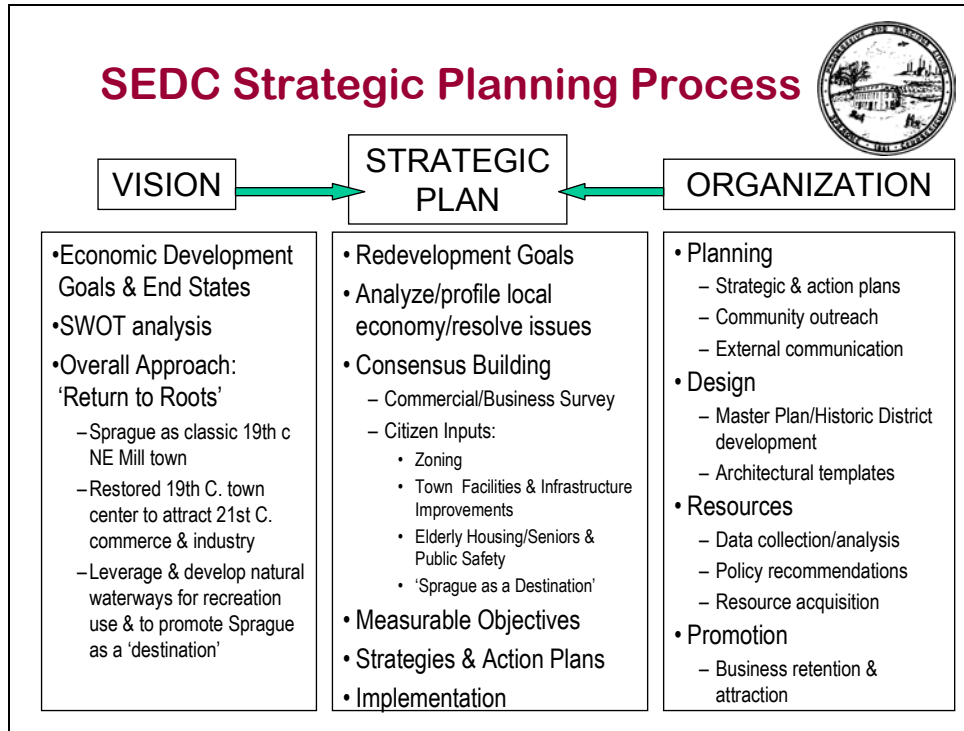
Strategic planning will benefit the community by:

- Organizing responsibilities and tasks
- Directing the flow and interaction of activities over time
- Generating a realistic schedule for completion of activities
- Projecting the impact or result of actions taken
- Outlining responsibilities of each person or organization involved
- Highlighting funding requirements and sources, and
- Providing a basis for monitoring and evaluating results.

The Strategic Plan focuses on the period for 2004-2014. Why a 10-year plan? Three factors drive this planning period. First, in terms of planning, a decade typically represents the extent of our ability to forecast the impact of

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developments and trends. For example, in 1990 no one could have forecast today's economic impact of the end of the Cold War or of two local Indian casinos on our region.



Second, this timeframe conforms to a ten-year planning cycle used by the Sprague Planning and Zoning Commission (P&Z) to update the Town's Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD). By state statute, P&Z must update the POCD every ten years. P&Z will conduct this update in 2004 for the period of 2004-2014. The activities in the POCD update relate closely to this Strategic Plan, which was also designed to serve as input into the P&Z Commission's POCD activities.

Third, the SEDC Strategic Plan is synchronized with regional economic planning activities conducted by the Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments and the Southeastern Connecticut Enterprise Region (SeCTer). In 2004, these bodies are jointly conducting a 10-year, region-wide Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). The CEDS -- which defines regional development needs and plans -- is submitted to the Federal government and qualifies the region for Federal support across a wide range of development programs. SEDC members also participated in the composition of the CEDS. Through our involvement in CEDS, Sprague will become eligible to apply for future Federal funds to support local development projects. Involvement also helps to integrate our economic development with the regional economy.

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Public Input to Strategic Planning

Like the process followed in developing the Vision, the SEDC sought active input from Sprague's citizens, organizations and businesses to build the Strategic Plan. Using the desired goals identified in the Vision, the SEDC asked people in the community to help identify development issues and make suggestions and recommendations in 5-year and 10-year phases.

Specifically, the SEDC sought citizen volunteers to serve on four *ad hoc* committees that provided valuable input into the final plan. These four committees and their missions were:

1. **Zoning & Conservation.** The mission of this committee was to define future directions for town zoning and conservation policies and activities that would support the goals of the Vision and strategic thrusts identified in the draft plan. The Committee's recommendations may also provide public input into the Planning & Zoning Commission's 2004 revision of the Sprague Plan of Conservation & Development (POCD).
2. **Town Facilities & Infrastructure Improvements.** The mission of this committee was to define future town government facility and public infrastructure requirements to provide municipal services to Sprague citizens, visitors, and the business community. Requirements should include requirements for completely new facilities as well as repair and reuse of existing facilities. Services included municipal government, public works, education, library and recreation.
3. **Elderly Housing, Seniors & Public Safety.** The mission of this committee was to define future requirements for quality of life improvement in the Town for housing, recreation, civic involvement of Sprague's senior citizen population, as well as the general public safety.
4. **'Sprague as a Destination.'** The mission of this committee was to explore recurring recreational and cultural activities, events, and supporting business infrastructure that would promote Sprague as a regional tourist destination.

Committee inputs were incorporated into the final strategic plan. A summary of Committee membership, mission statements, and primary recommendations can be found in the Annex.

Strategic Redevelopment Directions

The plan focused on building activities and implementation strategies to accomplish the goals identified in the Vision. The six primary strategic thrusts adopted to achieve the Vision are identified below:

Strategic Directions



Over the next 5 years Sprague will strive to:

- Create a business friendly environment for commerce & industry
- Restore the economic potential of our former mill sites
- Protect ‘Open Spaces’ through conservation planning & development
- Preserve & celebrate Sprague’s 19th c. industrial heritage & architectural style
- Re-develop, improve and extend the town public infrastructure
- Develop community facilities & and quality of life for residents and visitors

Six Strategic Thrusts to Achieve the Vision

The Plan calls for the following objectives to be pursued:

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Strategic Direction #1: Create a business friendly environment for commerce.

- **Objective 1: Gain knowledge on how to better support Sprague's existing business establishments (business retention) and new establishments (business attraction).** Before Sprague can attract new commerce and industry, we must first retain, and if possible, expand existing businesses by improving the commercial climate. In the past several years several small businesses in Sprague have either closed or relocated outside the Town. Few new commercial businesses have been attracted to Sprague. There is a need to better understand, and make efforts to reverse, these trends and devise a successful business retention and attraction strategy.
- **Objective 2: Creation of a local, non-profit redevelopment entity to act as economic development arm of the Town of Sprague and to acquire, manage and promote key development properties important to Sprague's future.** Sprague currently has no operational capability to focus on development projects that benefit the entire community. Establishing a non-profit, tax exempt Community Development Corporation (CDC) will provide a dedicated operational arm for economic development in Sprague that can focus exclusively on community redevelopment, yet be responsive to municipal leaders and the community. This approach has been used successfully by many communities to redevelop and re-invigorate their economic base.
- **Objective 3: Double the commercial/Industrial tax base in the next ten years.** Implementation of SEDC strategic plan will focus heavily on business retention and attraction, and the creation of commercial business locations and conditions conducive to these strategies.
- **Objective 4: Improve the quality and coverage of cellular/mobile telephone communications within the town of Sprague, in particular commercial and industrial zones.** There is a need to improve wireless communications capabilities, especially between the three villages separated by surrounding hills. The SEDC is investigating siting issues and will surveying local businesses to determine current/future needs.

Strategic Direction #2: Restore the economic potential of our former mill sites.

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- **Objective 1: Commission a feasibility study for re-development of the Baltic Mill site for mixed commercial and/or industrial use.** Re-use of the Baltic Mill site will require a comprehensive assessment of how to clean up possible environmental damage, assess existing structural integrity and envision commercial use. This must be accomplished prior to bringing the property onto the commercial market. A “Baltic Mill Commerce Park” project will be a high-priority pilot project that we believe will create long-term economic development opportunities within the town.
- **Objective 2: Secure a Developer for the re-development of the Baltic Mill site for use as mixed commercial and/or industrial use.** Following completion of preliminary plans, a feasibility study and brownfields remediation efforts, a second phase of a BMCP project will complete site preparation, develop and implement a marketing and promotion strategy to a preferred developer.
- **Objective 3: Create and promote a ‘Sprague Business Park’ adjacent to Sprague Paper Mill on Inland Road for light industrial/commercial use.** This area along the Route 138-Lisbon town line represents the greatest area of land for locating future light industries and high-technology businesses that will complement the existing industries in the same area of town.
- **Objective 4: Promote the *Baltic Mill Commerce Park* project and the *Sprague Business Park* on Inland Road (and similar projects in future) via potential tax incentive/credit programs.** To attract desirable commercial businesses, a strategy of using Federal and State business incentive programs and possibly devising local incentives should be investigated. Sprague’s designation as a disadvantaged community, and location

in a business enterprise zone should be leveraged to maximum effect.

- **Objective 5: Secure and support new owner/tenants to operate the M.S. Chambers facility.** A local electrical contractor, who will use 1 or 3 floors and sublet the remaining floors, has recently purchased this property. Reoccupation with a mixed-used zoning creates an opportunity to better shape the future role this existing industrial structure in the heart of the town center.

Strategic Direction #3: Protect 'open spaces' through conservation planning and development.

- **Objective 1: Impose building moratorium on multi-lot residential subdivisions and complete ban on multi-unit housing until completion of an updated Plan of Conservation and Development which takes into account community vision goals to preserve open space.** Planning & Zoning in 2003 took action on this objective.
- **Objective 2: Develop an 'Open Spaces' policy and regulations for new residential subdivisions and commercial-industrial projects within town limits.** SEDC will work with the local Planning & Zoning Commission through concerted conservation and planning development, for managed residential development policies that coexist with improved quality of life and environmental protection.
- **Objective 3: Limit the size and percentage of wetlands allowed on individual building lots in future residential subdivisions.** This objective is designed to better protect the town's inland wetlands from encroachment and over-development.
- **Objective 4: Create 'greenway trusts' to protect wetlands, farmlands and river-front properties from industrial or residential use.** The Town of Sprague should provide incentives and actively encourage land transfers, conservation easements and special 'open space' purchases by municipal government and private preservation groups.
- **Objective 5: Create (or designate to an existing municipal entity) town board(s) or commission(s) with responsibility to select and**
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procure ‘open space’ within the Town of Sprague. In special instances, Sprague should allow special open-space purchases by municipal authorities and private preservation groups. A specific entity under the Board of Selectmen should be designated to take responsibility to investigate open space acquisition issues, and to seek funding sources that could support these activities.

- **Objective 6: Create (or designate to an existing town body) a commission with responsibility to manage ‘open space’ within the Town of Sprague.** Apart from open space acquisition, there should be an existing body or a new body (e.g. a *Sprague Land Management Commission*) created with responsibility for management of municipally owned open space.
- **Objective 7: Seek grants from various sources, including the Quinebaug-Shetucket Heritage Corridor, to establish a land management program to manage the former Mukluk Club property.** This program would be administered by the above-recommended entity.
- **Objective 8: Identify and designate dedicated greenways and open space for passive/active recreational use (e.g. the former Baltic Reservoir and the former Mukluk Sports Club).** Certain properties (e.g. the Baltic Reservoir and former Mukluk Sports Club properties) lend themselves to create a ‘destination’ as recreational attractions, given proper management and upkeep.
- **Objective 9: Seek designation of the Shetucket River corridor from the Scotland Dam to the Occum Dam as a *National Wild & Scenic River Partnership*.** This Federal designation will provide resources to preserve, protect and manage this valuable stretch of river flowing through the center of Sprague.

Strategic Direction #4: Preserve and celebrate Sprague’s 19 th century industrial heritage and architectural style.
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- **Objective 1: Re-energize and recruit new members to the Sprague Historical Society.** An active historical society is a necessary component

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to preserve and celebrate Sprague's heritage, and to create redeveloped village centers to attract commerce and tourism.

- **Objective 2: Create a 'Baltic Historical District Commission' to work to establish a *Baltic Historic District* (with exact boundaries TBD), as designated by the C.G.S 7-147a-7.147k.** The formation of a defined local historic district commission would promote a unique sense of identity in Baltic village center and promote the town as a visitor/tourist attraction.
- **Objective 3: Establish "Village Center Districts" within Baltic, Hanover and Versailles.** The Village Center Districts (VCDs) are designed to restore, preserve and maintain a unique sense of identity to celebrate Sprague's 19th century industrial heritage, encourage renewed commercial investment, and create a renewed sense of community involvement in the town.
- **Objective 4: Establish a community-operated 'Sprague Industrial Museum' to be located in the Grist Mill.** Using existing and future historical artifacts and involvement of the Sprague Historical Society, Commission and Library, this museum will serve as a repository of the town's industrial heritage, a research center and source of visitors.
- **Objective 5: Design architectural templates for a series of 18th & 19th Century styles compatible with historical village centers.** These would enhance the historical 'look and feel' of authentic period village centers in terms of houses, public areas, lighting, signage, commercial and industrial buildings in village centers.
- **Objective 6: Promote by deliberate policy means – via grants and property tax incentives – architectural renovation and restoration of historical structures within the town, focusing on village centers.** These actions would enhance the historical 'look and feel' of the historical properties and create added incentives for tourism in Sprague.
- **Objective 7: Create a list of commercial and residential properties and landmarks of historical and architectural significance.** These actions would enhance the historical 'look and feel' of the historical

properties, create added incentives for tourism in Sprague, and identify properties eligible for historical restoration grants.

- **Objective 8: Investigate archeological landmarks of historic and architectural significance within Sprague, including those potentially located within the Mukluk Club property.** These efforts would identify and accent the historical character of Sprague and promote ‘Sprague as a destination.’
- **Objective 9: Seek Federal and State of Connecticut DOT designations for Route 97 as a ‘scenic highway’ between the Sprague border and Pomfret, CT.** Working with state and other municipal leaders, such a designation would help create ‘Sprague as a destination’ and an incentive for increased recreational and commercial tourism within the town.
- **Objective 10: Beginning immediate planning for town programs and events to celebrate the 150th Anniversary of Sprague’s founding in 2011.** Establish a ‘Sprague 150 Committee’ to provide long-range community event and program planning to celebrate Sprague’s heritage.

Strategic Direction #5: Redevelop and extend the town public infrastructure.

- **Objective 1: Complete upgrading and modernization of the Town utility infrastructure.**
- **Objective 2: Ensure full utility requirements to support an expanded commercial-industrial presence on the Inland Road-Route 138 corridor.** To support additional commercial-industrial business north of Sprague Paper, additional research is needed to identify specific utility requirements.
- **Objective 3: Improve Town transportation infrastructure to maximize future integration of Sprague with regional multi-modal transportation strategies.** For Sprague to be positioned for economic growth, for business attraction, or as a desirable tourist attraction, attention must be given to the Town’s transportation infrastructure now, as regional transportation needs are currently under review.

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- Objective 4: Shape a 'burden-sharing' policy requiring infrastructure improvements by developers proposing new residential subdivisions. New subdivisions that convert rural farm or forestland into new "suburbs" also drive the requirement for expensive new—or major upgrades to existing—infrastructure. The recently imposed a one-year moratorium on new residential subdivisions provides an opportunity to investigate a regulation that would require residential developers to share in the cost of infrastructure improvements with the Town.

Strategic Direction #6: Develop community facilities and quality of life for residents and visitors.

- **Objective 1: Design requirements for modernizing Sprague's community facilities:**
 - Municipal government offices
 - Public works department
 - Public library
 - Recreational facilities
- Public Safety/Volunteer Fire Department
- Designated senior housing

- **Objective 2: Develop the town's natural waterways for commercial tourism and general recreational use.** Development of Sprague's natural waterways for town recreational use and the promotion of Sprague as a recreational 'destination' for visitors will require a new approach to maintain town recreational facilities and attract visitors. This new approach would also support other economic development objectives identified in this plan. Pursuing this objective will require significantly expanding the mission and structure of the existing town Recreation Committee to include such tasks as designing, developing and promoting Sprague's recreational assets and cultural/heritage activities for residents and visitors alike.
- **Objective 3: Develop public safety and community awareness initiatives to improve public safety on town roads and in town facilities.** This objective will address rising concerns over public safety issues within the town. These concerns range from automobile speeding on town roads, use of off-road vehicles on public roads and increased vandalism and petty theft.

See the *Strategic Directions Annex* for specific activities and implementation strategies and actions items to accomplish these objectives.

PART II:

STRATEGIC PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

Recommendations for New Municipal Organizations

Along with these primary strategic thrusts, the SEDC has designed specific strategies and actions necessary to achieve the objectives described within this plan.

The SEDC is a state-sanctioned advisory commission and not an operational arm of the municipal government. For these strategies and projects to succeed, there is a requirement for sustained focus on project management, community investment and involvement, and the dedicated investigation of sources for grants and loans. Such dedicated activity is beyond the capacity of the existing Town of Sprague municipal staff and the all-volunteer members of the SEDC. In addition, some of the recommended activities and actions in this Plan are likely beyond the scope of current municipal organizations and the time constraints of existing paid and volunteer town officials.

The SEDC believes that the Implementation of this Strategic Plan would be facilitated by the creation of new supporting organizations within the town. Most of these organizations would require an active core of unpaid, civic-minded citizen volunteers. Recommended as Board of Selectmen-appointed, entities are:

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- **Creation of a local, non-profit tax exempt redevelopment entity — a Sprague Community Development Corporation (SCDC) — to act as the operational economic development arm of the Town.** This organization would also acquire, manage and promote key development properties important to Sprague’s future. Meeting this objective will provide a mechanism that can focus exclusively on redevelopment, yet be responsive to municipal and community leaders. This organization could eventually provide for a part- or full-time paid professional staff and hire consultant support for special projects.
- **Creation of an organization (or organizations) as a ‘Sprague Land Management’ and/or ‘Conservation Commission(s).’** Town-owned land assets that may become part of this strategic plan—e.g. the Baltic Reservoir property, other existing town-owned land and future ‘open space’ acquisitions — require both a management and a conservation function to be properly maintained. These public lands would be managed either under a single organization or two separate organizations. The management and conservation functions may also target future land for open space acquisition, and possibly act with other Town boards to secure financing for such acquisition.
- **Creation of a ‘Sprague Recreation & Tourism Council.’** This council would design, plan and promote recreational tourism as well as plan and manage quality of life events for the town. This council would also seek and secure state/federal/private grants, design recreational trails and programs, organize, promote and operate an extended Sprague Day and other social/cultural events promoting ‘Sprague as a Destination.’
- **Retain selected SEDC volunteer committees.** Because of continuing volunteer interest and the need for continued work in designing future requirements and programs, the SEDC will retain the following *ad hoc* functional committees to make periodic recommendations to the Commission :
 - **Town Facilities & Infrastructure Committee**
 - **Public Safety and Senior Citizens Committee**

These recommended organizations would be staffed by volunteers via appointment by the Board of Selectmen. The exception would be the non-profit Community Development Corporation, which could provide for some paid professional support. Suggested charters, membership and operating rules can be found in Annex Section.

Supporting Redevelopment Projects

The SEDC actively supports specific projects and activities that the Commission and a consensus within the community believe are critical to the economic future of the town.

Thus, the SEDC recommends that the proposed non-profit tax-exempt *Sprague Community Development Corporation* (SCDC) undertake three specific, highly visible and management-intensive redevelopment projects. These projects are:

- 1. 'Baltic Mill Commerce Park' Project.** The BMCP will be a high-priority pilot project that by cleaning up and redeveloping the Baltic Mill property will create long-term economic development opportunities within the town.
- 2. 'Sprague Business Park' Project.** The SBP adjacent to Sprague Paper Mill on Inland Road represents the greatest potential for locating future light industries and high-technology businesses that will restore balance to the grand list and complement the existing industries in the same area of town.
- 3. The Village Center District Redevelopment Project.** In coordination with Sprague Historical Society & a new *Baltic Historical District*, the Village Center Districts project will rejuvenate economic life within each village and highlight and preserve the unique qualities of a 19th century New England community.

See the *Strategic Directions Annex* for specific recommendations and actions related to these development projects

Recommendations for New Zoning Changes

In the near-term, the SEDC would recommend the following changes to the current zoning map in Sprague to accommodate the activities described in this Plan:

- **Baltic Mills Site** (along eastern bank of Shetucket River from Route 97 bridge down river approximately 1 mile): From **Commercial-Industrial** to **Commercial or Mixed Use**. This change will accommodate planned redevelopment and re-use of the mill site.
- **Former M.S. Chambers Site:** From **Industrial** to **Commercial-Industrial**. This change will accommodate mixed-use and especially encourage potential commercial tenants at the mill site.
- **Inland Road** (approximately 1 mile north of Sprague Paper mill, between Inland road and eastern bank of Little River): From **Industrial** to **Commercial-Industrial**. This change will accommodate planned redevelopment and re-use of the mill site.
- **Former Mukluk Club Property:** As the Town of Sprague acquires this property “*for open space and other municipal purposes*” it may be necessary to adjust the existing zoning boundaries from the existing **R-80 residential zone** and **Conservation Protection zones**. New zoning designations should permit those land use options recommended by the *ad hoc* Mukluk Property Committee and accepted by the Board of Selectman. These uses could require:
 - Expansion of the **Conservation Protection** designation
 - Adjustment or elimination of **R-80** designation

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- Addition of a designation suitable for commercial recreational use.

Financing Economic Re-Development in Sprague

This Strategic Plan is the culmination of two years of work on the part of the Commission's volunteer members. It provides an essential planning framework for moving ahead towards a new economic future for the Town of Sprague. However, this Plan will require sufficient financial resources necessary to accomplish its goals and objectives. Financing this effort will be one of the most critical components of implementation.

In the past, Sprague has approached financing of community improvement needs through a piecemeal process of grant applications and appropriation requests to the Board of Finance. This Strategic Plan will provide the necessary framework for coordinated and prioritized approaches to finance Sprague's future economic development needs.

To every extent possible, implementation resources will be sought from a variety of Federal and State sources. Sources will include economic development entities, historic preservation, parks and recreations, and environmental protection agencies. Types of funding could include direct grants, matching grants, tax incentives and community assistance programs. In addition, private and non-profit lending and investment resources will be investigated as well.

The Commission believes that there must be a sustained level of commitment on the part of the community to investment in economic development projects. Professional planners and economic development specialists report that a serious investment in economic development for a small town like Sprague requires a five-year sustained effort at a level of approximately \$100,000 per year. While this appears to be a significant sum, aggressive action by the Town towards

securing existing Federal and State funding can help offset this cost.

However, the Town must invest some resources to be aggressively pursuing these funds. The SEDC budget request for Fiscal Year 2005-2006 will represent the initial year of a five-year investment plan. The budget request will reflect the requirements to move the Plan's priority projects forward, unless alternative sources via grants and loans can be identified and secured. The Commission will pursue all avenues available to it.

Funding economic development is not merely 'government spending' but an investment in the community's future. While increased taxes driven by municipal spending are a burden for the community, in the past several years Sprague has seen increased taxes with no economic development, and an ever growing burden on residential property owners. Trends in the State's relationship with Connecticut municipalities – increased state mandates with ever-smaller state funding – are not promising. For this situation to be reversed, a significant investment must be borne *by the community itself*.

Economic development investment is not a “nice to have” but is essential if the community is to realize the goals in the Community Vision. Sprague's recent decision to purchase the Mukluk property represented a community consensus to ‘invest in the future’ and ‘control our own destiny.’ The same philosophy should apply to economic development investment.

Implementation

Implementation of the Strategic Plan will take a decade or longer. It is not the sole responsibility of the Economic

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Development Commission, but a task ultimately involving every commission, board, business, community group and citizen of Sprague.

Implementation activities will be conducted in cooperation and coordination with town and regional municipal planning and government authorities, relevant town commissions, civic groups, and private planning and development entities.

Our community newsletter is aptly named *Our Town*. And, if 'Our Town' belongs to all of us, then the community must work together to implement the activities initiated by this Plan.

Conclusion

This plan represents a roadmap for a Sprague that celebrates its 19th century mill town heritage and creates a 21st century community enjoying the economic benefits of a technology, service and tourism-based economy. This will be a town that can maintain traditional New England rural community values and preserve open space, while retaining and growing new commercial businesses.

The *2004-2014 Strategic Plan* is a starting point. Once committed to paper, any plan becomes static. In our fast-paced world today static plans are only of limited use. The objectives, projects or means to any specific end can evolve over time due to new circumstances and changing community needs. Dwight Eisenhower, the supreme commander of the D-Day invasion of Normandy, once said, "*Plans are nothing. Planning is everything.*" The SEDC will regularly review and update specific objectives of the Plan. However, a dynamic *process* of strategic planning must be maintained if Sprague is to make progress towards its Vision of the future.

The strategies and actions included in this Plan will not bear fruit overnight. It will take time and concerted community effort to reverse a half-century of economic decline. Beginning this effort today is the first step towards a better future for all residents of Sprague.

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