

Fighting the Smokestack Syndrome

Pumping new life into Newmarket

AN inconspicuous one-room office above Main Street in Newmarket is the hub of this town's development activity. Not a real estate office or the home of a private contractor, the perch over the center of Main Street houses the Newmarket Community Development Corporation (NCDC), headed by Executive Director Sarah James.

Few people know that it is the NCDC operating behind the third-floor windows; most probably think it's spare attic space for the town offices on the first floor. Down on Main Street, though, the work of the NCDC is plainly visible.

The nature of the NCDC is not well known either. Although it is a private corporation, both the words "private" and "corporation" seem to be misnomers. It is better described as a not-for-profit operation with public goals.

Newmarket residents enjoy the spoils of this community revitalization work, but they sometimes misunderstand the effort, thinking that a private corporation must be out to make a profit at the expense of the town.

Attitudes are changing as more people become aware of what the NCDC really is. Its funding, for example, is both public and private. The public funding is usually matching grants, which mirror the enthusiasm of individuals, local groups and other non-profits that support the NCDC through private donations for specific projects.

Sarah James points out that it is because the NCDC is nonprofit that sources of funding become available. On the other hand, it is organized and managed as a private corporation. The NCDC, says James, draws upon aspects of both public and corporate organization, deriving the benefits of both. If it chose to, she points out, it could act as a private developer, as long as its programs were of benefit to the community.

The trust grows

Newmarket's down-home population is increasingly beginning to trust the work of the NCDC. People still question where it gets its money, and whether taxpayers support its programs, but with a long stream of press releases over the past two years and many Wednesday nights spent at selectmen's meetings, Sarah James has convinced people to trust and support the NCDC's programs.

People in Newmarket may not

know it, but their NCDC is a unique entity in the state. Sarah James points out that Massachusetts has more than 80 community development corporations, while New Hampshire has one. The large Northern Community Investment Corporation, a bi-state CDC, operates in the three northernmost counties of Vermont and New Hampshire. A handful of other programs are just getting started. Old-timers would probably balk if they were told that Newmarket was trend-setting, but the NCDC certainly is.

The NCDC was incorporated in May of 1983. Sarah James had come to town in 1982 to administer the last half of a \$1,000,000 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) begun in 1980. Downtown store owners had received funds to revamp their storefronts in order to give Newmarket some of the appearance Portsmouth or Boston's Quincy Market are known for.

The CDBG program also provided loans and grants to low- and moderate-income households to rehabilitate their homes and apartments. Before the CDBG work came to an end, the Newmarket Community Development Corporation was incorporated to carry on the development work, adding even more ambitious projects like mill re-use alternatives, a waterfront boat launch and recreation park, and revitalization of the historic building once owned by the N.H. Fish & Game Department.

After three years, James recently decided to reduce her time with the NCDC—but not without first rough-drafting its next project. James will continue to work for the group on a consulting basis, but most of her time will soon be devoted to Real Estate Enterprises, a Boston based firm that helps neighborhood groups and community organizations carry out development projects.

The project James proposes for the NCDC as she weans herself from the corporation is called a "business incubator" process. The concept is to generate a regular income to maintain operations that accentuate the NCDC's commitment to development by supporting small business.

Newmarket's business incubator would entail the NCDC purchasing a centralized building in which offices would be rented to beginning and expanding local businesses. Shared services such as a message center, telephone answering, typing, reception staff, equipment, conference space, accounting and others would be provided at reduced costs to local

An old mill town plans for its future

entrepreneurs who otherwise could not afford such service.

Incubators are a relatively new business idea. Nationally, they have proven themselves to be mutually beneficial to development corporations and local businesses. James points out that large electronics firms have caught onto the idea, assuming that small businesses will turn around and purchase equipment or services from the incubator sponsor once their fledgling businesses have grown.

Following its incorporation in 1983, the NCDC found funding for specific projects by "beating the brush" for available sources, says James. The N.H. Charitable Fund and the N.H. Council for the Humanities gave a total of \$4,000 to create a slide show of the town. A \$2,500 Federal Land and Water Conservation Grant, which matched \$2,500 in private donations, helped to build the town dock.

A \$25,000 Federal Coastal Energy Impact Grant was received to improve the town landing and waterfront area along the Lamprey River. Another Federal Land and Water Conservation Grant, this one for \$12,300, with additional private donations of \$18,120, purchased the land for parking at the waterfront.

The Rockingham Community Action Program provided a \$30,000 grant, backed up by a pledge of \$120,000 for low-interest loans from Indian Head Bank, to fund a residential weatherization program. Most recently, \$8,500 was received from the Office of State Planning to conduct a downtown development feasibility study.

An odd mix

The grant for the downtown study, which is presently in the works, has brought together an odd mix of townspeople. To a recent planning session, development consultant Dick Stanley lured senior citizens, Newmarket's Stone Church jazz and folk crowd, town officials, doubtful long-time landowners, development

professionals and bedroom-community renters.

Together they planned for the future of the town. Eyebrows were raised by individual suggestions, but the group's variety resulted in recommendations that reflect Newmarket's own variety and needs. Working groups are continuing with the project, trying to implement plans to meet the needs they see in the town.

Another project is planning for reuse alternatives of the downtown mill complex that occupies a very visible chunk of the center of town.

The NCDC is looking to vary the number and types of industries in the complex so that the town will no longer depend on one or two large corporations for its tax base. The problem Newmarket has had, says Sarah James is the "smokestack syndrome," in which the economy depends on one large corporation.

For Newmarket, the smokestack has disappeared; efforts like the recent 'Newmarket at a Crossroads: A conference on Mill Reuse' are focusing on new ideas that will better safeguard the town in the future.

"Newmarket at a Crossroads" gathered 70 developers at UNH's New England Center to try to pinpoint the choices and obstacles facing any developer who takes over Newmarket's mill complex, which has been vacated by the Timberland Company with the Essex Group, a subdivision of United Technologies, soon to follow suit.

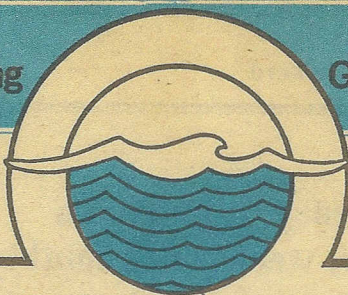
Reasonable and far-fetched suggestions were offered by New England mill developers at the conference. The consensus of the group was that Newmarket should look for a mixed industrial use for the mill complex, with the possibility of introducing some housing, retail and research groups as well. Another focus was the need to provide parking space for potential new tenants.

One dream scheme that was of-

Seacoast Dining

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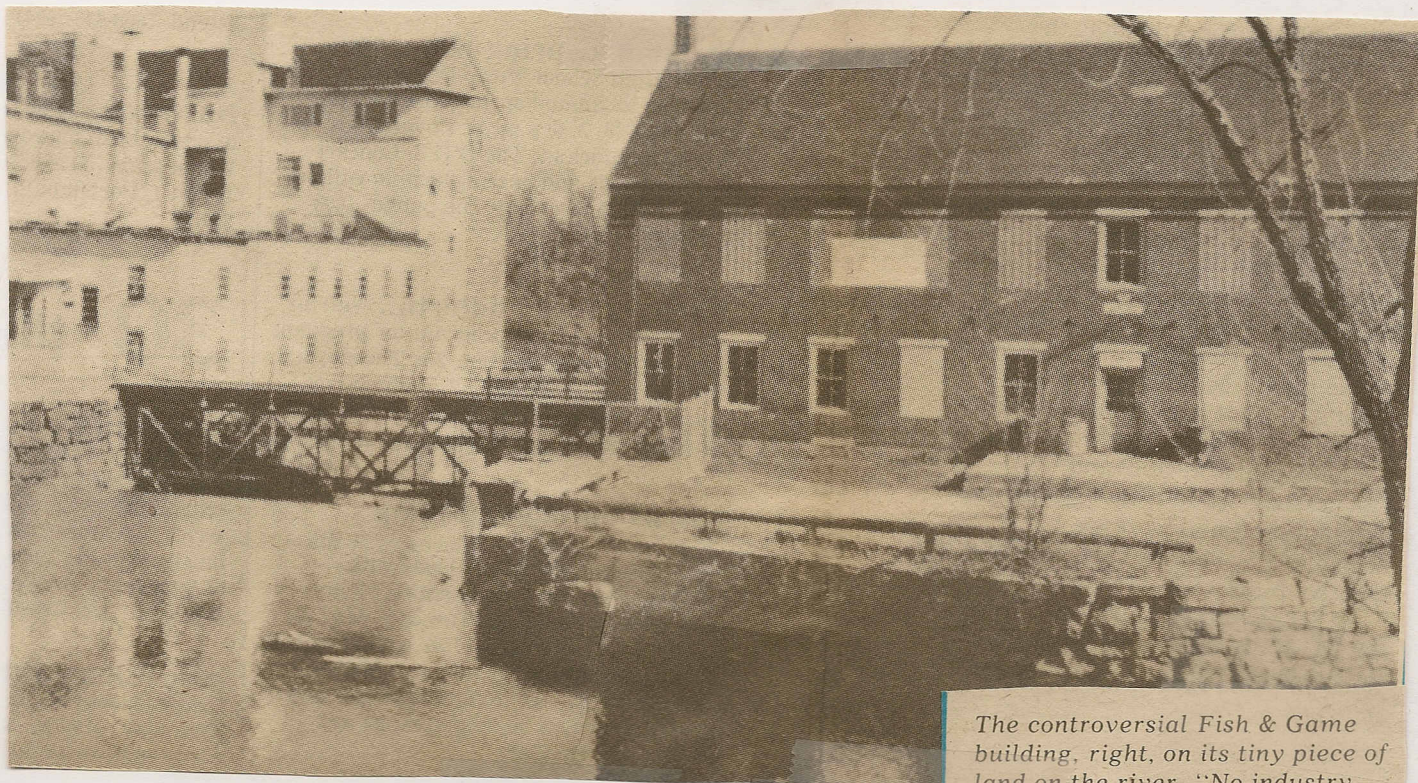
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Rethinking the smokestack syndrome



The controversial Fish & Game building, right, on its tiny piece of land on the river. "No industry wants the landless, town-controlled building."

(Paul Maria Salonen photo)



SARAH JAMES

'When it depends on one person to succeed, then ultimately it won't'

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ferred to solve the parking problem caused by the mill's downtown location suggested aqua-parking on the Lamprey River. James Stockard, moderator for the conference, hesitated to own up to the idea, but did suggest that the mill's proximity to the river should be taken advantage of, with the possibility of parking cars on barges that would be floated downstream in the morning and hauled back upstream in the afternoon.

Life-long resident and business owner Ron Lemieux had his own solution to the parking problem. He suggested that the town hall be moved closer to the mill complex, opening the current town hall site for a two-level parking facility. He also suggested that the Post Master General might agree to move Newmarket's post office, which would open up the area across the street from the mill for additional parking.

On a more serious note, Priscilla McComb Shaw added, "My biggest fear is that it just sits there."

She noted after the conference that she would like to see the complex "developed in a manner that would

provide some employment, make it esthetically pleasing to put Newmarket on the map, tie it in with the waterfront and generate activity in the downtown." She also hopes that a development professional of the caliber of the people who attended the conference will take an interest in the project.

Biggest frustration

At the head of the mill complex, in the town's historic district, sits the NCDC's biggest frustration. It is the Fish & Game building, deeded by an act of legislation for \$1 to the town in 1981 by the N.H. Fish & Game Commission and conveyed to the NCDC in 1984 to be developed for industrial use.

Development of the building is impossible; no industry will lease it because the deed says the town will maintain majority ownership and that the Fish & Game will maintain rights over the small piece of land it sits on. An industry refurbishing the building cannot receive historic renovation tax credits without holding majority shares. It seems that no industry wants the landless, town-controlled building.

The NCDC last month offered the Fish & Game Commissioners the approximate worth of the building.

Sarah James: 'a growing awareness of people to make the community a better, more economically healthy and more attractive place to live'

\$15,000 in return for an easement. The attorney general's office approved the plan as long as rights to the nearby fish ladder were protected. NCDC attorney Malcolm McNeill assured the Fish & Game Commissioners that the easement would be written according to Fish & Game's needs.

But the Commissioners turned down the \$15,000, which would have landscaped the acre of land for pedestrian use. With it, they turned down any realistic hope of renovating the deteriorating historic building for use by a clean industry.

The issue is being pursued through the governor's office, but the NCDC is frustrated. It is thought that Fish & Game is still mad that the building was given over to the town by the legislature in 1981.

One commissioner commented at their April meeting that enough had been given up already. The easement refusal was a back-stab not at the legislature, but rather at the NCDC, which has become the unwitting victim. It is not able to complete its development mandate because of a "non-tangible stumbling block," notes Priscilla McComb Shaw, NCDC chairperson.

Another frustration has been the weatherization project, in which funds were made available to low- and moderate-income residents for weatherization of homes and apartment. Very few residents took advantage of the service, even though income restriction guidelines were relaxed mid-stream and the project was well-publicized.

For James, the frustrations go beyond the success or sluggishness of a program. "One thing that's really frustrating, but very understandable, is the amount of time people have or don't have to spend with projects like

this," she says. "Oftentimes, the people involved with community development are the ones who are involved with other community projects as well.

"Another thing that can be frustrating to people who do this kind of work is the relative slowness with which results come. Some community development people don't see the results for years."

For Newmarket's CDC, some projects have been a long time in coming. Others have been quicker and easier. The corporation has the energy to keep pushing for projects like the Fish and Game building and mill alternatives because smaller efforts like storefront revitalization and waterfront development have fallen together with relative ease and strong community support.

The tangible benefits of CDC work in Newmarket are obvious, but James says, "One of the most rewarding things about this work for me is not so much the visible, physical results of what has happened, but rather the growing awareness and participation of people and businesses here in town to make the community a better, more economically healthy, and more attractive place to live."

As Sarah James pulls away from the NCDC, it will surely experience the adolescent pains of developing self-sufficiency. But the third floor of the town hall will not be relegated to spare attic space. It will continue as the hub of development activity for an old mill town looking toward the future, pursuing not a "smokestack," but a variety of industrialization. It will fill the Fish & Game building, perhaps later than sooner, and it will continue as a unique but hopefully catching phenomenon in the state. □

The people behind Newmarket's CDC

THE path of Sarah James' career originally seemed headed for anything but community development work. But after a start as a pre-med student at Simmons College in Boston, James switched to sociology, which brought her together with a group of people fighting a local slumlord to improve housing conditions.

She graduated from Simmons in 1970 and received a degree in city planning in 1972 from Harvard's Graduate School of Design. James then worked for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Housing Finance Agency, both in Massachusetts; the Urban Institute in Washington, D.C. and the Lakes Region Planning Commission in Meredith, N.H. She also ran Washington's New World Alliance Office and served as a consultant for the American Institutes for Research. She spent one year at Findhorn in Scotland, in a working spiritual community.

It was following her work for the Lakes Region Planning Commission that James came to Newmarket, looking for the experience of small community development versus a larger town where, she believes, it's harder to see the whole perspective of development impact.

Despite the NCDC's current state of change, James is optimistic that, even without a full-time director, the work will continue. Some of the responsibility will be transferred to the board of directors and some will rest with the creative program development that has earmarked past successes. Townspeople have also involved themselves as development volunteers.

In fact, James believes that her much-reduced time could prove providential to the NCDC. She says, "When an organization depends on one person to succeed, then ultimately it won't. It depends on a broad range and number of people involved."

That variety is certainly evident in the NCDC's board of directors. Priscilla McComb Shaw, the chairperson, brings to the NCDC government and fund-raising experience from her work with the Gallen administration, at the state Energy Office, the Division of Human Resources and the Office of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention. She came to the NCDC with a "concerned commitment to see how Newmarket develops," she says.

The vice-chairmen of the board is Walter Cheney of Cheney Enterprises. Ask anyone in Newmarket who Cheney is and the response is likely to be, "He owns Newmarket."

He does own a lot of land in town that he is developing, but he is also committed to conservation and NCDC programs. A public hearing was held several months ago to introduce Cheney's Moody Point condominium plan to the town's planning board. On 167.6 acres, Cheney proposes to construct 103 housing units, leaving 133 acres as a wildlife sanctuary.

Residents fought the condo plan, but one muffled voice at the back of the room commented, "We may slow him down a little, but it's better that he do the development, because at least he'll do it right." Cheney feels his work for the NCDC complements his own development work.

Other board members include former Newmarket building inspector Rolphe Voltaire, attorney Jack Albright, real estate broker Jeanne Filion, Meals on Wheels director Pinky Kram, dentist Chris Batt, planning board representative Betty Popov and selectman representative Albert Cawell.

Thanks to the board and broader community support, James is working for a self-sufficient NCDC.

—Paula Maria Salonen