

Former Gales Ferry School-Incubator



Description: The former Gales Ferry School building is a 22,109± former elementary school, owned by the Town, which has been under utilized for many years. The facility, at 7 Hurlbutt Road, Ledyard, CT, is in reasonable condition, however, for future utilization will require improvements to basic facilities to bring them up to current codes and requirements. Currently, the building is being used for miscellaneous uses on a month to month basis.

Project Overview: The Town of Ledyard and our region are the home of a significant number of small businesses, either operating out of home locations or in “make shift” space. In addition, many, relatively, small farms exist here and their continued growth and success is an important community goal. The Town hopes to encourage the growth of these businesses and create employment opportunities by creating a business incubator at the Gales Ferry School. A key element of the incubator would be a “kitchen incubator”.

A “kitchen incubator” is a business incubator dedicated to early-stage catering, retail and food businesses. With the regions strength in tourism and agriculture, we believe that this type of facility would be a significant resource. The simple idea of providing food preparation facilities which met food safety regulations could spur significant entrepreneurial growth.

Next Steps: The Town is researching the viability of this proposal on an ongoing basis. However, at this point it is necessary to engage qualified professional to document the feasibility of the project. Key issues to be defined:

- **Building Analysis:** Develop preliminary estimates for required facility improvements.
- **Incubator Analysis:** Develop preliminary estimates of the cost of establishing a “kitchen incubator”
- **Management Scenario:** The Town recognizes that a key element in the success of any incubator is the management structure and expertise offered by the facility. Currently, it is envisioned that a non-profit entity would oversee the facility. However, more work is needed to define a viable approach.
- **Financial Viability:** The Town needs to establish a the long-term financial viability of the proposal and a framework to ensure the greatest opportunity for success.

Funding: The Town is in the process of pursuing funding for a Feasibility Study to address identified issues. We are hoping to “tap” into federal and State resources. While no specific budget numbers have been identified a likely cost would be between \$25,000 and \$40,000.

Summary: The former Gales Ferry School could offer a unique opportunity to encourage small business, support local agriculture and create employment. It will not be easy, however, the benefits could be significant.

Commitment to Agriculture: In 2009, the Town of Ledyard received an Agricultural Viability grant from the State Department of Agriculture with the goals of creating land use regulations that reflect the needs of the agricultural community and assisting farmers with marketing via web and print materials. To that end the town has:

- Established an Agricultural Subcommittee of the Economic Development Commission
- Completed an Agricultural Plan
- Marketed market the Town’s Farmer’s Market
- Created www.ledyardfresh.com
- Created a “Ledyard Fresh” frequent shopper card, providing discounts and specials to card holders at the farmer’s market