



Whitefield Select Board Declines to Advance USDA Economic Development Opportunity to Voters

Company says federally funded manufacturing proposal deserved public consideration and reaffirms its long-term commitment to invest in Whitefield.

WHITEFIELD, ME, UNITED STATES, July 16, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Rural communities across

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We came to Whitefield because we believe Whitefield is worth building, and we remain committed to investing in its future.”

*Sean Patrick Harrington, CEO,
Coopers Mills, Inc.*

America are working to attract investment, create year-round employment, and strengthen local economies.

[Maine](#) has the oldest median age of any state in the nation, and Lincoln County has one of the highest median ages in Maine. Every opportunity to attract outside investment deserves thoughtful public consideration.

On July 14, the Whitefield Select Board voted not to advance a proposed USDA Rural Business Development Grant to a Special Town Meeting. The application sought

\$65,000 in federal funding to support value-added food manufacturing at [Coopers Mills, Inc.](#), headquartered in the unincorporated village of Coopers Mills within the Town of Whitefield, Maine, and doing business as [Swallowtail Farm](#) & Creamery, manufacturer of Swallowtail cultured provisions, including yogurt and butter.

The project included \$45,000 for specialized commercial food-manufacturing equipment, \$15,000 for installation, technical implementation, process development, and commercialization support, and \$5,000 to compensate the Town of Whitefield for grant administration. No local tax appropriation was requested.

Under the proposed structure, the Town would have purchased and retained ownership of the equipment while the company reimbursed the Town annually through a straight-line depreciation agreement. The proposal represented a federally funded economic development initiative rather than a municipal expenditure.

The proposed equipment consisted of specialized indoor food-manufacturing equipment designed to increase production capacity, expand value-added agricultural manufacturing, and support future product innovation.

As production expands, the company expects to convert a nutrient-rich dairy byproduct into higher-value products manufactured in Whitefield, creating new revenue, reducing waste, strengthening Maine agriculture, and supporting year-round employment.

During deliberations, the proposal was compared to recreational snowmobiles. The company respectfully rejects that comparison. Commercial food-manufacturing equipment is productive infrastructure that creates products, jobs, tax revenue, and long-term economic activity. Recreational snowmobiles are simply not comparable.

Two Select Board members voted to advance the proposal to a Special Town Meeting, one voted against it, and one abstained. The motion therefore did not reach Whitefield voters.

Although disappointed by the outcome, the company remains firmly committed to Whitefield as its long-term manufacturing headquarters and will continue investing in the unincorporated village of Coopers Mills, throughout Whitefield, and across the surrounding region.

The company recognizes and respects that elected officials often face difficult decisions and appreciates the time devoted by the Select Board to reviewing the proposal. This statement is offered not to revisit the Board's decision, but to encourage continued public discussion about rural economic development, municipal partnerships, and the importance of evaluating opportunities that strengthen communities for future generations.

Executive Interview

A Conversation with Sean Patrick Harrington
Chief Executive Officer, Coopers Mills, Inc.

Q1. Why are you issuing this statement? Isn't this simply sour grapes after the proposal failed?
No. The conversation is larger than one company or one grant application. Across rural America, communities are asking how they attract investment, create year-round jobs, strengthen their tax base, and encourage younger families to build their futures locally. Reasonable people can disagree about whether our proposal should ultimately have been supported. What concerns me is that the citizens of Whitefield never had the opportunity to consider it. This is not about revisiting a vote. It's to encourage a broader conversation on how rural communities evaluate opportunities that may shape their future.

Q2. Were you surprised by the Select Board's decision?

Yes. I was disappointed because I believe the residents of Whitefield deserved the opportunity to consider this federally funded economic development initiative for themselves.

Q3. Was this simply about helping one private business?

No. The objective was to create jobs, strengthen Maine agriculture, broaden Whitefield's economic base, and demonstrate how rural communities can leverage outside investment.

Q4. Did the Town have to spend \$65,000 of its own money?

No. The funding was federal and reimbursable through the USDA. The proposal anticipated making equipment purchases in manageable phases, with reimbursement requested as eligible expenses were incurred, rather than requiring a single upfront expenditure. The Town would have retained ownership of the equipment, received funding for grant administration, and the company would have reimbursed the Town annually through a straight-line depreciation agreement.

Q5. Why do you reject the snowmobile comparison?

Commercial food-manufacturing equipment is productive infrastructure. It creates products, jobs, payroll, agricultural purchases, and long-term economic activity. Snowmobiles serve an entirely different purpose. They are simply not comparable investments.

Q6. Why is this project important?

It creates manufacturing capability. It transforms a nutrient-rich dairy byproduct into higher-value products manufactured in Whitefield while supporting Maine agriculture and creating year-round employment.

Q7. Why is Whitefield's aging population relevant?

Communities remain vibrant when they attract younger families, employers, and investment. Economic development today helps determine whether rural communities thrive tomorrow.

Q8. What's next for the company?

We will continue investing. Approximately \$700,000 has already been invested in acquiring and improving the business and property. We will continue expanding manufacturing and pursuing alternative partnerships.

Q9. Could the company move this investment elsewhere?

We acquired a 21-year-old heritage Maine business headquartered in the unincorporated village of Coopers Mills and have invested approximately \$700,000 in Whitefield. As the business grows there may someday be satellite operations, but that is growth from Whitefield, not growth away from Whitefield. Every successful manufacturer broadens the tax base, creates jobs, supports local suppliers, and strengthens the community. We did not come to Whitefield to build a business somewhere else. We came to Whitefield because we believe Whitefield is worth building.

Q10. One Select Board member abstained. What are your thoughts?

I respect every Board member's right to vote as they see fit. I also recognize that abstentions have consequences. In this instance, the abstention proved outcome-determinative and prevented the question from ever reaching the citizens of Whitefield. I believe the community deserved the opportunity to decide that question for itself.

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