



Franklin Regional Council of Governments

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Committee

Date:	May 24, 2016
Time:	3:30 p.m.
Location:	12 Olive Street, Greenfield, MA
Duration:	1.5 hours
Facilitator:	Gary Dillensneider, Chair

CEDS Committee Attendees:

- Gary Dillensneider, Committee Chair, Franklin County Community Development Corporation
- Tom Hutcheson, Town of Conway
- Larry Jutres, Town of Greenfield
- Kevin Kennedy, Town of Orange
- Carmela Lanza-Weil, Greater Shelburne Falls Area Business Association (GSFABA)
- Nan Riebschlaeger, Town of Wendell
- John Ryan, Town of New Salem
- Jeanie Schermesser, Town of Erving
- Art Schwenger, Town of Heath
- Jerry Wagener, Town of Northfield

FRCOG Staff:

- Jessica Atwood, Economic Development Program Manager
- Linda Dunlavy, Executive Director
- Peggy Sloan, Director of Planning and Development
- Mary Chicoine, Land Use Planner
- Alyssa Larose, Land Use Planner

Guests

- MJ Adams
- Bob Armstrong
- Sam Lovejoy
- Alan Singer, Franklin County Community Development Corporation
- Mark Smith

Note: This meeting was a joint meeting of the CEDS Committee and EDD Governing Board.

1 – Welcome and Introductions: Gary Dillensneider, Chair

The meeting was called to order at 3:34 p.m. by Chair G. Dillensneider. A round of introductions followed.

2 – Vote to approve minutes from April 13, 2016

At 3:35 p.m., A. Schwenger MOVED to approve the April 13, 2016 minutes. Tom Hutcheson SECONDED. The motion PASSED unanimously.

3 – Review and vote on the final draft of the 2016 Greater Franklin County CEDS Annual Report

Jessica Atwood distributed copies of the 2016 CEDS Annual Report, stating that at the last CEDS Committee meeting a draft was released and a link sent out to Committee members. This is the first of four annual updates to the 2015 CEDS Plan. This report includes the most recent data, SWOT changes, updates on Action Items, and Performance Measures. Atwood explained that this is an economic development roadmap for the region and maintains the region's eligibility for certain EDA grant programs. The final report is due to the EDA by June 1. The revisions since the previous draft include: better incorporation of the Regional Plan for Sustainable Development and related documents and strengthened visibility of last mile broadband access as a critical infrastructure need. A map of the MBI network was added, as well as the wireline broadband availability map. Other updates include economic condition data and an updated list of key industries & clusters to include *Green Economy – Construction*. There is a lot of activity in this cluster now as part of the green innovation hub project.

In the previous draft, the Vermont Yankee Nuclear facility closure and the closure of Rodney Hunt in Orange was not included. On page 17, a section was added to capture this information. The section discusses the rippling effect of losing jobs in the region. The current revision incorporated SWOT comments from the last meeting and the following updates to Action Items:

- Governor's new leadership team for the Last Mile Broadband Project
- Clarified that the FRCOG Brownfields Revolving Loan Fund & Subgrant program contract has been closed out, but Program Income for clean-up projects has been retained
- Description of "Complete Streets"
- UMASS report called *Forging Ahead: Towards an Arts Center in North Quabbin* that also addresses the loss of Rodney Hunt, and notes the presence of large foundries now available for potential use as an Arts Center focused on large-scale sculptures
- GSFABA's Connecting Commerce & Community asset mapping identifying local artists; and with the Art Garden, the Hilltown Arts: Thriving Community Happenings (HATCH)
- EDA i6 Challenge opportunity looks at clusters and how to develop businesses to the next level of commercialization, which is being explored by FRCOG, PVPC, FCCDC, and Valley Venture Mentors

There was a question about the FRCOG Brownfield Clean-up Revolving Loan Fund and Subgrant program. Peggy Sloan responded that the FRCOG was able to retain the program income, though the grant itself is closed out. FRCOG still has an assessment grant and will be applying again in the fall. Once the program income is spent down FRCOG can apply to EPA to get a grant to fund another clean-up revolving loan fund and sub-grant program.

K. Kennedy noted that the UMASS report is still ongoing, and will propose regulation changes to the Town's bylaws to promote an Art Center use. There is currently no nearby facility that offers this type of service, and it could be a niche for artists.

C. Lanza-Weil noted that there have been three HATCH workshops, where artists come and talk about public art ideas that engage community and invite the community to interact with the project. An Adams Art Grant is providing \$500 in seed money for up to five artists to present their projects to the public, who can then engage in the project, provide input, or invest money. This is a pilot project with the hope that over 5-10 years we will have community art across the hilltowns and have a map of them to invite people to visit.

L. Jutres remarked that the Lunt Silversmith site has \$5 million in private investment, and when the other buildings are redeveloped it will be another \$5 million. Atwood noted that she will update the plan with this information.

G. Dillensneider asked for a motion to vote to accept the 2016 CEDS Annual Report. A. Schwenger MOVED to accept the report with the noted corrections. T. Hutcheson SECONDED. Discussion followed. The motion PASSED unanimously.

4 – Farm and Food system planning at the local, regional and state level

Mary Chicoine presented farm and food system planning that the FRCOG has been working on at three levels – State, regional, and local. Chicoine began with an overview of the Massachusetts Food Plan. The Plan was released at the end of 2015, and was developed through a two-year with the FRCOG, PVPC, and MAPC. The report is available online at mafoodplan.org. The project involved over 1,500 people through working groups that provided input into the Plan.

Chicoine then reviewed the Plan's major findings. One in ten jobs in the State are food system jobs, and food represents about 4.5% of MA gross state product. Some of the State's assets include a high concentration of consumers, some of the best farmland in the world, relatively strong fisheries, over 41,000 farm and food businesses, and that the State is sixth in the nation for the number of CSA farms. A comment was made that this is impressive given the size of Massachusetts. Challenges include low wages and poor benefits for food system jobs, lack of access to fresh and healthy food for many people, and poverty and poor nutrition are a key issue. It is estimated that one out of nine residents in the State are food insecure, meaning they do not know where their next meal will come from.

Chicoine went on to explain that the impetus for the Plan came from the MA Food Policy Council, which established four goals for the plan. Goal 1 is to increase production, sales & consumption of Massachusetts-grown foods. There is an opportunity to increase local consumption of food. Challenges include a short growing season, high farmland prices, difficult regulatory system, and a diminished UMass Extension program in the last few years. A question was asked whether regulations mean local zoning. Chicoine answered that it could be anything from the plumbing code, to different Board of Health regulations from one town to the next. Also food regulations, such as the food safety modernization act, which is scaled for large farms. Recommendations include marketing local food, providing technical assistance to farmers, and improving food processing infrastructure, such as shared use kitchens and freezer space.

Goal 2 is to create jobs and economic opportunity in food and farming, and improve the wages and skills of food system workers. Employers can't find the skilled workers they need, and businesses are impacted by the high cost of land, energy, and housing. Recommendations include expanding business

support, like the FCCDC's business planning and financial assistance, and identifying regulations that hinder food and farm business viability. Goal 3 is to protect the land and water needed to produce food, maximize environmental benefits from agriculture and fishing, and ensure food safety. Currently less than 15% of farmland in MA is protected, and lack of affordable land is one of the biggest challenges to starting or expanding farming. Actions include protecting farmland through different methods, as well as making it easier to protect smaller parcels; and increasing energy efficiency and sustainable practices on farms and in food processing businesses.

Goal 4 is to reduce hunger and food insecurity, increase the availability of healthy food to all residents, and reduce food waste. Food insecurity and obesity are increasing, and go hand in hand because of the availability of unhealthy cheap food. Diabetes is also growing. Children and the elderly are most at risk for food insecurity. The number one recommendation related to food access and hunger is to increase living wages. Also expanding education about nutrition, and increasing access to healthy food for children through farm-to-school initiatives. Chicoine concluded that this was a snapshot of the full report, and that she can be contacted with any questions.

In Franklin County, FRCOG is working on addressing issues related to access to land through District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) funding and through partnerships with Land for Good and Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust (MGLTC). Goals are to increase access to affordable land for beginning farmers and those that want to expand; keep existing farmland in farming; and to permanently protect more farmland. The project partners are working on connecting landowners to farmers and offering assistance on estate and business planning, and how to protect land. A workshop was held recently on estate planning, and was attended by 24 farmers. FRCOG will be working with Gill, Greenfield, Northfield, and Bernardston on leasing town-owned land to farmers.

State data shows that farmers aged 65 and older own 1/3 of the farmland in the state. Land may continue to be farmed, or it could be developed if not protected. At the same time the number of young farmers age 45 and younger has declined by 16% since 2002, likely due to the high cost of land and the difficulty in accessing land in MA. Focus groups has shown that farmers in the region want to see there land stay in farming and want to find someone to transition their land to. Estate planning is complicated however. Realtors are beginning to become involved, and a workshop will be held to train realtors.

Chicoine presented local projects the FRCOG is working on in Franklin County. In Whately, the Agricultural Commission asked with assistance to make the case to town officials and residents about why they should support protecting more farmland in Whately. The Commission did a lot of background work and went to every farm to collect gross revenue data. There are many benefits in addition to the economic benefits of farms. Farmland contributes to the rural and scenic character of communities. Towns also want to generate tax revenues and increase development. This tension is present in many communities. Cost of Community Services (COCS) studies show that residential land uses cost towns more in services than they generate in tax revenues compared to open land. It is a more complicated picture however for Whately and other towns that have excess capacity in their schools and suffer other consequences for not have families with children in their town. Currently there is not much farmland permanently protected in Whately. The Agricultural Commission is concerned about a potential increase in housing development if the housing market begins to accelerate. Whately has passed the Community Preservation Act (CPA), which can help provide funds for the APR program.

T. Hutcheson noted that in Conway CPA funds were used to protect farmland, but there was some pushback from residents who did not see the public benefit in it. Towns must be prepared to address this concern.

J. Wagener stated that Northfield conducted a COCS about eight years ago and had similar results, that residential uses cost more because of school kids, and that farmland and open space made up the difference. He noted that it is not always best to say we need more development to increase the tax base. One question, because of the high cost of land and aging farmers, what percent of the farmland is transitioning to other farmers, what percent is being developed, or just going fallow? In Northfield corporate farmers are leasing and buying farmland.

Chicoine stated that there is a disconnect between farmers looking for land and those wanting to transition it. Some matching services exist but are not well funded, and there are a lot of complicating factors to go into making those relationships work.

A comment was made about food waste in hospitals and whether it is being addressed. Also that Canada has a program that provides incentives for young people to go into farming. Also there is some interest in converting mill buildings to use for hydroponics, but that a model is needed. Finally, there was an additional comment that it seems that with current trends, the nation will become more dependent on other countries to feed our country.

S. Lovejoy noted that some land is returning to forest, and that providing incentives to the private sector may be one way to keep this land cleared.

5 – Franklin County Community Development Corporation (FCCDC) Lending Program, and the new PV Grows Investment Fund

G. Dillensneider introduced Alan Singer, the Lending Program Director at the FCCDC. Singer stated that the FCCDC serves all of Franklin County and the North Quabbin region, and in the last few years has expanded to Hampshire County and northern Berkshire County. The PV Grows Investment Fund provides funding for farm and food system infrastructure. Examples of funded projects include a winery, trucking delivery for the PV Grows Association, and an expanding porta-potties business, which is important since farms are now required to have them onsite. The FCCDC is currently working with Hager Brothers to transition to value added. The FCCDC is in a great position to do this. The FCCDC's Food Processing Center opened in 2001 and provides an incubator space for start-up food businesses. The FCCDC is also works on a farm to school and institution program. Many businesses that the FCCDC has worked with buy from local farms, and now employ roughly 100 people. The Center is a shared use facility, which is unique in Massachusetts.

A. Singer continued that the FCCDC offers loans to many kinds of businesses, including manufacturing and the service based businesses. He stated that the FCCDC specializes in value-added processing and working with farms. It is difficult to make small farms viable, as they require a lot of capital. The PV Grows Investment Fund has an advisory committee and is sponsored by CISA. They collaborate with the Fair Food Network for business planning assistance. Loans typically range from \$25,000 to \$75,000, but can be as low as \$5,000 and as high as \$200,000. Loans can be used for working capital equipment, to purchase buildings, or to buy a business in whole or in part. The business technical assistance program offers courses in management succession planning, including

farms. Farming is an important part of the regional economy. The net acreage of farms is increasing in the Pioneer Valley, which is contrary to national trends. This may not be the case without businesses like Real Pickles. He stated that just in the last year the Food Processing Center processed over 100,000 pounds of produce.

S. Lovejoy asked whether the FCCDC has the funding it needs. Singer answered that John Waite, the FCCDC Executive Director, and another staff person were on the MA Food Plan Committee and called for an increase in funding. The FCCDC needs additional capacity, especially storage. They have tenants ready to occupy the storage, but it is a question of getting the capital to create the space. The USDA has been a big supporter. The PV Grows Investment Fund is funded through private investors and sponsors. He stated money is available to lend. These loans are at about 7%, and serve as an alternate or supplement to bank financing. The FCCDC also borrows money from USDA, and has two loan funds that are revolving. In addition, the FCCDC manages two loan funds originally funded by a Community Development Block Grant for businesses located in Greenfield, Erving and nine other towns. These funds have been revolved many times.

J. Atwood noted that the lending program also collaborates with other lenders such as area banks and Common Capital.

6 - Other Business not reasonably anticipated 48 hours in advance, and Adjourn

G. Dillensneider asked if there is any other business. Being none, he asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

N. Riebschlaeger MOVED to adjourn the meeting at 4:53 p.m. T. Hutcheson SECONDED the motion. The motion PASSED.

Respectfully submitted by:


Gary Dillensneider, Chair