



Franklin Regional Council of Governments

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Committee

Date:	April 13, 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
- Larry Jutres, Town of Greenfield
- Ann Hamilton, Franklin County Chamber of Commerce
- Heather Hutchinson, Town of Leverett
- Carmela Lanza-Weil, Greater Shelburne Falls Area Business Association
- Fran Pheeny, Franklin County Regional Housing & Redevelopment Authority
- John Ryan, Town of New Salem
- Art Schwenger, Town of Heath
- Carolyn Shores-Ness, Town of Deerfield
- Jerry Wagener, Town of Northfield

FRCOG Staff:

- Jessica Atwood, Economic Development Program Manager
- Alyssa Larose, Land Use Planner

Guests

- Debra Boronski, Massachusetts Office of Business Development (MOBD)
- MJ Adams, Town of Greenfield

1 – Welcome and Introductions: Gary Dillensneider, Chair

The meeting was called to order at 3:33 p.m. by Chair G. Dillensneider. A round of introductions followed.

2 – Vote to approve minutes from February 11, 2016

The vote to approve minutes from the February 11, 2016 meeting was tabled until a quorum was present. At 4:04 p.m., A. Schwenger MOVED to approve the February 11, 2016 minutes. C. Shores-Ness SECONDED. The motion PASSED unanimously.

3 – Overview of State Business Development Programs by Regional Director Debra Boronski of the Massachusetts Office of Business Development (MOBD)

D. Boronski introduced herself as one of six regional directors in the Massachusetts Office of Business Development (MOBD). One main aspect of her job is to speak with municipal leaders about the Economic Development Incentive Program (EDIP). She has been tasked with visiting every small town in her region, and would be happy if towns contacted her to set up a time for a visit. J. Atwood stated she will share Boronski's contact information with committee members.

Boronski provided an overview of the EDIP. The main priority of the program is to provide incentives to businesses that want to invest in property and create jobs. Boronski has closed 15 projects in western Massachusetts in the last year. She stated that western Massachusetts has more activity than some other areas, but the investments are not as big as other areas of the state. Boronski reviewed the different types of projects that might qualify for state or local incentive. For example, if a business is buying a building and making improvements, a town can forgive some of the taxes that would result from a higher assessment on the property. This allows the business to invest money back into the property or business, and does not result in a loss in taxes to the town. MOBD just assisted North Adams with this for the Greylock Mills project. Boronski said that she can work with businesses on the applications for these types of projects.

A question was asked regarding how many projects have applied for the program. Boronski answered that there is a budget and that projects have to meet certain criteria, such as needing at least 25% of sales to be generated outside of Massachusetts. The purpose of the program is to entice a business to invest in the community. Boronski is happy to talk to selectboards and economic development staff and is available as a resource.

A committee member asked what the relationship is between the development projects identified in the CEDS Plan, and the MOBD. J. Atwood explained that these projects are intended to utilize public resources to invest in economic development initiatives. Boronski responded that if a business is a part of an identified project, than she can be brought into the conversation. In regards to infrastructure, the MassWorks grant program can be used to assist with these types of projects. Boronski can assist with directing communities to other state programs that exist, such as Green Communities.

A committee member asked what MOBD's role is in helping companies find sites in a community. Boronski answered that the MOBD can do a blind property search for businesses, and have a form that asks a company what they are looking for. A. Schwenger noted that a large percentage of the towns in the western Massachusetts region are very small, and that many wouldn't be able to take advantage of the programs offered by the MOBD because of a lack of broadband access. He asked if the MOBD is working on addressing this issue. Boronski stated that Secretary Ash is addressing the issue, and that the conversation is ongoing.

L. Jutres commented that in 2010 some changes were made to the EDIP which eliminated some smaller businesses that could not meet the new requirements. A question was asked about why small businesses are disqualified. Boronski answered that businesses need private investment and job creation and whether they derive 25% of their sales from out of state. Some hotels in Berkshire County can justify it because they have visitors coming from out of state. Boronski also noted that the abandoned building program could qualify a business or purchaser of an abandoned building for a tax deduction if it has been abandoned for a certain period of time and has been identified as a target area. Boronski can help with the paperwork for this program.

4 – CEDS Program Updates, including: Franklin County Business Development Resource Guide; Green Economy Innovation Cluster; 2016 CEDS Annual Report

J. Atwood presented the final draft of the Franklin County Business Development Resource Guide. Copies were distributed around the table. She discussed the changes from the previous draft. She noted that she received some comments that have not yet been incorporated, but will be. Committee members offered suggestions and comments on the draft. A suggestion was made to add a page with information about the area's amenities, the things that would attract people to live here. A suggestion was made to include the hospital on this page as well. It could also include cost of living information.

A committee member commented that as a business she would want to know how to get the word out, what are the quickest ways to reach her audience. It was suggested to add media resources such as newspapers, radio. A suggestion was made to include an indicator box on the front cover with some comparisons to the State. A committee member asked if we know what businesses move here and where they are coming from. J. Atwood answered that we grow more businesses than attract them. The only exception is if there is a lead and they are looking for a certain type of space, such as an industrial or warehouse type of space.

A question was asked about the audience for the resource guide. J. Atwood responded that it is for someone who wants to start a business but doesn't know where to begin, this guide can point them in a direction. Towns will be encouraged to post it on their websites, and can direct people to it. She noted that she tried to keep it simple for printing. A comment was made that if most businesses are grown here than maybe some of the comments earlier aren't needed.

J. Atwood provided an overview of the Green Economy Innovation Cluster initiative. The Southeastern Vermont Economic Development Strategy (SeVEDS) identified the green economy as an opportunity for growth in their region. The goal is for the region to be recognized as a center for green design and building. An EDA award is funding consultants working with a local leadership team on a cluster development strategy for Windham and Bennington Counties, VT. The project area was expanded to Cheshire County, NH, and Franklin County, MA.

Over the winter this team completed asset mapping and research which identified businesses, workforce and business development resources, and academic institutions, and conducted interviews with cluster leaders. A market opportunity analysis was done that identified market segments and opportunities for growth. Action teams were formed to further research these segments. Findings from the action team will be available at the end of April. A final report and action plan will be completed by the fall.

A committee member asked Atwood where she saw this project going in the future. Atwood answered that she thought it was a real opportunity. The project has already identified some interesting businesses and organization that are recognized as leaders in their field, and that happen to be right here in our backyard. The Northeast Sustainable Energy Association (NESEA) in Greenfield is one example. Atwood noted that the concept of a knowledge center is not necessarily a physical location, but a recognition that the region is a hub for these assets.

Atwood provided an overview of the draft 2016 CEDS Annual Report. She stated that this will be the first of four annual updates for the 2015 CEDS Plan, and is required to maintain EDA eligibility for select grant programs. Atwood noted that she will send out the link to view the full draft online, and asked for comments from the committee to be submitted by May 17th. The final report will be discussed and voted on at the next committee meeting. It is due by June 1 to the regional EDA office. A committee member asked what updates are anticipated. Atwood responded that any new data that is available will be updated, proposed changes to the SWOT analysis, and updates to action items.

Atwood presented the proposed changes to the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis. There was discussion. One suggestion was to add green building to the list of strengths. Atwood noted that green building is under opportunities, but that she could better emphasize the well-defined workforce that is present in the region. A suggestion was made to strengthen the language under agriculture to highlight organic farming, farmers markets, and high quality local food.

Atwood continued to present changes to the SWOT analysis. Under weaknesses, low wages, a low percent of residents working in the private sector, and a shortage of affordable housing were added. The green innovation hub and the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership initiative were added to opportunities. Under threats, more frequent severe weather events was added. It was noted that this might not be necessary to include since our region is doing a lot of work to address severe weather events, at least in terms of our rivers. Two conservation districts are working very hard to make the communities in the Deerfield River Watershed more resilient. It was commented that the lack of State understanding of program and policy impacts to rural areas was identified as a threat that should be added to the list. A committee member asked if the potential gas pipeline is a threat to encouraging young professionals to the area. J. Atwood stated that she would confer with the FRCOG Planning Director, who is working on the issue, to find out more about its current status.

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

J. Atwood noted that the Western Massachusetts Developers Conference is coming up in Springfield. If communities are interested they can have an exhibit table. The FRCOG will have a table, and if towns want to have something displayed at the FRCOG table they can contact her. She will send out more information about the conference.

A. Schwenger MOVED to adjourn the meeting at 5:04 p.m. J. Ryan SECONDED the motion. The motion PASSED.

Respectfully submitted by:


Gary Dillensneider, Chair