



Franklin Regional Council of Governments

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Committee

Date:	February 11, 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
- Martha Field, FRCOG Executive Committee
- Carmela Lanza-Weil, Greater Shelburne Falls Area Business Association
- Michael McCusker, Town of Buckland
- Fran Pheeny, Franklin County Regional Housing & Redevelopment Authority
- Art Schwenger, Town of Heath

FRCOG Staff:

- Peggy Sloan, Planning & Development Director
- Jessica Atwood, Economic Development Program Manager

Guests

- Anita Eliason, Franklin County Community Development Corporation
- MJ Adams, Town of Greenfield

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 December 15, 2015

A. Schwenger MOVED to approve the December 15, 2015 minutes. M. McCusker SECONDED. The motion PASSED unanimously.

3 – CEDS Program Updates

J. Atwood presented PowerPoint slides to review CEDS Program and project updates. She reported that since the last meeting, she has received further feedback about the draft Business Development Profile. Comments received include suggestions for additional content, new resources, and a revised

format to make it easier to view on a computer screen and to print. In addition, quotes from business leaders are being solicited to include in the document.

Atwood continued that the FRCOG Regional Brownfields Program has included two EPA funded activities: environmental site assessments and a Brownfields Clean-up Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) and Subgrant program. M. McCusker asked about the status of these accounts. P. Sloan reported that the RLF is in the process of being closed out. She stated that as part of this process, FRCOG has asked the EPA to allow us to retain Program Income earned from the lending activity for future projects. Once the Program Income is spent, the FRCOG may re-apply to the EPA for another RLF in the future. Atwood reported that the FRCOG is working with the Town of Monroe and MassDevelopment to support efforts to address the green, wood portion of the former Ramage Paper Mill. This portion of the mill has been condemned and is in a deteriorating condition. Through a new program called TA Connect, State agencies including MassDevelopment, DHCD and MassDEP are providing technical assistance on the project. A photo of mill was recently featured in a Boston Globe column about the challenges faced by small towns.

Atwood reported that several communities and organizations in the region are exploring project ideas for possible submission to the ArtPlace's National Creative Placemaking Fund. The purpose of this grant program is to fund community planning and development projects that leverage art and culture to create place-based change. In the 2016 round, there is \$10.5 million in funding available, with some of that money set aside specifically for Massachusetts-based projects. Atwood explained that it is a very flexible grant program with broad eligibility terms and no match required. There was discussion.

Atwood stated that the collaboration of economic development and planning agencies in Franklin County, Windham County, VT, and Cheshire County, NH continues. Work is underway to compare each region's CEDS and identify shared goals, indicators and clusters. At the same time, the Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation is using funding from an EDA grant to launch a Green Economy Cluster initiative. This effort is proposing the creation of a national knowledge center on resilient design and green building, similar to how Silicon Valley is recognized as a center for innovative information technology. Atwood added that while the efforts are being led by a southeastern Vermont-based consortium, it is being expanded to include Franklin County and Cheshire County.

Atwood announced that on March 16, the FRCOG will host a Select Board Essentials Workshop on the topic of public water and wastewater system basics. Speakers include Bob Dean and Glen Ayers from FRCOG as well as the executive director of the Massachusetts Rural Water Association. The target audience for this workshop is system operators as well as local officials. The workshop will include a review of potential resources for assistance and funding for systems.

Atwood reviewed the dates of upcoming events that may be of interest to CEDS Committee members, and offered to email out the list with links. One of these events is a Western Massachusetts Development Conference to be held in June in Springfield, which will highlight potential development opportunities in the region.

4 – Accelerating Business Development: An update on Franklin County Community Development Corporation (FCCDC) & Valley Venture Mentors (VVM) cooperative efforts in Greenfield – Anita Eliason, FCCDC

Anita Eliason, Business Development Specialist for the FCCDC, described how they partnered with VVM to expand the program to Greenfield. Using grant support, FCCDC has been able to fund event space at the Arts Block for the first Thursday of each month. And Hillside Pizza has generously donated free pizza for participants. She explained that the event is an opportunity to match up entrepreneurs with experienced business people, and at the same time an opportunity for business people to give back. She stated that she thinks reality TV programs have been a positive influence for people being interested. She continued that VVM calls itself Shark Tank with a heart.

She reported that since Springfield has more large employers, you see people from these businesses at their VVM events; whereas in Greenfield, the audience is mostly independent entrepreneurs who have walked the walk. It's a different experience for participants. Eliason reviewed some of the current entrepreneur's businesses participating in the Greenfield events, including Mountain Pet Products.

Eliason invited CEDS Committee members to attend the FCCDC/VVM events at the Arts Block in Greenfield on the first Thursday of the month. She noted that there is free Hillside Pizza and drinks can be purchased. She also reported that GCC has expressed interest in partnering in future events. She explained that the monthly event focuses on ten businesses. They are selected from a business pitch competition, and then for the next several months these businesses ask for help on a specific topic. There are three break-out sessions per night, with participating mentors meeting with entrepreneurs to provide input on the topic they have asked for help with. She reported that it's been a great match and mentors have been thrilled to be involved in newer companies. She stated that they do need more mentors, and encourage Committee members to attend.

Eliason asked for suggestions for how to get the word out more to let people know about the events and encourage them to become mentors. There was discussion. Committee members offered suggestions of including the events in the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce newsletter, speaking at the new Franklin County Young Professionals group, and connecting to the GCC business club.

Eliason also announced that the FCCDC won a \$200,000 Urban Agenda grant from the State to support business development. Tasks include matching GCC students with businesses to help them with their social media; working with North Adams and Greenfield to tackle empty downtown storefronts; continue a more robust business class schedule; accelerate the VVM collaboration; and working with businesses to help them succession planning.

5 – An Overview and Update on the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership Project

P. Sloan reported that the project grew out of the Franklin County Regional Plan for Sustainable Development's goals to conserve forestland and promote sustainable economic development. Sloan presented a PowerPoint slides to describe the project. She explained that the goal of the project is to explore an opportunity to form a new partnership between towns in western Franklin and northern Berkshire Counties, regional agencies, landowners, local businesses, the State and US Forest Service for the purpose of:

- Increasing economic development related to the extensive forest resources in the 21-town area, and
- Supporting the expansion of sustainable forestry practices and forest conservation on private lands in the 21-town region.

She noted that a traditional model would not work with these towns, so this project is looking at creating a new model. The new model invites the public, town officials, and landowners in the study area to define the elements of a designation that works for them. The new model being explored for a Special Federal Designation is based on Conservation Restrictions that encourages sustainable forestry on private forest land and increasing natural resource-based economic development. She continued that as part of the new framework being explored, it does not include federal government ownership of land. Sloan reviewed the community involvement process and input received from public outreach conducted for the project. She explained that a Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership Advisory Committee was created and has met quarterly since 2014 to oversee and provide input on the project. FRCOG and Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) with input from the Advisory Committee have prepared a draft plan for designation for the 21-town region.

Sloan reviewed the plan's key findings. She stated that the 21-town region is well-suited to receive a Special Designation from the US Forest Service because the varied topography and different forest types found provide a unique opportunity for research and demonstration forestry, and that the region has a large forested landscape that supports biodiversity and wildlife habitat. Sloan also reviewed the potential benefits of a new federal designation, which included the promotion of forestry and related manufacturing; the establishment of "Municipal Cooperative Agreements" to provide annual grants to participating towns; the creation of a multi-purpose center; and the creation of a new model partnership with private land owners.

Sloan reported that a draft business plan has been developed to establish the Mohawk Trail Woodland Partnership, with proposed funding from the US Forest Service and MA Executive Office of Environmental Affairs. She stated that the next steps in the process will be FRCOG and BRPC staff meeting with Select Boards in the 21-town region to receive feedback on the draft business plan and governance structure. The Select Boards will have the opportunity to support the potential Special Designation. At the same time, work will continue with the US Forest Service and State agencies to advance the goals of the project. Legislation would need to be drafted and filed at the State and then the Federal level to allow for the creation of the Special Designation.

Sloan responded to questions from the Committee. It was noted that this is a new partnership model for the US Forest Service. They are hopeful that this model could be applied to other areas of the country. M. McCusker asked if Massachusetts is the only state without a national forest. Sloan responded that its one of the few without a national forest, and under this new model, the project would not create a new national forest but would create a new special designation. There was a question about sustaining the project over time. Sloan responded that a trust fund model would make the project self-sustaining. There was a question about when the project started. Sloan stated the project started two years ago and has been driven by the Committee members. A. Schwenger commented that the US Forest Service is particularly interested in this model because they won't have much authority for decision-making, the local entities will make decisions; but at the same time will show how landowners can protect their land and/or use best practices. C. Lanza-Weil asked if artist were involved in conversations about this project, given the recent example of the ArtPlace program. Sloan responded that not specifically, but wood-based artisans will be sought for the gallery space at the proposed resource center. She also noted that participating towns and organizations wanted to appoint an artist to the Advisory Committee they are welcome to.

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

A. Schwenger MOVED to adjourn the meeting at 5:06 p.m. M. McCusker SECONDED the motion. The motion PASSED.

Respectfully submitted by:



Gary Dillensneider, Chair