



Franklin Regional Council of Governments

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Committee

Date:	February 28, 2018
Time:	3:30 p.m.
Location:	12 Olive Street, Greenfield, MA
Duration:	1.5 hours
Facilitator:	Gary Dillensneider, Chair

CEDS Committee Attendees:

- MJ Adams, Town of Greenfield
- Jim Basford, FRCOG Executive Committee
- John Baldwin, Greater Shelburne Falls Area Business Association
- Patricia Crosby, Franklin Hampshire Regional Employment Board
- Gary Dillensneider, Committee Chair, Franklin County Community Development Corporation
- Linda Dunlavy, FRCOG Executive Committee
- Tom Hutcheson, Franklin Regional Planning Board
- Sam Lovejoy, FRCOG Executive Committee
- Adrienne Menges, Town of Orange
- Walter Ramsey, Town of Montague
- Nan Riebschlaeger, Town of Wendell
- Art Schwenger, Town of Heath
- Carolyn Shores-Ness, Town of Deerfield

FRCOG Staff:

- Jessica Atwood, Economic Development Program Manager
- Alyssa Larose, Senior Land Use & Natural Resource Planner
- Peggy Sloan, Director of Planning and Development

Guests:

- Peter Larkin, Massachusetts Broadband Institute

1 – Call the meeting to order, and round of introductions: Gary Dillensneider, Chair

The meeting was called to order at 3:32 p.m. by Chair G. Dillensneider. A round of introductions followed.

2 – Vote to approve minutes from October 18, 2017, May 4, 2017, and June 7, 2017

J. Atwood explained that the minutes from the two previous meetings need to be voted and approved due to a lack of quorum at the last meeting. The May 4, 2017 minutes need to be re-voted on and approved because the wrong minutes were emailed to the Committee.

C. Shores-Ness MOVED to approve the May 4, 2017 minutes. A. Schwenger SECONDED. The motion PASSED unanimously.

Lovejoy noted that he attended the meeting but is not listed on the minutes. C. Shores-Ness MOVED to approve the June 7, 2017 minutes. A. Schwenger SECONDED. S. With the addition, the motion PASSED unanimously.

T. Hutcheson MOVED to approve the October 13, 2017 minutes. S. Lovejoy SECONDED. The motion PASSED unanimously.

3 – CEDS Program Updates: Industrial Park Inventory; Pioneer Valley Workforce Skills Cabinet; Upcoming Events

J. Atwood presented CEDS Program updates. Staff completed the first industrial park inventory in 2002/2003 and updated it once around 2010, so it was time to do another update. Atwood distributed around hard copies of the report. She listed the six industrial parks in the County. She explained that it is important to have a variety of commercial/industrial spaces available for businesses, including industrial parks.

Past inventories predicted an exhaustion of industrial park space in the region, and this is still a problem. Atwood noted that the report only includes planned industrial parks, not all areas zoned for industrial uses. The report categories parcels into four categories – Developed, Not for Development, Undeveloped – Constraints, and Undeveloped – Ready. The report also reviewed development trends over time. She noted that since 2010, approximately 1/3 of all parcels have changed ownership for various reasons, including ownership restructure, a new business moving into an existing building, or undeveloped parcels changing hands. When considering available parcels, Atwood explained that the inventory focuses on publicly-owned parcels. Currently there are 6-7 parcels in this category. Only three of these parcels are over five acres. Smaller parcels often are not of interest to most businesses. The supply of available parcels will likely be exhausted in the next few years, so there is a need to expand the inventory of planned industrial park parcels. Montague has a proposed industrial park site, Orange is exploring areas, and Erving is deciding on a redevelopment scenario for the former Millers Falls IP Papermill site. Atwood noted that this inventory report can help make the case that more industrial land is needed when communities are pursuing grants for that purpose. Atwood then presented maps of each industrial park and discussed remaining available parcels. It was noted that Greenfield is also exploring expansion of the I-91 Industrial Park.

Atwood then presented information on the Workforce Skills Cabinet. The Baker Administration launched an initiative to better align workforce development, economic development, and education systems. The initiative is similar to the labor blue print, which is completed every 10 years. The State was divided into 7 regions, with the Pioneer Valley region led by the Franklin-Hampshire Regional Employment Board and the Regional Employment Board of Hampden County. Over the course of a year, a regional team was convened, which included FRCOG staff, community colleges, private businesses, State officials, K-12 superintendents, etc.. They discussed what job seekers are looking for in employment, what employers are looking for in workers, and what jobs will need to be filled in the short- and long-term. Priority industries were also identified. The region-specific strategies will be incorporated into a statewide plan, which will play an important role in workforce funding.

Atwood reviewed the top challenges and opportunities identified in the region. Challenges include: attracting and retaining skilled employees at all levels, particularly to fill jobs of retiring “Baby Boomers”; developing and implementing creative workforce strategies that bring together workforce development, economic development, and education; and investing in systems to support workers, including transit, broadband, and other infrastructure. P. Crosby noted that our region has a tradition of working together, and that there is new attention to creating and supporting quality jobs. There is a need to think about what can be done to improve jobs, not just fill them.

Atwood then presented upcoming events, including a Massachusetts Downtown Initiative workshop, an emergency preparedness for businesses workshop, the Mass. Cultural Council Institute, and the 2018 Western MA Developers Conference.

4 – A Presentation of Massachusetts Broadband Institute’s (MBI) Last Mile Program, by Peter Larkin, Special Advisor to the Secretary of Housing and Economic Development for the Last Mile Program and Chairman of the MBI Board of Directors

Atwood introduced Peter Larkin from the MA Executive Office of Housing & Economic Development and the Massachusetts Broadband Institute’s Last Mile Program. Copies of his presentation were distributed. L. Dunlavy provided background information about the broadband access issue in the region and FRCOG’s involvement. She noted that twenty years ago Verizon was asked to fix the problem, but they said no. Then efforts focused on aggregating business demand to bring more service to the region. A contract was signed, but then the telecommunications company announced bankruptcy. Then efforts focused on studying how public investment might lure private investment. Legislators became engaged and created the Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI) with \$45M in funding. The Federal stimulus funded the MBI middle mile network, which built a robust publicly-owned fiber highway to make it easier for private investment to complete the last mile. Due to the region’s rural nature, private investment still did not come. An effort to create a regionally owned and operated system became very complicated. By 2017, Governor Baker restarted the Last Mile Broadband program with an approach to have each town decide how to move forward.

P. Larkin began by apologizing for the frustration around broadband. He noted that the MBI Middle Mile network provides benefits to critical community resources, but 53 communities still need last mile service. P. Larkin reviewed the current status of the Last Mile Broadband program and eligible communities. Under the Partial Cable part of the Program, Comcast is to complete at least 96% cable coverage in nine communities that are partially served by the provider. This has been fulfilled in two communities, and the remaining towns must be completed by the 3rd quarter of 2018. Charter covers three towns on the underserved list, and will be providing 100% coverage by the 2nd quarter of 2018.

The other part of the program provides direct grants to unserved communities. Four towns are pursuing wireless solutions. The State issued a private provider RFP, which resulted in offers from Comcast and Charter. Towns chose who to work with. The expectation is that the State will cover 1/3 of the cost, while the town will cover the rest. This is a real challenge, as towns have not had to fund this service in the past. A cable franchise agreement is required. Rates are tied to State competitive rates, which can benefit rural areas. Frontier responded to an RFP to serve three towns with a fiber network, but one town has since dropped out, so it is uncertain if that project will move forward.

Some communities have taken their allocations from MBI and gone their own route. The State realized that the MassWorks program provides a nice model, providing money to towns on a milestone payment basis with criteria. Twenty-two towns are working through this process. The State has hired Westfield Gas & Electric as the project manager.

P. Larkin stated that the make-ready process, which finds space on poles to site fiber, has been a challenge. First an application to the utility is made, then space and cost analysis for each pole is completed. It can cost up to \$10,000 to replace one pole, and \$300-\$400 just to attach to one pole. This is the most uncertain cost of any project. Once the attachment and space is ready, running the fiber is much easier. The whole make-ready process takes at least a year. Currently 20 towns are scheduled for the make-ready process this summer.

P. Larkin noted that there are remaining towns with challenges to implementing the last mile. A flexible program has been brought forward that may entertain solutions with less than 96% coverage. Every town wants full coverage but it costs a lot. It is very difficult to be cost-effective in these areas.

Due to the bottleneck of make-ready work in the region and delays involving utilities in the region, a summit was convened in January with all utilities, which now meets on a bi-weekly basis to reiterate timeframes for the various projects. Larkin provided an update on the middle mile network. There has been an issue with the operator, Axia, and currently a transition to another operator is underway. The system will remain functioning, and an emergency back-up agreement with Holyoke Gas & Electric is in place if needed.

P. Larkin noted that recently the legislature appropriated \$45M to secure MBI money for all town allocations, and set aside money for make-ready uncertainty. We are trying to protect towns on the make-ready costs, and are developing a policy around what is an eligible expense. Larkin then took questions from the committee.

A. Schwenger noted that it would be useful to study what the economic impact is to communities once a buildout is completed. Discussions about there being no return on investment may not be so important if the economic impact leads to additional resources, schools come back because people buy homes where they aren't now, etc. There may be more money from the investment in broadband than what is being discussed.

P. Larkin answered that he knows anecdotally that the value of homes have increased, using Leverett as an example, once a home is connected, and that realtors report not being able to sell homes without broadband. But at the same time, some elders don't want it. Leverett has also seen that registration of small businesses has doubled, from 8 to 16. We do have some money set aside with the new authorization to look at this, but first need to get systems up and running.

W. Ramsey asked what he should tell the 4% of residents that won't be reached with the cable extension. P. Larkin responded that residents could work with their cable committee in town and see if there can be a contribution in kind to share the burden. He noted that the last 4% are the hardest to serve. Sometimes it is easier to serve outlying residents from a bordering town. Larkin noted that crossing town borders would not violate a Town's franchise agreement.

Atwood thanked Larkin for his presentation.

4 – Other business not reasonably anticipated 48 hours in advance, and adjourn.

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

T. Hutcheson MOVED to adjourn the meeting at 4:45 p.m. A. Schwenger SECONDED the motion. The motion PASSED.

Respectfully submitted by:



Gary Dillensneider, Chair