



# Franklin Regional Council of Governments

## Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Committee

Date:	June 7, 2017
Time:	3:30 p.m.
Location:	12 Olive Street, Greenfield, MA
Duration:	1.5 hours
Facilitator:	Gary Dillensneider, Chair

### CEDS Committee Attendees:

- Jim Basford, FRCOG Executive Committee
- Gary Dillensneider, Committee Chair, Franklin County Community Development Corporation
- Lisa Davol, Franklin County Chamber of Commerce
- Linda Dunlavy, FRCOG Executive Committee
- Martha Field, FRCOG Executive Committee
- Tom Hutcheson, Franklin Regional Planning Board
- Kevin Kennedy, Town of Orange
- John Lunt, Town of Greenfield
- Julie Robinson, Town of Northfield
- John Ryan, Town of New Salem
- Jeanie Schermesser, Franklin Regional Planning Board
- Art Schwenger, Town of Heath

### FRCOG Staff:

- Jessica Atwood, Economic Development Program Manager
- Beth Giannini, Senior Transportation Planner
- Alyssa Larose, Land Use Planner
- Jessica McMillan, Public Health and Transportation Planner
- Peggy Sloan, Director of Planning and Development

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

The meeting was called to order at 3:31 p.m. by Chair G. Dillensneider. A round of introductions followed.

### **2 – Vote to approve minutes from May 4, 2017**

At 3:33 p.m. G. Dillensneider asked for a vote to approve the May 4, 2017 meeting minutes.

A. Schwenger MOVED to approve the May 4, 2017 minutes. T. Hutcheson SECONDED. The motion PASSED unanimously. J. Lunt abstained.

### 3 – Discussion and vote on the 2017 CEDS Annual Report

Jessica Atwood noted that Julie Cowan from MassDevelopment could not make it to the meeting today, and the agenda has been revised to reflect the change. Cowan will be rescheduled to speak at a future meeting.

Atwood presented proposed changes to the 2017 CEDS Annual Report. She explained that she would like feedback and a vote on the changes from the CEDS and EDD committees. The Report will then be voted on by the Franklin Regional Planning Board (FRPB). Any proposed changes from the FRPB or other feedback received will be sent to Committee members for consideration and a re-vote. Atwood distributed a handout of the PowerPoint slides.

Under the report's goals, P. Crosby from the FHREB provided three updates on projects related to workforce development. These updates included information about: the Summer Jobs and Beyond project in the Ralph C. Mahar and Turners Falls High Schools; the Adult Basic Education Partners Program; and the creation by the FHREB and Hamden County REB of the Pioneer Valley Workforce Blueprint. A typo in the language was noted.

There was discussion about the workforce updates. J. Basford asked whether Hampden County is anticipating jobs from the casino. L. Dunlavy noted that Holyoke Community College is doing hospitality training and culinary services education to prepare the workforce for jobs at the casino.

Atwood continued to review proposed report changes. An announcement from the Baker Administration about last mile broadband grants awarded to Franklin County towns was added to Goal 4.A. S. Lovejoy asked if the text could be amended to reflect that other towns didn't get funding. L. Dunlavy noted that some towns were not awarded funding because they haven't yet applied. Atwood will add language stating that additional unserved towns in Franklin County may apply for this funding in the future.

Atwood presented changes to Goal 8 regarding the tourism cluster. Text from Lisa Davol provided context to what our tourism industry is like. Regions are collaborating more, and efforts to create events and tours have been successful, particularly those with food and beverages, like Cider Days.

Information on future Creative Economy Summits was updated to include the Pioneer Valley Creative Economy Network. Under performance measures, Atwood noted updates regarding job creation for the Monroe mill project and the GCET project in Greenfield. Greenfield and Montague requested additional projects in the CEDS listing. Atwood explained that in the past, a project solicitation process was done every five years, which ranked projects by category. While the EDA has relaxed this requirement, it was decided that the 2015 CEDS Plan would maintain the project listing. Since it is no longer ranked or prioritized, projects can be accepted in between five-year plans.

J. Lunt presented the Greenfield projects. The Town is working on preparing an application to fund expansion of the industrial park by extending infrastructure to open up three possible sites. He had a conversation with Jay Ash, who did not realize the limited amount of industrial land in this area of the state. In particular, larger parcels over 5 acres for substantial development are very scarce and a top priority. The Town is working with many partners on redeveloping the First National Bank on Bank Row. The Bank Building has been on the CEDS list in the past. The Town is in the process of

acquiring the building under the Greenfield Redevelopment Authority, and is working with MassDevelopment and the Massachusetts Cultural Council, who have been accommodating. This project is central to the Town plans for revitalizing the downtown. The creative economy is working well in Greenfield for job creation. FCCDC has been very collaborative in transferring ownership.

Downtown Greenfield sewer infrastructure needs upgrades; this is ongoing work. The Abercrombie building renovation has begun. It is slated for office space. This and the First National Bank Building are the last two buildings in the urban renewal zone needing work. Redevelopment wouldn't have happened without the parking garage.

Atwood presented the Montague project. The description for the Canal District Revitalization was expanded. The Turnpike Road industrial park has been on the radar for some time. The Town is looking to do a 45-acre industrial park. The Town received a National Park Service grant to research Native American life and history in the area, and is looking to create a Native American Cultural Heritage Center to highlight this history.

Atwood asked if there were any other comments on the proposed changes to the Draft 2017 CEDS Annual Report. A. Schwenger requested that a comment be added regarding broadband and how the economic vitality of this region is important to the state as a whole. After discussion, it was agreed Atwood will find an appropriate location to add such a statement.

S. Lovejoy noted that in the past an industrial park inventory predicted we would run out of industrial land, and now we have. He asked if this study is referenced in the report. Atwood noted that an update to the industrial park inventory is included in the report and in the process of being updated. P. Sloan stated, that once completed, it will be useful in documenting the need to the State and will help towns that are applying for funds to expand industrial space.

J. Basford asked whether the report should mention potential of the marijuana industry, particularly as a use for vacant buildings. Discussion followed and it was decided that text would be added to note that legislation passed at the state level could impacts our communities in the future. T. Hutcheson suggested the report would flow better if the industry clusters went from natural resources, manufacturing, to services.

At 4:02 p.m. G. Dillensneider asked for a motion to approve the 2017 CEDS Annual Report with changes as discussed. T. Hutcheson MOVED to approve the report with changes. J. Ryan SECONDED. The motion PASSED unanimously.

### **3 – Presentations on two tourism related studies currently underway by the FRCOG Transportation Planning Program: Bicycle Tourism Plan; Visitors by Rail Study**

Atwood introduced Beth Giannini and Jessica McMillan to speak about the bike tourism project. Giannini stated that the FRCOG Transportation Planning department has an annual work program funded through MassDOT. This year, staff are compiling a regional bicycle tourism plan. FRCOG has done a lot of bicycle planning and tourism related projects, including bikeway maps, signs, etc. In the past, projects had to have a perspective of bicycling as a mode of transportation, but in recent years the MassDOT has supported bicycling for tourism as an acceptable focus for transportation planning projects. She added there is a lot of interest in this in our region. The industry in our region includes

bike shops that lead rides and mountain biking tours. West County in particular has a growing bicycle tourism industry. Efforts have been made to reach out to the people who serve bicycle tourists.

Bicycling is a popular form of outdoor recreation. Bicyclists also tend to spend more than other types of tourists. The different types of bicycling tourism in our region include: long rides, where cyclists seek scenic routes with low traffic and shoulders; touring bicyclists on multi-day rides; and event riding. The Franklin Land Trust's D2R2 has people from all over the world do this ride. In West County, a group is developing a mountain biking park at Berkshire East and interconnected trails within the state forest in conjunction with DCR. Bike paths and family friendly places to ride are another form of bicycle tourism.

A few meetings have been held that brought people together who are not typically involved in transportation planning projects. The project originally included hiring a consultant to complete an economic impact study, but the budget was not sufficient. Instead staff will do some internal analysis. An inventory of assets has been created that includes any resources available for bicyclists, such as bike shops, events, rides etc. Recommendations include themed rides, educating the tourism industry about bicycle tourism, and strategies to strengthen the industry in the region. One example is to explore opportunities for a bicycle-friendly business program. Businesses with bicyclist amenities could be identified through some type of marketing website or list. The plan also identifies future tasks, such as creating an online or mobile app to provide people with information on rides. A suggestion was made to include motorist education for bicycle safety as a recommendation.

J. McMillan presented the results of a survey conducted for the plan. The survey was sent to people on the advisory committee and was also available at the FRCOG's bike breakfast during Baystate Bike Week. About 30 people responded. The survey asked about what types of design features should be included on maps. Scenic locations, places to get food, restrooms, bike-friendly businesses, and bike shops were top selections. Maps could also include farms, nature areas, rivers, rural roads with good riding conditions, recreation areas and places where you could stop and swim, etc. The goal is to create tourism-focused bike rides that could appeal to a range of bicycle tourists.

J. Basford noted that Unity Park is a nice place for families, but the bathrooms are often closed. Several bikers have asked him to bring this up specifically. In addition, serious cyclists start in this region and go up into Vermont and New Hampshire. Is this project tying in with them? Giannini answered that the scope of the project is to focus on the county but that FRCOG would like to expand the conversation beyond county borders.

J. Robinson asked if there is money for implementation. Giannini answered that FRCOG can do mapping. The goal is to complete maps by the end of September. A question was asked if data exists that addresses different subsets or tourists, such as family vs. mountain bikers. Giannini said that staff are researching this type of information. Staff recognize there is a big difference among the subsets, and the project has brought many different groups to the table.

G. Dillensneider asked if lodging includes B&Bs. Giannini answered yes, it includes all types of lodging, but not short-term rentals like AirBnB. J. Schermesser suggested considering biking vacations. Giannini stated that this could be a recommendation, but that the FRCOG cannot organize the events. There is someone in the region already that organizes this type of bike ride. They might be open to creating rides that span multiple days.

S. Lovejoy noted that FRTA buses allow bicycles, and asked if any progress has been made with Amtrak to allow bikes on the train. Giannini answered that the train does carry bikes, however, you have to reserve the space, and it can only take two bikes at a time. This obviously creates a problem if travelling in a group. This is a topic of interest to FRCOG, but also for the whole northeast corridor.

It was noted that similar work is being done in surrounding counties. If Berkshire County is putting together an app, it would be good to link up with them. Having one site would make it easier. McMillan noted that part of the impetus behind this study is that the State doesn't have a good online bike resource. This project is exploring how to link into and build upon the online information for this part of the state.

It was noted that there are a lot of cell phone blackout areas where an app would not be useful. P. Sloan suggested adding a disclaimer to maps about cell coverage. Giannini stated that the maps will identify places where free wi-fi is available, like a library.

Several comments were made about finding a symbol for a bicycle friendly business program. McMillan noted there is no international symbol that already exists. The project's main deliverable will be maps, but the plan will also list other projects, with a goal of thinking about branding. J. Basford noted that the services and infrastructure need to be here first, otherwise people won't come. Giannini said they heard from the Northfield business group that if a group ride were coming to their businesses, they would want to be alerted so they could be ready to serve them better. Focus groups are planned to gather additional input.

It was noted that bike racks are essential and that having a bike rack program for businesses to do bulk purchases with a reduced price could be beneficial. Giannini answered that FRCOG has a program right now to purchase bike racks, but it is not for private businesses. The racks have to be on public property because it is federal funding. A suggestion was made that municipalities could put bike racks on public property near businesses, as well as other points of interest for cyclists.

Atwood presented an overview of a project to increase the number of visitors coming to the region by passenger rail. She provided an overview of the current service. Ridership at the Greenfield station in 2016 was 5,885, and the top destination was New York City. Atwood presented trends in tourism, which show leisure tourism is growing, and millennials are more flexible about choosing transportation modes. A majority of travelers to the State come from New England or mid-Atlantic states. Often visitors to Franklin County are here for a day or as a stop over.

The study will assess: how Greenfield is promoted via the Amtrak website; how the state promotes the Vermonter service; how local lodging and attractions promote rail as an option to getting to Franklin County; how travelers arriving by train get to their final destination; and how other regions encourage tourism by rail. Atwood noted that currently, Enterprise Rental Car picks up passengers at the station, but is closed on Sundays, which is a problem. She has heard they may be considering being open on Sundays, which would be a big change. Examples of tourism by rail in other regions include: Santa Fe New Mexico, where people can take the train to go skiing. Also Maine has invested heavily in promoting the Downeaster service.

Atwood plans to meet with local tourism groups this summer to talk about findings and to develop recommendations. Preliminary recommendations include adding information about Greenfield to the Amtrak website, adding the Vermonter service to MassVacation website, improving connections

between transportation providers and lodging, including the train on lodging and attraction websites, and developing itineraries of things to do in the region that can be accessed without a personal vehicle. The report will be completed by the end of September.

The timing of the train was noted as an issue. Atwood answered that more service is being advocated for, but not as part of this project. T. Hutcheson asked if ridership is meeting projections. Atwood stated that she has heard that ridership is exceeding expectations.

T. Hutcheson asked if this project will feed into more advocacy for commuter service along this route. Atwood answered that it can help support the case for more service if we are promoting rail and increasing ridership. J. Basford asked how much the intercity busses generate for the economy and whether this can be integrated with rail. Atwood noted most of the FRCOG's work has not dealt with intercity bus, but that the private companies do a great job and FRCOG would be interesting in knowing what works for them.

**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.

S. Lovejoy MOVED to adjourn the meeting at 4:53 p.m. L. Davol SECONDED the motion. The motion PASSED.

Respectfully submitted by:



Gary Dillensneider, Chair