



Franklin Regional Council of Governments Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Committee

Date:	December 6, 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
- Gary Dillensneider, Committee Chair, Franklin County Community Development Corporation
- Linda Dunlavy, FRCOG Executive Committee
- Tom Hutcheson, Town of Conway
- Glen Ohlund, Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority
- 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
- Maureen Mullaney, Transportation and GIS Program Manager II
- Megan Rhodes, Senior Land Use and Transportation Planner
- Peggy Sloan, Director of Planning & Development

Guests:

- None

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

The meeting was called to order at 3:36 p.m. by Chair G. Dillensneider. A round of introductions followed.

2 – Vote to approve minutes from June 13, 2018

G. Dillensneider asked for a vote to approve the June 13, 2018 meeting minutes. N. Riebschlaeger MOVED to approve the June 13, 2018 minutes. T. Hutcheson SECONDED. G. Ohlund ABSTAINED. The motion PASSED unanimously.

3 – Review and Vote on Amendments to CEDS Committee Procedural Rules, which Includes Committee Membership Composition

J. Atwood reviewed amendments to the CEDS Committee procedural rules and membership composition, which had been discussed at the last CEDS meeting in June. The focus of the amendments is to make the CEDS Committee more of a working group focused on the 5-year plan and strategy implementation. Atwood reviewed the current Committee, which has 50 seats, 26 current members, a quorum of nine, and with an average attendance of 9.8 members. Atwood distributed copies of the proposed revisions to the procedural rules, which were also sent to Committee members in advance. Proposed changes include removing Amherst, Athol, and Phillipston from the “Region” definition, as they are part of other Economic Development Districts (EDDs). Atwood explained that the representative from EDA is supportive of this change. The three towns have been offered membership but have not had members on the Committee for a number of years.

Atwood continued with proposed changes, including aligning membership terms of the Committee to the 5-year CEDS planning cycle, reducing the total number of seats on the Committee but retaining broad representation, enhancing committee member recruitment process, and better engaging implementation partners in the CEDS process. Atwood explained the proposed Committee composition, which was modeled on the Transportation Planning Organization (TPO) geographic sub-regions. The Committee would have 19 seats, with 1 representative from Greenfield, 2 from Central County towns, 2 from East County towns, 2 from West County towns, 1 from the Franklin Regional Planning Board, 7 from regional organizations, and 4 at-large seats.

Atwood explained the proposed nomination process. FRCOG staff would conduct outreach to municipalities, post a notice on the FRCOG website, and place legal advertisements in newspapers. A nomination committee will review candidates and provide recommendations to the FRCOG Executive Committee, which is the governing board for the CEDS. The Franklin Regional Planning Board would nominate its appointment, and FRCOG staff would reach out to regional organizations and provide recommendations to the Executive Committee. Membership terms would be five years, to correspond with CEDS Plan development and implementation. An alternate could be designated on a temporary basis, and the Chair and Vice-Chair would serve corresponding five year terms. A new quorum would be set at 7 members. If approved, the process would start with current committee members to see who wants to continue, and recruit new committee members in spring 2019. By the June 2019 EDD meeting, appointments will be made and the start of the five-year terms will begin in July. CEDS Committee members will elect officers in fall 2019, and commence work on creating a new five-year CEDS Plan for release in June 2020, with implementation over the course of 2020 to 2024.

Atwood asked for questions and comments on the proposed amendments. She read several comments sent to her by email. A question was asked about what happens to Amherst, Phillipston, and Athol. Atwood answered they would be notified that they are no longer part of the committee. They would remain part of their respective Economic Development Districts. Discussion followed about the history of these three towns being included in the CEDS region. Atwood noted that the committee will continue to work with organizations in the North Quabbin region to ensure connections are being made. Atwood noted that there has been no participation from these communities for at least 5-7 years. In addition, when reporting on participation to EDA, the FRCOG assessment is used as a match, so these three towns are not reported as participating since they do not contribute to the assessment. A question was asked whether our CEDS region is competing for funds with neighboring regions.

Atwood answered for planning, no, but for project funding, yes. Atwood noted that FRCOG has a formal relationship with PVPC and the Plan for Progress, and the FHREB blueprint, which covers Hampshire and Hampden Counties. For the regions to the east and north, relationships have been built at the staff level that will continue. A discussion followed about whether to specify the regional organizations that will have seats on the proposed restructured CEDS Committee. Atwood explained that the organizations were described generally, but that she can expand the descriptions and provide examples of regional organizations that might participate.

A question was asked if someone leaves their 5-year term on the Committee early, how a new appointment is handled. Atwood said this is not addressed in the bylaws, but should be. She will add language to address vacancies.

G. Ohlund MOTIONED to accept the proposed amendments to CEDS Committee Procedural Rules. J. Basford SECONDED. The motion PASSED unanimously. A. Schwenger ABSTAINED.

4 – Discuss MA Rural Policy Advisory Commission outline for a *Rural Plan for the Commonwealth*

L. Dunlavy provided a brief overview of the Rural Policy Advisory Commission, which was created in 2016 and serves as a research body for issues critical to the welfare and vitality of rural communities. The Commission has been charged to create the first *Rural Plan for the Commonwealth*. The hope is that the plan will be used by State agencies and the legislature to see issues through a rural lens before enacting policies, instead of after. The Commission is made up of 15 people from rural parts of the state. The Commission has come up with priority focus areas for the plan, and are now testing these at public listening sessions around the state to make sure the right issues are captured, and identify anything that is missing. The Commission is also interested in identifying sub-regional differences among rural areas of the state. Dunlavy invited Committee members to attend the Franklin County listening session on Thursday, December 13 from 5-7 pm at Greenfield Community College Downtown building. She explained the agenda for the listening session will be a short slideshow about rural MA demographics, the focus areas identified by the Commission, and then an exercise to gather feedback.

5 – Discuss Update to the *Franklin County Regional Transportation Plan*

M. Mullaney, Transportation and GIS Program Manager II at FRCOG, introduced herself and M. Rhodes, Senior Land Use and Transportation Planner at FRCOG. Mullaney explained that an update to the Regional Transportation Plan is required by law every four years. The first Franklin County RTP was prepared in 1993. The plan takes a long-term, 20-year, look at issues and needs, and takes stock of current conditions in a formal way. The plan examines the entire transportation infrastructure system and assesses existing conditions, gaps, and needs, and also the financial implications of projects. Recommendations are made on a 20-year horizon and include projections for funding. The region's socio-economic context is also taken into consideration in projections. Mullaney noted that J. Atwood has participated with other Regional Planning Agencies to come up with populations and employment projections that are used in the plan.

Mullaney said that the RTP update will review past goals, which sometimes stay the same, and other times new focus areas come into play. An example is transportation safety and security, which became more of a focus after the events of 9/11. Each update also includes a list of the top 25 projects, and a report card on progress made on these projects since the last update. Any transportation projects receiving Federal transportation funding have to be listed in the RTP. The projects don't have to be well-developed to be listed in the plan. One example is in the 1993 plan, bringing passenger rail back to Franklin County was listed as a recommendation. Not everyone thought this was feasible, but projects need to start somewhere. Now the region has Amtrak service, with a pilot project to kick off in June to expand service. The RTP drives the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), which is an annual listing of construction projects to receive federal funding.

Mullaney said that of the top 25 projects in the last RTP update, currently 9 are under design or included in the TIP for construction funding. Four projects have been completed or are in progress, and a handful of projects still need to get started. Mullaney provided examples of recent projects completed, including passenger rail expansion, Complete Streets prioritization plans, culverts and Green Infrastructure projects, a bike parking program that installed close to 70 bike racks in communities, ADA transition plans, trail mapping, and Scenic Byways land protection projects that have conserved close to 2,000 acres. Upcoming projects include Erving streetscape and pedestrian improvements, Charlemont traffic calming, the Schell Bridge replacement, as well as the General Pierce Bridge.

FRCOG staff are conducting public outreach during the drafting of the update, which needs to be complete by May 2019. Four public meetings will be held throughout the County, as well as meetings with municipal and State officials, and presenting at meetings like the CEDS Committee. Outreach to social service agencies is also scheduled, and staff are coordinating with FRTA on outreach regarding transit as well as possible innovations for our transit system moving forward. An online survey is also available. Mullaney presented the schedule for the plan update. Public outreach will continue through the winter, with a full draft plan for public review ready in April 2019. In May 2019 the TPO endorses the final plan. The State will then present the plan to the Federal Highway Administration which will fully endorse it. This is key, because a plan is needed in order to have a Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), and if there is no TIP, then there is no federal funding for roads, bridges, or paths. The plan represents the behind the scenes work that supports these projects.

Mullaney asked for questions and feedback. A question was asked about the relationship between the plan and the State Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). Mullaney answered that the plan is a framework, while the CIP is a spending plan identifying where money will be spent in a particular year. The TIP is a reflection of the regional projects that have funding in the CIP. Sometimes projects on the CIP are not in the TIP, such as the General Pierce Bridge. In that case, the project is to be funded entirely with State funds, where projects on the TIP are being funded with Federal funds. P. Sloan commented about adding a goal for increasing resiliency to climate change. Mullaney said this is a growing area to focus on. A question was asked if there was any direct outreach to businesses. Mullaney said this is a challenge as businesses do not always want to provide feedback. A comment was made about how a focus on developing more outdoor recreation in the region could increase traffic. Mullaney mentioned that staff do have conversations with outdoor recreation businesses and are also launching a bike friendly business campaign that is reaching out to 300 businesses. Staff are also talking with the Chamber of Commerce and will add a link to the public survey to the Chamber's newsletter. M. Rhodes noted that staff have been in contact with employers to coordinate transit routes or vanpools to accommodate different shifts.

A comment was made that an increase in marijuana-related business will require more trucks, which have a hard time negotiating Route 2. Another comment was made about east-west rail through Greenfield. Mullaney noted it is in the plan, though it may take a long time to achieve. A comment was made that many rural towns are having a hard time maintaining their roads, and are only fixing what must be fixed today due to lack of funding. Does the plan include support to local towns? Mullaney answered this is included in the plan, and many of the town roads cannot receive federal funding so the plan advocates for more state money. The small bridge program has provided some funds.

Mullaney noted the expanded passenger rail service will begin in June, and that ridership needs to double over the three year pilot period to justify it continuing. The expanded service will allow for travel to and from NYC in one day. Ridership levels on the existing service are already above what was expected. Rhodes noted that for this plan update, newer technologies like self-driving cars and electric vehicles will be included. She responded to a comment about coordinating shifts in business parks to accommodate transit. Staff completed a survey of shift times in the industrial parks and many are on differing schedule and are hard to coordinate. Shift coordination could be included as part of future industrial park inventories.

A question was asked about bikeshare for the region. Mullaney answered staff are working on exploring options, including partnering with Valley Bike Share to the south to expand service through the valley. Currently Valley Bike is a dock system, but the future of bike share is in dock-less systems, which are also less expensive. Bikes can be left anywhere, but there are labor costs associated with swapping out the batteries in the bikes.

A comment was made that the new expanded train service will need significant marketing and publicity. Mullaney said staff are working on a project to market the new service now, and are partnering with the Chamber of Commerce and legislators. A suggestion was made to extend these efforts to Hartford and NYC to strengthen interest in visiting Franklin County. Atwood noted that the new parking garage in Greenfield is a huge asset for people wanting to park and take the train.

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

G. Dillensneider asked if there is any other business. N. Riebschlaeger mentioned that the community solar project in Wendell is not going to be feasible, due to the need to upgrade a local substation which would cost \$3.9 million. It was noted that interconnection to the grid has been an issue for other projects as well. The Selectboard is writing to legislators to try to find a solution.

G. Dillensneider asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

A. Schwenger MOVED to adjourn the meeting at 4:50 p.m. T. Hutcheson SECONDED the motion. The motion PASSED.

Respectfully submitted by:


Gary Dillensneider, Chair

