



Franklin Regional Council of Governments

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Committee

Date:	June 13, 2018
Time:	3:30 p.m.
Location:	12 Olive Street, Greenfield, MA
Duration:	1.5 hours
Facilitator:	Gary Dillensneider, Chair

CEDS Committee Attendees:

- John Baldwin, Greater Shelburne Falls Area Business Association
- Adrienne Bedaw, Town of Orange
- Natalie Blais, Franklin County Chamber of Commerce
- 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
- Michael McCusker, Town of Buckland
- Fran Pheeny, Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority
- Nan Riebschlaeger, Town of Wendell
- Bryan Smith, Town of Erving

FRCOG Staff:

- Jessica Atwood, Economic Development Program Manager
- Alyssa Larose, Senior Land Use & Natural Resource Planner

Guests:

- Jenna Day, RCAP Solutions Inc.
- Greenfield resident

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

The meeting was called to order at 3:33 p.m. by Chair G. Dillensneider. A round of introductions followed. N. Blais commented about the good work of J. Atwood representing Franklin County at the Western MA Developers Conference recently in Springfield.

2 – Vote to approve minutes from February 28, 2018 and April 25, 2018

At 3:36 p.m. G. Dillensneider asked for a vote to approve the February 28, 2018 meeting minutes. J. Baldwin noted that he was at the meeting but was not listed in the minutes. N. Blais noted she was not at the meeting although she is listed in the minutes. P. Crosby MOVED to approve the February 28, 2018 minutes with the changes to the attendee list. L. Dunlavy SECONDED. The motion PASSED unanimously.



At 3:36 p.m. G. Dillensneider asked for a vote to approve the April 25, 2018 meeting minutes. J. Baldwin MOVED to approve the April 25, 2018 minutes. L. Dunlavy SECONDED. The motion PASSED with one abstention.

3 – Review and Vote to Approve 2018 CEDS Annual Report

J. Atwood provided background on the CEDS Annual Report update. A 30 day public comment period ended on June 11. This Report is the third of four annual updates to the 2015 CEDS Plan, with updated socio-economic data, projects, and programs in the region. Completing the CEDS planning process allows the region to maintain eligibility for funding through the EDA.

Atwood presented changes to the Draft Report. The public comment period was advertised in the newspaper, through emails to boards and committees, and through the FRCOG newsletter. Atwood received requests for hardcopies and received five comments via email or phone conversations, which have been incorporated into the revised report. After the CEDS Committee votes on the report, it will then need to be adopted by the EDD Governing Board, which is the FRCOG Executive Committee, and the Franklin Regional Planning Board, before being submitted to EDA at the end of June. All comments received are recorded and submitted along with the report.

Atwood distributed hardcopies of the revised report and reviewed the changes. Atwood reported that one comment was to place greater emphasis on the role of broadband in the region and State economy, and that improving Franklin County’s economy with increased access to broadband helps the overall State economy too. The report now also notes the importance of broadband in building collaborations under Strategy #2 on page 42. On page 10, a change was made to state that while unemployment in the region is low, underemployment is a concern.

Atwood continued with revisions to the report. The draft report included a table with census tracts that had been nominated for designation as Opportunity Zones through the Federal Tax Bill. The program allows individual investors to offset capital gains taxes by investing in Opportunity Funds which are then directed to certify Census Tracts. Census Tracts in 14 towns were nominated and have since been certified, so the table was replaced with a map showing the certified areas.

A comment was received recommending that the health care sector be added as a strength in the SWOT table on page 28, and to note the new investment in health care facilities. These include Baystate Franklin’s expansion, and the Center for Wellness in downtown Greenfield. The report was also revised to recognize the region’s leadership in addressing substance abuse disorders such as the Opioid Task Force. The Center for Wellness was also added as an example of downtown revitalization on page 60. Another comment was received to add to the SWOT’s weakness table, the situation with rural schools in terms of inadequate funding for transportation, increasing costs and declining student population. A Committee member noted that not all school districts are K-12. Atwood answered that she would revise the language to be inclusive of all rural public schools.

Atwood noted that revisions were made to the new Economic Resilience Chapter that address what FRCOG and the region will do in the event of a natural or manmade disaster or economic disruption. A separate A statement was added about the outreach to be conducted as part of preparing the 2020 CEDS Plan that will be specific local and regional emergency economic planning. Other revisions

include updates to passenger rail with the recent announcement of additional train service between Greenfield and Springfield expected in 2019. FRCOG and PVPC will be involved with measuring the service and to help market and encourage use of the service.

Atwood noted that the previous strategy about economic resilience was revised to emphasize the stress placed on local and regional economies by significant economic shifts, such as was experienced during the Great Recession. Atwood asked if there were any questions or comments about the revisions to the report. Being none, G. Dillensneider asked for a motion to approve the report as revised. T. Hutcheson MOVED to approve the 2018 CEDS Annual Report as revised. N. Riebschlaeger SECONDED. The motion PASSED unanimously. The Committee thanked J. Atwood for her work on the report.

4 – Discuss & Vote to Continue Current CEDS Committee Membership

J. Atwood reviewed the current bylaws for Committee membership. She noted that the membership is updated every three years, but the CEDS planning cycle is five years. She would like to take the next year to review the bylaws to see how they could be amended to better align with the planning cycle. Atwood would like to also review the total number of Committee seats, and conduct focused outreach to groups participating in the CEDS but are not currently represented. Currently there are 50 seats on the Committee, with 26 appointments, and a quorum of 9 which can be difficult to achieve. One example of a group with regional representation is the Transportation Planning Organization. Having seats for sub-regions rather than every town is one option to explore. In order to facilitate the study of possible membership changes, Atwood proposed to continue the current Committee membership for one year.

Atwood asked for discussion. Being none, N. Blais MOVED to continue the current CEDS Committee membership for one year. T. Hutcheson SECONDED. The motion PASSED unanimously.

5 – Review of MA Rural Policy Advisory Commission Report

L. Dunlavy provided background on the MA Rural Policy Advisory Commission. It was created in 2015 by the MA legislature with a mission to weigh in on policies that could impact rural areas and to enhance the economic vitality of rural areas. J. Atwood has pulled together information that helps provide a better understanding of what rural MA looks like and how western and eastern MA are different. The Commission consists of Dunlavy, who serves as the Governor's appointee for Franklin County, and appointments from every rural area in the State, and some specialized appointments.

Dunlavy noted that the definition of rural is always changing, but for the Commission's purpose, it is defined as communities with a population density less than 500 people per square mile. Using this definition, rural areas comprise about 13% of the State's population, and 59% of the State's land area. Once this definition was established, FRCOG staff created maps showing differences between the State as a whole and the rural areas. Population was mapped first. Franklin County and Berkshire County have declining population. This is significant as more than 183 Federal funding programs use population in their formulas. Declining population can also affect schools, the ability of the region to

attract workers and participants for local government etc. These impacts and how to reverse these trends could be a primary topic when updating the CEDS plan.

In terms of demographics, less than 5% of Franklin County's population is under the age of 5. The outer Cape is similar, and have become a partner in rural policy issues. Rural areas are also getting older, especially in the southern Berkshires and Cape Cod. The State as a whole is growing in population due to people moving into the State, many of whom are foreign born, but this growth has largely been in eastern MA. Median household incomes are higher in eastern MA, with housing in rural areas, except the Cape, cheaper. Employment in manufacturing is strong outside of the I-495 belt, especially in the Black River Valley area. Professional and technology jobs are clustered in eastern MA. Self-employment is more dominant in western MA.

Franklin and Hampshire Counties are more reliant on non-profit and government jobs than other areas of the State. This includes jobs at UMass, which relies heavily on Federal funding. Major cuts to Federal grant programs would hit our counties especially hard. A map was presented that shows communities without broadband, transit, higher education, and services. These are concentrated in more urban areas. A comment was made that the Northampton Career Center is now closed, which needs to be updated on the map.

Equalized value growth, which is used to determine Proposition 2.5 thresholds, was examined. Communities can increase their municipal budgets by an increase in taxes that is no more than 2.5% from the previous year plus any new growth. In our region there has been no equalized value growth, preventing towns from increasing revenue and providing municipal services. This is not just a rural problem. A comment was made that there is also a maximum levy beyond which a town cannot do an override. The MA Department of Revenue is aware of the issue but do not have an answer.

A comment was made whether it is feasible to conduct a survey to find out why people move to or away from the region, to have a better idea of how to make the area more attractive. It was noted that conducting a survey may be a good idea, potentially in conjunction with the Pioneer Valley Realtors Association. A question was asked about projections into the future for rural towns, and how will towns and school districts deal with a continued decline in students. J. Atwood answered that a committee is working on population projections with the UMass Donahue Institute and MassDOT that will be released in the fall. The projections will cover the State, county, and town levels. For Franklin County, preliminary projections show a continued decline, but do not take into account broadband or some other factors that may impact future population trends.

A comment was made that it would be helpful to compare Franklin County's demographics with other counties to see how we compare. A comment was made that it might be useful to look at different economic models for long term planning such as a steady state economy, as opposed to a growth model. How can the county make the most of what it has and have an economy that works without a lot of growth.

A comment was made about a campaign in Vermont to get people to relocate to that state. The campaign invites people to a reception where they can talk to realtors, employers etc. One complaint about the program was that economic development was not included enough in the program. Another piece of the program is that the state offers \$10,000 to a household to move to Vermont. N. Blais noted that the Chamber of Commerce is interested in exploring a similar program.

F. Pheeny commented that the lack of available housing and the cost of construction is a hurdle. When applying for funding, rural projects are competing against larger housing developments in other parts of the state. The cost of construction is the same in our area as it is in eastern MA. There is also a lack of rental housing which creates a real barrier for people to come to our area. Younger adults are not always interested in homeownership. A question was asked whether short-term rentals were a problem in terms of reducing the availability of rental housing. F. Pheeny answered yes, in some communities. It is a bigger problem in eastern MA. N. Blais noted there is not good data, and that the Chamber has tried to pull together information. There has been a decline in B&Bs. A comment was made that if there was a way to get some seed money, it may be possible to build small communities with sweat equity that are self-sustaining. In the 1970s a number of organizations sprang up to do this but tailed off in the 1980s.

5 – 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 4:26 p.m. P. Crosby SECONDED the motion. The motion PASSED.

Respectfully submitted by:


Gary Dillensneider, Chair

