



Franklin Regional Council of Governments

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Committee

Date:	June 12, 2019
Time:	3:30 p.m.
Location:	12 Olive Street, Greenfield, MA
Duration:	1.5 hours
Facilitator:	Gary Dillensneider, Chair

CEDS Committee Attendees:

- MJ Adams, City of Greenfield
- Jim Basford, FRCOG Executive Committee
- Patricia Crosby, MassHire Franklin Hampshire Regional Employment Board
- Gary Dillensneider, Committee Chair, Franklin County Community Development Corporation
- Linda Dunlavy, FRCOG Executive Committee
- Martha Field, Greenfield Community College
- Tom Hutcheson, Franklin Regional Planning Board
- Glen Ohlund, Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority
- Art Schwenger, Town of Heath
- Bryan Smith, Town of Erving
- Carolyn Shores Ness, Town of Deerfield
- Gabriele Voelker, Town of Orange
- John Waite, Franklin County Community Development Corporation

FRCOG Staff:

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

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

The meeting was called to order at 3:35 p.m. by Chair G. Dillensneider. A round of introductions followed.

2 – Vote to approve minutes from April 24, 2019

At 3:36 p.m. G. Dillensneider asked for a vote to approve the April 24, 2019 meeting minutes. T. Hutcheson MOVED to approve the April 24, 2019 minutes. MJ Adams SECONDED. The motion PASSED unanimously.

3 – Review and Vote to Approve 2019 CEDS Annual Report

J. Atwood presented revisions to the 2019 CEDS Annual Report based on comments received during the public comment period. She reminded the Committee that this is the fourth and final update to the

2015 CEDS Plan, and follows the EDA report framework. Having an approved annual report maintains the region's eligibility for certain funding programs from EDA.

Changes made to the draft included adding a sentence about the burden of car ownership due to the lack of a robust transit service. Atwood added mention about the closure of the Christian Redemption Academy in Northfield. There have been no plans announced yet for future of the campus. In the SWOT table, under opportunities, a sentence was added about the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership to reflect that one of the project's goal is municipal financial sustainability. On page 75, the update regarding the need for a poultry processing facility was revised to reflect that a small scale processing facility has been approved in Sunderland. Under the economic resilience chapter, major economic recession was added in the table of vulnerabilities.

Atwood asked if Committee members had any other comments on the draft report. C. Shores Ness noted that under winter storms, the report may want to list ice storms separately. With climate change, the potential for ice storms is increasing, and they can cause more disruption than blizzards.

At 3:44 p.m. G. Dillensneider asked for a motion to approve the report with the revisions discussed. P. Crosby MOVED to approve the 2019 CEDS Annual Report. T. Hutcheson SECONDED. The motion PASSED unanimously.

4 – Discussion of Regional Priorities

J. Atwood reviewed several initiatives that are in development and/or accepting public comment. At the December CEDS meeting, the Rural Policy Advisory Commission (RPAC) and Rural Policy Plan (RPP) were discussed. L. Dunlavy presented the history of the RPAC and the Commission's goal of advocating for rural regions and encouraging the State to look at policies through a rural lens. The RPP will help with this process. L. Dunlavy presented the focus areas for the plan. The plan will be clear and succinct, and will highlight sub-regional differences in rural areas. Each focus area will identify a goal, key issues, best practices and programs, and recommendations. The RPAC will review and prioritize short and long term recommendations. The RPP is just focusing on issues that disproportionately affect rural areas. A dozen listening sessions were held across the State, including at GCC Downtown in December 2018. A survey also went out to rural municipal governments. These served as the basis for the RPP. Focus area stakeholder meetings are now being held to drill down further more into each topic.

J. Atwood presented the list of focus areas and asked the Committee to identify priorities for Franklin County. T. Hutcheson noted that economic development is a priority, and that it looks different in rural areas, especially when there is no public water and sewer infrastructure. An example is Massworks funding. The smaller pool of STRAP funding is set aside for small towns, but is very narrow in what it can fund – only public safety issues in roads. Conway is trying to get help with its highway garage, but it's not eligible under the larger Massworks program, because it is not considered infrastructure that is tied to economic development. L. Dunlavy noted that State officials have said Franklin County does well with Massworks. She reported that she has had to correct them to say the county does well with STRAP, but not at with other Massworks grants because of the criteria.

C. Shores Ness noted the need to promote sustainable resource-based businesses, whether food or forest products. The State benefits by having a local food source, and should support local food businesses. T. Hutcheson stated that value added farm products is an example of developing the local economy in a way that ties the community together. The State needs a program that focuses on adding value to local economic development. It was noted that local processing should be promoted, rather than bringing in outside businesses, and that consumer education around buying local could use a boost.

J. Waite added that incentives for locally-owned businesses that support the local economy rather than taking money out of it should be prioritized. It was noted that support for businesses in villages is also needed. M. Field suggested the HIP program and ability to use SNAP benefits at farm stands and farmers markets should be expanded. A comment was made that the focus on small and home-based businesses leads back to broadband. A method of keeping track of the number of home-based businesses is needed to show the State how important broadband is. A comment was made that there are many connections between the focus areas. Reversing population trends may be more of an overall goal than a focus area for the RPP. Agri-tourism and the potential to bring more farms to the region should be called out.

A. Schwenger commented that rural areas are important to the State, and that the plan needs to demonstrate and showcase this. L. Dunlavy noted this was brought up at the last RPAC meeting and that the introduction to the RPP will highlight the assets of rural Massachusetts. T. Hutcheson commented that rural areas are more sensitive to change, such as the loss of one business, because there is less redundancy. The importance of regional interdependence in rural areas because of the small economies of scale should be highlighted in the plan. Rural residents still need the same goods and services.

C. Shores Ness noted that the State should provide funding for outdoor recreation facilities. Recreation tourism is promoted on the rivers, but the State does not provide funding for access points. A question was asked about what is meant by land use. L. Dunlavy answered that recent population projections show a steep increase in the Boston area and a decline in many rural areas. An overall recommendation of the RPP will be for the State to develop a land use strategy to invest thoughtfully and encourage a more even distribution of population growth, while recognizing the need to balance environmental resources with growth. A discussion followed about how east-west rail might impact the region.

L. Dunlavy said the draft plan will be reviewed in July by the RPAC, with chapters published on the FRCOG website in August for public review. The final plan will be rolled out in September/October to match the legislative schedule.

T. Hutcheson commented that it would be helpful to have a formal study done on rural economics. M. Field noted that such a study might show that investments in rural areas have a greater impact than in urban areas. C. Shores Ness noted that climate change resilience should be considered in any decisions. A comment was made about encouraging the creation of cooperatives in the agriculture and forest product sectors, and across all sectors, to help with succession planning of small businesses. Cooperative ownership would help keep more businesses in local ownership. J. Waite noted that more capital is needed in rural areas. The proposed Green Bank could be more helpful to rural areas. It was noted that educational institutions could also help.

J. Atwood stated that the State Economic Development Plan is also under development. It is required by law for the Governor to create a 4-year plan for each term. Governor Baker decided to create a new plan for this term. The MA Economic Development Council is made up of public and private representatives statewide. The Council is gathering information through regional engagement sessions and collecting comments online. CEDS Committee members may want to submit comments online to ensure our region is heard. Some of the comments from the last plan included supporting collaborative workspaces and makerspaces, which became State programs.

The State will also include “deep dives” into certain key economic sectors, including manufacturing, life sciences, and one on the rural economy. Atwood presented topic areas for the plan and noted that the State is interested in cutting edge technology and exciting innovations in urban areas, but we are also advocating to recognize innovations in outdoor recreation and working landscapes. A. Schwenger noted that with development of broadband in rural communities there will be a need for website development assistance for businesses.

P. Crosby noted that the funding formula for career centers needs to be fixed. Current funding is not enough to keep a basic employment office open in the region. There is still a need for training and education; with declining federal funds, MA needs to reinvest in this basic public service. J. Waite commented that having strong downtowns is key to economic development and to curb sprawl. MJ Adams described the vacant storefront program that Greenfield applied for and was recently awarded. It will provide a financial incentive to new businesses that locate in vacant downtown storefronts through a State tax credit.

J. Atwood described the economic development planning process for the 2020 CEDS Plan. The plan will include an expanded data analysis section. Forums will be held on specific topic areas. FRCOG is working together with GCC and others on planning the forums. A new SWOT analysis will be done to confirm the region’s innovations clusters. Atwood asked the Committee for thoughts on the next five-year plan. Examples include redeveloping vacant mill sites; the need for new industrial park land; exploring new models for transit such as micro-transit; and the need for more daycare options to support working parents.

T. Hutcheson commented that a priority should be to develop the sectors that are already thriving, farm and food production, manufacturing, etc. and support markets for new value added products. MJ Adams noted the emerging recovery health care specialty in the region. A. Schwenger commented that a lot of small businesses are providing health and wellness services. Health care is changing, and needs to be thought about differently. C. Shores Ness asked whether a planned industrial park is outdated. It was noted that we do have industries that need developable land and current parks are mostly built out. MJ Adams talked about the plans to expand the I-91 industrial park in Greenfield.

J. Waite asked whether redeveloping vacant mill sites should still be a priority, given how difficult it can be. A discussion about the emerging marijuana industry in the region and state. It is becoming a big industry in rural areas but there is a lack of data and focus on it as an economic driver. There is a need to plan for how it will be a long-term industry as other states legalize it. G. Voelker noted that Orange has a workforce housing shortage.

Discussion followed on how to make use of the federal Opportunity Zone designations in the county. A group from the region will be attending an Opportunity Zone Academy to learn more about how to

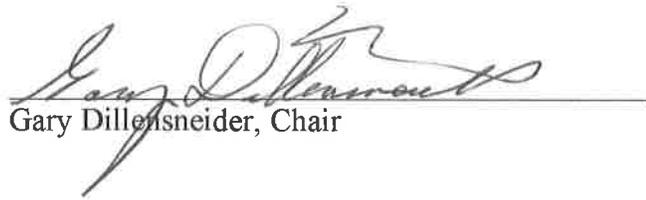
build capacity in the region to take advantage of the designation. Investors need projects that are ready to go. This may be an opportunity to pool capital for smaller projects.

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 4:58 p.m. C. Shores Ness SECONDED the motion. The motion PASSED.

Respectfully submitted by:



Gary Dillensneider, Chair