



Franklin Regional Council of Governments

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Committee

Date:	November 19, 2019
Time:	3:30 p.m.
Location:	12 Olive Street, Greenfield, MA
Duration:	1.5 hours
Facilitator:	L. Dunlavy, FRCOG; G. Dillensneider, Chair

CEDS Committee Members:

- MJ Adams, City of Greenfield
- Teri Anderson, MassHire Franklin Hampshire Career Center
- Marie Breheny, Greenfield Community College
- AJ Bresciano, Greenfield Savings Bank
- Patricia Crosby, Franklin Hampshire Regional Employment Board
- Jenna Day, RCAP Solutions
- Gary Dillensneider, Franklin County Community Development Corporation
- Gina Govoni, Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority/Rural Development, Inc.
- Tom Hutcheson, Franklin Regional Planning Board
- Clare Higgins, Community Action Pioneer Valley
- Walter Ramsey, Town of Montague
- John Waite, Franklin County Community Development Corporation

Guests:

- Dawn Creighton, Greenfield Community College
- Martha Field, Greenfield Community College

FRCOG Staff:

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

1 – Call the meeting to order, and round of introductions: Linda Dunlavy, FRCOG

The meeting was called to order at 3:33 p.m. by L. Dunlavy. A round of introductions followed.

2 – Elect Chair and Vice-Chair: Linda Dunlavy, FRCOG

L. Dunlavy stated that Gary Dillensneider volunteered to serve as Chair of the reformulated CEDS Committee. He was the Chair of the previous CEDS Committee, and only missed one meeting in 20

years. Patricia Crosby has volunteered to serve as Vice Chair, and was an active member of the previous CEDS Committee.

At 3:37 p.m. MJ Adams MOVED to elect G. Dillensneider as Chair, and P. Crosby as Vice Chair, of the CEDS Committee. T. Hutcheson SECONDED. The motion PASSED unanimously.

3 – Vote to Approve Minutes from June 12, 2019: Gary Dillensneider, Chair

J. Atwood noted that even though the CEDS Committee has been restructured since the June 12, 2019 meeting, the Committee still needs to acknowledge those minutes. G. Dillensneider asked for a motion to approve the minutes from June 12, 2019. MJ Adams MOVED to approve the June 12, 2019 minutes. T. Hutcheson SECONDED. The motion PASSED unanimously, with T. Anderson abstaining.

4 – Review and Discussion of the CEDS Planning Framework: Jessica Atwood, FRCOG

J. Atwood provided an overview of economic development. The purpose is to enhance the overall environment that supports economic prosperity, and encompasses many areas of expertise and experience, including workforce development, business development, infrastructure, governments, and real estate. The CEDS planning framework was created by the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA), a division of the Department of Commerce. It requires a 5-year plan for the region that outlines goals and strategies. It serves as a mechanism for bringing partners together and leveraging or building on the strengths of our region. By participating in the CEDS framework, our region maintains its eligibility to apply for EDA construction or non-construction grants.

Atwood explained the role of the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG). The FRCOG Planning Department implements region-wide initiatives and provides municipal technical assistance in a variety of topics, and serves as the coordinator of the CEDS program. In 2006, FRCOG was designated by the EDA as an Economic Development District (EDD), allowing FRCOG to apply for planning grant funds for staff time and to make the region eligible for other EDA grants. The EDD Governing Board is made up of the FRCOG Executive Committee. The Franklin Regional Planning Board, with members from each of the 26 towns, also serves an advisory role to the Planning Department and is part of the CEDS process. FRCOG has a scope of work from EDA that directs the CEDS activities; creating the CEDS plan is one of the activities.

FRCOG has led the CEDS planning process since 1995. In 2019, the CEDS Region was restructured. The region previously included Amherst, Athol, and Philipston, but these towns are included in other CEDS regions. The FRCOG CEDS region is now only comprised of Franklin County towns. Atwood noted that staff will continue to work with neighboring regions on initiatives. The CEDS Committee was also restructured in 2019 to better highlight economic development partners. The new composition includes geographic representatives from Greenfield, Central, East, and West County; regional organizations that focus on workforce development or education, entrepreneurship or business development, business groups or chambers of commerce, social and human service organizations, and/or government service; a representative from the FRPB; and At-Large representatives. In total the Committee has 19 members. Additional people can be added to the email list if interested, and all meetings are posted to the FRCOG website in advance.

Atwood provided an overview of the CEDS Plan. The Plan identifies regional economic development goals and the strategies to accomplish them. It is a five-year plan with annual reports. The next plan will be submitted in June 2020. The plan serves as a roadmap for FRCOG and partners to work together, and maintains the region's eligibility for certain EDA funding. A project/entity wanting to apply for EDA funds in the next five years needs to be listed in the CEDS Plan. Required elements of the plan include a summary background of the region, a Strength-Weakness-Opportunity-Threats (SWOT) Analysis, strategies including economic resilience, and how progress will be evaluated using performance measures, which are reported on each year.

Atwood presented an overview of the current economic environment in Franklin County. She noted that new U.S. Census data will not be released for a few more weeks. At the next meeting, she will have more information to share. Although the CEDS plan will be shorter, the appendix will include data that is helpful for grant applications. Atwood explained that population projections for the county completed by UMass and MassDOT show a slight uptick in the next ten years, then a decline in population for the next 20 years. All areas of MA are expected to increase in population over the same timeframe, except for Franklin County, Berkshire County, and the Cape. The projections do not assume impacts from sea level rise. Franklin County's population skews older than the State and is less diverse. When looking at neighboring counties in New Hampshire and Vermont, they are seeing similar trends in population.

Atwood explained that the labor force and number of employed has increased since the end of the recession. Residents are more likely to be employed in not-for-profit, self-employed, or government sectors than private for-profit employers. The size of private businesses is also small in the region. A large employer for Franklin County has 50 employees. A Committee member commented that it would be helpful to see pre-recession figures to see how the economy changed. A question was asked about what caused the dramatic increase in labor force between 2017 and 2018. Atwood said the trend is similar in other parts of the State but was unsure.

Income levels in Franklin County are significantly lower than the State, but comparable to national figures. This does not take into account the cost of living. Average earning per job in Franklin County has been the lowest in the State since 2000. Franklin County is not isolated, with 23% of workers come into the county for jobs; 31% live and work in the county; and 46% commute outside of the county for work. This is similar to other counties. There is also workforce flow between states.

The CEDS Plan uses industry clusters to identify competitive advantages, Defining clusters is not easy, and traditional definitions don't always line up with Franklin County. The U.S. Census Bureau's County Business Patterns gives a picture of key private sector industries, but does not include the public sector and self-employment. The region has seen recent increases in manufacturing and education services. Manufacturing in Franklin County is double the percent of employees than the state and nation. Non-employer statistics can capture self-employment in the region, though there is not a direct correlation to employment. For agriculture, the USDA Census of Agriculture provides data every five years on farm operations. Between 2012 and 2017, the number of farming operations in the county increased by 6%, compared to a statewide decrease of 7%. Atwood noted that there are clusters not defined by the U.S. Census or USDA that have traditionally been important to Franklin County, including adventure tourism/outdoor recreation, the creative economy, the green/sustainable economy, forest, farm and food systems, and the knowledge creation economy.

Atwood presented a list of potential strategic partners in Franklin County as well as outside of the county. She noted that much of what drives our initiatives is public investment by the state and federal government, making it important to align efforts with state plans. An example is the Rural Policy Plan (RPP). L. Dunlavy provided an overview of the RPP, which was spearheaded by the MA Rural Policy Advisory Commission. The Plan was launched in October and aims to educate lawmakers about rural conditions in the State and what is needed to strengthen the vitality of small towns.

Atwood asked the Committee to begin thinking about a vision for the region in 20 years. She shared what has been the approach to economic development traditionally, and asked for thoughts from the Committee. A comment was made that with a declining, old white population, it makes sense to revisit the approach and ask why aren't people coming here, and how can we attract a more diverse population. Atwood provided some examples of shared values for working on economic development and asked for comments. A comment was made that the term "community character" jumps out as potentially unwelcoming to newcomers.

A comment was made to add language about supporting a diversity of economic sectors, growing businesses from within, and stronger language to encourage living wage jobs. It was noted that the "nurture greater local control / independence" language can be problematic – local control can keep people out. A regional approach where towns have the tools to create economic resilience and independence was discussed. Another comment was in regards to making sure the State recognizes the challenges of rural areas. There need to be equitable ways to meet the needs of rural communities. A Committee member commented that focusing on self-reliance and import substitution could be a goal. Another comment was to focus on welcoming young people, innovation, and more diversity, which could help draw innovative employers too. Atwood said she would revise the shared values and vision based on Committee comments.

Atwood reviewed the SWOT analysis framework and inputs that go into the CEDS plan. Inputs come from the Committee, strategic partners, neighboring regions and the State, and from a solicitation to identify local projects. The Plan can't cover everything but should identify what we can work together on. A Committee member asked what research of other rural areas is being done. Atwood answered there are some regions with similar characteristics. In the RPP, examples from Maine and Vermont often came up.

Atwood discussed project solicitation for the CEDS Plan. She explained that any projects seeking EDA funding need to be in the Plan. However, for projects not seeking EDA funding, it is still helpful to be included when pursuing other funding. A few example projects were provided. She noted that EDA funding is very competitive, and only government and non-profit entities are eligible to apply. Some EDA priorities include brownfields redevelopment, infrastructure to support business development, and specifically new job creation.

Atwood noted that the project solicitation will be online, and passed out a draft hardcopy of the form. She would like input from the Committee on the form and who should be forward the information on how to submit projects, and how to get input on the vision, goals, and strategies for the Plan. The challenge for the CEDS Plan is to be comprehensive but also focused on strategies that can be implemented. A community-wide survey was discussed. It was noted that a number of partners are in the process of doing strategic plans and have surveys out already.

5 – Next Steps: Jessica Atwood, FRCOG

Atwood discussed next steps and a proposed meeting schedule with the Committee. She asked if the Committee was agreeable to the schedule of four more meetings through June 2020. The Committee asked to have the meetings scheduled ahead of time. Atwood will send out the slides from the meeting to the Committee, and will ask for feedback on specific items.

6 – 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 4:48 p.m. P. Crosby SECONDED the motion. The motion PASSED.

Respectfully submitted by:



Gary Dillensneider, Chair