



# Franklin Regional Council of Governments

## Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Committee

Date:	April 9, 2020
Time:	3:00 p.m.
Location:	Virtual Meeting via Zoom due to COVID-19 state of emergency. (Meeting ID: 640 658 461)
Duration:	1 hour, 10 minutes
Facilitator:	J. Atwood

### CEDS Committee Attendees:

- MJ Adams, City of Greenfield
- Teri Anderson, MassHire Franklin Hampshire Career Center
- Marie Breheny, Greenfield Community College
- Patricia Crosby, MassHire Franklin Hampshire Regional Employment Board
- Jenna Day, RCAP Solutions
- Gary Dillensneider, FCCDC Loan Review Committee
- 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
- Nan Riebschlaeger, Wendell Energy Committee and Quabbin Mediation
- Diana Szynal, Franklin County Chamber of Commerce
- John Waite, Franklin County Community Development Corporation

### FRCOG Staff:

- Linda Dunlavy, Executive Director
- Peggy Sloan, Director of Planning and Development
- Jessica Atwood, Economic Development Program Manager
- Liz Jacobson-Carroll, Administrative Services Assistant

### **1 – Call the meeting to order, and round of introductions: Jessica Atwood, FRCOG**

At 3:00 p.m., J. Atwood called the meeting to order. The meeting was held via the online Zoom application, due to the COVID-19 state of emergency preventing in-person meetings. Atwood announced the online participants.

### **2 – Vote to Approve Minutes from February 11, 2020: Jessica Atwood, FRCOG**

Approval of the February 11, 2020 minutes was tabled for the next meeting.

### 3 – CEDS Planning and the COVID-19 State of Emergency: Jessica Atwood, FRCOG

J. Atwood reviewed recent activities of FRCOG’s Economic Development Planning Program in response to the COVID-19 state of emergency. Activities included gathering business resources and guidance, and sharing it with regional partners and municipalities and posting it online and via social media. Staff also worked with partners in Franklin County and across the Pioneer Valley to conduct a survey of business and organizations to better understand the economic impact of this crisis.

*The Impact of COVID-19: Pioneer Valley Business/Organization Survey* was released online on March 24. The same day, Gov. Baker issued an order for all non-essential businesses to cease in-person operations, and the MA DPH issued a stay at home advisory, which are now in effect through May 4. Since then, the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, allocating \$2.2 trillion to individuals and businesses impacted by the pandemic and economic downturn, was enacted. The survey ended on March 31, and had 284 respondents from Franklin, Hampshire and Hampden counties. Information gathered in the survey will be used to advocate for resources, she explained.

J. Atwood summarized survey results from Franklin County based businesses and organizations. There were 139 respondents, or 40% of the total respondents, based in Franklin County. Eighty-seven percent of respondents reported a negative impact on business, 68% of those “significantly” or “severely negative.” In response to the question of “at this rate, how long do you estimate your business/organization can operate with your current cash flow and/or reserves?”, 19% responded less than a month; 38% responded 1-3 months; 12% responded 4-12 months; 19% responded 1+ year or indefinitely; and the remaining 11% didn’t know. Respondents reported that they are being impacted in many ways, with declines in sales and clients, and cancelled or postponed events and contracts chief among them. The full results of the survey is available on the FRCOG website.

Local respondents indicated plans to use grant funding (if available), unemployment insurance, potential offers from suppliers/lenders to delay payments, and new or re-financed business loans, among other possible resources. Open-ended survey questions showed interest in financial support for payroll and the implementation of safety equipment and protocols; expanded unemployment benefits and support for laid-off workers; deferment or relief of mortgage or rent payments; business technical assistance; additional staff or volunteers; IT or broadband support, including internet access at employees’ homes; and the deferment or reduction of tax payments. Additional responses mentioned the need for help with debt management, transitioning business models, marketing, post-crisis scaling-up of operations, restoring community confidence, re-engaging advertisers, and accessing alternate suppliers.

J. Atwood said that the federal CARES Act will distribute supplemental funding to federal agencies, including the Economic Development Administration, the Department of Agriculture’s Rural Development program, the Small Business Administration, the Department of Labor, and the Housing and Urban Development’s Community Development Block Grant program. She noted that funding for the latter will come through the state, and that in Franklin County, the City of Greenfield is the only mini-entitlement community that does not need to apply, and will automatically receive grant funding. MJ Adams indicated that she, J. Atwood, J. Waite, and W. Ramsey have discussed using past CDBG resources to provide help to small businesses.

T. Anderson announced that the Career Center is operating remotely, and its website includes two new resource pages. She noted that the CARES Act unemployment provisions will not be ready until the end of April, but that payments will be retro-active. The counseling team reports receiving approximately 100 unemployment-related calls per day, and the business team is working with employers who are hiring, she said.

J. Atwood reported that a new Notice of Funding Opportunity for EDA funds is expected to be release in the next 2-3 weeks. Currently the FRCOG's preliminary requests to the EDA are to:

- Capitalize programs to provide direct investment in private for-profit businesses and non-profit organizations using loan-grant combinations, such as discounted loans or forgivable loans.
- Fund programs to provide business technical assistance, counseling and coaching to private businesses/organizations. Allow these entities to scale up staffing and to procure consultant and service providers to provide targeted assistance to businesses/organizations in need.
- Fund CEDS projects that address barriers to accessing employment and long-term infrastructure needs.
- Adjust match requirements and increase FRCOG's EDD planning staff award.

J. Waite indicated that the FCCDC has been administering CDBG and EDA revolving loan funds (RLF) for 25 years, and would be happy to administer new EDA funds to capitalize an RLF and for expanded technical assistance. He is hesitant to encourage local businesses to take on additional debt, which may be possible for the few that are well-established. J. Atwood noted that FCCDC's strong relationships with surrounding CDCs may yield collaboration on EDA funding requests, and that she is advocating for a reduction in the EDA's requirement for a 50% match with non-federal funds. J. Day suggested further elaboration of technical assistance requests.

L. Dunlavy reported that US Congressmen Richard Neal and Jim McGovern have encouraged her to think about requests for infrastructure, as that there may be opportunity for transformational projects to be undertaken. Water and wastewater infrastructure is badly needed in the region, and may be an appropriate focus, she indicated.

C. Higgins described a pronounced need for larger spaces to accommodate Community Action's public services for the next 18-20 months, noting that small church basements and the like do not allow for social-distancing when accessing emergency resources.

In summary, J. Atwood stated that requests for COVID-19 emergency resources will be incorporated into the new CEDS Plan. While the plan had been drafted based on the most recent data available, she will incorporate the survey results on the current crisis to provide context.

#### **4 – Review and Discussion of CEDS Plan Project Proposals, and Draft Goals and Objectives: Jessica Atwood, FRCOG**

In response to a January invitation sent to the 26 member municipalities and 37 non-profit and government entities, J. Atwood received over 30 project proposals. Projects proposed included infrastructure, development or re-development of a structure, cluster development, programmatic support, and a revolving loan fund. J. Atwood reviewed the projects submitted.

In response to questions, P. Sloan described the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership and the proposed Forest Center. J. Atwood expanded on proposals to foster the Creative Economy, and to conduct a Deerfield River Outdoor Recreation study. D. Syzmal explained the reasoning behind the request to do a CiderDays economic impact study. Further discussion identified Erving as a location needing a public water supply study. J. Atwood indicated that additional submissions may be considered. While all submitted project ideas will be included in the appendix, the CEDS Plan will highlight those proposals aligned with the Plan's vision and goals, have an established implementation team and next steps identified.

J. Atwood requested feedback on the draft of a goals and objectives. Members suggested the inclusion of goals pertaining to employment equity, career advancement, job quality enhancement, improvement of working environments, access to supportive services, a social assistance sector, a food system resiliency plan, transportation infrastructure, access to safe housing, availability of housing for various income levels, equitable wealth creation and financial security.

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

J. Waite announced a FCCDC initiative to develop a grant pool of a few hundred thousand dollars for awarding to struggling small businesses. The fund would be comparable to CISA's emergency fund for small farms, and the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts' emergency fund for non-profit organizations. Ideally, flexible private capital will be available before government relief funds arrive, he indicated.

J. Atwood reviewed the schedule for creating the 2020 CEDS Plan, including distributing a preliminary draft plan to the Committee on April 30 and a virtual Committee meeting on May 4 at 1 pm.

The meeting adjourned at 4:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by:

Gary Dillensneider, Chair