



Franklin Regional Council of Governments

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Committee

Date:	May 4, 2020
Time:	1:00 p.m.
Location:	Virtual Meeting via Zoom due to COVID-19 state of emergency.
Duration:	1 hour, 15 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 & Redevelopment Authority
- Tom Hutcheson, Franklin Regional Planning Board
- Walter Ramsey, Town of Montague
- Bryan Smith, Town of Erving
- Diana Szynal, Franklin County Chamber of Commerce
- John Waite, Franklin County Community Development Corporation

Guests:

- Judy Raper, Greenfield Community College

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 roll call for attendance: Jessica Atwood, FRCOG

At 1:01 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 on minutes from February 11, 2020 and April 9, 2020: Jessica Atwood, FRCOG

T. Anderson moved to approve the February 11, 2020 minutes, MJ Adams seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously with B. Smith abstaining.

MJ Adams moved to approve the April 9, 2020 minutes, with clerical amendments; T. Anderson seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

3 – Update on economic recovery efforts due to COVID-19 pandemic: L. Dunlavy, FRCOG

L. Dunlavy reported that the FRCOG is communicating with Franklin Region Economic Development Initiative (FREDI) organizations (including Community Action, Franklin County Chamber of Commerce, Franklin County Community Development Corporation (FCCDC), Franklin County Regional Housing & Redevelopment Authority, Greenfield Community College, MassHire Franklin-Hampshire Career Center and Workforce Board), as well as other local organizations and leaders including CISA, Community Foundation of Western Mass, Franklin County Sheriff's office, Franklin County Probate Judge, GADC, and Mayor Wedegartner to ensure that local needs are addressed in the post-pandemic recovery. She continued that the FRCOG is also supporting the MA Rural Policy Advisory Commission as it too is looking for opportunities to collaborate and jointly advocate. Lists of priorities and immediate needs – with sections on economic relief, municipal relief and infrastructure – are being developed and will be shared with legislators Comerford, Hines, Blais, Mark, and Whipps, and with aides to McGovern and Neal.

J. Waite reported on that the FCCDC's efforts to secure and distribute federal, state, and local emergency funding. It has been busy facilitating applications to the US Small Business Administration's Paycheck Protection Program (PPP). At last count, \$50 million of this federal funding was distributed through Greenfield Savings Bank and Greenfield Cooperative Bank. Waite anticipates applying for additional small business revolving loan fund from the U.S. Economic Development Administration. He continued that towns are working on using their federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) money to award small grants to struggling businesses. The FCCDC is also working with CISA to establish the Emergency Farm Fund, which has provided fourteen farms with \$25,000 in 0% interest loans, Waite reported.

The Franklin County Chamber of Commerce has been functioning as a vehicle of information coming from FCCDC, the City of Greenfield and MassHire Franklin Hampshire Career Center (MHFHCC), D. Syzmal reported. She has noted a shift in conversation toward re-opening, and is attending weekly preparatory meetings of MA Regional Tourism Council executive directors.

The MHFHCC continues to field approximately 100 calls per day regarding Unemployment Insurance (UI), T. Anderson said, and that many this week were regarding new Pandemic Unemployment Assistance for self-employed and gig workers. The MHFHCC also has been focused on helping local businesses to navigate the transition between utilizing UI and re-opening with PPP funding, directing employers to the state's COVID-19 Long Term Care Facility Jobs Portal, and converting their workshops for job-seekers for on-line delivery.

The MassHire Franklin Hampshire Regional Employment Board's Patricia Crosby reported that they are awaiting news on their application to the National Emergency Grant Funding program; that Greenfield Community College is now offering an on-line information session about its manufacturing training classes; and that the School-to-Careers program is newly focused on graduating high school seniors. She is seeing more information on the state's efforts to identify companies interested in re-tooling their manufacturing facilities to produce personal protective equipment, she said. She has begun developing the annual proposal for state funding to aid local manufacturing. As a member of the

Gill Arts Council, she noted that Western MA artists have received 57 of the 272 \$1,000 COVID Relief Fund grants from the MA Arts Council.

T. Anderson explained that local unemployment numbers are not yet available for March and April due to a data glitch. When they are released, however, they will include figures pertaining to self-employed and gig workers.

4 – Review and discuss the Preliminary Draft 2020 CEDS Plan: Jessica Atwood, FRCOG

J. Atwood reviewed the Preliminary Draft 2020 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Plan, inviting suggestions for incorporation before she releases the document on May 8 for a 30-day public comment period. She highlighted changes made since the April meeting, and potential additional changes, mostly relating to developments due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

To provide context on the current COVID-19 pandemic crisis, data was added from the March 2020 Pioneer Valley Business Survey Findings for Franklin County and from monthly unemployment and UI Claimant data (rather than only annual data). Throughout the document, context will be provided about potential impacts, such as potential population increase post-pandemic, similar to that experienced by Berkshire County post-9/11 or the closure of businesses.

A new section was added to Chapter: Summary Background about economic development incentives and related programs, like the federal Opportunity Zone program. The new Chapter 3: Economic Resiliency reviews vulnerabilities, steady-state initiatives (e.g. mitigation from long-term changes), responsive initiatives (e.g. mitigation from short-term impacts), and refers to specific goals, objectives and the action plan in Chapter 6.

Atwood reviewed Chapter 6: Goals, Objectives and Action Plan with Committee members. The draft goals were developed based on the Summary Background data, SWOT and Vision, and have been revised according to the April meeting discussion.

Since the last meeting, a new goal added was: “Goal 2. Implement efforts to sustainably grow the population of Franklin County and to make Franklin County a more welcoming and inclusive place.” The corresponding draft goal’s objectives are:

- Objective 2A. Examine and strategize how to overcome workplace cultures that create structural and institutional barriers to equity.
- Objective 2B. Provide technical assistance to implement local planning that encourages sustainable growth and economic development, and enhances the overall health and quality of life of the region.

Atwood noted the language change in Goal 6. “Encourage economic security for individuals, and equitable wealth creation and financial security in the region.” J. Waite suggested a reference to “pathways to economic security” be added.

Atwood reviewed the draft Action Plan, which included projects reviewed at the previous meeting as well as new activities. Examples of new activities include tasks for FRCOG staff, including: staff will complete the scope of work and reporting requirements of the EDA Partnership Planning award; and staff participation and leadership in collaborative capacity building and leveraging of resources with

the CEDS Committee, Franklin Regional Economic Development Initiative (FREDI), the Economic Development Partners group of western Mass, the MA CEDS/EDD Practitioners group, and the Rural Policy Advisory Commission.

Another new project included in the draft was the Strengthening Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Franklin County Project, which seeks to develop and encourage adaption of workplace policies and practices to deconstruct white dominance, identify and reduce bias, and facilitate the hiring of people of color and people from other marginalized groups, and to ensure workplaces are welcoming and healthy for everyone. J. Waite announced that the Welcoming and Belonging Group, which includes the FCCDC with GCC and FRCOG, applied for and will receive an award through the MA Department of Public Health to promote such culture change in area businesses.

Other activities and projects added to the Action Plan, included:

- Local Technical Assistance – FRCOG staff to provide planning technical assistance to municipalities, such as through an updated zoning bylaws and subdivision regulations, Master Plan, Open Space and Recreation Plan, village center studies, and similar planning efforts.
- Growth Management Strategy - Advocate for a study of infrastructure, regulations and employment needs to accommodate and welcome people moving from urban to rural communities.
- Bridge of Flowers and Water Infrastructure Project - Structural improvements to bridge and public water infrastructure.
- FRCOG Brownfields Program - Administer a brownfields program to conduct assessments and support the remediation and redevelopment of sites.
- Commercial/Industrial Site Promotion - Track sites and support the development or redevelopment of vacant and underutilized properties, including sites under municipal ownership and in Opportunity Zones.
- Last Mile Broadband in Unserved Areas - Advocate for the elimination or reduction of municipal capital cost burden in unserved communities, in light of anticipated municipal revenue declines due to pandemic impacts.
- Transportation Planning - Staff to conduct transportation planning program to forward investments in roads, bridges, transit, passenger rail, Complete Streets, culvert assessments, and recreational trails.
- Establish Valley Flyer - Market the pilot passenger rail service to increase ridership and establish the service permanently by funding operations and the acquisition of train sets.
- East-West Passenger Rail Service - Advocate for planning and implementation of rail service between Boston and Pittsfield, and between Boston and Greenfield.
- Innovative Public Transit Services - Invest in regional on demand micro-transit services beyond the current pilot period.
- Workforce Training for Unemployed Workers - Development and implement new training programs for workers in COVID-19 impacted industries, including agricultural, food service, retail trade and others; and continue with advanced manufacturing training program to meet needs of employers.
- Response and Recovery Strategy - Examine the experience from the COVID-19 pandemic and develop strategies to improve response and recovery, including improving communication and support to business community, coordination about regional organizations and resources.
- Resiliency and Economic Development Alignment – FRCOG staff to better align economic development resilience best practices with local planning efforts through state programs, such as Green Communities, hazard mitigation plans, and MVP plans.

There was a discussion about two projects in New Salem submitted for inclusion in the 2020 CEDS Plan. The projects propose to restore and rehabilitate two municipal buildings for community purposes. J. Atwood noted that while they are worthwhile and important community projects, they do not meet the criteria of resulting in direct job creation. It was determined that the projects will be included in the Plan's appendix.

J. Atwood reviewed the timeline for finalizing the Plan and submitting it to the EDA by the June 30, 2020 deadline. She asked that Committee members please contact her with any additional comments about the draft the Plan.

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

The next scheduled CEDS Committee meeting is Monday, June 8, 2020 at 3:00 p.m. J. Waite made a motion to adjourn the meeting, MJ Adams seconded the motion, and the meeting adjourned at 2:16 p.m.

Documents distributed/presentations viewed:

- Agenda
- 2020-02-11 CEDS Minutes DRAFT
- 2020-4-09 CEDS Minutes DRAFT
- Presentation

Respectfully submitted by:

Gary Dillensneider, Chair