



Franklin Regional Council of Governments

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Committee

Date:	November 10, 2020
Time:	2:00 p.m.
Location:	Virtual Meeting via Zoom due to COVID-19 state of emergency. (Meeting ID: 832 5524 0789)
Duration:	1.5 hour
Facilitator:	J. Atwood

CEDS Committee Attendees:

- MJ Adams, City of Greenfield
- Teri Anderson, MassHire Franklin Hampshire Career Center
- Marie Breheny, Greenfield Community College
- Rebecca Bialecki, MassHire Franklin Hampshire Regional Employment Board
- Jenna Day, RCAP Solutions
- Gary Dillensneider, FCCDC Loan Review Committee
- Gina Govoni, Franklin County Regional Housing & Redevelopment Authority & RDI Inc.
- Tom Hutcheson, Franklin Regional Planning Board
- Walter Ramsey, Town of Montague
- Diana Szynal, Franklin County Chamber of Commerce
- John Waite, Franklin County Community Development Corporation

Guests:

- Kristin Cole, Greenfield Community College
- Brianna Drohen, LaunchSpace Inc.
- Judy Raper, Greenfield Community College

FRCOG Staff:

- Linda Dunlavy, Executive Director
- Peggy Sloan, Director of Planning and Development
- Jessica Atwood, Economic Development Program Manager

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

Atwood called the meeting to order at 2:04 PM. The meeting was held online, via Zoom, due to the COVID-19 state of emergency preventing in-person meetings. Each meeting attendee was asked to introduced themselves.

2 – Vote to Approve Minutes from June 8, 2020: Gary Dillensneider

Adams moved to approve the June 8, 2020 minutes. Hutcheson seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously by roll call, with two abstentions.

3 – Brief update on economic impacts of COVID-19 and recovery efforts: Jessica Atwood, FRCOG

Atwood presented a PowerPoint reviewing the economic impacts of COVID-19. She reviewed the timeline for when the pandemic crisis began in March 2020. She reported on changes in the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which changed -31.4% from the first to second quarter in 2020, and increased 33.1% from the second to third quarter. Unemployment rates for the county, state and nation showed the dramatic increase from March to April 2020, and peaked in the county and state in June 2020. Correspondingly, the county's labor force decreased sharply from March to April, and has increased through September but not to pre-pandemic levels.

Atwood reported on the findings of a statewide small business survey conducted by MassINC Polling Group, which found that nearly half of small businesses have laid off or furloughed employees. She also reported on articles from MassBenchmarks, a quarterly journal produced by the UMass Donahue Institute. According to MassBenchmarks, the Commonwealth was hit harder by COVID-19 early on than the country due to shutting down earlier and more completely. It continued that the upside is that the state will grow faster in the third quarter with slower growth in the fourth quarter.

Atwood showed data on the federal Paycheck Protection Program loans applied for in the county. She also reviewed county information for state programs, including forgivable loan/grant programs available to small businesses, MassDevelopment's Commonwealth Places, and MassDOT's Shared Streets and Spaces Program. A new round of the MassDOT program has opened, and it was noted that a new planning program for municipalities was announced in the Governor's economic recovery plan and may be launched soon.

She continued to review federal CARES Act resources through the US Economic Development Administration, including the supplemental planning award to FRCOG and the re-capitalization of a small business loan fund administered by the FCCDC.

Other potential impacts were discussed, such as recent data and anecdotal reports indicating population shifts from urban areas to rural and suburban areas. Atwood reviewed recent news articles and single family home sales data for Franklin County. In comparison to the previous year, the number of sales and the median sales prices have increased in recent months.

Day asked if there was any data was collected on water and wastewater systems, such as rates or unpaid bills. Atwood responded that we have not, and added that we will be doing an RFP this winter to hire a consultant to do a county-wide water and wastewater infrastructure study.

4 – Report on Business Technical Assistance and Financing by Franklin County Community Development Corporation: John Waite, FCCDC

Waite provided an update on the launch of the CDBG Microenterprise Recovery Program administered by the FCCDC. Through re-programmed CDBG funds and a new regional award, which allowed up to \$5,000 forgivable loans to be awarded small business micro-enterprises (less than five employees) with owners who meet low-moderate household income thresholds and can demonstrate an economic loss due to the pandemic.

Waite reported on the July-September 2020 awards from re-programmed CDBG funds included:

Greenfield: \$84,757 for 16 businesses
Shelburne: \$40,000 for 8 businesses
Buckland: \$15,000 for 3 businesses
Montague: \$50,000 for 10 businesses
TOTAL: \$189,757 for 37 businesses

The Franklin County Regional Micro Assistance Program, which includes 23 Franklin County towns (except Ashfield, Rowe and Monroe), was funded by a new CDBG award to the City of Greenfield and is administered by FCCDC. Waite reported that 32 applications were received so far. The first round of awards ranging from \$5,000 - \$10,000 will be distributed next week. Awards will be made until the \$600,000 is depleted. Waite continued that businesses receiving these awards are from various sectors that include downtown storefronts, services, restaurants and manufacturing.

Waite reported that businesses are struggling as they figure out how to survive on 25% income to cover expense that may have not gone down as much as income. He continued that owners that may have not been eligible in 2019 are now eligible because their income is within the 80% HUD levels. Owners are using funds for rent, utilities, inventory, PPE, insurance, and employees. Most are worried how they will survive another shut down and extended reduction in business. Many businesses don't fit in the guidelines of these forgivable loans and don't have options for grant right now and don't want more debt. Owners are trying to innovate strategies to keep them viable. Many business owners need support, and FCCDC provides technical assistance as well.

Waite added that local municipal governments can help by delaying permits, licenses, taxes and other fees; promoting local businesses that are open or selling online; and promoting these grant programs and assistance to connect owners to resources.

Adams noted that another small business grant program through the state is open until November 12 through the Massachusetts Growth Capital Corporation, and available to more businesses.

Waite also described the re-capitalization of the FCCDC's Revolving Loan Fund through the EDA. Also as funded through the EDA, the FCCDC was selected by the FRCOG through a procurement process to provide business technical assistance.

Waite stated that before the pandemic started, the FCCDC had about 120 outstanding loans to businesses. With the start of the pandemic crisis in March 2020, the FCCDC Lending Program transitioned about half of their outstanding loans to interest only or non-accrual for three months. Since the end of that initial period, these terms were reviewed and extensions have been granted. At the same time, they are also talking to entrepreneurs seeking to start new businesses.

Waite updated the Committee on the state's new food system infrastructure grant program. Many farm and food businesses in Franklin County have been successful in receiving grants to help keep them in business and make them more successful in the future.

Adams asked about challenges for women in the workforce in our region. Dunlavy responded that Rep. Blais has proposed a study on the issue. Anderson stated that data has shown women leaving the workforce due to lower pay and more entry-level positions. She continued that the State is looking at digital inclusion resources for remote working and training, and a report on childcare.

5 – Updates of CEDS Action Plan projects: Greenfield Community College’s Rural Innovation Center with LaunchSpace, and Town of Montague’s Canal District, Farren Care Center site and other projects: Judy Raper, GCC & Brianna Drohen, LaunchSpace; and Walter Ramsey, Town of Montague

Raper presented a PowerPoint on GCC’s Rural Innovation Center for Greater Franklin County with their partner LaunchSpace. She reviewed elements of the project that include: business incubation/ideation, makerspace, training/micro-credentials/certificates, co-working space, mentoring/advising/coaching, and entrepreneurial mindset. She continued by reviewing the three pillars of the project (economic revitalization, intergenerational relationships, and health and well-being) as well as the mission and vision of partners. There was a review of how the project was developed and how it connects to the work of GCC and LaunchSpace. Drohen reviewed funding sources for the project. She continued that the project will be based at the GCC Downtown Center in Greenfield and the LaunchSpace facilities in the Orange Innovation Center and the former Pleasant Street School in Athol. Raper and Drohen responded to questions.

Ramsey reviewed the recent history of the Turners Falls Canal District, a vision for the District, and current projects. Current projects include the assessment and clean-up of hazardous materials totaling over \$3.5 million across three properties. Ramsey described the smokestack demolition process underway. He continued that the Town is working on a \$2.3 million MassWorks grant to re-establish the pedestrian connection over the canal and improve the sewer and water service to the district. The Town is also working with Firstlight Power to extend utilities to Strathmore Mill. In addition, the Town is interested in assessing the redevelopment opportunities for the former Railroad Salvage site. Ramsey noted that with the pending closure of the Farren Care Center, a site reuse feasibility study is forthcoming.

6 – Other business not reasonably anticipated 48 hours in advance, and adjourn: Jessica Atwood, FRCOG

Atwood noted the next meeting is scheduled be on December 8, 2020 to discuss the development of an economic recovery and resiliency planning project.

Day announced that RCAP Solutions has received some funding to provide technical assistance to municipalities in pursuing USDA resources for community facilities or infrastructure projects. Assistance could include application development or budget analysis.

Hutcheson moved to adjourn the meeting, Adams seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously by roll call vote. Dillensneider adjourned the meeting at 3:36 pm.

Respectfully submitted by:

Gary Dillensneider, Chair