



Franklin Regional Council of Governments

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Committee

Date:	December 8, 2020
Time:	2:00 p.m.
Location:	Virtual Meeting via Zoom due to COVID-19 state of emergency. (Meeting ID: 640 658 461)
Duration:	55 minutes
Facilitator:	J. Atwood

CEDS Committee Attendees:

- MJ Adams, City of Greenfield
- Teri Anderson, MassHire Franklin Hampshire Career Center
- Rebecca Bialecki, MassHire Franklin Hampshire Workforce Board
- Gary Dillensneider, FCCDC Loan Review Committee
- Gina Govoni, Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority/Rural Development, Inc.
- Tom Hutcheson, Franklin Regional Planning Board
- Walter Ramsey, Town of Montague
- Bryan Smith, Town of Erving
- Shelby Snow, Franklin County Chamber of Commerce Board & Northfield Golf Club
- Diana Szynal, Franklin County Chamber of Commerce

Guests:

- Judy Raper, Greenfield Community College
- Kristin Cole, Greenfield Community College
- Dan Hodge, Hodge Economic Consulting

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 2:00 pm, Dillensneider 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 asked each online participant to introduce themselves.

2 – Vote to Approve Minutes from November 10, 2020: Jessica Atwood, FRCOG

Atwood reported there were two amendments recommended: to add Teri Anderson to the list of Committee attendees, and to specify eight businesses in Shelburne received grants on page 3.

Anderson moved to accept the minutes of the November 10, 2020 meeting, as amended; Hutcheson seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously by roll call with Smith abstaining.

3 – Review of New Economic Recovery Funding Opportunities: Jessica Atwood, FRCOG

Atwood reviewed new economic recovery funding opportunities:

- Local Rapid Recovery Planning Assistance to Revitalize Downtowns – open to municipal governments (who may work with non-profit partners) who seek technical assistance, not cash, with placemaking, on-line storefronts, marketing, addressing regulations, etc.; the straightforward application is due 12/18/20 at 3pm. <https://edit.mass.gov/forms/local-rapid-recovery-planning-application>
- MassDOT Shared Winter Streets & Spaces Grant – open to municipalities for quick-build improvements to streets and parking areas to support public health, mobility, renewed commerce. The first of four application deadlines has passed; January 5th, January 29th, and February 26th remain. <https://www.mass.gov/shared-winter-streets-and-spaces-grant-program>
- Rural LISC’s Rural Relief Small Business Grant – a competitive grant process open to eligible small businesses with priority given to those in underserved communities, entrepreneurs of color, woman- and veteran-owned businesses; may be used for rent, utilities, payroll, outstanding debt to vendors. <https://www.lisc.org/covid-19/small-business-assistance/rural-relief-small-business-grants>

Adams noted that the Urban Agenda grant opportunity is open and that only Greenfield is eligible. The City is aiming to submit an application, by the 12/18/20 deadline, for funds to enable family daycare businesses and childcare centers to remain open until enrollment returns to pre-pandemic levels and they become economically viable again.

4 – Discuss the creation of the Franklin County Economic Resiliency & Recovery Plan (ERRP) Jessica Atwood, FRCOG

Atwood explained that FRCOG has contracted with Dan Hodge of Hodge Economic Consulting to conduct a survey that will be used to help form a plan to address the economic impacts of the coronavirus pandemic. Funded by a US EDA grant, the plan will incorporate and expand on the economic resiliency elements of the 2020 CEDS Plan, and have two goals: to understand and respond to the economic injury caused by the pandemic, and to create a framework for regional partners to prevent, prepare for, and respond to future economic shocks. It will include: a background section identifying potential hazards, review relevant existing plans, and key stakeholders; results and recommendations from a survey on the impact of COVID-19 on stakeholders; and strategies to advance future response/recovery/resiliency, and a response framework for use by partners. Hodge described his plans for the survey, which will have ample opportunities for open-ended response, and for interviews as well. Attendees suggested the inclusion of survey questions addressing mental health impacts, equity and access issues. The need to plan for any type of emergency that would cause an economic crisis—be it a pandemic, an extreme weather event, a cyber attack on the power grid, or something else—was discussed, as was the importance of strengthening infrastructure of all types, through redundancy and other means. Requesting updates from Eversource and National Grid regarding their work to strengthen the electrical grid was mentioned, as was Northampton’s goal of creating a micro-grid to keep essential operations running in the event of a regional grid failure, and lessons to be learned from stakeholders responding to the natural gas explosion in the Merrimack Valley in 2017.

Raper suggested a goal of encouraging a culture of creativity and action in response to crisis, perhaps through workshops and other means. Ramsey encouraged the group to recall the recent success of expanding the region's internet/broadband infrastructure, and the news of the current real estate boom. Further, he suggested the acronym PERRFCT: Plan for Economic Resiliency & Recovery for Franklin County Towns.

Atwood reported that findings from the survey and selected follow interviews will be presented at the next CEDS Committee to be held in March or April 2021.

5 – Discuss the development of the Franklin County Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Study.

Atwood described plans for a water and wastewater infrastructure study that would profile existing systems, summarize potential systems, articulate common issues, and identify potential funding programs, all through the lens of economic development. She indicated that an RFP is in the works to hire a consultant for the job. Attendees identified topics for further consideration: whether the water supplies of individual institutions such as schools and campgrounds should be included in the study; the governance of water and wastewater districts; accessibility to these systems by various groups within our communities; potential consolidation of districts; the availability of qualified operators.

In response to a query from Atwood, members agreed that the project should not (and could not, financially) be expanded to include a study of the electrical infrastructure in the region, but focus on the already large task at hand. Nonetheless, they would like to see future studies of local infrastructure pertaining to food systems/distribution/retail, and transportation/distribution of goods in the event of a gas crisis.

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

Atwood noted that, after a minor revision to the title and the inclusion of past committee minutes in the appendix per the request of the EDA, the 2020-2025 Franklin County CEDS Plan was formally approved by the EDA.

The meeting adjourned at 2:55 pm.

Respectfully submitted by:

Gary Dillensneider, Chair