



Franklin Regional Council of Governments

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Committee

Date:	June 8, 2021
Time:	2:00 p.m.
Location:	Virtual Meeting via Zoom due to COVID-19 state of emergency. (Meeting ID: 640 658 461)
Duration:	1 hour, 45 minutes
Facilitator:	J. Atwood

CEDS Committee Attendees:

- MJ Adams, City of Greenfield
- Rebecca Bialecki, MassHire Franklin Hampshire Workforce Board
- Jenna Day, RCAP Solutions
- Gary Dillensneider, FCCDC Loan Review Committee
- Walter Ramsey, Town of Montague
- Nan Riebschlaeger, Wendell Energy Committee
- Diana Szyal, Franklin County Chamber of Commerce

Guests:

- Judy Raper, Greenfield Community College
- Jennifer Gross, Wendell Planning Board, Franklin Regional Planning Board
- Alec Wade, Town of Orange

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: Gary Dillensneider, Chair

At 2:00 p.m., 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.

2 – Vote to Approve Minutes of May 11, 2021: Jessica Atwood, FRCOG

Riebschlaeger motioned to approve the minutes of the May 11, 2021 meeting, Adams seconded the motion, and the motion was approved by roll call (with attendees introducing themselves), unanimously with two abstentions (Ramsey, Szyal).

3 – Review Proposed Changes and Vote to Approve the final draft of the 2021 Franklin County CEDS Annual Performance Report: Jessica Atwood, FRCOG

Atwood reviewed changes to the annual 2021 CEDS Annual Performance Report, the first of four to the 2021-2025 CEDS Plan. Recent changes include the additions to the pandemic timeline (a lifting of

the mask mandate, the state-of-emergency ending), sections on the pandemic's effects on the childcare and manufacturing industries, and an explanation of the Community One Stop for Growth (a site aggregating numerous state funding resources). In response to guidance from the EDA, sections were added or reformatted, including a summary added of trends with a "Looking Ahead" section noting the return of in-person activities and events, the anticipated opening of the Tree House Brewing Company, the expanding access to entrepreneurial training and capital, and local Rapid Recovery Plans for downtown spaces. Reference to the *Franklin County Economic Recovery and Resilience Plan*, to be completed in 2022, was also added, along with an explanation of the evaluation framework and a table summarizing accomplishments of the past year. The latter includes progress on Northern Tier 2.0 project, the capitalizing of a small business revolving loan fund, securing business investment funds, building food security infrastructure, and continued work both on brownfields remediation (including the Railroad Salvage building site in Turners Falls) and toward county-wide broadband access (with just three unserved towns remaining). A paragraph titled *Challenges and Mitigation* emphasizes the limited professional capacity and the difficulty securing adequate funding by local municipalities and other entities. Another titled *Next Steps and Anticipated EDA Assistance* references the American Rescue Plan of 2021, a study of Deerfield River corridor outdoor recreation opportunities and strategies, and the Franklin County Public Water and Wastewater Study.

If the committee approves this annual report, Atwood explained, it will be reviewed/voted on by the FRCOG Executive Committee/EDD Governing Board on June 11, and by the Franklin Regional Planning Board on June 24. Assuming positive outcomes, she will submit it to the US EDA by June 30, 2021. **Adams motioned to approve the final draft of the 2021 Franklin County CEDS Annual Performance Report -- with information added regarding the effect on female employment due to the childcare industry's devastation during the pandemic, and with data points from the Franklin County CDC added; Ramsey seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously by roll call.**

4 – Presentation of the Marketing Campaign for the Valley Flyer Passenger Rail Service:

Linda Dunlavy, FRCOG

Dunlavy explained that the Valley Flyer, the pilot passenger rail service funded by MassDOT and operated by Amtrak from Greenfield to New Haven, was launched in 2019. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the service schedule was greatly reduced. The pandemic delayed the launch of a marketing campaign to promote the service. An effective marketing campaign is important to increase ridership, as MassDOT will only make this pilot service permanent if ridership goals are met. Prior to the pandemic, the goals were in sight, and stakeholders remain optimistic that they will be again.

The marketing campaign was created by "the watsons" advertising agency and will be launched in fall 2021 through 2022. Marketing will target tourists heading in both directions equally, and will highlight points of recreational, educational, cultural and culinary interest in the rural and urban centers with playful language and images, and a lighthearted hint of rivalry between the two cities. An initial 60-day multi-media push including billboards, train platform posters, print publications, radio and television ads will be followed by a year of broad digital efforts, including search engine optimization, she said. Traditional print media will be utilized mostly in Western MA, she noted, as cost prohibits doing so in the metropolitan area. In response to a question, Dunlavy noted that Sen. Comerford has secured funding for an upcoming study of the feasibility of an east-west passenger rail service in the northern tier (North Adams to Boston).

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

Atwood noted that FRCOG had submitted an application to the EDA for the final grant of a 3-year planning cycle. She introduced three new CEDS Committee members to be appointed later in the week. They are Alec Wade (Town of Orange), Jennifer Gross (FRPB), and Rudy Raper (GCC). Atwood thanked outgoing CEDS Committee member Marie Breheny for her years of service. Atwood stated that she will continue work on the Economic Recovery and Resiliency Plan, and will be in touch regarding the possibility of a vote, at the fall meeting, on whether or not to allow continued remote participation/voting at committee meetings.

Adams described a LaunchSpace/CDC initiative to assess the region's capacity to increase its digital economy, as well as the possible development of a rural innovation center.

The meeting adjourned at 2:45

Respectfully submitted by:

Gary Dillensneider, Chair

Documents Distributed / Presentations Viewed:

- Agenda
- 2021.05.11 CEDS Minutes Draft
- 2021-06-08 CEDS Presentation (Jessica Atwood/PowerPoint)
- 2021 CEDS Annual Report Draft 06.08.2021