



Franklin Regional Council of Governments

Executive Committee

Economic Development District Governing Board

MINUTES

Date & Time:	Thursday, June 9, 2022, 5:00 p.m.
Location:	Meeting held with video conferencing technology
Facilitator:	Bill Perlman, Chair

Executive Committee Representatives Present:

- Bill Perlman, Regionally Elected
- Kevin Fox, Council Appointee
- Julia Blyth, FRPB representative

Staff Members:

- Linda Dunlavy, Executive Director
- Claire McGinnis, Finance Director
- Rebekah Boyd, Admin Services
- Bob Dean, Dir. of Regional Services

1. Review and adopt 4.11.22 Executive Committee meeting minutes

Chair Bill Perlman convened the meeting at 5:09 p.m. **Kevin moved adoption of the 4.11.22 minutes. Julia seconded the motion, which passed unanimously, by roll-call vote.**

2. Convene the Economic Development District Governing Board for presentation and vote on the 2022 Franklin County CEDS Annual Performance Report

Before her presentation, Jessica Atwood reminded the board that the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is the economic roadmap for FRCOG and other planning agencies and municipalities, and that FRCOG’s participation maintains the region’s eligibility for EDA funding. She noted that this is the second annual report on the 2020, 5-year CEDS Plan, which articulates goals, provides updated socio-economic data, notes progress made on Action Plan projects, and includes multiple sections specific to the pandemic’s effect on the economy.

The annual report includes updated statistics regarding the county’s population decline and aging, racial diversity lack, and flat per capita income (contrasting with the state level, up by 4%), among others. Graphs tracking trends indicated changes in employment rates over 15 years, in home sales and median sale prices in recent years, average annual pay, and numbers of employees and establishments by industry sector.

Pandemic-related statistics included in the report show an already struggling early education and childcare sector experiencing a 17% closure of care programs statewide; the establishment of new health care/social assistance operations, notably Baystate Franklin Medical Center’s family medicine residency and the new Community Health Center of Franklin County located in Orange; and substance use disorder programs expansions. Many Franklin County businesses and organizations took advantage

of the response/recovery funding options from various federal and state programs. These include: the Paycheck Protection Program (\$136 million); Economic Injury Disaster Loan Program (\$34.6 million); Shutter Venue Operators and Restaurant Revitalization Funds (\$6.4 million); Food Security Infrastructure Grant (\$6.9 million); MGCC Sector-Specific Relief Grant Program (\$3.8 million) ; and Local Rapid Recovery Plan funding for three downtown/village centers.

Jessica updated the committee on key regional projects, including:

- Business technical assistance grants/access to capital
- LaunchSpace’s \$1 million federal earmark
- The ArtsHub Western MA launch
- The Deerfield River Outdoor Recreation study
- The Franklin County Water and Wastewater Systems study
- Investment and planning in the Turners Falls’ Canal District
- Planning for industrial land in Orange and pre-development of the Erving IP Papermill site
- Last mile broadband efforts
- The Valley Flyer and additional east-west rail studies and other transit pilot projects
- MassHire Franklin Hampshire workforce initiatives

The governing board commended Jessica and the CEDS committee for their good work on the performance report.

Kevin moved approval of the 2022 Franklin County CEDS Annual Performance Report. Julia seconded the motion, which passed unanimously, by roll-call vote.

3. Report on the Franklin County Economic Recovery and Resiliency Plan (EERP) and Framework

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) act allotted \$400K to FRCOG to assist with economic recovery and resiliency. Three local projects were earmarked for implementation. The Community Development Corp was subcontracted to assist with expanding businesses; Tighe and Bond oversaw a sewer and water study; and FRCOG hired Keith Barnicle to assist with this creation and implementation of the EERP. Jessica reported that The EERP captures lessons learned from the pandemic and other shocks to the region, outlines tasks to be undertaken at a time of emergency, and recommends long-term strategies for resilience when the next disaster (natural, human-caused, technological, or economic) hits. Unlike other resiliency plans, EERP’s focus is on economy, not emergency response or public safety. After reviewing long-standing and potential vulnerabilities with key stakeholders, a response framework with the following objectives, emerged:

- **Convene and Coordinate Partners** – Determine who needs to be part of the discussion, review status, and determine roles.
- **Inventory and Advocate** – Review available resources, identify additional needs or policy changes, and determine strategy to secure them.
- **Prepare and Perform** – Implement tasks, which may include creating new programs or redirecting services.
- **Communicate and Collect** – Maintain communication among partners, establish a clearinghouse for sharing information, collect data.
- **Deploy** – As appropriate, set-up a shared space to provide important services, such as a Business Recovery Center

The EERP also includes specific tasks for vulnerability reduction, such as efforts made to reverse population decline, and it outlines resiliency strategies, namely infrastructure improvement and private sector business development.

The CEDS Committee and framework partners reviewed the EERP and minor edits were made before distribution and website posting. Following plan completion, staff submitted an application to the Economic Development Administration (EDA), requesting funding for implementation of recommendations.

Before a vote to approve, Bill suggested the plan be refreshed periodically and that stakeholders be reminded of its existence often. Jess said she would discuss these ideas with stakeholders to see if that direction could be added. Julia voiced her appreciation for the broad framing of the plan, created to incorporate everything from hurricanes to cyber attack.

Julia moved approval of the Franklin County Economic Recovery and Resiliency Plan and Framework. Kevin seconded the motion, which passed unanimously, by roll-call vote.

4. Consider signing the Order of Discontinuance and Transfer of Poplar Mountain Road in the Town of Erving

Bob Dean reported that he had received certification from the Erving town clerk stating that the town voted at its annual town meeting to accept and lay out Poplar Mountain Road. The last task for the committee is to sign off on the transfer of the road to Erving and sign the Order of Discontinuance and Transfer, he said. When signed, the Order will be recorded at the Registry of Deeds.

Kevin moved to approve the signing of the Order of Discontinuance and Transfer of Poplar Mountain Road to the Town of Erving. Julia seconded the motion, which passed unanimously, by roll-call vote.

5. FERC relicensure of local hydroelectric properties update.

Briefing the committee on the progress of Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) relicensure of local hydroelectric operations, Linda reported that the settlement agreement is rumored to soon be available for public review, and the relicensure process is scheduled to be fully completed by this fall. While other stakeholder groups partook in negotiations focused on fish passage and stream flows, whitewater flows, and cultural resources, FRCOG staff have, over many months, participated in a subcommittee to negotiate terms for recreational facilities in Erving, Montague, Northfield, and Gill, on and alongside the power-generating Connecticut River.

When the time is right, stakeholders feel it's important to hire an attorney to review the settlement. FRCOG hopes to use the same counsel that the Connecticut River Conservancy uses and to split the cost, now estimated at between \$15-20K. FRCOG's portion will be funded by the existing line in 2022 and by Miscellaneous and Contingency. Staff have asked the four towns involved to contribute \$2500 should the cost reach the high end of the estimate. Linda did not ask that the committee vote, yet, on the funding. The current priority is determining that the agreement meets the needs of the county.

6. Discuss succession planning efforts

Linda explained that FRCOG rolled out its current management structure in a piecemeal manner to match the needs of the agency as it grew; it was not created using a thoughtful, intentional method. With managers retiring over the next few years, the FRCOG has an opportunity to reimagine the organizational structure. To that end, Linda has conceived of a committee consisting of four current and former Executive Committee members, one county selectman, and a town administrator. She noted that, so far, the group lacks diversity.

Kevin suggested that the process could benefit from having a larger group at the helm, with so many competing meetings. Julia suggested that this process could be an opportunity to introduce more democratic thinking — to consider using some kind of public process to garner voices not regularly involved in FRCOG’s business. Bill wondered if partnering organizations might be interested in assisting with the planning. Linda had approached the executive directors of other councils and planning agencies, and while interested, they declined, overwhelmed with their own work delayed during the COVID pandemic. The committee strategized ways to include the ideas of a wider group, through surveys, or a limited number of larger meetings. Bill cautioned that the committee proceed with care, stressing that the FRCOG would not want to end up losing important functions or to devolve into a lesser organization, even with a better-organized management structure.

7. FRCOG Covid-19 After Action Review (AAR) municipal meetings update

Linda reported that FRCOG has convened six AAR municipal meetings to date, inviting select boards, boards of health, EMDs, police and fire officers, and town administrators. The conversations have been thoughtful and engaging, she said, with many towns feeling they were trained to take on the pandemic, but lacked capacity to carry out the response. Town officials said they needed volunteers, technical assistance, vaccination delivery, and so on, to do so effectively. Attendees offered their understanding of “readiness” and suggested roles for the FRCOG, such as filling a communications gap, helping towns find equipment, managing equipment and supplies, interpreting state policies, offering logistical and technical support, coordinating the regional response, and so on.

The AAR attendees’ discipline cross-section has been excellent, Linda said. Four more town meetings are planned and two follow up catchall meetings will follow those. She will bring the results of these meetings back to the executive committee.

8. Business not reasonably anticipated 48 hours in advance of meeting

Good news! By all firefighter accounts, the CoMIRS radio system functioned very well during the recent massive fire in Orange. The incidents of connection loss were few.

Julie moved committee adjournment. Jay seconded the motion, which passed unanimously by voice vote. Bill adjourned the meeting at 5:48 p.m.

Documents Distributed:

- Agenda
- Draft 4.11.22 Executive Committee meeting minutes
- *Franklin County Economic Recovery and Resiliency Plan and Framework Slideshow*
- *Franklin County CEDS Annual Performance Report for 2022*

Minutes taken by Rebekah Boyd.