



# Franklin Regional Council of Governments

## Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Committee

Date:	May 26, 2022
Time:	11:00 p.m.
Location:	Virtual Meeting via Zoom due to COVID-19 state of emergency. (Meeting ID: 861 3013 3455)
Duration:	1 hour, 2 minutes
Facilitator:	J. Atwood

**CEDS Committee Members (attendees indicated):**

- |           |                    |  |
|-----------|--------------------|--|
| 1         | Diana Szyal        | Franklin County Chamber of Commerce                                    |
| 1         | Gary Dillensneider | Retired from manufacturing industry; FCCDC Loan Review Committee Chair |
| 1         | Gina Govoni        | Franklin County Regional Housing & Redevelopment Authority             |
| 1         | Jenna Day          | RCAP Solutions, Inc.   |
| 1         | Jenny Gross        | Franklin Regional Planning Board                                       |
| 1         | John Waite         | Franklin County Community Development Corporation                      |
| 1         | MJ Adams           | City of Greenfield   |
| 1         | Rebecca Bialecki   | MassHire Franklin Hampshire Workforce Board                            |
| 1         | Maura Geary        | MassHire Franklin Hampshire Career Center                              |
| 1         | Walter Ramsey      | Town of Montague   |
| <b>10</b> | <b>Quorum = 7</b>  |  |

**Guests:**

- Alyssa Larose, Franklin County Regional Housing & Redevelopment Authority

**FRCOG Staff:**

- Linda Dunlavy, Executive Director
- Peggy Sloan, Director of Planning and Development
- Jessica Atwood, Economic Development Program Manager
- Keith Barnicle, Economic Development Special Projects Planner
- Liz Jacobson-Carroll, Administrative Services Assistant

**1 – Call the meeting to order, and round of introductions: Jessica Atwood, FRCOG**

At 11:00 a.m., J. Atwood called the meeting to order. The meeting was held via the online Zoom application, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Atwood announced the participants.

**2 – Vote to Approve Minutes from April 13, 2022: Jessica Atwood, FRCOG**

Geary motioned to approve the minutes of the April 13, 2022 meeting, Adams seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously by roll call. (Ramsey was not present for the vote.)

**3 – Review and discussion of Draft Franklin County Economic Recovery and Resiliency Plan (ERRP) and Framework; and of the 2022 CEDS Annual Performance Report: Keith Barnicle and Jessica Atwood, FRCOG**

Barnicle reviewed the draft ERRP, funded by the EDA via the CARES Act, and written with three goals: to capture lessons learned during acute phase of the COVID-19 pandemic; to outline tasks to be undertaken in an emergency; and to identify long-term strategies for resilience. He noted the on responses to economic emergencies over public health or environmental emergencies, and that the plan includes a review of human-caused/technological and economic vulnerabilities. Barnicle identified four lessons learned: existing challenges may be exacerbated by crisis; clear and frequent communication is important; transparency and flexibility should be emphasized; and the ability to pivot quickly between technologies and business models is valuable. The response framework described in the plan includes sections on convening partners; evaluating and gathering resources; preparing and implementing programs; coordinating communications; and centralizing deployment.

The plan contains active links to Framework partner organizations, each with contact information, and details about existing and potential services. It covers basic emergency preparedness topics, tips on crisis communications, and considerations regarding temporary relocation.

Atwood described the ERRP's focus on three regional strategies to reduce vulnerability and increase resiliency of the business ecosystem:

- Reverse Population Decline: attracting younger working-age adults and people of color; growing the Welcoming and Belonging Franklin County Initiative; developing affordable housing options.
- Improve Strategic Infrastructure: expanding development capacity in the region (via wastewater and water systems, for example); and supporting broadband access, downtown revitalization, industrial park development, and brownfields redevelopment
- Develop Private Sector Business Opportunities: fostering entrepreneurship and economic self-sufficiency; offering industry-specific toolkits to support recovery, growth and resiliency; and promoting programs in the business development eco-system

FRCOG staff will incorporate updates from Framework partners and others, then distribute digital copies, Atwood concluded.

Atwood reminded attendees that FRCOG's participation (as a federally designated Economic Development District) in the CEDS planning program maintains the region's eligibility for certain EDA funding programs. She noted that this second annual performance report on the CEDS Plan articulates goals, provides updated socio-economic data, notes progress made on action plan projects, and includes multiple sections specific to the pandemic. The regional economic dashboard provides key data from the U.S. Census' American Community Survey, and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, she said, then shared statistics regarding the county's population decline and aging, lack of racial diversity, and flat per capita income, among others. Graphs 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 sector.

Atwood shared several pandemic-related statistics and items of note. An already struggling early education and care sector saw 17% of care programs close statewide, she said; Larose noted that childcare in Franklin County consumes a significant portion of household income. Atwood indicated that health care/social assistance programs began operations: Baystate Franklin Medical Center's family medicine residency, and the new Community Health Center of Franklin County, located in Orange (and a West County location is being discussed.) Also, substance use disorder programs have expanded. She reported that Franklin County businesses and organizations took advantage of the response/recovery funding options from various federal and state programs: 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.

#### **4 –Regional Economic Development Updates: Jessica Atwood, FRCOG**

Atwood provided key project updates regarding: business technical assistance grants/access to capital; LaunchSpace's \$1 million federal earmark, the launch of ArtsHub Western Mass, the Deerfield River Outdoor Recreation Study, the Franklin County Water and Wastewater Systems Study, investment in Turners Falls' Canal District, planning for industrial land in Orange, pre-development of the Erving IP Papermill, last mile broadband efforts, the return of the Valley Flyer and additional east-west rail studies, innovative transit pilot projects, MassHire Franklin Hampshire workforce initiatives and the economic recovery and resiliency plan. Wade indicated that Orange did not receive the EDA funding it applied for to expand its industrial park, but that the Planning Board is undeterred and will look elsewhere. It was reported that there were no responses to Erving's recent Request for Proposal for re-use of the IP Papermill. Regarding the 2022 CEDS Annual Report, Atwood requested to receive feedback by June 9, so it can be incorporated into the final version.

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

Adams requested information on the EDA's Build to Scale Program. The Build to Scale Program is a competitive grant opportunity to fund venture capital type initiatives. Atwood indicated that Center of Rural Innovation (CORI) based in Vermont may be interested in applying to accelerate tech oriented startups and serving rural areas across the country. Adams reported that CORI has done some research in the area and their initial findings indicate that Franklin County has the economic drivers to expand its digital ecosystem. Atwood noted that CORI are also working people at Berkshire Community College.

Govoni encouraged attendees to promote the lottery for apartments in the new Sanderson Place complex for low-income senior citizens in Sunderland, as applications have been slow to come in.

Unless there is feedback on the ERRP or CEDS that warrants another meeting before Atwood submits those, the next meeting will be in September. Although not in attendance, Atwood thanked departing

Chamber of Commerce Director Diana Szydal's for her work on the CEDS Committee and wished her well.

Documents distributed or viewed:

- Agenda
- 2022-05-26 CEDS Presentation
- Minutes of the April 13, 2022 CEDS meeting
- Franklin County ERRP Draft of 05.17.2022
- 2022 Annual Report Draft 05.25.2022

Following a motion by Adams, seconded by Waite, the meeting adjourned at 12:02 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by:

Gary Dillensneider, Chair