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BERKSHIRE CEDS MEETING #4 MINUTES
THE COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR THE BERKSHIRES

DATE: Tuesday June 8, 2004
TIME: 8:30 AM
PLACE: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission Offices
1 Fenn Street, Suite 201
Pittsfield, MA

I. Call to Order

Chair Vinette called the meeting to order at approximately 8:38 a.m.

The following Committee members were present:

Blair Benjamin	Bill Mulholland
Donna Cesan	Sharon Palma
Churchill Cotton	Ed Perlak (arrived at 8:50 a.m.)
Tim Geller (arrived at 9 a.m.)	Richard Scullin
Mark Germanowski	Rich Vinette
Sam Haupt	

Also present were Nat Karns (BRPC Executive Director), Kate McNulty-Vaughan (BRPC staff), and Peter Falcier (BRPC staff).

II. Approval of CEDS Meeting #3 Minutes of May 25, 2004

Mr. Germanowski moved to accept the minutes. Mr. Mulholland seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

III. Action Plan & Implementation Schedule

A) Review Draft 2004 Goals & Objectives and Action Plan Activities

Mr. Vinette laid out the strategy for going through the list of Action Plan Activities and related Goals & Objectives. Mr. Karns added that the staff felt it would be useful for the Committee to look at the Activities under each Objective in clusters and to identify the one or perhaps two under each Objective that are the greatest priority. Mr. Karns explained that the staff did its best to incorporate into the draft Activities list at this meeting the ideas put forward by Committee members at the previous meeting.

B) Prioritize Activities

Mr. Vinette told the Committee that the first three workforce Activities under Goal 1 Objective A were based on suggestions from Committee Member Heather Boulger, who as Executive Director of the Berkshire County Regional Employment Board has ongoing workforce strategies programs in the region.

Mr. Vinette asked if Mr. Karns or the staff had reviewed the applicability of the 2001 workforce-related Activities to the 2004 Goal 1, Objective A; he suggested that the Committee Members take that opportunity at this meeting. Mr. Karns mentioned that his personal preference would be for the applied technologies initiatives to be included, notably the Berkshire Plastic Network's (BPN) training program and the like, which had been working well and now lacks certain funding.

Mr. Mulholland, a key figure in the BPN training initiative, added that along with the BPN Activity, the CEDS workforce Action Plan should include the 2001 Activity, "foster[ing] connections and develop[ing] programs that are responsive to the needs of minority and under-served populations" (#5 in the Activity count on the handout). He noted that minority outreach has become a significant element of the BPN training program, especially in the northern part of the county, where graduation rates have declined.

Mr. Benjamin suggested adding the term "minority and underserved populations" to the end of Ms. Boulger's first activity, under Goal 1A. Mr. Mulholland agreed. The revised Activity would read, "Develop sectoral initiatives and career ladders within the region's critical industries to meet the needs of local businesses and minority and underserved populations." The Committee agreed unanimously.

Mr. Mulholland explained that the internship component of high school training is integral for employers getting to know the students and getting them to stay and work in the region. He said that MCLA would soon be announcing a major funding initiative related to the internship program. Mr. Karns suggested including in the 2004 Goal 1A Activities the 2001 internship Activity, "Expanding summer internships and employment opportunities with training initiatives across the region for high school age eligible workers" (#8 in the Activity count on the handout). The Committee agreed to include the internship Activity from 2001 in the 2004 Activities under Goal 1A.

Ms. Cesan asked what Ms. Boulger's third Activity (#3 in the Activity count on the handout) really means. It reads, "Continue to strengthen economic development opportunities by developing stronger employer relations." Mr. Mulholland explained that Ms. Boulger was trying to incorporate employers into workforce strategies, whereas most such initiatives do not include the employers' point of view. Mr. Mulholland explained that, for instance, the Berkshire Applied Technology Council (BATC) has tried to make all of its workforce initiatives employer-driven.

Of the four listed activities under Goal 1A, Mr. Scullins and Mr. Mulholland suggested that the first activity, "Develop sectoral initiatives and career ladders within the region's critical industries to meet the needs of local businesses and minority and underserved populations" (#1 in the handout Activity count), should be prioritized. The Committee agreed unanimously.

Concerning Goal 1, Objective B.... Mr. Vinette suggested striking the Revolving Loan Fund Activity (#11 in the handout Activity count) from the Activities under 2004 Goal 1, Objective B. The Committee asked what the motivation was for that Activity in 2001. Mr. Karns explained that there was a feeling that Berkshire businesses/projects/initiatives did not have an easily accessible resource that would help them package funding sources to move something forward. Mr. Scullins asked whether or not some aggregation of the available loan opportunities and sources might be a prerequisite for the last Activity under Goal 1B, "Identify and publicize public, private and other available funding sources; develop a better tracking system of funding available and funneled into the Berkshires" (#13 in the handout Activity count). Mr. Karns argued that that Activity was, in fact, a primary first step in the aggregation of loan opportunities.

Mr. Karns suggested that the Downtown Revolving Loan Fund should go under the downtown revitalization goal, 2004 Goal 2, Objective B. The Committee agreed.

Among the three remaining Activities under Goal 1, Objective B, the Committee also agreed unanimously to prioritize the first Activity, "Develop a centralized information source for people and businesses in developing or expanding a business in the region, providing information on financing, workforce and training, business services, sites and buildings, and permitting; market utilization of the centralized source to all economic development entities in the region" (#10 in the Activity count).

Before discussion concluded on Goal 1, Objective B, Ms. Cesan noted that each of the related Activities dealt with tracking and publicizing *existing* capital. She asked whether there was any discussion of *creating* new capital sources for the region. She and Mr. Benjamin noted that capitalization of the Downtown Revolving Loan Fund would be one new source. Mr. Vinette suggested adding a phrase like, "innovative, new funding sources" to the language of the third Activity under Goal 1, Objective B, "Identify and publicize public, private and other available funding sources. A better tracking system of funding that is available and funneled into the Berkshires is needed" (#13 in the Activity count). The Committee agreed to allow the staff to fine tune the language.

Goal 1, Objective C was new for CEDS 2004; in fact, it was an Activity under another Objective in 2001, so it had relatively specific related projects listed under it. Mr. Germanowski suggested making Activity #17 the top priority under this Goal and Objective: "Move feasible business park sites forward to complete readiness to market." He noted that it makes sense to prioritize projects that are essentially ready to go. Mr. Scullins suggested tying Activity #17 to Activity #20, "Prepare feasibility studies for or move forward to complete readiness to market at least one building reuse project in each of the larger downtowns in the region (Great Barrington, Lee, Pittsfield, Dalton, Adams, North Adams, Williamstown)." Mr. Vinette agreed that that was a good idea.

Mr. Mulholland said that he felt the PEDAsite, in particular, is really ready to go, that its timing is right. He argued that as a potential technology center, in the linking of all the area high schools, laboratories, colleges (including Berkshire Community College, MCLA, even Williams College), there has to be a role for PEDAsite that is industry-specific and that fills a gap in the current educational system in the region. Mr. Mulholland said that he and others are focusing on a PEDAsite that would have a defined role in workforce training, which in turn would be linked to all the educational institutions in the county. He noted that the proposal had made it all the way to the finals of the highly competitive National Science Foundation Technology Center grant competition. The vision for PEDAsite, he said, is ultimately to transform a one-employer town with pollution into a high-tech innovator, linked to existing assets. He urged the Committee not to let that kind of initiative get "stuck in the mud" as it has been in recent years. He wished to see the PEDAsite, in particular, prioritized in the coming year.

Mr. Karns asked why the PEDAsite initiative might be any more or less critical than MassMOCA's marketplace and business development initiatives. Mr. Mulholland suggested that the primary difference is that the PEDAsite would be more of an educational and workforce development component of the region's economic development strategy, not just attracting businesses but also providing them with a vital connection to the area's training and educational resources.

Mr. Vinette asked Mr. Mulholland if the PEDAsite initiative had submitted a CEDS 2004 initial project brief. Mr. Mulholland said that it depends on whether the BATC jobs task force makes it its next project. He suggested that some language could be added to the brownfields assessment Activity (#18 on handout) to say something like, "Prepare regional and/or local brownfields site assessments; analyze sites for appropriate reuse and feasibility, including a possible technology center/PEDAsite."

Mr. Haupt suggested that Activities #18 and #19 could be combined, but he felt that PEDAsite is included in the third Activity under Goal 1, Objective C (Activity #17). Perhaps the CEDS document could mention that the BRPC has applied for a grant to inventory the region's brownfields sites. [Editor's Note: Between CEDS Meetings #4 and #5, the BRPC learned that the U.S. EPA had awarded the agency some of that brownfields assessment funding.]

The committee agreed to move Activity #17 to top priority under Goal 1, Objective C: "Move feasible business park sites forward to complete readiness to market," with the "business park sites" changed to "business development sites." Mr. Mulholland agreed that that goal was broad enough to encompass the technology center/PEDAsite project.

Mr. Karns asked if that would eliminate the need for Activity #20, "Prepare feasibility studies for or move

forward to complete readiness to market at least one building reuse project in each of the larger downtowns in the region (Great Barrington, Lee, Pittsfield, Dalton, Adams, North Adams, Williamstown).” Mr. Haupt recommended not eliminating Activity #20 because it addresses a different issue than Activity #17. The Committee discussed moving Activity #20 under Goal 2, considering it is as much a “target infrastructure and community improvement” activity as anything else. Ms. Cesan agreed with Mr. Haupt that Activity #20 was a separate issue from Activity #17 and suggested that it complements the other Activities listed under Goal 1, Objective C. Mr. Benjamin argued that since Activity #20 explicitly addresses downtown projects, it might be better suited as a higher priority Activity under the downtown-oriented Objective B under Goal 2. Mr. Scullins agreed with Mr. Blair, noting that Activity #20 does pose the opportunity for success stories—moving at least one building per downtown to market—and that perhaps if it were a higher priority Activity under another Goal and Objective, it could be something the Committee could point to in the future as a CEDS priority that produced real economic development achievements. Ms. Cesan argued that if the Committee decided to make Activity #20 a high priority under Goal 2, Objective B, at least some of the Activities under Goal 1, Objective C should be reworded to include an emphasis on “reuse of existing buildings” or the like. She felt otherwise the Activities under the “providing inventory of sites and buildings” objective would have a “suburban slant,” focusing too heavily on business park-type development.

Mr. Geller made the argument that the brownfields assessment (Activity #19) should be regarded as the “same animal” as “business development sites” or “business parks,” since the assessment is the real hangup and the sites are more or less ready for cleanup and market afterwards. The Committee discussed the wisdom of putting the region’s energy behind rehabilitating brownfields versus developing other business development sites. Mr. Vinette suggested that Activity #17, revised to say, “Move feasible business development sites forward to complete readiness to market,” could well include brownfields that have gone through assessment and therefore was the statement was a sensible top priority as it was written and revised. Mr. Geller refined his point to conclude that he wished to see development sites that are ready to go prioritized above sites requiring feasibility studies.

The Committee generally agreed that the CEDS document and process were best served by moving Activity #17 to the top and combining Activities #18 and #19 under Goal 1, Objective C, then moving Activity #20 under Goal 2, Objective B. The Committee agreed to leave the Activity dealing with brownfields (#19) as is.

Concerning Goal 2, Objective A: “Improve the housing supply in the region.” The Committee agreed to make Activity #22 the highest priority under this Goal and Objective. They also agreed to remove the term “larger” when referring to communities with sufficient infrastructure capacity. The revised Activity will read: “Utilize the results of recent community development plans to promote development of new housing in appropriate locations in communities across the region, particularly in municipalities with sufficient infrastructure capacity.”

Concerning Goal 2, Objective B: “Develop appropriate strategies for downtown redevelopment which are community-driven and which respect the widely different sizes and functions of various community centers throughout the region.” Mr. Karns suggested that Activity #27, “Support specific downtown projects that promote 24x7 activities in the major downtowns in the region,” could be removed from the list of Activities. The Committee agreed unanimously. The Committee also agreed to prioritize Activity #20, which was moved under this Goal and Objective from Goal 1, Objective C.

Also, the Committee unanimously agreed to change the word “strategies” in the statement of the Objective to “initiatives.”

Concerning Goal 2, Objective C: “Enhance neighborhood quality in communities of different sizes and character.” Mr. Karns explained that the Activities under this Objective derive from the fact that neighborhood quality is seen as an impediment to building economic viability and community improvement.

Mr. Haupt suggested replacing the phrase “communities of different sizes and characters” in the Objective statement with “urban communities.” The Committee agreed unanimously. Objective C will read: “Enhance neighborhood quality in urban communities.” The Committee then agreed to prioritize Activity #31 under Goal 2, Objective C and removing Activity #33.

Ms. Cesan suggested adding a new Activity under this Objective: “Explore opportunities to integrate neighborhood revitalization with business development activities.” Mr. Karns noted that the collaboration between PEDDA and the Morningside Heights neighborhood in Pittsfield is a perfect example of this. The Committee agreed unanimously to include this statement as a third Activity under this Objective.

Concerning Goal 2, Objective D: “Improve transportation access and capacity throughout the region.” Mr. Karns explained that the Activities listed under this Objective were culled from the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) produced in 2003 by the BRPC. He noted that, like the BCREB workforce Activities, the transportation Activities went through a long public input and refinement process and they fairly encapsulate the major transportation needs and goals of the region. Mr. Scullin asked whether or not EDA reviewers would understand just how thorough and well vetted the BRPC transportation plan recommendations are. He wanted to clarify that the reviewers would not construe the culling of another plan’s recommendations as the CEDS Committee shirking its duties. Mr. Karns explained that the CEDS document could include the one-page executive summary of the 2003 RTP, and Mr. Vinette noted that it only makes sense for the CEDS Committee to rely on the coordinated efforts of other comprehensive planning projects in fields where experts and the public have already done good work.

The Committee agreed to prioritize Activity #34, since the studies cited in that Activity are already under way and probably will have significant short- to mid-term impacts.

Concerning Goal 2, Objective E: “Improve water, sewer, telecommunications and other utility capacity to economic development target areas.” Mr. Germanowski made the point that Activity #38 should be broken into two separate Activities at the semicolon: “Assess water and sewer availability and capacity to serve key economic development target areas in the region; prioritize needs for improvements to treatment plants and major lines or to expand existing service areas.” He then suggested that the first clause of the Activity be prioritized.

Mr. Karns emphasized that broadband access is still a very significant problem in encouraging economic development, particularly in the southern Berkshires and mid-sized municipalities, such as Dalton. Mr. Vinette added that communications access is always cited as a primary requirement by business developers in the Berkshires. Mr. Karns noted that wireless cellphone coverage is also a recurring economic development complaint in the region. The Committee agreed to allow the staff to work in the notion of improving adequate cellphone coverage throughout the region as an addition to the broadband Activity or as its own Activity under Objective E.

Mr. Geller suggested adding “...in ways that are compatible with local community development plans” to the Activity formed from the second clause of Activity #38. The Committee agreed unanimously.

The Committee agreed to prioritize the first clause of Activity #38, as its own Activity, under Goal 2, Objective E.

Concerning Goal 3, Objective A: “Strengthen and expand growing regional economic cooperation to serve as the foundation for successful internal and external marketing and outreach. (2001 Goal #6).” Mr. Karns explained that many of the Activities listed under this Objective came from the brainstorming suggestions of Committee Members at Meeting #3.

Mr. Vinette posed the question of whether the EDA would automatically assume that Activity #39, “Maintain

and expand the CEDS Committee on an ongoing basis, utilizing subcommittee capacity as warranted, and involving regional partners in conducting CEDS annual business/regional economy scans and strategies,” needed to be expressly stated. Mr. Karns said that it most certainly should be stated. The Committed agreed that that Activity should be prioritized, though Mr. Karns conceded that there could be more than one priority Activity under this Objective considering the large number listed.

Mr. Mulholland suggested amending Activity #41 to broaden the focus from the “ongoing activities of the BCREB” to the idea of supporting “ongoing activities of business, education and government collaborations, such as the BCREB and the Berkshire Applied Technology Council and others.” The Committee agreed to make Activity #41 a high priority Activity under Objective A.

Mr. Karns expressed personal chagrin that the Berkshire Plastics Network has lost all support, though it was a model of an inter- and intra-industry support group for over a decade—a program that indeed led to other collaborations. He explained that the state at one time provided the Network some financial support, but even if the state was not forthcoming now, it would improve the chances of winning support for the Network if it were made a priority in the CEDS. Mr. Vinette agreed, and suggested that the “arts economy network,” which Ms. McNulty-Vaughan pointed out already exists however informally, be added to the statement of the Activity #42. The Committee agreed to let the staff wordsmith the language of the revised Activity, to include something about “creating new networks” in the region.

Mr. Geller, speaking on behalf of Ms. Vicky Singer’s usual interests, argued that it would be appropriate to prioritize a program that focuses not just on the “existing, hard industries” but also on the “small, entrepreneurial start-ups.” Mr. Karns agreed.

Mr. Perlak suggested moving Activity #46, “Develop a resource guide for accessing the array of social service agencies in the region to encourage partnering among service providers, and improve connections and accessibility for those in need of services,” to Objective C, “Develop a regional capacity to analyze and develop appropriate strategies to deal with changes in the demographics and economy of the region.” The Committee agreed unanimously.

Concerning Goal 3, Objective B: “Develop strategies for site and building development and reuse. (2001 Goal #4 Objective A).” Mr. Benjamin argued that the theme of Activity #47, “Support implementation of specific building reuse projects that support creative and/or “new” economy business locations within our principal city and town centers,” had already been conveyed by earlier Activities, and, in any event, didn’t belong under the Goal of “Promot[ing] Regional Economic Cooperation and Analysis.” The Committee agreed to remove the Activity.

Ms. Cesan suggested rewording Objective B. She argued that Objective A under Goal 3 concerns the relationships of economic development organizations in the region and that Objective B should deal with the economic development projects. She suggested that the Chamber programs (Activity #48) would fit under such an Objective B, and then Objective #43, “Develop a regional retention and attraction program for firms and workers,” could be moved from Objective A to the revised Objective B. She said that the projects under Objective B would, by their nature, be collaborative but would also reinforce the real, on-the-ground cooperation of ongoing or future endeavors. The Committee agreed to let the staff reword Objective B to include ideas about developing region-wide projects, initiatives, and programs fostering regional collaboration and building capacity.

Mr. Geller made the point that the issue of regional collaboration is crucial to many of the smaller towns in the Berkshires and deserved a thorough thinking-through. He didn’t want the staff to have to come up with all of the ideas simply because the Committee was running short on time at this meeting. He asked the staff to give the reworking of these Objectives and Activities some genuine “brain space.”

Mr. Benjamin argued that, under the new trajectory of the Goal 3 Objectives, with Objective A covering the networks, and Objective B covering the on-the-ground initiatives, Activity #47 (“Support implementation of specific building reuse projects that support creative and/or “new” economy business locations within our

principal city and town centers.”) and Activity #50 (“Seek funding for brownfields rehabilitation in the region and aggressively pursue funding from the Environmental Protection Agency’s Brownfields Reclamation Program.”) may not make sense where they are and may in fact duplicate other Activities already stated. Mr. Karns added Activity #49 to that list (“Analyze high-priority business lands identified in the Berkshire Economic Development Sites Strategy (BRPC, June 1999) for manufacturing / high tech use.”)

Concerning Goal 3, Objective C: “Develop a regional capacity to analyze and develop appropriate strategies to deal with changes in the demographics and economy of the region.” The Committee agreed to remove Activity #54 (“Create a regional taskforce with partners across fields and occupations to consider issues related to the age population of the Berkshires: especially the growing 85+, 65+ cohorts, effects of the ‘baby boomers,’ and median age”), citing redundancy.

Mr. Benjamin asked whether the idea of a resource guide in Activity #46 (“Develop a resource guide for accessing the array of social service agencies in the region to encourage partnering among service providers, and improve connections and accessibility for those in need of services.”) was a specific product proposal or is the idea more to develop resources or opportunities for improving access to the array of social services in the region. He suggested that if the resource guide is more of a product, then it should be less an Activity and more a project. Mr. Karns said that no one had submitted the resource guide as a CEDS 2004 project. In that case, Mr. Benjamin suggested that Activity #46 could be reworded to say, “Improve access to the array of social services in the region...”—an Activity that might spawn a variety of projects.

Mr. Geller and Mr. Perlak that several groups in the region, such as the Berkshire Consortium for the Homeless and the Community Health Network, are actually working on coordinating awareness of the various social service agencies in the Berkshires. The Committee agreed to let the staff sort through the Activities under Goal 3, Objective C and reorganize the Activities under the newly conceived structure of the Goal 3 Objectives.

C) Outline Implementation Schedule

There was no discussion of the Implementation Schedule at this meeting.

IV. Review of Submitted CEDS 2004 Projects (45 minutes)

Ms. McNulty-Vaughan reviewed the handout summarizing the submitted CEDS projects. Mr. Vinette told the Committee that Ms. McNulty-Vaughan would go through the project list at some length at the next meeting.

V. Next Meeting (5minutes)

The Committee agreed to meet at 8:30 a.m. Thursday June 17, 2004 at the BRPC offices. The meeting was adjourned at approximately 10:25 a.m.