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**BERKSHIRE CEDS MEETING #7 MINUTES**  
THE COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR THE BERKSHIRES

**DATE:** Thursday, July 15, 2004  
**TIME:** 8:30 AM  
**PLACE:** Berkshire Regional Planning Commission Offices  
1 Fenn Street, Suite 201  
Pittsfield, MA

I. Call to Order

Mr. Vinette called the meeting to order at approximately 8:36 a.m.

The following Committee members were present:

Blair Benjamin	Tim Kiely (Town of Dalton)
David Bissaillon	Sharon Palma
Donna Cesan	Richard Rilla
Sam Haupt	Vicky Singer
Matt. Kerwood (arrived at 8:54 a.m.)	Rich Vinette

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

II. Approval of CEDS Meeting #6 Minutes of July 8, 2004

Mr. Haupt moved to approve the minutes of the July 8, 2004 meeting. Ms. Singer seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

III. Discussion of Project Evaluation Method

Ms. McNulty-Vaughan reviewed a set of handouts describing the project evaluation methodology and project score sheets. She explained the project scoring system, which for most project criteria categories amounts to 1, 3, or 5 (as in low, medium, or high compliance). She said that the criteria followed the suggestions of Ms. Donna Cesan, who laid out several key evaluation parameters at the July 8, 2004 meeting.

Ms. McNulty-Vaughan explained that if a project received a regional impact score, it would not receive a local impact score. She went on to say that she separated two criteria, funding readiness and project stage of development, from the others. These are less “evaluative” and more timeline oriented, she noted. The last score sheet, she explained, consisted of cumulative scores with the funding readiness and project stage of development left out.

After Ms. McNulty-Vaughan’s explanation of the project scoring methodology, the Committee members engaged in a discussion about one of the proposed projects, the Berkshire Business Real Estate Locator. Mr. Bissaillon, head of the Berkshire Chamber of Commerce and proponent of the project, explained that the Berkshire Business Real Estate Locator is intended to be a database covering all commercial buildings, space

and acreage available in the Berkshires for lease or sale. He said it would not be limited to Berkshire Chamber members. Working with the region's realtors, the chamber spent about \$15,000 to establish the database, which was launched on March 1, 2004. While it's not a new idea, Mr. Bissaillon noted, it had never been properly constructed and maintained. There was initially some concern that the realtors might resist, but they have been amenable to working cooperatively with the Chamber. Mr. Bissaillon said that Chamber staff is capable of managing it, though it should be marketed more and maintained better to be most effective. He apologized for not submitting it as a CEDS project months ago.

Ms. Singer asked if realtors pay a fee to list sites on the database. Mr. Bissaillon said no. He indicated that there are about 1,000 properties currently listed. The project needs funding for staffing and marketing.

Mr. Vinette pointed out that this project fit Goal #3 of the 2004 Berkshire CEDS: "Promote Regional Economic Analysis and Collaboration." Mr. Vinette asked what sources the Chamber had already pursued for funding the project. Mr. Bissaillon said that now most of the funding comes from the Chamber's own development corporation.

Mr. Kiely asked what kind of response there had been. Mr. Bissaillon said that right now the database is still in the building stages, but there is one success story so far.

Mr. Karns said that Pioneer Valley has a similar site locator, which it does not maintain itself. Mr. Vinette asked Mr. Bissaillon if the Chamber's board wants to retain maintenance of the real estate locator or turn over control to another agency. Dave Bissaillon said that at this point the Chamber can maintain the commercial realty database, though it may consider spinning it off to another agency at some later date.

Ms. McNulty-Vaughan asked Mr. Bissaillon if the Chamber had talked with the Western Mass Economic Development Council about their site locator. Mr. Bissaillon said that the Chamber had discussed things but not in any specific way. Mr. Kerwood recommended that the Berkshire region work much more closely with the Western Massachusetts Economic Development Council (EDC). He said that the EDC did take over the Pioneer Valley sites database. The EDC contracted with LoopNet, where realtors pay to have their properties listed. He said that the difference between the Pioneer Valley database and the Berkshire's database is that the capacity and scope of the brokers in the region is not as large-scale or nationally known. He said that the Pioneer Valley database is seamlessly integrated into the EDC's website through Loopnet.

Mr. Vinette suggested that the CEDS Committee take up recommendations on the Berkshire Business Real Estate Locator in the future.

#### IV. Discussion of Project Prioritization

Ms. McNulty-Vaughan explained that after the Committee scores the submitted projects, it must decide which among the top scoring projects get high priority for funding, for Committee attention, for follow through and so on. She explained that the EDA guidelines call for the Committee to lay out an implementation schedule for the priority projects, complete with possible funding sources and implementation roles and partners.

Ms. McNulty-Vaughan described the criteria required for EDA project funding: a community or area with an unemployment rate 1% over the national rate, or median per capita income less than 80% of the national level, or high degree of population loss (open-ended EDA criteria). Ms. McNulty-Vaughan said that most projects in most Berkshire communities will not qualify for EDA funding. However, Adams, North Adams, Pittsfield, and Florida are EDA eligible communities or have eligible tracts.

Mr. Karns reminded the Committee that the purpose of the CEDS is not just to identify EDA eligible projects but to help the region organize itself to pursue as many economic development projects as possible, with any variety of funding sources.

Ms. McNulty-Vaughan went over a sample prioritization the CEDS staff had drafted, based on differing project evaluation criteria and scoring systems. Several handouts showed draft rankings of the submitted

projects based on different analyses of the staff's sample scoring system. Mr. Karns pointed out that scoring many of the projects was made difficult because information, particularly for employment or project readiness, is limited for most projects.

Mr. Vinette asked if Ms. McNulty-Vaughan could run through how she evaluated the Jones Block project in Adams, for instance, since it was the top scoring project on most of the staff score sheets. He suggested that it might help the committee understand how all projects were evaluated. Jones Block scored well, said Ms. McNulty-Vaughan, because it's a downtown redevelopment project with a significant number of jobs, which would be high-skill, high-education jobs, not lower-paying retail jobs. Mr. Karns pointed out that most of the jobs proposed for the Jones Block project will probably require graduate degree-level education. The Jones Block also met three of the Objectives from the 2004 CEDS Goals and Objectives. Funding readiness for some projects was hard to determine because not every project has a business plan developed. However, the Jones Block project seemed to be at a high level of both funding and project development readiness.

Ms. Cesan suggested that the project evaluation criteria could use a lot more work. She expressed concern that some of the scoring in the draft system might not be clear to people who did not participate in the CEDS process. As an example, she pointed to the different scoring scales for "local impact" and "regional impact." Ms. McNulty-Vaughan had designed the local impact on a scale of 1, 3 or 5 and the regional impact on a scale of 6, 8 or 10, assuming that projects with significant regional impact would automatically be awarded the highest points available for local impact. Ms. Cesan suggested that this was too confusing; it should be clear which component of the "impact" score came from the local element and which came from the regional. She preferred that the scorer be allowed to score each element separately on a 1, 3 or 5 point scale.

Mr. Bissaillon asked if there are any projects that don't have a local impact. He questioned whether it was necessary to have a score for local impact at all. Mr. Karns said that Project Native, for example, could possibly have a local impact without having a regional impact. Ms. Palma said that Project Native would certainly have a great local impact in Great Barrington, but it may have a broader impact because it addresses what perhaps none of the other submitted projects do: Berkshire youth. She argued that it may very well have a sub-regional impact in South County, since it offers jobs in agriculture—and perhaps entrepreneurial jobs—for young workers in a sub-region most young people leave behind after high school.

Ms. Singer said that taking subjective scores and trying to make them into objective rankings will "never be a science." She suggested that the Committee members do the rankings themselves, acknowledging that each one brings his or her own opinions, and that the staff "pool" the rankings. This way, she argued, no one can pick on the subjective assessments of one staff interpretation but will have a more representative assessment based on 10 or 15 or 20 Committee members' interpretations, however subjective they may also be.

Mr. Vinette brought the Committee back to finalizing the criteria for the project evaluation. On his suggestion, the Committee agreed to separate the scoring of local impact from regional impact and score each on a scale of 1, 3 or 5 points.

Regarding the job potential score, Mr. Kerwood suggested that it should measure whether the project is maximizing the job creation potential for its location, for its type of enterprise, for its size. Mr. Karns agreed, suggesting that it would be best to consider specifically whether the numbers of jobs being created are reasonable for the scale of the project. Ms. McNulty-Vaughan reminded the Committee that most of the project proponents didn't submit job creation numbers or wage per job figures, so it would be difficult to determine objectively whether a project will maximize the number and quality of jobs for its scale and type.

Mr. Bissaillon asked what "impact" meant -- whether it meant increased tax revenue, for instance. Mr. Vinette said that "impact" assessment should include anything that changes the status quo. Mr. Vinette and Mr. Kerwood discussed the fact that some projects may impact a very specific sector of a local community but not the community in its entirety. They noted that some projects may in fact include negative impacts locally and very positive impacts regionally.

Ms. Cesan felt that, even with the above suggestions, the staff's evaluation criteria were still too complicated. The score sheets, she suggested, were just supposed to be a tool for the Committee to help them prioritize the

submitted projects. She felt that the Committee needed to agree on the definition for the scores 1, 3, or 5.

Mr. Karns suggested the following definitions for the scores: “5” meant “improves community in its entirety,” “3” meant “improves community in some part,” “1” meant “relatively insignificant community improvement.” He ruled out attempting to gauge negative impacts, suggesting that projects with negative impacts would probably not rise to priority status anyway. Ms. Cesan laid out even more specific definitions for 1, 3 or 5: “1” meant “has benefit to a portion of the local community, but does not act as a catalyst for economic development community-wide,” “3” meant “has benefit community-wide and provides some catalyst for economic development,” and “5” meant “has community-wide benefit and acts as a major catalyst for economic development in that community.” Mr. Kerwood suggested that the same definitions could be applied for regional impact scores with “community-wide” replaced by “regional.”

Ms. Cesan suggested that the staff set the project evaluation criteria (following committee suggestions from this meeting) in a spreadsheet or worksheet for the Committee to fill in. Ms. Cesan noted that after the Committee members filled out their own evaluations, there might be differences in members’ assessments that would frame the discussion of priority projects. In that case, she said, they would have performed their role, using a tool to help the Committee prioritize the submitted projects.

The Committee agreed that economic cluster improvements should be included in the regional impact evaluation and that compliance with CEDS 2004 Goals and Objectives should be scored according to the number of objectives met. Ms. Cesan suggested that each Committee member also do a preliminary matrix for the Commonwealth’s 10 Sustainability Principles and then decide what the range would be. For instance, if the highest number of principles any project met is 5, then meeting 1 or 2 principles would earn a score of 1, meeting 3-4 would earn a score of 3 and meeting 5 would earn a 5.

Mr. Benjamin expressed a bit of trepidation about scoring so many projects when he knew relatively little about many of them. He lauded the staff’s project summary sheet for its clear and succinct descriptions but still felt that he didn’t necessarily know enough about all of the projects to “do every one of them justice.” Ms. Singer said that every Committee member understood that the scoring would “never be perfect,” but recommended plowing forward with the information available, either from the staff’s summary description sheet or from the Initial Project Briefs. She added that she would like to see if the Project Brief for any given project includes a jobs number. Mr. Vinette suggested putting aside the job numbers and job quality at this stage in favor of dealing simply with a job potential index. The Committee members present agreed.

The Committee discussed the idea of creating a subcommittee to score the projects, consisting largely of the people present at this meeting who had taken part in establishing the criteria and score definitions. Ultimately, the Committee dismissed the idea of a project scoring subcommittee and agreed to invite all Committee members into the scoring process.

Ms. McNulty-Vaughan expressed the idea that, as opposed to ranking 39 different projects in some artificial numeric order, it might be preferable to think of prioritizing the projects in terms of the Action Plan and the Implementation Schedule. She suggested that it might be better to do the prioritizing in a “broader way.” Ms. Singer said that, in her experience, it pays to plow ahead with the kind of ranking spreadsheet the Committee had discussed and, most likely, four or five projects would probably rise above the rest. And that’s all the Committee is looking for now, she argued. The Committee agreed to go forward with the scoresheet procedure as a tool for prioritizing the submitted projects. They agreed that the numerical rankings of the projects would not necessarily be set in stone at the end of the exercise, and that if a consensus formed around adding a particular project to the priorities the Committee could use its discretion in the end.

## V. Next Meeting

The Committee agreed that over the next 3 weeks, the staff should poll members for the best meeting time, after the project evaluation worksheets have gone out. The staff agreed to set the next meeting date then.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:49 a.m.