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**BERKSHIRE CEDS MEETING #8 MINUTES**  
THE COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR THE BERKSHIRES

**DATE:** Tuesday, September 21, 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 about 8:39 a.m.

The following Committee members were present:

Donna Cesan	Richard Rilla
Steve Fogel	Richard Scullin (arrived at 8:50 a.m.)
Sam Haupt	Rich Vinette
Matt. Kerwood	

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

II. Approval of CEDS Meeting #7 Minutes of July 15, 2004

Mr. Kerwood moved to approve the minutes. Ms. Cesan seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

III. Discussion of Project Evaluation Results

Ms. McNulty-Vaughan reviewed the handouts summarizing the results of the member-scored project evaluations. She explained that the staff decided to use the median project scores as the criteria of comparison for sorting the submitted projects because the spread of scores per project made the median more meaningful than the average score for each project.

Ms. McNulty-Vaughan noted that the handout sheet divided the scored projects into three tiers of priority—essentially “high,” “medium,” and “low.” She noted that the sheet showing the median-based priority rankings accounted for the scoring of 9 different committee members. Another scoresheet came in between the compilation of that ranking and this meeting, but Ms. McNulty-Vaughan said that, even accounting for the 10<sup>th</sup> set of scores, the top projects remain essentially the same.

The projects in the top tier of priority ranking, based on member-scored project evaluations were:

### CEDS Projects 2004: Top-Tier Priority Score Summary

Project Type	Project	Median (Scored)
Redevelop	William Stanley Business Park of the Berkshires	31.5
Redevelop	Jones Block Redevelopment Project	30
Redevelop	Small Business Development Center @ MASS MoCA	25
Redevelop	Pittsfield Enterprise Center	23
Program	Berkshire Business Real Estate Locator	21.5
Redevelop	New England Log Homes	20
Develop	Lane Property	20
Develop	Dalton Business Park	19
Redevelop	Colonial Theatre	17
Program	Downtown Business Revolving Loan Fund	17

[Total Range of Median Scores: 4—31.5]

Mr. Haupt said that he didn't feel there were any surprises in the top priority projects. Mr. Karns said that the Committee must decide if the top four, five or six projects are the ones to which the committee can give its limited collective resources. Are these the projects that the Committee would like to concentrate on getting at least one step forward in the next several years? He said that it would be a great year if the region saw any progress on even the top four prioritized projects. Mr. Kerwood noted that that doesn't mean these projects will move forward with EDA money.

Mr. Vinette asked for Committee consensus on prioritizing the top-tier priority projects in the 2004 Berkshire CEDS, based on the results of the member-scored project evaluations. Mr. Kerwood moved to endorse the scoring results as proposed by the staff (that is, according to the median scores shown in the table above). Mr. Rilla seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

#### IV. CEDS Action Plan

Mr. Karns handed out a draft sketch of a 2004 Berkshire CEDS Action Plan. He explained that the Committee is supposed to lay out who the lead responsible party is for each priority project. Given the stage of each project, he said the Committee must consider what the next milestone the committee is really looking for in the next year for each priority project. Mr. Karns added that most of the projects are long-term projects. The draft Action Plan sketch included the "development stage" for each project, "potential funding sources", and 1<sup>st</sup> year milestone(s).

Mr. Karns reviewed the development stages and needs of the top 10 projects.

Mr. Fogel said that the Pittsfield Enterprise Center had applied for a USDA grant this week. The Center is looking for operating money, he explained. The Center would like to see Berkshire Community College offer some classes in downtown Pittsfield. The Center is looking for two or three additional sources of funding. There are three or four tenants, and possibly another two. Mr. Vinette asked if the Center is still looking for another location. Mr. Fogel said that that's possible, but the City needs to be involved. The city has done some searching. Mr. Fogel said that it's been difficult to recruit tenants enthusiastically with only month-to-month funding. He noted, however, that the quality of tenants is getting better.

Mr. Karns said that the Business Real Estate Locator is also in need of long-term funding support. He said that, as lead proponent, the Berkshire Chamber of Commerce is grappling with the ever-present challenge of securing ongoing operational funding support. Mr. Vinette, speaking as a member of the board of the Pittsfield Economic Revitalization Corporation (PERC), recommended that at some point PERC should approach the Chamber to take on responsibility for this project, or for some part of it, including perhaps operational funding support. He recommended that the CEDS Action Plan should

include PERC as a potential funding source for the Berkshire Real Estate Locator project.

The New England Log Homes project is at the site cleanup stage. Mr. Karns said that the project has been through all of the brownfield assessment stages. Mr. Kerwood asked if the Southern Berkshire (or Tri-Corner) CDC is still the lead on this project. Ms. McNulty-Vaughan said that the CDC had submitted the project, and Mr. Vinette said that Tim Geller, director of the CDC, was the active proponent.

The Lane Property project requires an initial feasibility study, and the Dalton Business Park requires the completion of an initial feasibility study. The Colonial Theatre is undergoing final design and needs construction funding. Mr. Karns explained that the Downtown Business Revolving Loan Fund is in the process of being designed. Ms. Cesan said that the Town of Adams is working through several different models to figure out the best option for the program.

Regarding potential funding sources, Mr. Karns said that the biggest project—the GE Site under PEDDA—does not require additional funding for the time being. Mr. Karns mentioned MassElectric as a possible funding partner for the Business Real Estate Locator and WMECO as a possible funding partner for the Pittsfield Enterprise Center. Mr. Vinette suggested that WMECO may also be a possible funding partner for the CEDS Committee activities.

Mr. Vinette asked if anyone had anything to add to the information shown in the draft Action Plan handout. Mr. Kerwood suggested that the Committee and the staff should approach the proponents of the priority projects and tell them that they've been endorsed as a priority. The Committee should ask the proponents to help us fill in the blanks for the Action Plan and Implementation Schedule. Mr. Scullin added that the Committee and staff should contact the other proponents to let them know that this is not a static list of top ten priority projects. He and Mr. Kerwood agreed that it would be wise when notifying the non-priority project proponents that even though their projects were not prioritized this time, they have not "fallen into an abyss." The Committee will be following up with submitted projects as their development warrants.

Mr. Karns raised the idea that ongoing operating funds seem to be a major need of most priority projects in the Berkshires. He argued that the regions neighboring the Berkshires have had much better success at gaining collective public and private ongoing operating funds from major contributors. He asked the Committee if the staff should address the lack of ongoing operational funding support in the CEDS document. He said that it would be good to have several hundred thousand dollars each year for incubators, real estate locators, the CEDS process, the marketing efforts, etc. He argued that gaining funding for the bricks and mortar economic development is less difficult. The "soft costs" of economic development support is much harder, much more "hit and miss." He told the Committee that his experience in VA was that the private sector and other organizations in the region reached out and did collective marketing. The towns and other entities in that region contributed to do regional marketing and to provide operational support, rather than fighting "cat and dog" for every penny of soft, operational funding support.

Mr. Vinette pointed out that two of the top priority projects, the Pittsfield Enterprise Center and the Berkshire Business Real Estate Locator, fall into this unfunded category, though both of them are regionally-based projects intended to increase the region's overall economic development capacity. He asked if the Committee thought these projects should be "asterisked" in some way to call attention to this aspect of their development.

Mr. Kerwood pointed out that this notion of ongoing support is clearly identified in the 2004 CEDS Goals and Objectives. He said that through the document there should be an undercurrent of building ongoing collective, collaborative economic development support among entities throughout the region. He said that he has been preaching the sharing of resources for years in the Berkshires, but warned it doesn't always resonate.

Mr. Vinette said that since the notion of "regional cooperation" is covered in the Goals and Objectives,

the document should make it plain that it is always easier to get funds for bricks and mortar projects than to secure operational support. Mr. Kerwood added that he would love to use the 2004 CEDS document as a way to encourage entities outside the CEDS Committee to say, "regionalization is the way to go." In his opinion, the more the Berkshires lets a collaborative, consolidated strategy of economic development slide away, the more the region will get left behind by neighboring regions who have adopted collective economic development models.

#### A. Review of EDA Guidelines

Ms. McNulty-Vaughan reviewed the EDA guidelines concerning how to construct the Action Plan for the CEDS document.

Ms. McNulty-Vaughan said that the Committee must break the Action Plan and CEDS activities into a multi-year program. Mr. Karns said this was the intention of laying out milestones and target completion on the sketch Action Plan.

Ms. McNulty-Vaughan suggested that in addition to laying out milestones for the project proponents themselves, the Committee should complete a Committee Work Plan to coincide with the project milestones. She also pointed out that workforce initiatives were identified as the #1 Goal, and there were *no* workforce projects submitted or prioritized.

Mr. Vinette asked if this put the document in jeopardy of being kicked back by EDA. Ms. McNulty-Vaughan thought that it was possible. Mr. Vinette pointed out that one of the members of the CEDS Committee is the director of the Berkshire County Regional Employment Board (BCREB). He and Mr. Karns recalled that it was the initial plan of the Committee to simply use the programs and activities already being pursued by the BCREB as the workforce initiatives for the CEDS. They argued that it only made sense to employ the programs already in place in the region, rather than duplicating the work of the BCREB in creating CEDS-specific workforce initiatives. Mr. Vinette recommended that the Committee ask straightforwardly for the workforce development people to provide a comprehensive summary of their workforce initiatives and programs for the purposes of the CEDS and for the collective organization of regional economic development. He stressed that this was very important for completing the CEDS.

Ms. Cesan said that typically an Action Plan features, in addition to the bricks and mortar projects, the programmatic, organizational, "work together" action items. She argued that there should certainly be action items for the CEDS Committee itself, laying out how it intends to play the coordinative role for economic development in the region.

Mr. Kerwood said that as an addendum to the CEDS document, the CEDS Committee could submit the latest workforce development blueprint from the BCREB. Mr. Karns explained that workforce initiatives would have to be addressed directly, not necessarily as an addendum, in the CEDS document itself.

Mr. Kerwood pointed out that the top four priority projects, though they are primarily bricks and mortar projects, also include workforce development components. He said the CEDS document should emphasize that the priority projects include workforce development aspects. Mr. Kerwood suggested that the staff should make use of the fact that the projects with workforce development components rose to the top of the priority. He recommended stressing in the document that moving forward on any of the top four physical projects moves the region forward on CEDS 2004 Goal #1, workforce development.

#### B. Implementation Schedule

There was no additional discussion of the Implementation Schedule.

### V. Finalizing CEDS Document

Ms. McNulty-Vaughan said that in advance of devising a final Action Plan, the staff would communicate

with the project proponents. Mr. Kerwood suggested that the staff provide the priority proponents a format for the 5-year Action Plan and Implementation Schedule to use as a template that will allow the staff to put the best argument forward for why these projects rose to the top. He made the point that not every project proponent may have fully understood what they were submitting information for when they sent in their initial project briefs. He thought it would be wise to make sure that the top priority project proponents thoroughly understand what it is the CEDS Committee is asking of them and why.

Ms. McNulty-Vaughan suggested that at some point in the near future, the Committee should probably invite the priority project proponents in to talk to the Committee and review the details of the projects, the specific plans for the future, the barriers and the needs of each project. She pointed out that, while the staff may be able to point out the lead responsible party for each project, it is not always clear who the partners are or who they could be for the projects. Mr. Vinette asked if that type of detailed assessment is an EDA requirement, or if it could be one of the things the Committee does down the road in its role as an ongoing facilitator. Mr. Karns told the Committee straightforwardly that, although sitting down with priority project proponents would be beneficial, the BRPC does not currently have the resources available to pursue that level of interaction.

The Committee discussed whether the collaborative economic development aspects of a CEDS Committee Work Plan should be included in the CEDS Action Plan. Mr. Vinette said that the Committee should be aware of what he sees as its dual purposes—one, developing a document characterizing a regional economic development strategy according to prescribed EDA guidelines and, two, serving as an ongoing collaborative clearinghouse, monitor and facilitator for collective economic development in the Berkshires.

Mr. Scullin said that if this Committee positioned itself as an action-oriented entity, it should consider publicizing its proposals and its priority projects to the public press. He acknowledged that it might be controversial, but it would be a way to market the group and create interest in the Committee as a viable, energetic force for economic development in the Berkshires.

Mr. Vinette suggested that the Committee must be mindful of how it puts out the information to the public. He suggested that the Committee not necessarily refer to the top ten ranked projects as “priority projects, but perhaps as the Committee’s group of focus projects, or important projects. Mr. Rilla argued against issuing a list of any ten projects, saying that the other 29 projects may change in status, or “importance,” over time. Mr. Scullin noted that the Committee should figure out, then, how it intends to talk publicly about the group of projects it has chosen to focus on. He reiterated, however, that it was important to publicize the group’s effort if it is to become an ongoing, fundable economic development entity in the Berkshires.

Mr. Kerwood asked what the drop dead time on completing the document is. Mr. Karns said that Congressman Olver had contacted him seeking confirmation that the Berkshire CEDS document would be submitted this fall. He also recommended that the regional bodies (BRPC, RCC, and PERC) should be given the chance to endorse the document. It may come after submission of the document to EDA.

## VI. Next Meeting

### A. Setting Milestones

Mr. Vinette shared an analogy of the CEDS Committee as a baseball team who had to clean off the field before it was actually able to play the game. He suggested that much of the hard work that has gone into the CEDS process so far—the Goals/Objectives/Activities visioning sessions, the prioritization of projects and so forth—hasn’t necessarily been a lot of fun, but that once that field had been cleaned up a bit, the Committee could actually start to play the game. He suggested that the Committee take time at a subsequent meeting to set milestones for itself. He told Committee members it was important to remind themselves why the Committee is doing this in the first place. For one, argued Mr. Vinette, no one else is, and who would if this Committee didn’t?

The Committee agreed to discuss milestones for itself at a subsequent meeting.

**B. CEDS Committee Work Program**

Mr. Vinette proposed putting together a draft of a CEDS Committee Work Program. He volunteered to do it and asked for any suggestions from Committee members for what this Committee should do over the next year. He suggested that the Committee should brainstorm on how the Committee can continue looking at projects and programs, increase Committee's capacity to form the

Mr. Vinette recommended that the Committee Work Program be included on the agenda for the next meeting. Mr. Karns said that to get the updated project information and to distill it will take at least three weeks. The Committee agreed to meet again Thursday the 14<sup>th</sup> of October.

Mr. Kerwood moved to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Haupt seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 9:57 a.m.