



BRPC

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

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**Berkshire County
Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committee
Agenda
August 4th, 2021 | 1:00 PM**

In person or virtual participation in this meeting is allowed by Ch. 20 of the Acts of 2021 suspending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c.30 sec.20. The meeting will be held at 1Fenn St., Suite 201, Pittsfield, MA 01201, and via the Zoom information below.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87177322280?pwd=a2tUWE14RUhQcFFEUWduWXd4RkpwUT09>

Meeting ID: 871 7732 2280

Passcode: 450496

One tap mobile: +16465588656,,87177322280#,,,,*450496# US (New York)

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1. Call to Order
2. Approval of Minutes from March 25th, 2021 (5 min)
3. Comments from the Public (5 min)
4. EDA CARES Act project
Agility & Resilience in Berkshire County: Public and Private Sector Preparedness
 - a. Berkshire Benchmarks – indicators, website RFP (5 min)
 - b. Technical Assistance for Businesses – survey results, consultants (5 min)
 - c. Technical Assistance for Municipalities – e-news, one-on-one (5 min)
 - d. Long-term Resiliency Planning – scope, agency debriefs, working group (10 min)
 - e. Project Identification and Support (5 min)
5. Discussion of CEDS 2021 Annual Report (10 min)
 - a. Project solicitation
 - b. Representative activities
6. "Preparing for the Future of Work in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts"
(Report issued by the Baker-Polito on July 13th, 2021)
<https://www.mass.gov/news/baker-polito-administration-releases-future-of-work-report-outlines-ongoing-steps-to-address-findings>
7. Adjournment
Next Meeting September (TBD)

City and Town Clerks: Please post this notice pursuant to M.G.L. Chapter 39, Section 23B

Please Note:

For information regarding postponements or cancellations on the day of a scheduled meeting, please call Berkshire Regional Planning Commission at (413) 442-1521, x5



CEDS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

ZOOM Virtual Meeting

March 25, 2021

I. Call to Order

Kyle H. called the meeting to order at 1:02pm

Committee Members Present

George Ambriz, Berkshire Community College
Roger Bolton, Williams College
Heather Boulger, MassHire Berkshires, Alternate
Mike Ferry, Berkshire Bank (retired)
Kyle Hanlon, BRPC
Lesley Herzberg, Berkshire Historical Society at Arrowhead
Ben Lamb, 1Berkshire
Jim Lovejoy, Mount Washington
Laurie Mick, PERC
Mike Nuvallie, City of North Adams
Chris Rembold, Town of Great Barrington

BRPC Staff Present

Tom Matuszko, Executive Director
Mark Maloy, GIS and Data Manager
Laura Brennan, Senior Planner

Non-Committee Members Present

Allison Marchese, Community Development Corporation of Southern Berkshire
Mark Phillips, Berkshire Agricultural Ventures

Laura Brennan asked all present to briefly introduce themselves. New members joining the committee since the last meeting include Lesley Herzberg and George Ambriz.

II. Approval of Minutes from September 10th, 2020

Roger B. moved to approve from September 10th, 2020. Chris R. seconded the motion.

Roll Call

George A. - abstained	Ben L. - Yes
Roger B. - Yes	Jim L. - abstained
Heather B. - Yes	Laurie M. - Yes
Kyle H. - Yes	Mike N. - Yes
Lesley H. - Yes	Chris R. - Yes
Mike F. - Yes	

III. Comments from the Public

No comments from the public.

IV. EDA CARES Act project

Laura B. shared with the group that BRPC's competitive application to EDA has been awarded as of February 25th, 2021. Scope of work for the two-year project was provided with meeting materials. An abbreviated version is also posted on berkshireplanning.org. Laura B. also clarified that this is a technical assistance focused program, it does not include funding for direct grants to individual small businesses. Ben L. added that we will be adding detail to the project scope soon. Roger B. asked whether we have received any indication of a change in direction or scope in general for EDA after the new administration. Tom M. and Laura B. indicated that there has been no official word regarding structural or procedural changes. We will keep an eye out for changes to their stated funding priorities, which are posted on the EDA website with any changes made quarterly. Laura B. also now receives a regular bulletin from EDA staff regarding federal funding opportunities related to economic development. Components of the scope of work were then reviewed:

Berkshire Benchmarks – Mark Maloy described the planned overhaul of the Berkshire Benchmarks website, being guided by the Berkshire Leadership Impact Council (BLIC). Work on identification of indicators is underway. BLIC's data team has made significant progress, and various subgroups/sectors have begun to meet. Sectors include economy, education, environment, government, health, housing, social environment, and transportation. Both quantitative and qualitative indicators are considered for each of the eight sectors. In addition to the website overhaul, an annual report will be issued, and a biannual convening of organizations around the county to discuss how the data is trending. Qualitative data will be addressed through a county-wide survey every three to four years. The new website is expected to be up and running by late fall or early winter of 2021. Recommended quantitative economic indicators currently include employment by sector, females age 18-64 that are employed, gross domestic product, households making greater than \$75,000 per year, income by educational attainment, income inequality, median household income, population in income brackets, self-employed, unemployment rate.

Technical Assistance for Businesses – Ben Lamb described a referral program using both individual and group settings to provide technical assistance to small businesses. A business needs assessment will be utilized to gather information on what business owners and non-profit leaders need. Ben shared a draft survey and solicited suggestions from committee members to improve the draft. George B. suggested a question regarding length of time the business/organization has been open. Laura B. clarified that this should apply to both for- and non-profit businesses so some of the phrasing may need to be adjusted. Allison M. suggested adding food safety or other food-sector related items to the list of potential topics for technical assistance. Another question could be added to generally categorize respondents into industry categories. Roger B. suggested adding something related to cybersecurity. Ben L. indicated that he will also add a question that helps determine business size. Roger B. suggested adjusting the title to ensure that non-profits are included among recipients. Mark P. asked about making the survey available in multiple languages. Both BRPC and 1Berkshire work with the Berkshire Immigrant Center for translation services. Heather B. suggested braking out workforce recruitment from workforce retention. Mark P. suggested including a topic in accounting services and tax preparation.

Technical Assistance for Municipalities – Laura B. shared a draft list of potential topics to cover in TA offerings for municipalities. Committee members provided some additional suggestions. Roger B. mentioned some pending MEPA changes to the environmental review process. Mike Nuvallie requested a focus on the MassWorks program, which has become highly competitive. Mike F. asked for the Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) program to be added to the list. Jim L. added that basic identification and management of grant

program opportunities for small municipalities would be helpful. Tom M. suggested adding migration to online billing and permitting, as well as improved cybersecurity, for municipal governments.

Long-term Resiliency Planning – Laura B. described intentions to develop a new chapter in the next 5-year CEDS document. Potential future economic disruptions caused by public health crises, natural disasters, or drastic market downturns are not well covered in ours or other MA CEDS documents at this time. Members of the CEDS Committee will have an opportunity to get involved in building our resiliency chapter over the course of the EDA-funded project. Some of the focus will be on ways that agencies throughout Berkshire County can better communicate with one another at the onset of a crisis, for improved awareness and to avoid duplication of efforts. Outreach to other organizations throughout the region will need to occur to document experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and provide further clarity regarding roles in future events.

Project Identification and Support – Laura shared that the scope also includes a focus on Priority Projects, helping along projects which may be stalled, or identifying emerging projects that might be added as a priority. Roger B. asked whether BRPC is still maintaining a database of regional investments, and Laura B. confirmed.

Tom M. asked the group whether any of them have been involved in communicating potential earmark proposals to Congressman Neal. He would like to coordinate so that the congressman's staff is not receiving suggestions from too many sources. The process is being formalized and some projects may not qualify under the new guidelines. Jim L. brought up transportation projects, and Tom M. suggested those may be routed to the pending infrastructure bill. Roger B. brought up BRTA, which he feels needs funds and planning assistance to restructure. Jim L. suggested support for state parks, which are seeing much heavier visitation since so many cultural venues are closed. Chris R. indicated that there is a long list of underutilized properties that could use funding. Brownfields work in particular can help move some projects forward. Tom M. confirmed that likely projects would need to be fairly immediate and shovel ready to be considered. Ben L. shared a link from Matthew R. from Congressman Neal's office regarding earmark timelines.

V. Economic Development District application update

Laura B. shared that our EDD application is still being reviewed, and we may expect our designation to be finalized by the end of this calendar year. This is in line with indications we have received regarding the review and approval timeline. Laura B. briefly described what EDD designations are and what the benefits include. BRPC has provided updates to data during the review timeframe, and will continue to do so when asked.

VI. Discussion of CEDS 2021 Annual Report

Laura B. reminded the group that we will need to submit an annual report as usual in December. Future CEDS Committee meetings will include work on components of that report.

VII. Adjournment

Roger B. moved to adjourn the meeting. Chris R. adjourned the meeting at 2:04.



**2021 Annual Report/Update to Berkshire County's
Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)**

SOLICITATION FOR PRIORITY PROJECTS

The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, on behalf of the Berkshire CEDS Committee, is soliciting Priority Project submissions for the 2021 CEDS Annual Report. More information about the 2017-2022 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy is available at: <http://berkshireplanning.org>.

The CEDS Priority Project list contains economic development projects being planned or already underway within Berkshire County. We encourage you to submit projects in all stages of development, from concepts to those nearing completion.

The CEDS Priority Project list provides an opportunity for project managers to make their projects known to others who may be able to provide assistance. Inclusion on the list also satisfies one of the criteria for funding from the federal government's Economic Development Administration.

Please note that this solicitation is for new projects **not already included** in the 2017-2022 CEDS, or in annual updates from 2018, 2019, or 2020.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING THE FORM

- The lead entity responsible for a project should complete the form.
- Please provide succinct responses to the questions that are applicable to your project.
- Contact Laura Brennan with questions: 413.442.1521 x14, lbrennan@berkshireplanning.org.

HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR PROJECT

Please use the online form at: <https://form.jotform.com/211946198845166>

You may also request a PDF copy of the form by contacting lbrennan@berkshireplanning.org.

Please submit completed forms no later than Friday, August 13, 2021

Section 3: Goals & Objectives

Performance Report (2020 version)

The 2017-2022 Berkshire CEDS sets forth six goals and objectives for the region. This section highlights the activities undertaken over the last 12 months to help the region meet these goals and objectives.

Goal # 1: Talent & Workforce

To stabilize and strengthen the region's workforce in order to meet the evolving needs of employers in the region.

Representative Activities:

- ✓ 1Berkshire continues to host "the jobs thing", the first Berkshire County exclusive jobs portal which only hosts positions that are permanent, full-time and pay \$40,000+ a year. Since its launch in July 2018 it has seen over 185,000 site visits, more than 58,000 unique users, and over 3,500,000 digital impressions.
- ✓ As part of the Berkshire Workforce Blueprint, during FY20, training grants were secured in each of its critical industries:
 - The Berkshire Workforce Board secured \$176,000 to train 55 un/underemployed residents in entry-level manufacturing. Training was provided by McCann Tech and Berkshire Community College. The job placement rate is 73%.
 - Berkshire Community College secured \$125,000 to train 62 residents in hospitality and culinary arts.
 - Berkshire Workforce Board secured \$225,000 in a healthcare grant to train 70 nursing assistants and established on-line training and day-time training programs.
- ✓ The MassHire Berkshire Workforce Board (BWB) issued an annual Berkshire Workforce Blueprint which identifies the region's critical (largest number of people employed) and emerging (signs of growth) industries.
- ✓ BWB leveraged \$2M which assisted 3,022 people and 524 companies with their workforce needs during FY20.
- ✓ BWB worked with all public middle and high schools and leveraged \$210,000 to connect K-12 youth with career readiness and career exploration activities. More than 2,500 students participated in activities and 384 in high school internships.
- ✓ Workforce pipeline expansion established at Monument Mountain Regional High School in manufacturing & healthcare; MCLA expanded their Health Sciences offerings; BCC has added a Community Health Worker certificate program, and the Berkshire Innovation Center has established new technology and manufacturing training opportunities.

- ✓ The Berkshire Business Interns program, developed by Lever, Inc. in partnership with the Berkshire United Way and the BWB, placed 45 interns during the summer of 2019 at 18 leading Berkshire organizations, in full-time, 10-week, paid internship positions. During the summer of 2020, they provided virtual internship opportunities.
- ✓ The MassHire Berkshire Workforce Board facilitated the Workforce Skills Cabinet consisting of economic, workforce and education partners which generated assets, opportunities and initiatives, as well as creating strategic benchmarks for further development within the regional workforce landscape.
- ✓ More than \$200K was provided in capital skills grants to improve equipment and infrastructures within our educational programs.
- ✓ During March 1 – June 30, 2020 and in response to COVID19, the workforce system assisted 1,700 job seekers and 350 employers with their immediate workforce needs and generated 10,000 unemployment claims.
- ✓ The Nonprofit Center of the Berkshires (NPC) provides professional development for nonprofit staff in Berkshire County. It hosts a List Serve where anyone can post nonprofit job opportunities. Peer support meetings for Executive Directors are held every other week via Zoom. The NPC coordinates consultants to teach workshops or hold “office hours,” often resulting in paid gigs. A Business-to-Nonprofit Resource Fair was cancelled due to COVID-19. Additionally, the NPC promotes volunteerism as a healthy community initiative and potential precursor to employment. This is done via an annual publication called the Giving Back guide, a new web site called GiveBackBerkshires.org, and volunteer fairs.
- ✓ 1Berkshire, in partnership with the Berkshire Immigrant Center has launched an Immigrant Business Support program that will provide targeted support for immigrant owned and operated businesses around the Berkshires.

Goal # 2: Entrepreneurship & Innovation

To create a diverse and robust business and entrepreneurial environment that encourages innovation and drives economic growth and opportunity.

Representative Activities:

- ✓ Thanks to the support of the Mass Life Science Center, the City of Pittsfield, the Pittsfield Economic Development Authority, and private industry partners, the Berkshire Innovation Center (BIC) held its grand opening and ribbon cutting ceremony for its brand new 22,500 SF building on February 28, 2020. The BIC offers world-class R&D facilities and equipment, interactive training and conferencing facilities, and shared access to advanced technology for local small and medium sized manufacturing companies. The BIC brings together industry, higher education, and vocational training, and provides hi-tech classrooms, labs, and equipment. It also serves as home to a handful of member tenants, including young companies seeking to grow.
- ✓ The Schumacher Center for New Economics facilitates an Entry to Entrepreneurship program, an entry-level business planning course taught by members of the Berkshire business community that is focused on fostering community entrepreneurship.

- ✓ In 2019, 1Berkshire and MCLA co-presented a Business Boot Camp for entrepreneurs in the idea stage of a new business.
- ✓ In 2019, 1Berkshire conducted a Get Mentored series, pairing entrepreneurs with mentors suitable for a variety of business launch stages.
- ✓ 1Berkshire continues to hold monthly entrepreneurial meetups. These networking occasions are now conducted virtually due to COVID-19, which has allowed for individuals from outside the region to more regularly attend and participate as they seek opportunities to relocate and grow into the Berkshires.
- ✓ Lever conducted entrepreneur challenges in the manufacturing, health technology, and clean energy. In this competitive format, four entrepreneurs compete for \$25,000 in seed funding and extensive mentoring from Lever staff and affiliates.
- ✓ In Fall 2019, a group of organizations launched EforAll Berkshire County which offers mentorship, accelerator support, education workshops, pitch competitions and supportive programming for startups, entrepreneurs, and existing small businesses across the region.
- ✓ The Massachusetts Small Business Development Center Network office in Berkshire County served 301 unique small business clients, helped 12 startup businesses open their doors, and assisted in the creation or retention of over 385 jobs. It also worked to put the capital infusion of \$3,602,524 into the hands of local small business owners.
- ✓ The Nonprofit Center of the Berkshires (NPC) is now serving as a fiscal sponsor to new nonprofit organizations. NPC continues to host statewide organizations that want to offer services to the Berkshires region including Mass Service Alliance, MA Nonprofit Network, and Philanthropy MA. NPC partners with various businesses and consultants to reach their network of nonprofits with news of services and products, and recently partnered with the HomeWorks division of MA Saves to promote virtual energy assessments.

Goal # 3: Infrastructure, Site Readiness & Transportation

To invest in infrastructure and site improvements that support or facilitate economic growth in appropriate areas.

Representative Activities:

- ✓ The Berkshire Brownfields Program continues to operate an Environmental Protection Agency funded brownfields assessment program and revolving loan fund to facilitate the assessment and cleanup of contaminated sites.
- ✓ 1Berkshire launched the beta version of their Site Selector tool. This interface allows for realtors and property managers to post commercial properties and development opportunities for free on a site targeted toward those seeking investment opportunities. Since launch, the Site Selector has hosted over 30 regional properties to help promote them to investors and developers.
- ✓ The Berkshire Flyer Pilot, a weekend passenger rail service connecting New York City and the Berkshires, is proposed to run between Memorial Day and Columbus Day in 2021. Funding has

previously been secured through legislative appropriation to support the pilot, deemed economically viable and beneficial by the Berkshire Flyer initiative studies.

- ✓ Since June 2018, State and local stakeholders have been engaged in the East-West Passenger Rail Study, which is evaluating six alternatives for providing rail service between Pittsfield and Boston. These alternatives range from retooling existing freight and passenger rail for as low as \$27.4M to constructing a new high-speed rail corridor along I-90 for \$24.9B.
- ✓ Former Massachusetts State Senate President Stanley Rosenberg in 2019 proposed that MassDOT, in addition to the East-West Rail Study, conduct a Northern Tier Rail Study, with the goal of extending existing passenger rail service from Fitchburg to North Adams.
- ✓ MassDOT expended \$5.7 million on resurfacing the Ashuwillitcook Rail Trail from the Pittsfield town line to the Adams visitor center.
- ✓ MassDOT invested \$3.9 million for a bridge replacement on Berkshire School Road in Sheffield over Schenob Brook.
- ✓ MassDOT completed the Narragansett Avenue bridge replacement project over Pontoosuc Lake in Lanesborough at a cost of \$7.6 million.
- ✓ MassDOT completed a replacement bridge project in Pittsfield over the West Housatonic River at a cost of \$2.7 million. The 2017 5-year ACS indicates that 78.2% of homes are considered to have broadband access, an increase of over 8% since the 2016 5-year estimates.

Goal # 4: Collaboration

To increase regional and inter-regional collaboration to better leverage economic development opportunities.

Representative Activities:

- ✓ Berkshire Regional Planning Commission continues to operate a data clearinghouse and indicators website (Berkshire Benchmarks) focused on improving the quality, volume and access to information and statistics for the Berkshire region. Substantial expansions and improvements are planned for FY21.
- ✓ 1Berkshire continues to host the Economic Development Practitioners Group meetings in an effort to create collaborative and cooperative opportunities for programs and initiatives around economic development in the region. This group meets quarterly and includes a cross section of economic development stakeholders both regionally and at the state level.
- ✓ The Berkshire Compact is a continuing regional collaboration. The Compact is a group of regional civic, education and business leaders who seek to ensure the well-being of each individual and the strength of our economy and community by raising the educational access, aspirations and attainment, as life-long learners, of Berkshire County residents.
- ✓ A partnership between MassHire Berkshire Workforce Board and Berkshire United Way allowed a Berkshire Recruiter to assist 155 job seekers, with 70% finding employment. BWB also convened with 150 businesses and established bi-monthly human resource networking meetings which

assists 46 companies with their recruitment and retention needs. Additional resources for provided by Berkshire Taconic Foundation to expand career readiness in southern Berkshire.

- ✓ The Berkshire Leadership Impact Council serves as a countywide collaborative representative of major employers, key organizations, sectors, and initiatives from throughout the region. It serves as a resource, facilitator, connector, convener and guide to advance opportunities and align efforts pertaining to economic development, quality education, workforce development and promotion of the Berkshires as a great place to live, work and play.
- ✓ The Berkshire Municipal Managers Association (BMMA), which includes every town administrator in Berkshire County and is currently led by Robert Graves, Town Administrator of Hinsdale, meets monthly to share best practices and explore shared services.

Goal # 5: Industry & Occupational Clusters

To support and expand the region's industry and occupational clusters.

Representative Activities:

- ✓ 1Berkshire publicly launched the Berkshire Blueprint 2.0 in February of 2019. This updated strategic imperative for economic growth is a guiding, action-oriented document focused on the five top industry clusters, and the cross-cutting issues of importance that face the regional economy. This effort updates and expands upon the original Berkshire Blueprint issued in 2008, and brings a new level of facilitation, tracking, and reporting to the regional economic development activities going forward into the implementation phase.
- ✓ 1Berkshire has undertaken the development of a COVID-19 addendum to the Berkshire Blueprint 2.0. This addendum provides an updated lens for the Blueprint to pivot and maintain a vital scaffolding to our economic development, resilience, and rebound across the Berkshires.
- ✓ A database of regional investments is being maintained by Berkshire Regional Planning Commission. This database catalogs priority projects identified in the Berkshire County CEDS, along with similar and emerging projects that may be incorporated into future CEDS. The database now contains over 360 entries.
- ✓ The Nonprofit Center of the Berkshires is now holding Legislative Town Halls for the nonprofit sector and taking on more advocacy working with MNN, writing OP EDs, etc.
- ✓ The Berkshire Skills Cabinet continues to prioritize Healthcare/Social Assistance, Advance Manufacturing, and Hospitality/Management, and has added an emphasis on vocational trades. The 2020 Workforce Blueprint update includes expanded training in manufacturing (47 trained & 12 on-the-job training) and hospitality (38 trained) and a new pathway for healthcare/social assistance; expanded career readiness into all middle and high schools (2,800 students) and additional post-secondary pathway offerings, more than \$1.2M in industry specific capital investments, and assisting 200 job seekers find employment in these sectors. The region's immediate impact from COVID was a 8% drop in manufacturing, 51% drop in hospitality, and 15% drop in healthcare/social assistance, and now there are 1,600 job openings with all partners rallying to bridge the employment gap.

- ✓ Lever's COVID-19 Intrapreneur Challenge employs a competitive format to activate, connect and focus Massachusetts companies as they pivot production capabilities to meet the emerging demands of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Goal # 6: Economic Resiliency

To support the resiliency of individual businesses and the regional economy during future economic disruptions.

Representative Activities:

- ✓ The Massachusetts Small Business Development Center Network (MSBDC) continues to serve as a mandated response agent along with the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) to support small business needs and help provide express access to loan funds released by the US Treasury in any state declared or nationally declared disaster. During the current pandemic, the Berkshire Office worked closely with the SBA and other partners in accessing relief funds available through the CARES Act. In a four-month period alone, the Berkshire Office assisted about 40 small businesses receive \$3.1 million in PPP and EIDL funds.
- ✓ 1Berkshire has launched a series of Virtual Town Halls. These targeted panel discussions provide a candid platform for individuals and agencies across the region to learn about responses and updates in relation to COVID-19.
- ✓ 1Berkshire launched a COVID-19 Response Portal on their website. This platform promotes resources and opportunities for individuals and businesses to take advantage of to sustain, persist, and rebound through and following the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ✓ Lever, Inc. provides mentorship and access to expert advisors on topics such as market diversification and capitalization strategies.
- ✓ Investment in developing the Outdoor Recreation economy of the Berkshires continues on a number of fronts, including at Greylock Glen in Adams, Springside Park in Pittsfield, and Hanging Mountain in Sandisfield, through the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership and the "High Road" initiative of Berkshire Natural Resources Council, and throughout the region with multiple recent investments made by Mill Town Capital in outdoor recreation facilities. In 2019/2020, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission completed an Outdoor Recreation Plan for Berkshire County, which includes an inventory of assets and recommendations for a wide range of outdoor recreation activities.