



BRPC

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

1 Fenn Street, Suite 201
Pittsfield, MA 01201
T: (413) 442-1521 · F: (413) 442-1523
TTY: 771 or (800) 439-2370
berkshireplanning.org

CEDS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Hybrid ZOOM Virtual Meeting/In-Person Meeting

August 4, 2021

I. Call to Order

Kyle H. called the meeting to order at 1:00PM

Committee Members Present

George Ambriz, Berkshire Community College (Present via Zoom)
Roger Bolton, Williams College (Retired) (Present via Zoom)
Heather Boulger, MassHire Berkshires (Present via Zoom)
John Duval, BRPC Commission Chair (Present via Zoom)
Keith Girouard, Massachusetts Small Business Development Network (Present via Zoom)
Kyle Hanlon, BRPC Executive Committee, CEDS Chair (Present via Zoom)
Lesley Herzberg, Berkshire County Historical Society at Arrowhead (Present via Zoom)
Ben Lamb, 1Berkshire (Present via Zoom)
Allison Marchese, CDC of Southern Berkshire (Present via Zoom)
Laurie Mick, PERC (Present via Zoom)
Mike Nuvallie, City of North Adams (Present via Zoom)
Mark Phillips, Berkshire Agricultural Ventures (Present via Zoom)
Kevin Pink, 1Berkshire (Present via Zoom)
Ian Rasch, Alander Group (Present via Zoom)
Chris Rembold, Town of Great Barrington (Present via Zoom)
Ben Sosne, Berkshire Innovation Center (Present via Zoom)

BRPC Staff Present

Laura Brennan, Economic Development Program Manager
Wylie Goodman, Senior Planner
Mark Maloy, GIS and Data Manager
Alexander Valentini, Economic Development Researcher (Present via Zoom)

Kyle H. asked all present to briefly introduce themselves.

II. Approval of Minutes from March 25th, 2021

Heather B. moved to approve the minutes from the March 25th, 2021 meeting. Roger B. seconded the motion. The Committee unanimously approved the motion. No abstentions.

III. Comments from the Public

No comments from public.

IV. EDA CARES Act project

Berkshire Benchmarks – Mark M. reported on this aspect of the project. For the economy sector of the Berkshire Benchmarks overhaul, the Economic Development Practitioners group has selected ten quantitative indicators to track and review, four of which are priority indicators.

Priority Indicators:

1. Employment by Sector – Between 2001 and 2019, the sector which has experienced the largest decline in employment is manufacturing and the sector which has experienced the largest increase in employment is health care and social assistance.
2. Percent of Households Making Over \$75,000 per annum – A smaller portion of Berkshire County households make more than \$75,000 per annum than the corresponding portions of Massachusetts and United States households. This indicator will be further broken down into smaller demographics according to race and gender to examine inequities within the County.
3. Income by Educational Attainment – For each educational attainment cohort, Berkshire County residents demand less wages than the corresponding State and National cohorts. This discrepancy is especially pronounced for the Bachelor's degree and graduate degree or professional degree cohorts.
4. Income Inequality (GINI Coefficient) – Income inequality is less pronounced in Berkshire County than in Massachusetts and the United States, and has trended downwards since 2011, whereas it has trended upwards in the State and Nation. However, the degree of these trends is not too significant.

Additional sector meetings will be held over the next month, a qualitative survey will be deployed to County residents throughout the winter, website redevelopment will start in September, and an annual report on project progress will be available in time for the bi-annual meeting in April 2022.

Chris R. asked how recent the data is that is being used. Mark M. said that it is the most recently available data; most of it comes from the most recently published American Community Survey, which means it is 2019 data.

Roger B. mentioned that he found it curious how uncompetitive earnings for more educated Berkshire County residents are compared to the State and Nation and would be interested to learn more about this.

Technical Assistance for Businesses – Ben L. spoke on this aspect. At the beginning of the project in March, 1Berkshire deployed a survey to the business community, which will stay active over the duration of the project and continue to inform the topic areas in which 1Berkshire focuses technical assistance. So far, the survey has received approximately 110 responses. The three primary issue areas identified by respondents were: workforce recruitment and retention; social media and e-communications marketing; and grant preparedness and support. A fourth issue, which was found, is that although Berkshire County contains many minority- and woman-owned businesses, not many of these are certified as such. 1Berkshire has issued RFPs to the consultant community and is conducting interviews with consultants who identified any of the three topic areas as areas of expertise. 3 or 4 consultants will eventually be identified and delivery of both group workshops and one-on-one technical assistance will begin Fall 2021.

Roger B. asked to be reminded what EDA grant funded this program. Laura B. said it was the CARES Act.

Technical Assistance for Municipalities – Laura B. spoke on this aspect. The procedure for technical assistance for municipalities is very similar to that for technical assistance for businesses. Initial outreach to town and city leadership throughout the County collected responses on which sorts of technical assistance would be most helpful. The most consistently identified topics included: training for boards and committees; grant identification and management; online communications; and online processing of permits,

licenses, taxes, and other documents. The consultants that 1Berkshire is currently interviewing may also have their ability to deliver technical assistance to municipalities vetted. If needed, BRPC will contract government- or municipality-specific consultants to deliver assistance. A regular e-blast with helpful information and various timely reminders regarding grant and educational opportunities geared towards municipalities is being issued, and some specific, direct, and one-on-one assistance to municipalities has been provided.

Long-term Resiliency Planning – Laura B. spoke on this aspect. BRPC is currently working on the final annual report for its 5-year CEDS published in 2017. This report will not contain a resiliency chapter, but the new 5-year CEDS to be published in 2022 will contain a resiliency chapter. Economic resiliency is defined by EDA as the ability to recover from economic disruptions, the ability to withstand disruptions, and the ability to avoid disruptions altogether. Disruptions may take three primary forms: downturns in the national or international economy; downturns in particular industries critical to a region’s economy; and external shocks by way of natural or man-made disasters. EDA further divides resiliency planning activities into two types: Steady-state initiatives and responsive initiatives. BRPC will be evaluating to what degree these initiatives currently exist in Berkshire County, and what can be done to strengthen them. Additional activities to be undertaken will include: debriefing of the agencies throughout the County involved in pandemic response/relief; development of broad coordination protocols; resource mapping on a town-by-town basis; and studying the disproportionate effects of the pandemic on certain demographics. BRPC will also be convening a resiliency planning working group, which will help with the above initiatives.

Kyle H. volunteered to be part of the working group.

Ben L. indicated that 1Berkshire staff will be a part of the working group.

Heather B. said that she or someone from the Workforce Board would participate.

Mark P. said he would be interested in learning more about the working group.

Project Identification and Support – Laura B. spoke on this aspect. BRPC and 1Berkshire staff have been helping County organizations launch projects to help the region recover from the impact of the pandemic, often through job creation, but also through the strengthening of a particular sector/cluster in the County. Laura B. has been working with the BIC on an application for their proposed Manufacturing Academy, and has also worked with Lever, Inc. on some proposals. EDA has recently announced a new round of funding under the American Rescue Plan Act equal to \$3B – this is an opportunity for the County to pursue extensive funding. This funding has a very tight turnaround, and BRPC therefore needs to hear project ideas as soon as possible.

V. Discussion of CEDS 2021 Annual Report

Project Solicitation – Laura B. talked about updating existing priority projects for the 2021 CEDS annual report. Currently, there are 39 priority projects included in the CEDS. BRPC is collecting updates from project stakeholders, and roughly half of the projects have been updated. Additionally, 3 new projects are potentially going to be included in the 2021 Report: Berkshire Digital Economy Build-to-Scale; Redevelopment of Site 9 at the William Stanley Business Park; and Kemble Street Studios. The 2022 5-year CEDS document is going to involve an overhaling of the priority projects list, with more of an emphasis put on those projects that can receive funding from the Federal government.

Ian R. asked how priority projects are removed, as some current projects such as Spring Lawn and Elm Court are unlikely to move forward. Laura B. said that such projects will most likely be removed for the 2021 annual report. Ian R. asked if projects must receive federal funding, specifically EDA funding, to qualify. Laura B. said that some of the current projects may have originally qualified for federal funding, such as historic tax credits, but such considerations will be taken more seriously when building-out the project list for the 2022 5-year CEDS document.

Representative Activities – Laura B. provided an update on the collection of representative activities by BRPC and asked that the agencies/organizations represented by CEDS Committee members submit updates/new reports on their activities that fulfill one or more of the 6 CEDS Goals.

**VI. “Preparing for the Future Work in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts”
(Report issued by the Baker-Polito Administration on July 13th, 2021)**

Wylie G. introduced herself and gave a brief overview of her background.

Wylie G. talked about a recently released report conducted by McKinsey & Co. examining the impact of the pandemic on Massachusetts and how the impact has differed in different regions.

The report posits 3 possible scenarios. In the first scenario, working conditions largely return to how they were before the pandemic, with the frequency of remote working diminishing, and brick-and-mortar commerce rebounding. In the second scenario, pandemic trends continue with many workers choosing to work remotely and e-commerce continuing to displace brick-and-mortar commerce. In the third scenario, remote working trends accelerate, and retail businesses relocate to serve workers in new locations.

Some key shifts, which are already occurring, include: increased need for affordable child-care close to home; increased need for re-skilling the workforce for remote work; increasing inequities for women, low-income, less-educated, and BIPOC workforce; decreased need for office space, public transit, business travel; decrease in immigration; and decreased availability of affordable housing.

The Berkshire County priority clusters that are predicted to see an increase in labor demand include: health care & social services; arts, entertainment & recreation; and manufacturing. The priority clusters that are predicted to see a decrease in labor demand include: retail trade; accommodation & food services, and agriculture, forestry & fishing.

Berkshire County, and especially Southern Berkshire County, experienced a positive shift in net migration between 2019 and 2020. However, the permanence of this migration is unknown.

Future threats that Berkshire County is likely to face include reduced demand for office real estate; need for childcare; need for reskilling; slowing population growth; equity challenges; and housing shortages.

Keith G. asked for the presentation to be shared.

Laura B. encouraged agencies submitting applications to the Commonwealth to reference this report as the Administration invested heavily in this effort and will likely be referencing it for funding decisions.

Roger B. said that the report's conclusion that changing employment conditions will decrease demand for public transit should not discourage Berkshire County from seeking better and more extensive public transit, as the County's transit needs are to a large degree defined by lifestyle needs, not commuting needs.

Ian R. said that there is a significant amount of emphasis on developing affordable housing throughout the County, but that there also needs to be a push for developing more market-rate housing, which is very difficult to do outside of gateway cities like Pittsfield. Roger B. echoed these sentiments and said there must be more a push to accommodate middle-income people who are relocating to the County from urban areas.

VII. Adjournment

The September meeting of the CEDS Committee will take place on Wednesday, September 29th. The CEDS annual report will be largely finished by this meeting, and BRPC staff will be asking for provisional approval of the document from the Committee.

Chris R. moved to adjourn the meeting. Roger B. seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 2:02PM.