



CEDS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Virtual Meeting via Zoom

February 16, 2022

I. Call to Order

Kyle H. called the meeting to order at 1:03PM

Committee Members Present

George Ambriz, Berkshire Community College
Roger Bolton, Williams College (Retired)
Glenn Bergman, Berkshire Agricultural Ventures
John Duval, Town of Adams/BRPC Commission Chair
Keith Girouard, Massachusetts Small Business Development Center Network
Kyle Hanlon, BRPC, CEDS Chair
Lesley Herzberg, Berkshire County Historical Society at Arrowhead
Ben Lamb, 1Berkshire
Jim Lovejoy, Town of Mt. Washington
Laurie Mick, PERC
Chris Rembold, Town of Great Barrington
Ben Sosne, Berkshire Innovation Center

Committee Alternates Present

Kevin Pink, 1Berkshire
Shannon Zayac, MassHire

Guests Present

Elizabeth Nelson, 1Berkshire

Not Present

Mike Coakley, City of Pittsfield
Christina Wynn, Berkshire Community College
Heather Boulger, MassHire
Mike Nuvallie, City of North Adams
Ian Rasch, Alander Construction

BRPC Staff Present

Tom Matuszko, Executive Director
Laura Brennan, Economic Development Program Manager
Wylie Goodman, Senior Economic Development Planner

Kyle H. asked all present to briefly introduce themselves.

II. Approval of Minutes from January 12nd, 2022

Ben L. moved to approve the minutes from January 12nd, 2022. Keith G. seconded. No discussion. The minutes were approved by roll call vote.

III. Comments from the Public

No comments from public. Kyle Hanlon reminded the group of the recent news of EDD designation for Berkshire County. Laura Brennan provided a brief summary of what benefits this designation will bring, primarily related to the technical assistance that BRPC will be able to provide to its member municipalities. Roger B. noted that EDD designation also allows BRPC to apply for EDA funding in areas not officially deemed "in distress," as defined by EDA, which was not the case previously. In the past, if a project was adjacent to - but not within - a distressed area, the project would be deemed ineligible. This designation will also help when people/organizations come to BRPC seeking collaborations. Engaging BRPC as a partner now raises the profile of these projects, which would have the advantage of being both rural and having EDD designation. BRPC is the 9th EDD in Massachusetts.

IV. EDA CARES Act project

Berkshire Benchmarks – Laura B. reported on this topic because Mark Maloy could not join on the call. The *Quality of Life* survey officially closed yesterday. It was open for a month. Some postcards have not yet arrived, so the survey will remain open until the end of February. There have been over 3K responses, but BRPC is seeking more. However, the diversity of responses is solid vis a vis income, race, age, etc. The Berkshires Benchmarks website is on track, with vendor Badie Designs providing good support. The site will go live in mid-April. The user experience is exciting and the ability to interact with charts and graphs that in the past were static is a strong draw. The website will also allow for many opportunities for personalization based on people's data interests.

Technical Assistance for Businesses – Ben L. shared progress on the Spring entrepreneur cohort and MWBE assistance programs. The Fall cohort ended successfully, although some topics were less well-attended. Starting in the beginning of March and every week thereafter, a new cohort will be starting. The primary foci are marketing/branding and getting ready to get funded. 1Berkshire is actively seeking additional presenters for some workshops. Two niche workshops they plan to offer are Branding for Growth and Press Strategies. They are looking as well at Spanish-language programming. They have a draft of an MWBE module that will be translated into Spanish, too. It is an interactive workshop that participants can do at their own pace/time and will walk them through the basics. If people want to pursue help after that, they can follow-up for more assistance.

Technical Assistance for Municipalities – Laura B. shared with the group another sample of one of the "Toolkits," BRPC has created. These are two-page summaries of an economic development strategy that municipalities have at their disposal. All Toolkit items will be posted on www.berkshireplanning.org once complete, after final formatting is done. The example shown was for Business Improvement Districts; BIDs could be a good strategy for downtown districts, particularly those that have been a part of the Commonwealth's Local Rapid Recovery Planning project.

Long-term Resiliency Planning – Wylie G. described a recent food access and insecurity-focused working group meeting. Participants included Berkshire Grown, Berkshire Agricultural Ventures, the Town Manager from Lee (Chris Brittain), and representatives of area food pantries. The group discussed the gaps that were revealed during COVID when food was needed to support a larger food insecure population. On the consumer side, the group looked at the most efficient ways to get local, healthy food to people who need it. We learned that transportation for families is difficult, requiring delivery of food, and that incentivizing farmer's markets to take SNAP and expanding generally outreach and education to let food-insecure people know resources exist is important. On the producer

side, we talked about the need for a shared freezer/storage and meat processing facility to allow farmers and growers and herders to have product stored until there is a consumer to purchase them, as well as the potential for a processing center for Value Added products. Glen Bergman shared his organization's work on the Market Match Fund for farmers' markets in Berkshire County, which allows for centralized management of handling SNAP benefits using tokens. Market Match extends SNAP benefits to people up to a 4:1 match at the highest level. They have already raised \$85K and hope to raise at least \$100K, which would be 100% pass-through with no administrative costs taken, and data gathered about how it is used. Foundations and individuals have given sizeable contributions. Jim L. suggested training small processors around USDA food handling best practice protocols. Glenn B. noted that the Child Tax Credit brought down lines at food pantries and that this or Universal Basic Income should be pursued as a strategy rather than building more food pantries.

Project Support – Elizabeth N. shared 1Berkshire's work as the Regional Tourism Council. She shared the marketing and promotion efforts being planned through www.berkshires.org and provided a link to a page that reports direct visitor spending data gathered by their organization related to tourism (\$304M in 2020: down 45% from 2019; \$553M in 2019: increase over 2018). The estimated total economic impact of tourism in Berkshire County is around \$456.6M. She noted that there are over 2M views annually to the Berkshires.org website and 4 out of 5 visitors to the County reportedly use it. However, the current site is eight years old and needed to be updated. The new site will launch ideally in mid-March with more focus on user engagement, advertising opportunities, and a stronger focus on telling the Berkshires story to entice people with the goal of attracting the 25–45-year-old visitor and to encourage people to not only visit here but also potentially relocate. She showed a promotional video developed by the team behind the website revamp and showed how the site can be tailored to people's interests. The Living Here section currently on 1Berkshire.com is going to move to Berkshires.org.

V. 2023-2027 Berkshire County CEDS

Laura B. reviewed the goals and objectives of the previous CEDS to begin discussion on to what degree the group wants to accept or revise for the five-year update. There are currently six goals: Talent/Workforce, Entrepreneurship/Innovation, Infrastructure/Site Readiness/Transportation, Collaboration, Industry/Occupational Clusters, and Economic Resiliency.

Ben L. asked about how we bring in a more programmatic focus. Glenn B. suggested climate adaptation and resiliency should be included in parallel with BAV's own work in seeking funding for projects aligned to those themes. He gave an example of projects such as agriculture on municipal-owned land and solar arrays in conjunction with farming. Tom M. suggested adding the lack of housing and its impact on businesses' ability to attract a workforce. Roger B. concurred and suggested a greater emphasis on equity and under-represented people. Ben L. concurred with the focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion plus. He also suggested childcare impacting across industry clusters. Roger B. suggested we look to EDA's own goals and priorities and that we try to match that. These priorities change on a quarterly basis. Equity has been added as a funding priority as well as green technology. Ben S. suggested working with Glenn B. on clean tech. Are these new goals or can some of the items now identified as goals instead be woven into other categories (i.e., collaboration and equity which could easily cross topics).

For future funding, Laura noted that proposed projects must align with regional CEDS to receive EDA investment. To that point, we will continue to discuss how many goals are sufficient. Ben L. suggested two functional areas: Outdoor Recreation and its impact and

Digital Economy / Rural Innovation Hub with scalable growth potential but we need to take strategic action. Other rural economies are talking about this in a more strategic fashion. We will in future meetings discuss what needs to stay and what needs to be eliminated.

VI. Adjournment

Glenn B. moved to adjourn the meeting. Ben S. seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 2:01 pm.