



BRPC

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

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**Berkshire County
Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committee
Agenda
April 20th, 2022 | 1:00 PM**

This will be a **Virtual Meeting** as allowed by Ch. 20 of the Acts of 2021 suspending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c.30 sec.20.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83086779508?pwd=cFVclZLclZMQ1M1QnZKNHFHSmhGUT09>

Meeting ID: 830 8677 9508

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1. Call to Order
2. Approval of Minutes from March 16th, 2022
3. Comments from the Public
4. EDA CARES Act project update (10 min)
Agility & Resilience in Berkshire County: Public and Private Sector Preparedness
 - a. Berkshire Benchmarks – new website sneak peek
 - b. Long-term Resiliency Planning – working group update – Creative Econ.
5. 2023-2027 Berkshire County CEDS (45 min)
 - a. EDA award April 1, 2022 – March 31, 2023
 - i. Overview of scope, including surveys
 - b. Goals and Objectives discussion, continued
6. Adjournment

Next Meeting – May 18th, 2022

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

Virtual Meeting via Zoom

March 16, 2022

I. Call to Order

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

Committee Members Present

George Ambriz, Berkshire Community College
Roger Bolton, Williams College (Retired)
Mike Coakley, City of Pittsfield
John Duval, Town of Adams/BRPC Commission Chair
Kyle Hanlon, BRPC, CEDS Chair
Lesley Herzberg, Berkshire County Historical Society at Arrowhead
Ben Lamb, 1Berkshire
Jim Lovejoy, Town of Mt. Washington
Tom Matuszko, BRPC Executive Director
Laurie Mick, PERC
Chris Rembold, Town of Great Barrington
Ben Sosne, Berkshire Innovation Center

Committee Alternates Present

Glenn Bergman, Berkshire Agricultural Ventures
Kevin Pink, 1Berkshire

Guests Present

Rebecca Lilly, MassHire (appointment by Commission 3/17)

Not Present

Heather Boulger, MassHire
Keith Girouard, Massachusetts Small Business Development Center Network
Mike Nuvallie, City of North Adams
Ian Rasch, Alander Construction
Christina Wynn, Berkshire Community College

BRPC Staff Present

Laura Brennan, Economic Development Program Manager
Wylie Goodman, Senior Economic Development Planner
Mark Maloy, Manager, Data & Information Technology

Kyle H. asked all present to briefly introduce themselves.

II. Approval of Minutes from February 16th, 2022

George A. moved to approve the minutes from February 16th, 2022. Chris R. seconded. No discussion. The minutes were approved by roll call vote.

III. Comments from the Public

No comments from public.

IV. EDA CARES Act project updates

Berkshire Benchmarks – survey results overview

Mark M. shared that there were over 3K responses to the Berkshire County *Quality of Life* survey with reasonably reflective age, income, race/ethnicity distribution for the region. Mark reviewed responses specific to the Economic category: In terms of saving for retirement, 25% of respondents said they can save as much as they want; 50% can save some, but not as much as they want; 25% cannot save or haven't thought about saving. Of those earning under \$30K, over half cannot save or can save but not much.

In terms of savings to cover living expenses, 25% have more than 2 years of living expenses saved; 50% have 6 months or less of savings; 15% have no savings at all; results correspond to income.

For working hours (part-time or full-time), 2/3 would prefer a full-time job but cannot find it. As income rises, the percent who want a full-time job decreases.

About 60% of respondents feel financially secure all or most of the time. In terms of sources of income, 60% rely on income from a primary job, 25% have a side job; 25% receive social security; 25% receive a pension or social security; 25% rely on investments. As income decreases, fewer had a primary job, retirement pension, or investment however there was an increase in income from social security, support from family, and/or a side job. People of Color have a higher percentage of side jobs regardless of income.

Mark M. is working on the State of the County report which will be released on or around 5/23/22 during a State of the County meeting along with a preview of the Berkshire Benchmarks website. There will be a formal announcement in a few weeks. The event will likely be held at the BIC.

Technical Assistance for Businesses – Kevin P. shared an update about TA cohorts and the MWBE training module. 10 cohorts held to date for training (branding, social media marketing), with another 6 in spring including some in Spanish. MWBE module is complete in English and will be translated into Spanish. Translation on aggregating other materials that would be helpful for entrepreneurs in Spanish and other languages through grant from state. Berkshire language services

Technical Assistance for Municipalities – Wylie G. shared information on presentations she has given to town select boards about resiliency. Thus far she has spoken at six meetings with 12 scheduled between now and mid-April and another 12 towns that have not yet responded to queries. The meetings have been productive and allowed BRPC to share more about the resiliency chapter organized around People-Community-Economy. This has also been a good opportunity to talk to primarily residential communities about how they can become involved in economic development activities.

Long-term Resiliency Planning – Laura B. and others have sent out BRPC-drafted surveys to small businesses and local sector leaders and begun conducting follow-up interviews. At least 20 business or nonprofit leaders have filled out the survey so far. Some businesses reported doing better during COVID while others fared worse. Interviews have been revealing. One interviewee focused his attention on new residents coming to

Berkshire County and how they can be better integrated into the community and how systems for that are lacking which is critical for future resident attraction and retention. We have also learned about supply chain challenges in greater detail through interviews. Finding staff has been a particularly significant challenge, made worse by acute housing crises. Restaurants, for example, can't stay open later if their workers have to travel long distances and rely on public transportation. The next part of the process will be conducting focus groups with industry clusters and/or organized around thematic topics (e.g., food and agricultural realm; creative economy). Ben L. is organizing guests for the next session on March 30th.

Project Support – featured projects: Greylock Glen - Donna Cesan presented on the history and current status of the Greylock Glen project, which the town of Adams has been working on since 2004 in response to a DCR and MassDev RFP. In 2006, Adams was designated as developer and since then has been working on planning and permitting and full implementation. The plan now being activated will create a four-season education and environmental education destination. The overall site consists of 1,063 acres on the Eastern slope of Mt. Greylock. The Glen project is an economic development project intending to revitalize and strengthen the local economy and establish Adams as the recreational hub for the Berkshires. The site will be centered around a 10k sf Outdoor Center, which serves as a welcome area for visitors and a base camp for further exploration. They have funding for this building, have gone through the public bidding process, are now under contract with a construction company starting 5/1/22. Other components include a lodge and conference center, campground (160 sites ranging from rustic to glamping), 2.5K-seat outdoor amphitheater connected by a multi-use trail system for hiking, equestrian, mountain biking, and more. They are potentially envisioning carriage and sleigh rides in winter like Acadia, and cross-country skiing, and snowmobiling in certain parts of the property. In 2010 the project went through MEPA; in 2014 they executed a Master Lease Agreement with the Commonwealth (99-year lease w/Commonwealth as owner). The process has been slow and deliberative, funded primarily by grants, with a focus on eliminating controversy from previous proposals before the Town became involved.

They have applied for EDA funding for water system infrastructure. The project is primarily to fund a gravity-driven 350K gallon water storage tank system. Since 2012, the concept has not changed but costs have doubled. Now they are looking at a \$4.1M overall project with \$2.9M being requested of EDA, with \$1.2M in match to be provided by the town. They recently applied for an EDA ARPA Travel and Tourism grant that was brought to the town's attention by BRPC Economic Development Program Manager, Laura Brennan. They applied prior to the end of January 2021; EDA has since asked for additional information. It is a very demanding grant requiring engineering in place (they are at 90% design and have all permitting behind them), but Donna C. feels they have a strong application. The announcement date is unknown.

Glenn B. suggested partnering on a USDA carbon sequestration grant to plant nut trees on the property. Wylie G. asked about broadband and cellular service at the Glen and whether that is something that they are ensuring is sufficiently provided and funded. Tom M. brought up a recent announcement about a congressional earmark (\$1M secured by Rep. Neal) which Donna indicated is the last part of the critical funds needed. Ben S. asked if the Glen would connect into the bike path, but Donna C. said that due to the high elevation change they were instead looking into a shuttle to and from the Outdoor Center at the Glen that could transport people and bikes. They are actively working on phase 4 of the bike trail to reach North Adams and will soon reach 25% design.

Berkshire County CEDS 2023-2027

Approved/Funded by EDA for project period 4/1/2022 – 3/31/2023

The scope of the approved project is to facilitate the development of Berkshire County's 2023-2017 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. This work will follow the completion of the region's 2017-2022 CEDS, and will include revisions to past goals and strategies, consideration of priority projects, analysis of economic trends and conditions, as well as the identification of metrics to measure progress, resulting in the clear articulation and prioritizing of economic goals in our region. Specific tasks will include:

- Meetings with the Berkshire County CEDS Committee on a monthly basis
- Meetings and correspondence with CEDS Committee members and working groups as needed
- Incorporation of parallel economic development documents and plans from the region, including 1Berkshire's "Berkshire Blueprint 2.0" and MassHire's "Workforce Blueprint for Berkshire County", in order to integrate and leverage other pertinent planning efforts
- Outreach via email, phone, and meeting participation to economic development stakeholders beyond those represented directly on the CEDS Committee, engaging in meaningful conversation about what tactics would best serve the region
- Electronic surveying of community members regarding economic experiences in Berkshire County, with a special focus on new residents and owners of second homes
- Public presentations and opportunities for input regarding metrics, goals, strategies, and priorities as expressed in draft CEDS materials to ensure a broadly inclusive process
- Development of SWOT Analysis for Berkshire County Region
- solicitation and review of priority projects for inclusion in the 2023-2027 CEDS
- Ongoing analysis of a wide range of economic indicators
- Refinement of 2023-2027 CEDS Goals based on data analysis and public input
- Finalization of the Berkshire County CEDS document for the 2023-2027 timeframe
- Creation of social media and website content to explore components of the resulting 2023-2027 CEDS

Laura B. indicated that EDA received 6x the request for funds than was available nationally which shows how highly competitive this ARPA-funded opportunity was, but also points to the importance of outdoor recreation for local economies.

5. 2023-2027 Berkshire County CEDS Goals and Objectives discussion, continued

Laura B. reminded the group of discussion at the last meeting regarding the goals and objectives of the previous CEDS, as well as discussion on what might be missing and new themes since it was drafted (i.e., climate adaption, resiliency, housing, and workforce; diversity/equity/inclusion, and childcare).

She shared a spreadsheet with possible Goal/Objectives organized around People, Community, and Economy, and asked for input. The resiliency chapter of the CEDS will be organized using these 3 headings, but the approach does not necessarily need to be carried over to the whole report. Wylie explained that economist Brian Dabson is the source for the 3-layer pyramid. Kyle H. brought up the concern of affordable healthcare, and Roger pointed out that healthcare issues also tie to attraction of medical specialists to the region. Wylie also noted some consistent terms across categories, such as access, affordability, quality, and these may serve as an alternate way to group future CEDS Goals. Roger B. suggested the goals might be better thought of as a mosaic rather than a pyramid. The pyramid may be more applicable to the resiliency issues specifically.

Meeting materials had included EDA's own Investment Priorities. Laura B. explained that when EDA considers a project for funding, they look at both whether it aligns with EDA's priorities, which do occasionally change, and whether it aligns with the regional CEDS. As we set local priorities, we should take into consideration how they pair with EDA's current priorities. Roger B. expressed his concern about EDA's focus on exports. Laura explained that local projects do not need to adhere to all EDA priorities, just at least one.

Roger B. also noted that entry-level/low-wage jobs must be also part of the equation in terms of economic progress not only high-paying jobs. There must be a balance. People won't come for high-quality jobs if there are not enough entry-level/low-wage jobs to support them.

John D. suggested that first responder recruitment has also been challenging and that towns are beginning to have more difficulty attracting and retaining them, especially young people going through the academy; there are no longer people on a waiting list as they once were. Volunteer fire departments and other volunteer committees are similarly having difficulty attracting people due to lack of pay and time commitment. There has been talk of consolidation in northern Berkshire County around services like ambulance service, but this will make response times longer.

The next meeting will take place on April 20th at 1pm.

V. Adjournment

John D. moved to adjourn the meeting. Jim L. seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 2:10 pm.