



CEDS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Virtual Meeting via Zoom

April 20, 2022

I. Call to Order

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

Committee Members Present

George Ambriz, Berkshire Community College
Roger Bolton, Williams College (Retired)
Kyle Hanlon, BRPC, CEDS Chair
Lesley Herzberg, Berkshire County Historical Society at Arrowhead
Ben Lamb, 1Berkshire
Tom Matuszko, BRPC Executive Director
Laurie Mick, PERC
Chris Rembold, Town of Great Barrington
Shannon Smith, Berkshire Agricultural Ventures
Ben Sosne, Berkshire Innovation Center
Mike Nuvallie, City of North Adams
A.J. Enchill, Berkshire Black Economic Council

Committee Alternates Present

Kevin Pink, 1Berkshire
Rebecca Lilly, MassHire

Not Present

Jim Lovejoy, Town of Mt. Washington
Mike Coakley, City of Pittsfield
John Duval, Town of Adams/BRPC Commission Chair
Heather Boulger, MassHire
Keith Girouard, Massachusetts Small Business Development Center Network
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 March 16th, 2022

Ben L. moved to approve the minutes from March 16th, 2022. Mike N. seconded. Roger B. made a correction in Section IV. asking that we change the text from "2/3 of people working would prefer a full-time job but cannot find it" to "2/3 of those working part-time would

prefer a full-time job but cannot find it.” The minutes were approved by roll call vote. Shannon S. and A.J. E. abstained having not been present at the last meeting.

III. Comments from the Public

No comments from public.

IV. EDA CARES Act project updates - *Agility & Resilience in Berkshire County: Public and Private Sector Preparedness*

Berkshire Benchmarks – new website sneak peek

Mark M. shared a beta version of the new Berkshire Benchmarks site. It will be live in approximately two weeks at BerkshireBenchmarks.org. The site offers indicators and data in a simple, interactive, and more intuitive format than the former data clearinghouse. Mark demonstrated its use and showed how results can be downloaded by users. The site includes survey data and links to related reports. Mark demonstrated changes made to major sectors (Creative Economy, Healthcare, and Manufacturing). Separately, he announced that there will be a *State of the County* report event happening in person at the BIC on May 23rd.

Long-term Resiliency Planning – working group update – Creative Economy

Wylie G. shared a brief update about the last resiliency working group meeting where members heard from representatives from leading creative economy stakeholders such as Chesterwood, Norman Rockwell Museum, and Tanglewood. The stakeholders identified key issues they face, including difficulty hiring, particularly for part-time staff; a need for housing; and a desire to diverse staffing and audiences. Nearly all identified the lack of affordable seasonal housing being their primary concern. As an example, Kemble Street Studio is including provisioning of housing in their long-term feasibility planning. In the area of hiring, MCLA is educating guidance counselors about pathways to careers in the creative economy and creating a clearinghouse for jobs. COVID mental health support for leaders and creating a rainy-day fund to plan ahead were also identified needs among the participants. On the issue of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA), a recent gathering led by BCAN brought together leaders from MCLA and the Center for Peace and Justice with representatives from Latinas413 for a conversation about engaging Hispanic audiences. They found that creating ambassadors to encourage Hispanic residents who may not be accessing the arts to the extent organizations would like was a powerful tool to expand audience reach. Similarly, there will be an upcoming event led by the Berkshire Black Economic Council informed by a BBEC survey with black youth. Finally, arts organizations spoke about their pivot to digital platforms during COVID to increase access to their assets for audiences beyond the Berkshires. The next resiliency working group meeting will include representatives from Chambers of Commerce (5/27 @ 1:00 p.m.).

V. 2023-2027 Berkshire County CEDS (EDA award April 1, 2022 – March 31, 2023)

Overview of scope, including surveys

Goals and Objectives discussion, continued

BRPC has received funding from EDA to write its next CEDS report (2023-27). The period began on April 1, 2022. The report will be written over the next 9 months with time allocated after the report's completion to sharing it with the public starting in early 2023. BRPC hopes to encourage people to use the report - and Berkshire Benchmarks - to gather data for their own research and grants. Laura B. stated that future CEDS Committee

meetings will be judicious with likely only one in the summer in July or August. The group will be asked to re-convene in September for tasks such as reviewing public comments and approving a version that will go to the Commission before being submitted to EDA.

Laura B. then re-shared the Scope of Work approved by EDA. Priorities will be identified by the committee along with local stakeholders. Goals, strategies, and priorities, including priority projects that can be funded by EDA or alternative projects we want to track that could be eligible for other funding, will be shared and discussed with the public. Ongoing economic indicators, including distress criteria such as per capita income and unemployment rates, will be incorporated into the report. For the first time we will be surveying homeowners, emphasizing those who moved to the region over the last few years to understand their motivations, employment status, and more. Cape Cod performed a similar analysis looking at the investment new transplants brought to the area that will be used as a model. The survey will seek to address such questions as "Is the urban exodus predicated by COVID permanent or transitory and what are the implications for Berkshire County?" Parallel documents and efforts (i.e., *Berkshire Blueprint*, *MassHire Blueprint*) will also be acknowledged in the new report. The committee can be helpful in connecting BRPC with priority projects and on-the-ground needs and concerns. BRPC will start soliciting priority projects earlier than it did in the last round. Chris R. supported that idea, especially for towns with capital projects that need funding. Chris R. suggested looking at the Berkshire Taconic Foundation's report from a few years ago in addition to the Blueprint as a key background document. Chris R. also cited a recent report Great Barrington worked on with the Conway School called *Growing Better Great Barrington* that reiterated housing as a major priority.

Laura B. also shared that the Manufacturing Academy at the BIC in partnership with MIT and Greylock Glen's water infrastructure application are two projects that will potentially be funded by EDA. EDA's previous spending in the region was only for planning, so these larger investments are promising. Both pools of funding were highly over-subscribed and very competitive, thus having two projects in the region potentially funded is something we should be proud of, and which could not have been done without strong support from EDA's Debra Beavin for shepherding both applications. EDA's other funding often comes with a 1:1 match that can be hard for project proponents to meet with local funds, but the CEDS can help draw attention to the highest priority projects for EDA consideration. BRPC hopes Debra Beavin can meet the CEDS Committee later this year possibly in conjunction with a formal kick-off of our EDD designation.

We then discussed potential CEDS Goals and Objectives by first conducting an online brainstorming SWOT analysis of the region. Some SWOT findings may be unchanged from 2017, but others have shifted dramatically, for example affordable housing (a Strength last time) that is now a Threat. Some additional examples are below:

Strengths: Strong cultural institutions and collaborations; Proximity to major cities; Highly engaged leadership

Weaknesses: North-South-Central competition; Aging civil infrastructure; Gaps in technology

Opportunities: East-West passenger rail; Increased interest in the area / Quality of life; Expanding bicycle trail network

Threats: Losing younger generation; Affordable housing; High energy prices

Chris R. further discussed the lack of access to affordable, available land for agricultural use

and housing identified in the Conway School's report, with land under preservation unfortunately limited in terms of creating housing for farmworkers. Roger B. suggested adding proximity to the Albany Capital District (a high-tech center) as a regional strength. Transportation was raised as an opportunity through both rail and bike but public transportation in general was noted as a weakness. A shortage of medical professionals and emergency responders was also identified as a weakness. Ben L. noted that the high turnover of municipal leadership and reliance on volunteers in town government could be an opportunity or threat, depending on how it is framed. A positive opportunity was the number of hospitality projects experiencing re-investment and an influx of capital with a "Play to Stay" mentality taking shape. Wylie G. raised the issue of lack of access to affordable childcare as a threat. Chris R. noted the constrained electric grid as another threat including our being nearly built out regionally in terms of solar or wind capacity. George A. noted the issue of lack of diversity particularly in management positions as another weakness, with Laura B. adding that there is a need for diversity across other areas of influence, too.

Laura B. will send out calendar invitations soon for May, June, September, and October, and a poll to committee members to select either a July or August summer date. Kyle A. thanked the two new members. The next meeting will take place on May 18th at 1 pm.

I. Adjournment

Chris R. moved to adjourn the meeting. Ben L. seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 2:04 pm.