



CEDS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Virtual Meeting via Zoom

May 18, 2022

I. Call to Order

Kyle H. called the meeting to order at 1:09 PM.

Committee Members Present

George Ambriz, Berkshire Community College
Kyle Hanlon, BRPC, CEDS Chair
Lesley Herzberg, Berkshire County Historical Society at Arrowhead
Ben Lamb, 1Berkshire
Tom Matuszko, BRPC Executive Director
Laurie Mick, PERC
Shannon Smith, Berkshire Agricultural Ventures
Ben Sosne, Berkshire Innovation Center
Mike Coakley, City of Pittsfield

Committee Alternates Present

Kevin Pink, 1Berkshire
Rebecca Lilly, MassHire

Not Present

Roger Bolton, Williams College (Retired)
Jim Lovejoy, Town of Mt. Washington
John Duval, Town of Adams/BRPC Commission Chair
Heather Boulger, MassHire
Keith Girouard, Massachusetts Small Business Development Center Network
Ian Rasch, Alander Construction
Chris Rembold, Town of Great Barrington
Christina Wynn, Berkshire Community College
Mike Nuvallie, City of North Adams
A.J. Enchill, Berkshire Black Economic Council

BRPC Staff Present

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

Also Present

Brittany Polito, iBerkshires.com
Jayne Bellora, MSBDC

Kyle H. introduced by name those present.

II. Approval of Minutes from April 20th, 2022

Ben L. moved to approve the minutes from April 20th, 2022. Ben S. seconded. The minutes were approved by roll call vote.

III. Comments from the Public

There were no comments from the public.

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

Berkshire Benchmarks – State of the County event overview

Mark M. shared his screen to present a summary of the 2022 *State of the County* report, which will be presented at an event happening in person at the BIC on May 23rd. The report reviews key indicators and survey responses from local residents. The report does not provide solutions to area challenges, simply identifies major successes and challenges. This is a baseline report with data current to April 2022. Copies of the report will be available at the May 23rd meeting and at www.BerkshireBenchmarks.org. Declines in poverty, increase in income, increases in property taxes as a share of municipal budgets, and disparities by ethnicity/race were highlighted, with Black Berkshire residents showing a vast disparity in income levels.

Long-term Resiliency Planning – working group update – Chambers of Commerce

Wylie G. shared a brief update about the last resiliency working group meeting where members heard from representatives from four Chambers of Commerce. Chamber leaders discussed challenges they experienced themselves as well as those faced by the clients/business owners they serve. Among those faced by them and small businesses are rising commercial rents and difficulty finding workers due to a lack of affordable housing in the region. Chambers themselves were similarly under-staffed but asked to do more in terms of being an information conduit between State and Federal resources and business owners during the crisis. Being a 501c(6) makes it more difficult for them to secure donations for the work they do, and many younger business owners see Chambers as outmoded and do not fully understand their role. A need to help businesses pivot so that they can be nimbler in a digital environment is also a priority they identified. One new initiative to bring in new customers and turn the tide on empty storefronts is being pursued by the Southern Berkshire Chamber, which is developing a “Made in the Berkshires” documentary-style series of videos to promote more engagement. All the Chambers agreed that a “How-to Do Business in...” guide for their respective towns would be useful. They hope to return to quarterly meetings soon and were referred to 1Berkshire for tourism numbers and data to better inform their work. Ben S. shared that recent profiles of workers that ran in the *Berkshire Eagle* have been similarly interesting to hear what life is like for people in different professions.

V. 2023-2027 Berkshire County CEDS

SWOT Analysis

Laura B. discussed the SWOT Analysis started during the last meeting, which she has further organized. She stated that in future meetings, we will make an effort to share content ahead of time with the committee. The spreadsheet has been color-coded by categories and bucketed into potential goal areas. The SWOT chart will be turned into a narrative chapter in the CEDS. For the narrative, we will need to clarify when data is anecdotal / qualitative versus quantitative.

Wylie G. asked Mark M. for further clarification regarding the Benchmarks' data point regarding "Stability of Young Adult Population," a trend that has been moving in a positive direction over the last decade. There was some discussion as to whether this was related to young adults failing to launch or not having jobs versus an active choice to remain in the region. Mark M. stated that has been a long-standing (over a decade) trend. Nonetheless, we are still losing workforce due to the high percentage of our aging population.

Laura B. asked for further discussion among the group regarding the threats related to stratification of income levels and accumulation of wealth in nearby areas. Kevin P. responded that the threat may have to do with income inequality. Mark M. stated this indicator is improving but it could be because we are very different than the rest of the State. Ben L. stated that the second indicator regarding accumulation of wealth is the significant amount of investment in land in the region due to accumulation of wealth and its subsequent re-deployment into purchasing land assets, making both agriculture/affordable housing out-of-reach for most people.

Laura B. asked if there were any categories missing or categorized incorrectly. Tom M. asked about childcare, and Laura B. noted it was included but not particularly emphasized. It falls under threats, but it is the only time it appears, so could be further explained or emphasized. Laura B. stated that it does deserve a prominent place, given how much we have heard from stakeholders about this topic. She noted that in writing the narrative, we will be writing more specifically about why childcare is challenging and what can be done about it will be put forward.

In putting together her analysis, Laura B. reviewed the SWOT from the last CEDS to ensure we had not overlooked any topics. She noted that affordable housing was a strength in the last report but is now a threat but otherwise she did not find anything we had left off. She also noted that while wages in Berkshire County continue to be an issue, it was not deeply explored in the SWOT analysis exercise.

Goals and Objectives

Laura B. shared the six goals (condensed) from the last CEDS of 2017-22 to see if they should remain the same or be combined, or otherwise changed:

- Stabilizing and Strengthening Workforce
- Entrepreneurship and Innovation

- Infrastructure, Site Readiness and Transportation
- Collaboration
- Industry and Occupational Clusters
- Economic Resiliency

Wylie G. suggested that a Mission Statement for the new CEDS might be helpful to organize thinking around goals. Laura B. noted that the last CEDS did have a Vision Statement, and that this element is worth including in the upcoming CEDS. The previous vision statement read:

“To create a diverse and robust economy that creates sustainable prosperity for all its residents. While capitalizing on the region’s heritage, intellectual vigor, cultural assets, agricultural and natural resources we will encourage innovation, collaboration, and entrepreneurial spirit.”

Laura B. suggested that in-between meetings we can send out the Vision Statement and ask for input. She also asked whether the goals felt like they were inclusive of what was needed or whether they needed to be examined. She asked whether diversity, equity, and inclusion require its own category or should be subsumed by the general category of “Community.” Tom M. suggested we incorporate it more explicitly in our Vision Statement. Laura B. noted the lack of language about this topic in the last CEDS and noted that this language has taken on new urgency in the years since.

Priority Project solicitation

For Priority Projects, Laura B. shared that we are starting anew as major things have happened in the two-year stretch of COVID and with new funding coming into the region. Organizations will thus be asked to fill out a new form to submit Priority Projects even if their projects were listed previously. Project submission invitations have been issued to some previous project proponents, and those invitations will continue in the next few weeks. Laura B. is asking members to help identify other projects we should submit that are fundable but are not listed in the current CEDS. Mike C. noted that a recent MassWorks Infrastructure grant application he was working on asked whether the project was included in the regional CEDS. This shows that CEDS-identified projects improve their fundability at the State level too. Many projects being funded are in the current CEDS. Laura B. will reach out to more people soon and ask for suggestions as to what should be on the list. Following that, the CEDS Committee will take a vote about formal incorporation.

Laura B. also shared news received yesterday that Greylock Glen received official word that it will get funding through EDA for its water infrastructure project and thus can begin the construction process this year as hoped. The project would not have happened without BRPC’s relationship with EDA and the region’s active engagement with the CEDS process.

VI. Adjournment

The next meeting will be held June 15, and our only summer meeting will be July 13. Kevin P. moved to adjourn the meeting. Ben L. seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 1:55 pm.