



CEDS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Virtual Meeting via Zoom

January 15, 2025

Committee Members Present

Roger Bolton, Williams College (Retired)
Linda Clairmont, Berkshire Community College
Michael Coakley, City of Pittsfield
Robert DelMastro, Massachusetts Small Business Development Center
Malcom Fick, BRPC Chair (ex-officio non-voting member)
Kyle Hanlon, BRPC, CEDS Chair
Lesley Herzberg, Berkshire County Historical Society
Ben Lamb, 1Berkshire
Bryana Malloy, MassHire Berkshires
Laurie Mick, City of Pittsfield
Tom Matuszko, BRPC Executive Director
Laurie Mick, PERC (Pittsfield Economic Development Corporation)
Mike Nuvalle, City of North Adams
Chris Rembold, Town of Great Barrington
Ben Sosne, Berkshire Innovation Center

Committee Alternates Present

Jayne Bellora Jayne, Massachusetts Small Business Development Center
Kevin Pink, 1Berkshire

Committee Members Absent

A.J Enchill, Berkshire Black Economic Council
Shannon Smith, Berkshire Agricultural Ventures

BRPC Staff Present

Laura Brennan, Assistant Director & Economic Development Program Manager
Wylie Goodman, Senior Economic Development Planner
Thomas Matuszko, Executive Director

Guests Present

Alex LaValley, 1Berkshire
Cody Chamberlain, 1Berkshire
Allison Schmitt, EforAll

1. Call to Order

Kyle Hanlon called the meeting to order at 1:01 p.m. This meeting was conducted via Zoom as allowed by Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023 extending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law M.G.L. Chapter 30 Section 20 until March 31, 2025. Laura Brennan conducted roll call.

2. Acknowledgement/Introduction of Guests/non-Committee Members

Kyle Hanlon and Laura Brennan welcomed guests in attendance including Allison Schmidt from EforAll

Berkshire County and Alex LaValley from 1Berkshire. Rob Del Mastro, a regional director at SBDC, was welcomed as a new member of the committee.

3. Approval of Minutes from October 9, 2024

Ben Lamb made a motion to approve the minutes of the October 9, 2024, meeting. Roger Bolton seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

4. Update from Economic Recovery Corps Fellow, Cody Chamberlain

Cody Chamberlain shared about an up-to \$1M grant opportunity from NSF (Excellent Grant – Experiential Learning in Emerging Technologies) to create an entrepreneurial accelerator program for young people to hire their peers to do STEM work for them (e.g., website and app development). He has been in discussion about this with Berkshire Community College. The application is due in late February. Cody is open to finding additional partners. The award might be awarded until later this year. The primary applicant will be BCC with support from 1Berkshire and the BIC. Linda Clairmont applauded Cody for his work initiating this discussion.

5. Update re: Adventure to Ashuwillticook Trail Project grant award from US DOT

Laura Brennan announced that Berkshire Regional Planning Commission received approval for approximately \$17.3 million grant from the US Department of Transportation's RAISE program. This funding will be used for full engineering, design, and permitting of a 9.3-mile section of the shared-use Ashuwillticook Trail in Northern Berkshire, connecting cultural institutions, hotels, retailers, and restaurants. The trail will be shovel-ready for construction and will be added to the state's transportation improvement plan. The project is seen as a major opportunity for the region that will provide 25-miles of contiguous connectivity rivaling other regions of the state (Cape Cod). Karen Pelto was instrumental in making the application so strong. Ben Lamb, Ben Sosne, and Michael Nuvalle reinforced how impactful this project will be to the region and noted the hurdles involved to bring it to fruition.

6. 2023-2027 Berkshire County CEDS – Year 2 Performance Progress Report to EDA

a. Economic Conditions – review and discussion of ACS-informed data

Laura Brennan discussed the upcoming year's EDA performance report, which will be due in June 2025. She then shared economic indicators of note from American Community Survey data released in December 2024. They include:

Labor Force Participation increased by 1,600 workers or 2.5%. This is well below pre-pandemic levels, but the first time BRPC has seen an increase in the last several years.

Annual Unemployment Rate experienced a slight increase from 2023 to 2024 by .2% but overall was low, as it is nationally, too.

Median Household Income (MHI) was \$72,565, which is lower than Massachusetts and the U.S. The MHI is also significantly lower than neighboring counties. Going forward, BRPC will start comparing Berkshire County to regions in other parts of the country of the same size and geographic density that also have arts/culture and outdoor recreation as key parts of their economy. In terms of MHI, Berkshire County is behind in absolute numbers as well as in its growth rate. Linda Clairmont noted that another potential comparison location might be Mass. Gateway Cities. Chris R. noted that we could also compare Berkshire County to the new Mass. designation of Seasonal Communities, as this may open opportunities, including exemptions for homeowners to assist with Cost of Living. Tom M. shared that the Seasonal Communities in our region include ((Monterey, Mt. Washington,, Otis, Alford, Hancock, Becket, Stockbridge, Tyringham). Ben L. added that the designation, like a credential, can be helpful for

us to have, especially when dollars follow policy.

Per Capita Income is significantly higher than the U.S. but not as high as Mass. overall. Berkshire County does not appear to be as low as adjacent counties vis a vis PCI. Laura B. speculated that older adults living alone in single-family homes with incomes that are stagnant, or declining may explain the results. The difference between PCI vs MHI thus reflects household size and an aging population. Roger B. hypothesized that we have a small number of very rich individuals in Berkshire County,

which skews the arithmetic mean without affecting the median. Laura Brennan noted that BRPC pays more attention to MHI because it is a measure of economic distress for EDA that helps when apply for funding.

Annual Wage by Sector is based on two-digit NAICS codes. They have grown but slower than Massachusetts but not necessarily the country.

24-month Unemployment is lower than at this time last year and is better than when we submitted the last Five-year CEDS. On this measure of economic distress, the county is continuing to improve. Another round of data will come out in June, so we will have a few more months of data to analyze.

EDA was recently reauthorized by Congress with the goal to expand ways that communities can measure their economic conditions, which will be helpful to the county.

b. Committee review of SWOT – discussion

Roger Bolton shared his recommendation that a new opportunity was the availability of the Bard College at Simon's Rock Campus for redevelopment. Chris Rembold noted that in the near-term the campus is an economic threat or liability but could be a great opportunity in the future to create jobs and bolster the town's tax base. The loss of Simon's Rock undercuts the town's strength due to the loss of an academic leader. Roger offered that our region would likely be less vulnerable going forward than other rural communities due to our having two state institutions and one private college.

Tom Matuszko returned to the topic of the requirements that come with the Seasonal Communities designation including one that there must be a provision to allow tiny homes although we are unsure re: lot size requirement or how it affects water/sewer requirements, for example. Under-sized lots can be used for housing. Details remain to be seen.

Linda Clairmont discussed the strengths and a weakness for BCC. She noted that free community college for students has been a considerable success with a 32% increase in enrollment. The school's work preparing people for the workplace is good, but a challenge/weakness is workforce training programs, which are not free and are mostly grant-funded and can be fickle and inconsistent. Workforce community education thus needs to find a diverse pool of funding and not be solely reliant on grants so they can build out a portfolio of programs. She expressed questions regarding the change in administration and the lack of knowledge about their future investment interests.

Ben Lamb commented that remote work is a strength, given the number of people who came to the Berkshires during the pandemic and stayed. However, the risk is that people do not become integrated into the community. Berkshire is now working on initiatives to address this. Another risk is business succession, which is accelerating as many small businesses are reaching the end of their lives and are not being transitioned to new ownership or becoming employee-owned. Older owners retiring businesses (grey tsunami) are not preparing or thinking about preparing for transition. This potentially poses a threat to our downtowns. These owners need support and exposure to outside markets. Berkshire is doing some work around this topic. Berkshire Funding Focus has been an important partner. He also noted issues with the potential loss of grant funding as well as capacity issues to achieve goals when grant funding is in abundance, but organizations cannot deliver given time-limited

deadlines.

Ben Sosne noted investments in specific industries statewide that could be good for the region that the BIC is tracking such as a bill that will provide funding in key sectors such as climate tech and reauthorization of life science centers as well as funding from MassTech related to advanced manufacturing, applied AI, robotics, and tech hubs. The governor and state administration are supportive of the Berkshires, but we need to provide them with impactful programs that they think have potential. He felt William Stanley Development Park was primed for a big project and re-affirmed Ben Lamb's statement that BFF has been tremendously helpful.

Ben Lamb shared that there had been a listening session recently about the state's new policy on ADUs. Ben felt this was a great opportunity, especially for "over-housed" individuals so that these could be re-imagined for more people in need of housing, with the caveat that funding remains an open question. Tom Matuszko stated that BRPC submitted comments to ask for clarification about short-term rentals and what is allowable. He also noted that more resources are needed to make ADUs financially viable.

Laura B. stated there will be more opportunities for people to revisit the SWOT.

c. Priority Project Updates solicitation – issued early 2025 (due no later than 2/28)

Laura B. has received many comments and updates already submitted. They are due on February 28th and asked people who have not yet responded to send them.

d. Priority Projects – discussion of potential additions (due no later than 3/31)

Laura Brennan stated that she continues to welcome new submissions of Priority Projects and reported that we have received two new ones that were provided in the packet (2025 Halloween Costume Exchange – Great Barrington; Simon's Rock college campus repurpose/reuse – Great Barrington). We will vote on new projects at the next meeting. People can submit ideas that do not rise to the level of a Priority Project but could fit into another part of the plan. Chris Rembold noted the Bard project which the school is looking to sell. The town is looking at possible overlay zoning to ensure it is feasible for the campus to be used for other purposes. He hopes to work with BRPC through DLTA on this and hopes it can become a CEDS Priority Project. Mass Development may also be engaged as a partner. There is a link in the agenda for new submissions.

e. Priority Projects – discussion of potential removals

Laura Brennan noted that some projects are removed because they are completed (White Terrace – Pittsfield) or lose steam. She will be reaching out to people about a few projects that may meet one of these criteria.

7. Adjournment

Ben Lamb made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Chris Rembold seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 2:00 p.m.

Next Meeting – March 12, 2025

Documents & Exhibits Used:

Minutes from October 9, 2024

CEDS Committee Agenda 1.15.24

SWOT Notes – 2024 Annual Report

Response 1 – Priority Project

Response 2 - Priority Project