

CEDS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Virtual Meeting via Zoom
March 12, 2025 APPROVED

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
Kyle Hanlon, BRPC, CEDS Chair
Lesley Herzberg, Berkshire County Historical Society
Mike Nuvalle, City of North Adams
Chris Rembold, Town of Great Barrington
Shannon Smith, Berkshire Agricultural Ventures

Committee Alternates Present

Jayne Bellora, Massachusetts Small Business Development Center

Committee Members Absent

A.J. Enchill, Berkshire Black Economic Council
Malcolm Fick, BRPC Chair (ex-officio non-voting member)
Ben Lamb, 1Berkshire
Bryana Malloy, MassHire Berkshires
Tom Matuszko, BRPC Executive Director
Laurie Mick, PERC (Pittsfield Economic Development Corporation)
Ben Sosne, Berkshire Innovation Center

BRPC Staff Present

Laura Brennan, Assistant Director & Economic Development Program Manager

Guests Present

Alex LaValley, 1Berkshire
Tova Brown, Berkshire Black Economic Council

Call to Order

Vice Chair Chris Rembold called the meeting to order at 1:26 p.m. once a quorum was reached. 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.

Approval of Minutes from January 15, 2025

Michael Nuvalle made a motion to approve the minutes of the January 15, 2025 meeting. Roger Bolton seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

CEDS Priority Project Consideration

This item was moved up in the agenda in order to conduct any necessary voting while a quorum was available. Laura B. provided a brief reminder of the criteria for determining whether something rises to the level of a Priority Project, including having a substantial impact on a geographic portion of the county larger than one or two municipalities. She also reminded the group that placement on the Priority list does not indicate any guarantee of funding. The committee discussed two submissions for consideration as priority projects in the CEDS:

Submission 1 focused on a Halloween costume exchange proposal from Families Like Ours. While members

appreciated the community-building aspect, they determined it does not meet the criteria for a priority project due to its limited economic impact and scope. Roger B. commented that while it is a wonderful project, he does not see it as meeting the stated criteria. After some discussion, the committee voted unanimously against including it as a priority project but agreed to support it in other ways, such as referring Families Like Ours to Berkshire Funding Focus for potential funding opportunities and general grant-seeking support. It could also be mentioned in the annual report as an example of community building and support. Several members of the committee expressed admiration for the organizers of this project and hoped to refer them to potential funding sources.

Submission 2 focused on the potential closure of the Simons Rock campus in Great Barrington. Christopher R. expressed uncertainty about the future of the campus, including its potential sale or repurposing. The group acknowledged the campus's significant impact on the town as well as the broader region, including its role as a large employer and its influence on attracting businesses and residents. Linda C. asked Chris R. about the estimated cost of repurposing the site. This information is not yet available. Linda C. made a motion to approve this submission. Kyle H. seconded. The attendees agreed via a unanimous vote to adopt the campus redevelopment as a Priority Project despite the lack of a specific funding estimate.

Laura clarified that Berkshire Regional Planning Commission is not generally a grantor and does not manage funds for priority projects; it can assist in and is often instrumental in seeking funds from other sources.

SWOT Analysis

The group discussed the SWOT analysis, following up on the conversation during the January meeting. Laura shared an overview of the notes from the previous meeting for the group to comment on and discuss.

Linda C. suggested adding grid capacity as a weakness and threat, which was agreed upon. Michael C. added that energy costs are high compared to other areas. Roger B. expressed concerns about the potential threat to the Brownfields Restoration activities. Michael N. agreed and shared that BRPC has been instrumental in this area, and shared that the City of North Adams is a recipient of an EPA grant and recently received urgent demands for a status report. Laura B. indicated that an application is pending to the EPA Brownfields program for recapitalization funding. The group also identified federally-sourced CDBG (HUD), EDA, HHS, and USDOT funding as concerns. Chris R. added that projects like broadband deployment authorized via BIL are also at risk. Michael N. mentioned the recent termination of a HUD DCTA technical assistance grant in North Adams. Shannon S. highlighted the impact of USDA staffing cuts and funding issues on the agricultural sector, which in turn affect other organizations, such as American Farmland Trust, that support farms and agricultural businesses. Roger B. added that the Commonwealth's funding programs are also under pressure since states will be hard-pressed to replace federal funding. Shannon S. suggested that Berkshire County might have an advantage due to its high degree of philanthropy.

Finalizing Report and Meeting Procedures

Laura invited all attendees to email ideas for the SWOT analysis update under any of the four main categories. The next meeting is scheduled for May 7th, where the group will review and endorse the near-final report for approval by the Commission. Laura notes that public meetings may need to be held in person or in a hybrid format after March 31st due to potential changes in state legislation.

Adjournment

Kyle H. moved to adjourn the meeting, which Rob D. seconded. The meeting adjourned at 2:05 p.m. The next Meeting is scheduled for May 7, 2025

Documents & Exhibits Used:

Minutes from January 15, 2025

CEDS Committee Agenda 3.12.2025

SWOT Notes from the January 15, 2025 meeting

Response 1 – Priority Project

Response 2 - Priority Project