

CEDS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES APPROVED

Virtual Meeting via Zoom

May 7, 2025

Committee Members Present

Roger Bolton, Williams College (Retired)
Robert DelMastro, Massachusetts Small Business Development Center
A.J. Enchill, Berkshire Black Economic Council
Malcolm Fick, BRPC Chair (ex officio non-voting member)
Lesley Herzberg, Berkshire County Historical Society
Ben Lamb, 1Berkshire
Tom Matuszko, BRPC Executive Director
Laurie Mick, PERC (Pittsfield Economic Development Corporation)
Mike Nuvalle, City of North Adams
Chris Rembold, Town of Great Barrington, CEDS Vice Chair
Ben Sosne, Berkshire Innovation Center

Committee Alternates Present

Tova Clark Brown, Berkshire Black Economic Council
Rebecca Busansky, Berkshire Agricultural Ventures
Jayne Bellora, Massachusetts Small Business Development Center

Committee Members Absent

Linda Clairmont, Berkshire Community College
Michael Coakley, City of Pittsfield
Kyle Hanlon, BRPC Executive Committee
Ian Rasch, Alander
Shannon Smith, Berkshire Agricultural Ventures

BRPC Staff Present

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

Guests Present

Brandon Gill, PERC

Call to Order and Roll Call

Chris R. called the meeting to order at 1:01 p.m. once a quorum was reached. Conducted roll call.

Acknowledgement of Guests/Non-Committee Members

Laurie M. and Laura B. introduced Brandon Gill, who gave a summary of his professional background.

Approval of Minutes of March 12, 2025 meeting

Ben L. moved to approve the minutes of the March 12, 2025, meeting. Rob D. seconded the motion, which passed unanimously by roll call vote.

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

Laura B. shared the draft document and led a discussion highlighting changes to the CEDS data points in the past year. One key modification from prior years' reports is the inclusion of comparison regions as identified through Berkshire Benchmarks, rather than only the adjacent counties in MA, NY, and CT.

i. Review of economic data featured in the draft document

- There was a notable uptick in labor force participation.
- Unemployment saw a small increase but was generally stable.
- Median Household Income remains below the state and nation, but follows the same upward trend; Per Capita Income is in the middle, largely explained by our comparatively smaller household sizes.
- Per capita income is slightly higher than in most of our neighboring counties.
- There were changes in the EDA Economic Distress Map based on 24-month unemployment. Hinsdale is no longer on the map, but Cheshire is. Mark Maloy, who oversees Berkshire Benchmarks, indicates that communities coming on and off the map are common over time.

ii. Summary of Accomplishments – overview of draft document, discussion

Among the accomplishments Laura B. shared were the following:

Healthy People

- BHS Urgent Care opening in Lenox
- Berkshire Agricultural Ventures loans and projects
- Early Childhood Care/Education coordination facilitated by Berkshire United Way staff
- Berkshire Medical Center improvements
- Increase in participation in the Home Modification Loan Program

Resilient Communities

- Municipal staff participation in the MA Suffolk University Leadership Program
- Pittsfield Cultural Plan

Roger B. recommended moving an item related to co-responders from under Healthy People to Resilient Communities. Laura B. further explained what co-responders do. Chris R. stated that the program is helpful and has been positive.

Future-Ready Workforce

- Berkshire State of Work Summit on June 18th at BCC. Ben L. highlighted the value of the event and its benefit to the community. JD Chesloff will be the keynote speaker. He is the Chair of the MA Business Roundtable.

Separately, Laura B. mentioned 2nd Street, Second Chances, recognized recently for its workforce development work by the Mass. Sheriffs Association. Ben L. later shared progress on BCC's ESOL classes funded with state earmark dollars, which made it free for participants. Laura B. asked Ben L. to send her more information so it can be added to the report.

Strong Business Environment

- The Jobs Thing expansion and inclusion of a niche focus on seasonal workforce recruitment.
- Increase in clients at SBDC seeking advisement, both new and established business, and the nonprofit being joined by a Senior Business Advisor.
- PERC grant and loan accomplishments

Robust Infrastructure

- TriTown Connector (now South County Connector) has expanded from serving three to seven towns and is supplementing BRTA's fixed routes. BRTA ridership is also up.

- Route 2 Overpass Study, which North Adams staff has ensured is informed by collaborative conversations.

In response to a question from Roger B. regarding the impact of tariffs on the region, Ben S. and Ben L. spoke about the uncertainty around the manufacturing sector and the difficulty of businesses to plan, and of costs rising in some cases by 20-30%. It was also noted that quality of some goods had gone down because businesses were no longer purchasing from international suppliers. Rebecca B. confirmed a similar impact on farmers who now have more difficulty planning. Roger B. noted construction work going on in Williamstown and the potential impact on costs.

ii. Committee review of SWOT – overview of draft document, discussion

Laura B. shared a brief overview of how this list has grown since the group's previous discussion. There were no additional items to discuss.

Endorsement of Draft for advancement to BRPC Commission at the May 15th meeting*

Roger B. made a motion to accept the draft, subject to the condition that staff can make minor changes deemed necessary. Ben L. seconded the motion. Laura B. took a roll call vote. The response was unanimous. The draft was approved. Edits will be made as needed before it is shared with the full commission on Thursday, May 15th..

Continued Discussion – Potential change to committee name, input from Exec. Comm.

Laura B. noted that the idea of a name change was presented to the Executive Committee in April. In summary, the Exec Committee understood that the CEDS Committee has taken on an expanded purpose beyond the CEDS, in light of the EDD designation. Tom M. and Malcolm F. concurred with Laura's description and the committee's potentially expanded role. The change could happen after July 1. Examples of names and phrases will be shared with the CEDS Committee for consideration. Chris R. asked about the process to approve. Laura B. suggested that the CEDS Committee discuss first and endorse a selection that can then be advanced to the full Executive Committee for consideration. Roger B. suggested a simple name. Laura B. will share options prior to a future meeting.

Adjournment

Laurie M. moved to adjourn the meeting. Ben L. seconded. The meeting adjourned at 1:57 p.m. The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for a Wednesday at 1 pm. in September 2025.