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BERKSHIRE CEDS MEETING #3 MINUTES
THE COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR THE BERKSHIRES

DATE: Tuesday May 25, 2004
TIME: 8:30 AM
PLACE: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission Offices
1 Fenn Street, Suite 201
Pittsfield, MA

I. Call to Order

Chair Vinette called the meeting to order at approximately 8:38 a.m.

The following Committee members were present:

Blair Benjamin	Ed Perlak
Donna Cesan	Sharon Palma
Tim Geller	Richard Rilla
Mark Germanowski	Vicky Singer
Mike Hoffman (Banknorth alternate for Gary Schiff)	Rich Vinette
Matt Kerwood [arrived at 9:15 a.m.]	Ken Walto

Also present were Nat Karns (BRPC Executive Director), Kate McNulty-Vaughan (BRPC staff), and Peter Falcier (BRPC staff).

II. Approval of Minutes of CEDS Committee Meeting of May 13, 2004

Mr. Germanowski moved to accept the minutes of the May 13, 2004 CEDS Committee meeting. Ms. Singer seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

III. Review/Revise 2004 Draft Goals & Objectives

Mr. Vinette described the process by which the Committee reached the draft goals and objectives at the previous meeting.

Mr. Karns noted several topics missing from the draft version of the 2004 Goals & Objectives: 1) workforce development, 2) telecommunications, water, and utility upgrades, and 3) site inventories and building reuse.

The Committee discussed whether workforce development should be a Goal unto itself or an Objective under one of the three draft 2004 Goals. In the end, the committee agreed to include 2001 Objective 2A as an Objective under 2004 Goal 1. Mr. Rilla asked that the term “and redefine” be added after the phrase, “Promote programs that enhance....” Thus, 2004 Objective 1B is to be, “Promote programs that enhance and redefine the skills of a varied workforce.”

For the second topic (utility upgrades), Mr. Karns suggested a 2004 Objective 2E: “Improve water, sewer, telecommunications and other utility capacity to economic development target areas.” He noted that these

issues are recurrent economic development themes in Berkshire County, from Lee to Pittsfield to Dalton to Adams, and so on. Mr. Germanowski added that there are several activities that could go under this Objective, notably Pittsfield airport sewer extension.

On the issue of site inventories and building reuse, Mr. Karns suggested moving 2004 Objective 3C under Goal 1 or 2. He suggested altering the language from, “[d]evelop strategies for site and building development and reuse” to “Provide adequate inventory of site and building sites for a variety of economic base and emerging industries.” Mr. Vinette noted that this suggestion under 2004 Goal 1 may not convey the idea of regional cooperation in relation to sites inventories; he raised the notion of keeping the new language under 2004 Goal 3, or if the new language goes under 2004 Goal 1, perhaps keeping some mention of site use strategies under the regional cooperation umbrella of 2004 Goal 3. Mr. Vinette mentioned that the one prime example of this in the region so far--Berkshire Chamber’s website inventory of Berkshire business sites—is really a strategy. Ms. Cesan and Mr. Benjamin noted that examples like that could serve as Activities more than Objectives.

The Committee discussed how site reuse and development correlates to the Goals. Mr. Vinette suggested that part of this site discussion is marketing and another is regional cooperation. Mr. Geller made the point that providing inventory of sites is not the same as developing strategies to reuse and develop sites. The Committee clarified that the term “providing inventory” was not necessarily limited to simply listing available sites on paper but actually developing the physical sites and preparing them for use. Mr. Karns added that the analysis piece is identifying what the market needs or wants and then there is the long, hard task of developing the physical inventory available for use.

In the end, the Committee agreed to move draft 2004 Objective 3C under 2004 Goal 1, making 2004 Objective 1C: “Develop strategies for site and building development and reuse.” It also agreed to leave Objective 3C under Goal 3 as a reminder that the issue should be included both under the “encouraging economic vitality” and under the “regional cooperation” Goals. The Committee agreed to revisit the issue as it works through the CEDS Activities.

The last revision Mr. Karns requested is that the word “population” be added after “aging” in draft 2004 Goal 3.

There were no other revisions to the draft 2004 Goals & Objectives. Mr. Hoffman moved to approve the 2004 Goals and Objectives, as amended. Mr. Rilla seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

A) Goal Priorities

Mr. Vinette asked the Committee to review the priority rankings of the three 2004 Goals. He said that, whether or not the Committee set out to establish a hierarchy of Goals at the previous meeting, the sequence of the draft Goals, numbered from 1 to 3, seemed to be a reasonable prioritization.

Ms. Singer raised the idea that from a chronological standpoint, the Goals as ordered may not work realistically. Mr. Vinette recommended that the Committee consider the importance of each goal—not the timing of how they might be applied--and decide if it agrees with the order set out in the draft numbering of Goals.

Mr. Walto moved to accept the Goals with the priority in order of their listing, 1 through 3. Mr. Benjamin seconded the motion. The Committee approved the prioritization unanimously.

B) Timeframes for Objectives

Mr. Vinette explained that the EDA requires CEDS objectives include timeframes, such short term, medium to long term, long term. Ms. Cesan asked how each term is defined. Mr. Karns replied that short term refers to approximately one year, medium term to about 2 to 3 years, and long term to about 5 years.

Mr. Hoffman moved to have the staff assign timeframes to the approved 2004 objectives. Ms. Singer seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously. The Committee agreed to review the staff-assigned timeframes at the next meeting.

IV. Action Plan & Implementation Schedule

Mr. Falcier explained that the 11 x 17 handout provided to each Committee member at this meeting showed all of the Activities listed in the 2001 CEDS, now re-correlated to the draft 2004 Goals and Objectives, many of which were themselves reshuffled 2001 CEDS Goals and Objectives. He explained that the 2004 Committee is charged with reassessing those Activities, though they are not limited to them nor do they have to keep all of them.

In addition to reassessing the 2001 Activities, Mr. Vinette explained that the Committee should take this part of the CEDS process as a brainstorming exercise, in which Committee members should propose potential economic development Activities to meet the 2004 Goals and Objectives. He suggested that at this stage the Committee should consider Activities that may not be occurring in the Berkshires but that should or could be occurring in order to achieve the region's 2004 Goals and Objectives. He suggested that ultimately the Committee will work to turn those possible Activities into substantive beginnings of programs or projects.

Ms. Cesan asked for clarification about the list of Activities & correlated Goals & Objectives shown on the handout. She distinguished those Activities, most of which were listed in the 2001 CEDS, from the 2004 CEDS Projects submitted by May 21, 2004. Mr. Karns explained that at this stage the Committee must review and, if necessary, devise a series of CEDS Activities that are more general than those specific submitted physical development projects. Mr. Karns cited examples of broad CEDS Activities: assessing relative needs of space, developing a regional reuse program (i.e. Brown Fields), meeting quarterly as a CEDS Committee. Mr. Vinette noted that each Committee member might best propose Activities related to the culture in which they work: the BCREB and BCC regarding workforce development, the Town Administrators regarding infrastructure and revitalization, Berkshire Enterprises regarding small-business innovators, the CDCs regarding housing and site reuse, the banks regarding capital assistance.

Going round the Committee table, Ms. Singer suggested that the region needs one centralized place, either physical or virtual, for any new or existing business to go for all its economic development needs, whether it be sites and buildings, workforce development, funding sources, etc. She said such a site can include a posting of all the development partners, by community or by type. She suggested this Activity should go under 2004 Goal 1 Objective A. Ms. Palma added that a related Activity could be the education of all economic development partners in the region to point people to this new centralized site.

Mr. Benjamin suggested creating a Berkshire-wide creative economy initiative based on the New England-wide creative economy model. He proposed this activity under Goal 3, Objective C. Regarding workforce, he suggested integrating the Berkshire creative economy initiative into any workforce development program, so that the region doesn't always have to import people for those creative economy jobs. Under Goal 1, Objective B, among the site development and reuse Activities the CEDS should include the development of artists' lofts and studio spaces, for which there is great market interest throughout the county.

Mr. Germanowski suggested an Activity for Goal 2, Objective E: identify regionally significant deficiencies in utility service (telecommunications, water, sewer, etc.), especially in large commercial or industrial sites. Mr. Germanowski suggested a similar Activity regarding the identification of regionally significant transportation deficiencies.

Mr. Perlak explained that the aging population of the Berkshires, addressed in 2004 Goal 3, Objective D, is what drives what Berkshire Health Systems provides—it determines what BHS employment will be, what technologies it will require. He added that aging also determines health care costs, a major economic development factor; the one thing to note, Mr. Perlak pointed out, is that the money going toward higher health care costs at BHS generally stays in the county and pays for BHS's 3,000 jobs. The Activities he

suggested under Goal 3, Objective D were: programs, such as a health insurance cooperative among Berkshire businesses, to keep the workforce healthy, decrease downtime, increase productivity, and minimize costs. He added that healthcare entails substantial hidden costs, particularly the cost of the uninsured.

Mr. Walto described a forum with 17 local businesses in Dalton at which the overriding economic development needs turned out to be 1) telecommunications services, 2) health care concerns, and 3) infrastructure (sewer, water and roads). As proposed activities he listed five items: 1) infrastructure upgrades, 2) start-up support activities, including education, management, financing and site assistance, 3) activities to promote properly permitted industrial sites throughout the county, 4) activities to encourage adequate air and highway transport into and out of this county, and 5) venture capital, “patient capital” (investment that doesn’t require immediate returns), and private capital ventures backed by public financial support.

Ms. Cesan suggested as a “wishlist” activity: a contractor incentive program to attract a deep pool of developers with good track records.

Mr. Gellar suggested the need for a non-profit developer working in smaller towns. He cited Berkshire Housing Development Corp. as a very successful example, but now it doesn’t do projects under 50 units, and its original target areas—small towns—are again without a dedicated agency for real estate development, whether housing, commercial, industrial or else. Mr. Geller also expressed the need for a commercial real estate market analysis for rural Berkshire communities. He noted that it’s difficult for a small town to figure out what type of commercial development works well. He said that the typical small, rural town commercial development strategy—tourism—may be part of the solution but by itself will kill the Berkshires.

Mr. Hoffman suggested the need for a program of banking education that identifies capital options, ownership options, workforce options, project options.

Mr. Rilla requested a comprehensive resource center identifying all the workforce skills initiatives available to the Berkshire population. His personal vision is a “virtual reality” training center, not just for the paper and plastic industry, but for nanotechnology, the construction trades, and health care training. He suggested the region would benefit from the “cross pollination” of such a facility.

Mr. Kerwood raised the idea that “cultural development” should be a CEDS Goal unto itself, with underlying Activities being building reuse for artist studios and lofts, tourism-based workforce development, the creation of incentives, such as tax free zones (e.g. Providence, RI) to encourage the sale of art, the development of housing, etc.

A) Review Draft 2004 Activities & Correlated Goals & Objectives

The Committee went down the list of draft 2004 CEDS Activities (which were the Activities from CEDS 2001), each of which were listed on the 11 x 17 handout under correlated draft 2004 Goals & Objectives. The Committee did not prioritize the Activities at this meeting, but sorted through each Activity and decided which of the 2001 Activities still make sense, which no longer make sense, and which deserve further discussion. The CEDS Staff agreed to add the proposed Activities listed above to the revised list of Activities cited below and present a final draft version for the Committee to work from at the next meeting.

Going down the list, the Committee agreed either to discuss an Activity further, give it high, medium or low priority, or eliminate it entirely. The Table below summarizes the results of the Committee’s review.

Table 1. Results of Committee Review of 2001 CEDS Activities

Activity Count	Activity	Committee Decision
1	Seek capitalization of a Downtown Revolving Loan Fund from the EDA	Discuss
2	Develop a Comprehensive “Loan Packaging System.”	Discuss
3	Organize business development assistance	High Priority
4	Identify/track/publicize public/private/other available funding sources	High Priority
5	Housing study for all classes of housing and residents	Discuss (Specify Activities)

Table 1. Results of Committee Review of 2001 CEDS Activities

Activity Count	Activity	Committee Decision
6	Downtown redevelopment strategies for towns of different sizes/character	High Priority (Refine)
7	Develop/implement Community Cultural Center project in Pittsfield	Staff review
8	Neighborhood advocacy/assessment/planning re: blight/housing/safety	Medium Priority (see Goal 2C)
9	CEDS Committee/regional partners new programs and projects	High Priority (Goal 3A)
10	Encourage region-wide discussion/partnerships in CEDS process	High Priority (Goal 3B)
11	Develop regional retention/attraction program for firms and professionals	High Priority (Goal 3B)
12	Coordinated marketing campaign/acknowledge existing economic diversity	High Priority (Goal 3B)
13	Build outreach capabilities/increase technical assistance to small towns <i>Mr. Kerwood suggested rolling Activities 11, 12 & the outreach part of 13 into one Activity, making technical assistance a separate Activity</i>	High Priority (Goal 3B)
14	Develop regional benchmark for continual strength/weakness assessment <i>Mr. Karns suggested joining this with Activity 9 under 2004 Goal 3A</i>	High Priority (Goal 3A)
15	Resource guide of social service agencies encouraging partnering and improving accessibility for needy	Discuss
16	Worker replacement/need for workers, housing/healthcare/safety/transport issues	Eliminate
17-22	Site and building reuse Activities related to specific 2001 projects	Generalize by Staff

The 2001 Activities 23-34 were not addressed at this meeting. The staff will correlate them logically to the approved 2004 Goals & Objectives as amended above and send the revised list of correlated draft 2004 Activities to the Committee for review before the next meeting.

B) Revise/Amend/Prioritize Draft 2004 Activities

The Committee decided to prioritize the 2004 Activities at the next CEDS meeting.

V. Overview of Submitted Projects

Ms. McNulty-Vaughan distributed the listing of submitted Initial Project Briefs and presented a brief Power Point slideshow on the number and type of submissions.

VI. Next Meeting (5minutes)

The Committee agreed to meet again 8:30 a.m. Thursday June 3, 2004 at the BRPC offices. The staff will clean up the Activities sheet and send it out before the next meeting for Committee Review. The meeting was adjourned at approximately 10:15 AM.