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BERKSHIRE CEDS MEETING #5 MINUTES
THE COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR THE BERKSHIRES

DATE: Tuesday, June 17, 2004
TIME: 8:30 AM
PLACE: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission Offices
1 Fenn Street, Suite 201
Pittsfield, MA

I. Call to Order

Mr. Vinette called the meeting to order at approximately 8:36 a.m.

The following Committee members were present:

Blair Benjamin	Mike Hoffman
David Bissaillon	Matt Kerwood
Heather Boulger	Sharon Palma
Churchill Cotton	Richard Scullin
Tim Geller (arrived at 9 a.m.)	Vicky Singer
Mark Germanowski	Eleanore Velez
Sam Haupt	Rich Vinette

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

II. Approval of CEDS Meeting #4 Minutes of June 8, 2004

Mr. Hoffman moved to approve the Meeting #4 minutes. Mr. Bissaillon seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Mr. Karns expressed regret that the staff could not provide the meeting materials on a timelier basis. He explained that BRPC is working on an inordinate number of projects, all due June 30, 2004. He told the Committee that the BRPC does not like to work on such a rushed basis; he apologized for the inconvenience and thanked the Committee members for their understanding.

III. Action Plan & Implementation Schedule

Mr. Karns described the organization and content of the 11" x 17" Goals/Objectives/Action Plan Activities handout. He said that the handout for this meeting incorporated all of the revisions and the prioritization decisions made by the Committee at the previous meeting June 8, 2004. Acknowledging that Committee members did not receive the handout ahead of time, Mr. Vinette suggested the Committee take five minutes to review it at this meeting.

A) Final Review of Draft 2004 Goals & Objectives and Action Plan Activities

After the five-minute review, Committee members suggested various improvements.

Ms. Singer wished to see entrepreneurial training programs at the high school level added as an Activity to Goal 1, Objective A. Mr. Germanowski questioned the wording of Activity #27, "Assess water and sewer availability and capacity..." Based on the previous meeting's discussion, he had the understanding that the Activity was meant to emphasize implementing sewer and water infrastructure improvements, rather than simply "assessing" them. He felt that "assess and implement" might be a better phrase; Mr. Benjamin suggested "strengthen." The Committee agreed to let the staff wordsmith the statement to include the idea of implementation as well as assessment.

Mr. Benjamin noted that Activity #19, "Develop a regional team to work with communities and developers in planning and packaging the complex redevelopment financing packages needed for individual building reuse projects in downtowns across the region," seemed like more of a medium-range Activity than a long range one, as listed. He thought that the same thing applied to Activity #23, "Explore opportunities to integrate neighborhood revitalization with business and downtown development initiatives." He suggested that since these are ongoing Activities, they could just as well be listed as short-to-medium term.

The Committee discussed just what the strategy should be for prioritizing the CEDS Activities. Mr. Scullin asked whether the EDA will evaluate the Berkshire CEDS document and process based on the success or lack of success of fulfilling the priority Activities on the given timescales. The BRPC staff members explained that the EDA is primarily interested in seeing the Committee come to a consensus on the most significant or most critical Activities to pursue in Year 1, then building on those into Year 2 Activities, and so on. The staff explained that the Committee can't possibly prioritize all of the 42 listed Activities in the first year of the CEDS implementation schedule, even if many of them are ongoing in reality.

The staff added that the CEDS Committee should use the CEDS document to track its progress on the Activities it has identified as most critical over the course of Year 1 and, in the annual update a year from now, assess which Activities produced good results and which need more attention. Ms. McNulty-Vaughan explained that, based on her reading of other regions' annual updates, the EDA is primarily looking for a commitment to serious strategic economic development planning and follow-through. The staff noted that the EDA will take into account the realities of the Berkshire's resources for economic development and measure the region's CEDS success accordingly.

Ms. Boulger returned the Committee's discussion to Ms. Singer's earlier point regarding youth workforce training. She suggested adding the phrase, "with an increase in entrepreneurial opportunities, summer internships and training initiatives," to Activity #4. She also wished to change the phrase "high school age eligible worker" in Activity #4 to the term "youth" and add the phrase, "expand employment and career exploration opportunities" in addition to entrepreneurial opportunities.

Mr. Kerwood asked if the Committee would be able to reassess the timescale assessments laid out for the Activities in the handout. Mr. Vinette explained that the Committee will return to the Activity timeframe assignments after the project evaluation phase, but he noted that the Committee is likely to have to accept numerous compromises due to the limitations of the CEDS document structure and EDA requirements.

Mr. Karns asked Ms. Boulger if, as the resident workforce expert, she believed the Activities listed under Goal 1, Objective A (the workforce Activities) were in a logical prioritized order. She replied that it's very difficult to chronologize any of the workforce Activities since they are so intertwined. She and the Committee agreed that the listing looked fine.

Ms. Boulger questioned the specificity of and concentration on manufacturing and high-tech sector in Activities #10 and #11. Mr. Karns explained that the Committee has tried to address the various important clusters in the different Objectives. He explained that the Committee felt it had addressed the concepts of the "creative economy" in Goal 2, Objective B, which focuses on downtown initiatives. Mr. Vinette pointed out that Goal 1, Objective C was made broader by including the phrase, "a variety of established and emerging industries."

Mr. Kerwood suggested broadening the language of Activity #10 to include, "other business and critical industries." Ms. Singer suggested placing a period after the parenthetical in Activity #10. The Committee agreed. The approved Activity reads, "Prepare feasibility studies for additional/expanded business parks in each of 3 subregions of the County as identified in the Berkshire Economic Development Sites Strategy (BRPC, June 1999)."

B) Identify and Prioritize Most Important Activities

The Committee agreed that the timeframes laid out in the CEDS 2004 Draft Action Plan Activities handout are reasonable. The consensus was to accept term assignments for the time being and review them a final time after the project evaluation and prioritization stage.

C) Outline Implementation Schedule (Multi-Year Strategy)

The Committee did not discuss the Implementation Schedule at this meeting.

IV. Review of Submitted CEDS 2004 Projects

Before the Committee began the project review, Mr. Vinette introduced Ms. Velez to the Committee, and each Committee member in attendance introduced him or herself by name and affiliation.

Ms. McNulty-Vaughan handed out a summary of the submitted CEDS 2004 projects. She described what it means to have submitted a project to the CEDS Committee. She emphasized that inclusion in the CEDS document is not necessarily an endorsement. She explained that the summary handout sorts the projects by type: building and site rehab, development, infrastructure, program, school re-use, etc.

As Ms. McNulty-Vaughan moved through the first few project descriptions, the Committee began to discuss the definitions and adequacy of the handout's type and readiness descriptions. Mr. Kerwood asked why the William Stanley Business Park was under "site re-hab" and not "development." Mr. Germanowski asked how Committee members could tell when a project is beyond the planning stages and is ready for construction. Mr. Geller suggested that the gross categories provided on the handout did not give Committee members enough of an idea about the current stage of development for each project.

Mr. Karns explained that labeling projects as "re-hab" or "redevelopment" or "brownfields," even if they could be labeled equally well under another category, may be more pragmatic in building appeal from the state, whose current policy perspective favors the redevelopment or brownfields aspect of a project. Ms. McNulty-Vaughan also explained that the readiness descriptions were taken explicitly from the project submittal forms, as written by project proponents. Mr. Vinette suggested that gross readiness categories were not necessary; he wished to see the project readiness description as provided by the project proponent. The Committee agreed.

Ms. Singer asked whether the Committee should look at the submitted projects in relation to the Goals/Objectives/Activities or independently. Mr. Karns said that it was clear from the 2001 CEDS experience that the Committee required a brief overview of all of the submitted projects before it considered any of their strategic, economic development merit. Last time, he explained, many Committee members did not fully understand the nature of the projects and thus had difficulty understanding how to prioritize them. After the project review this time, the Committee will assess the suitability of each project in relation to a number of evaluation criteria, including conformity with the accepted Goals/Objectives/Action Plan Activities.

One of the other main points in the discussion focused on project evaluation. Mr. Geller asked that the the Committee spend some time parsing out the parameters for priority ranking: geographic distribution, EDA fit, conformity to goals and objectives, readiness. Mr. Scullin made the point that it may pay to identify the projects that could use just \$10,000 or so to push them over the threshold into economic development success. The Committee agreed that the region needs a mix of small funding and large funding projects fro

the regional strategy to be comprehensive and truly forward looking.

Ms. McNulty briefly ran through the submitted projects, citing readiness descriptions from the project submittal forms when necessary. In cases where a Committee member knew more about the project details, he or she described the project.

Mr. Karns and Mr. Geller described the Log Homes rehabilitation site in Great Barrington and the GE site in Pittsfield.

The Project Native proposal is in the planning stages. Mr. Germanowski pointed out that the funding may have gotten waylaid. Mr. Geller explained that the group owns the site, it is a currently operating business, so it can use ED support right now. In many respects, it is ready to go for expansion purposes.

Ms. McNulty-Vaughan described the West Stockbridge truck plaza. It is currently at the feasibility study stage. The owner has independently pursued clean up.

Mr. Vinette described the Lane Trucking site, which has an asphalt license on the property. Mr. Vinette explained that such a license is not easy to obtain. Ms. McNulty-Vaughan asked that Committee members to pass along any other large redevelopment sites like the Lane Trucking property.

Mr. Vinette described the Route 102 corridor project from Lee to Stockbridge. It included zoning and infrastructure assessment, particularly of the industrial land along the corridor.

Ms. McNulty-Vaughan described the Lenox Shops project. Mr. Karns explained that the project received some EOE, DHCD and MassHighway money. Mr. Kerwood, Mr. Geller, and Mr. Karns said that it was very near ready-to-go stage.

Mr. Benjamin explained that a developer has approached MassMOCA to provide a 20,000 sq. ft. art storage space. The demo and hazardous materials have already been eliminated. It's now at the renovation and construction stage. The other MassMOCA project would set aside a certain amount of space already fit out and would provide small office space for entrepreneurial businesses. He pointed out that this space is becoming more popular for workspace as Main Street turns more towards housing.

Ms. McNulty-Vaughan described that Pittsfield Downtown Cinema project. Mr. Kerwood explained that the site is not ready for construction, depending how one defines "ready." He suggested that "final planning stages" would be a better description than "ready for construction." Mr. Geller said that if the project sponsors have their equity partners on board (which they do), then they're pretty close to construction. Mr. Vinette suggested that the project could best be characterized by "final planning stages/anticipated completion by 2005."

Ms. McNulty-Vaughan described the Colonial Theatre project.

The Jones Block redevelopment site is a downtown project in Adams. Funding sources have been approved but no funds are available. Mr. Karns said that the designs are done and the group is looking for the funding to put the project out to bid.

Ms. McNulty-Vaughan described the Belcher Square revitalization project in Great Barrington. It is a rehabilitation of two buildings, with demolition of three structures and development of a mixed-use project with commercial space and housing.

Ms. Singer described the Pittsfield Enterprise Center. She and Mark Amuso have discussed moving the Berkshire Enterprises offices from Fenn Street to another unused, city-owned building requiring minimal rehabilitation.

Ms. McNulty-Vaughan described the Mahaiwe Theatre project as already under way. Mr. Geller explained that the Theatre group has done substantial interior work already.

Ms. Singer described the Pittsfield Storefront Artists project. Berkshire Enterprises is working with the artists to develop a business plan. The Catholic diocese has agreed to sell the Notre Dame Middle School to the City for \$45,000. Berkshire Enterprises is working with the group on a business plan, which will include provisions for approximately \$300,000 in renovation costs.

McDermid Graphics Reuse is a brownfields project.

Mountain Mill is in the early planning stages requiring 21E clean-up; it is still under private ownership. Mr. Vinette explained that the Lee CDC is working with several other proponents for use of certain parts of the property.

Ms. McNulty-Vaughan described the Mullen House in North Becket Village. The business plan revolves around the use of the house by a mix of non-profit groups, including the Nature Conservancy and a Quarry museum. The town owns the building.

The Cable Mills condo in Williamstown is in the final design phase with construction to begin in the fall.

Mr. Vinette described the Lee municipal golf course project. The feasibility study has been done. Lee has control over the property.

The Rose Playhouse group hopes to construct a historically accurate Rose Theatre. The project is moving into the initial design and funding stages.

The Dalton Business Park is in the very early stages. The proponents would like to target paper and plastics industries businesses. Mr. Kerwood, who is consulting for the Town of Dalton, said that the Town has engaged SK Design to do feasibility for the two parcels, which are still under private ownership.

The Town of Lenox has completed comprehensive water treatment plan for its Sewer System Upgrade. The Town is looking for funding.

The Town of South Egremont is pursuing a Wastewater Treatment Facility. The Town has failed septic systems, specifically around Prospect Lake.

Mr. Geller explained that the Pinewoods Housing project hopes to break ground September 7, 2004. The development is approximately a 14-month buildout; the sidewalk needs environmental and engineering studies.

Ms. McNulty-Vaughan explained that the Town of Lenox proposes to install historic street lights. The project requires more detailed engineering studies.

The Clarksburg Mill project already provides a site for 100 jobs, with additional jobs probable after renovation and rehabilitation. The businesses there are having trouble expanding because they cannot secure adequate fire protection due to insufficient water main supply. The project already has preliminary feasibility and design studies done.

Mr. Germanowski explained that the Pittsfield Airport Water and Sewer line extension was done; additional extensions to another parcel are required but are beyond the scope of work for the initial extension. The project submitted to the CEDS Committee is to complete the next phase of the expansion.

The Shakespeare & Company utilities project was submitted by the Town of Lenox, in preparation for the Rose Theatre construction. It proposes a new water, sewer and drainage system for redevelopment.

Mr. Geller described the Hillside Avenue affordable housing project. He hopes to initiate the zoning and

permitting applications in the next month. The water and sewer in the vicinity are more problems of age. The design documents necessary to put it to bid have not been completed. It really needs further engineering studies.

Based on discussions with Donna Cesan on a business Revolving Loan Fund, Mr. Karns said that the small downtown development projects cannot easily get *interior* improvement funds from the public sector. Revolving loan funds are one specific enhancement to EDA fundable activities. Mr. Geller said that North Adams has a revolving loan fund, though it may not be actively lending.

Ms. McNulty-Vaughan described the four school re-use projects in Great Barrington, Lee and Stockbridge. Several have been considered for housing; several are in the feasibility study stages.

Mr. Vinette explained that the next phase in the CEDS project assessment is in two parts: 1) the Committee must identify how the submitted projects fit into the Goals/Objectives/Activities, without processing any notions of where they might rank; and 2) apply a kind of “natural selection” process to the submitted projects once the Committee has matched them up to the Goals and Objectives. The final step will be to rank them, after they have been sorted according to the Goals and Objectives and other relevant evaluation criteria.

V. Next Meeting

Mr. Karns suggested meeting after July 1st to allow the BRPC staff time to finish the other projects that will consume it until June 30, 2004.

Mr. Geller asked to set aside 10 minutes on the next meeting agenda to discuss the evaluation criteria for the CEDS projects (e.g. EDA fit, geographic distribution, how close to bearing fruit with a small push, amount of money requested). Mr. Karns suggested that the Committee address ideas for this by e-mail.

The Committee tentatively agreed to meet at 8:30 a.m. Thursday July 8, 2004. The staff will e-mail the Committee to confirm the best possible date some day during the weeks of either July 5th or July 12th. The meeting was adjourned at approximately 10:30 a.m.