



Berkshire Economic Development: CEDS, 2004 Projects, Priorities, Evaluation & Action Plan

PROJECTS FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

In the next few weeks the Berkshire Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Committee will be issuing a request for projects — and potential project ideas — for consideration by the Committee for development and implementation as part of the Berkshire region’s CEDS Action Plan. That request will come in the form of an *Initial Project Brief*, a rewritten (and simplified) version of the Project Profile used by the CEDS Committee to solicit projects in 2001.

Essentially this new form will allow project developers or proponents (BOX below) in the region the opportunity to put their project (or projects) *on the table for regional prioritization for development, implementation and collaboration on funding sources.*

This will also mark the continuation of a concerted effort to systematically collect together the wide variety of projects important to the regional economy being discussed and developed by its municipalities, CDC’s and other public agencies. Coordinating these with projects developed by non-profits or the private sector meeting a wide variety of needs related to, or supporting economic development goals, and prioritizing them will result in a single focused Vision and Action Plan for the Berkshire region.

This is a *comprehensive strategy* – and links between the public and private sectors and activities and programs of public and private non-profits are very much a part of the regional economic picture. Agencies or non-profits with a focus on and expertise in all facets of the regional economy — workforce programs, housing development, or business outreach and support services — are a vital component of the overall regional strategy.

Both federal and state agencies have placed increasing emphasis on achieving regional economic goals by partnering and leveraging projects and programs of various types. The operation and performance of any regional economy is a complex system of interconnected places, populations and employers, and types of economic activities — and the Berkshire regional economy is no exception.

The CEDS Committee, representing the region, will sort through projects in various stages of development from conceptual to total project readiness (bolstered by feasibility, financial, and marketing studies, etc.), assess their expected benefit to the region and their readiness to proceed. Projects and project concepts or ideas will be prioritized, arrayed on a timeline, and become part of an ongoing Berkshire CEDS Action Plan. This Action Plan — with its assessment of regional priorities and project benefits, needs, and funding requirements — is expected to become a significant resource for and directive to state legislators, and state and federal agencies for regional funding priorities and consideration of other types of assistance or regional improvements.

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INITIAL PROJECT BRIEF

The Initial Project Brief (2 pages) will elicit fairly standard introductory information from project proponents. All Project proponents (public or private) will be required to have on board a “municipal sponsor,” an official representing the community in which the project will be located.

Key questions will focus on how a project meets the region’s priority economic development goals or affects and improves the region’s competitive advantage. The Project Brief will seek details and an explanation of what stage of “readiness” for implementation or development the project is in to help place projects on the Action Plan timeline. Additional questions will pertain to project funding and identification of potential or committed funding sources. The overall project description and cost

WHO CAN SUBMIT PROJECT PROPOSALS & IDEAS?

The *Initial Project Brief* will be distributed to: Berkshire Municipal Officials (Mayors and City Councils, Town Administrators and Select Boards, Development Offices); Community Development Corporations and IPDC’s; Public and Private Non-Profits, and Private Sector organizations in cooperation with local government with jurisdiction over the project area.

ON THE WEB: www.berkshireplanning.org (mid-May)

outline will be followed by critical questions on project effects – what the region expects to see in benefits from employment and wages resulting from the project.

Since the Initial Project Brief is also intended to open up opportunities to gather project ideas – or early stage concepts — for future regional projects that could provide economic development benefits or improve the region’s environment for economic growth and development, a wide array of regional organizations in the region (BOX pg 1) will be encouraged to use this process and form to put ideas into the mix for potential consideration and future development as well.

HOW WILL PROJECTS BE EVALUATED?

Included with the Brief will be an outline of 10 guidelines for development (often called the “Smart Growth Principles” — BOX at right) promoted by the Massachusetts Office for Commonwealth Development.

Why the focus on these principles from the outset? Because they will serve as the threshold for evaluation of projects. Projects or project ideas that demonstrate attention to these principles from the initial planning stages on will find fewer hurdles to overcome in the overall assessment process and compatibility with longstanding regional environmental, community and economic goals.

Beyond Sustainable Development: Evaluation

Once projects have been identified through the *Initial Project Briefs*, the Committee will begin a process of determining where projects fit on the CEDS Action Plan timeline. Determining what project needs are and how and by whom these can be addressed will be major factors affecting how projects will be prioritized for follow through activities related to funding and implementation.

A project’s effect on overall regional employment and income will be a primary focus of project evaluation:

- *Number of full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs estimated to be added (or retained) by the project;*
- *Wages and occupations of those jobs.*

A particular focus will also be on the location of projects in Berkshire County: matching and encouraging suitable projects in communities or areas of the County with historically higher rates of unemployment, lower income levels, or shrinking job opportunities.

Other important aspects of the evaluation process will focus on how projects meet regional goals relevant to building a more sustainable regional economy:

- Promoting opportunities for innovation and incubation of small businesses in expanding clusters

Sustainable Development Principles:

The Massachusetts Office for Commonwealth Development lists the following 10 principles to guide development throughout the Commonwealth:

- 1. Redevelop first.**
- 2. Concentrate development.**
- 3. Be fair.**
- 4. Restore and enhance the environment.**
- 5. Conserve natural resources.**
- 6. Expand housing opportunities.**
- 7. Provide transportation choice.**
- 8. Increase job opportunities.**
- 9. Foster sustainable businesses.**
- 10. Plan regionally.**

More detailed explanations of these principles can be accessed on the MA Office For Commonwealth Development website at:

<http://commpres.env.state.ma.us/content/ocd.htm>

and sectors, manufacturing, and economic base industries;

- Expanding workforce development opportunities;
- Ensuring regional competitiveness by a continuous commitment to provision of/upgrade of infrastructure and the supply of adequate, prepared, available sites and buildings;
- Supporting new entrepreneurial opportunities and activities and existing businesses with necessary financial and management expertise;
- Addressing other conditions in the region which act as barriers, or unnecessary hindrances to regional competitive advantage (whether regulatory, politically, or institutionally driven).

Practical questions relating to implementation and management capacity will also affect a project’s placement on the CEDS Action Plan as well — prioritized projects must demonstrate full “readiness” to go. □

CEDS ACTION PLAN

The Action Plan answers the question “How do we get there?” and is based primarily on long-term goals.

The Action Plan describes activities and groups them into programs designed to achieve the desired results and to turn potential for improvement into reality.

The CEDS Strategy Committee has the central role of overseeing development and implementation of the Action Plan.

LEADING QUESTIONS FRAMING EVALUATION

The CEDS Process suggests the following 4 questions to guide comparative evaluation of projects and decisions on project prioritization:

What are the activities and what are their expected benefits?

Which activities address the area's greatest need or best enhance the region's competitive advantages?

Does this project contribute directly and significantly to one or more of the regional goals or strategic directions identified?

Do these activities represent the best use of limited resources?

Does this project build on known resource strengths and comparative advantages of the Berkshires?

Will this project result in permanent improvement in the basic intraregional growth dynamic, the diversity of economic opportunity, and the resiliency of the regional economy?

Can this project be fully and effectively implemented in a relatively short time? Longer time frame suggested?

Does, or can, this project have a mutually reinforcing link with another proposed project?

Will the activities have positive economic, environmental, and social impacts?

Will this project be environmentally sustainable over the long run?

Who will benefit from this project directly or indirectly?

REGIONAL COMPETITIVE STRENGTHS

Innovative, entrepreneurial and creative culture

Highly talented professionals, in many fields, attracted to region's quality of life, many as second home owners

*Strong rate of traded cluster establishment formation**

*Traded clusters describe linked industries in a region which outperform other sector groups

— Briefing to the Governor & Cabinet, Berkshire Regional Competitiveness Council (December, 2003)

REGIONAL COMPETITIVE WEAKNESSES

Dependence on shrinking traditional manufacturing economy

Disproportionate share of economy in clusters that are losing national share/shrinking

Employment growth slower than state, national average

Lack of a clear strategy for regional economic development

Perception that neither local leaders nor state leaders have articulated a clear, or at east unified, strategy

Many related entities, but no development organization or development plan for entire region

— Briefing to the Governor & Cabinet, Berkshire Regional Competitiveness Council (December, 2003)

2004 CEDS COMMITTEE

Rich Vinette, Chairman

<i>Members*</i>	<i>Organization</i>
Al Bashevkin	Northern Berkshire Community Coalition
Blair Benjamin	MASS MoCA
David Bissailon	Berkshire Chamber of Commerce
Heather Boulger	Berkshire County Regional Employment Board
Jim Canavan	North County Community Development Corp.
Donna Cesan	Town of Adams
Sam Haupt	Berkshire Regional Planning Commission
Denise Johns	Berkshire Applied Technology Council
Matt Kerwood	Pittsfield City Council
Al Marden	City of North Adams
Bill Mulholland	Berkshire Community College
Cheryl Nolan	Westside Neighborhood Initiative
Sharon Palma	Southern Berkshire Chamber of Commerce
Yvonne Pearson	Downtown, Inc.
Richard Rilla	Berkshire Plastics Network-Ironman Machine
Gary Schiff	Banknorth
Vicki Singer	Berkshire Enterprises
Eleanore Velez	Berkshire Latin American Council
Rich Vinette	Lee Community Development Corporation

***Other organizations expecting to name members are listed below:**

- Berkshire Medical Systems
- City of Pittsfield Town of Dalton
- CDC of Southern Berkshire
- Berkshire Competitiveness Council
- MASS College of Liberal Arts