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Executive Director

**Berkshire Regional Planning Commission  
Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committee**

*Tuesday, February 15, 2011, 12:30 PM*

*2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Conference Room, BRPC Office, 1 Fenn Street, Pittsfield, MA 01201*

**Committee Members**

Kristine Hazzard X Roger Bolton AB Heather Boulger AB Kevin O'Donnell AB  
Keith Girouard X Mike Nuvalle X Laury Epstein X Mike Supranowicz AB Lauri Klefos X  
Michael Hoffmann X Christine Ludwizewski X Eleanore Velez AB Deanna Ruffer X  
Ann Dobrowolski (Alt) X Helena Fruscio AB Tim Geller X Robert Wilson AB Brenda Burdick X  
Mark Berman X

**BRPC Staff**

Nathaniel Karns X Thomas Matuszko X Daniel Sexton X Mark Maloy X

**Public**

Allison Johnson X Andy McKeeven X Joe Scelsi' X

**Meeting Minutes**

**1. Call to Order**

The February 15, 2011 meeting of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Strategy Committee was convened at 12:35 pm. Mr. Matuszko explained that he would be the moderator for this meeting and that the meeting was being recorded in accordance with the Open Meeting law. Mr. Matuszko then asked if there was anyone present whom wished to record the meeting as well. Seeing none the meeting began.

**2. Approval of Minutes**

Mr. Matuszko asked for approval of the meeting minutes from the January 25, 2011 meeting of the CEDS Strategy Committee.

**Mr. Hoffmann made a motion to approve the minutes, which was seconded by Ms. Ludwizewski. Mr. Matuszko then asked for unanimous consent, seeing no objections the motion passed.**

**3. Public Comments (Non-Agenda Items)**

Mr. Matuszko then explained that this was a public meeting being held by Berkshire Regional Planning Commission. Noticing that there were members of the public present; Mr. Matuszko asked if there was anyone whom wished to speak on any non-agenda items? Seeing none, Mr. Matuszko then moved the discussion to the Project Priorities agenda item.

**4. 2011 CEDS – Berkshire CEDS Project Priorities**

Mr. Matuszko started by thanking the Committee members for taking the time to complete the evaluation/scoring worksheet. He mentioned that some Committee members had indicated it took longer than expected to complete the worksheet. Understanding the time commitment necessary to complete the worksheet, staff was very happy to have received 14 completed worksheets. Mr. Matuszko then explained to the Committee that the next step was to develop a method or structure for the prioritization of regionally significant projects.

- a. **Regional Criteria Evaluation/Scoring Results**
- b. **EDA Criteria Evaluation/Scoring Results**

To set the stage for the discussion and briefly speak to the manner in which information was present to Committee members in the meeting packet, Mr. Matuszko explained the method staff used to list the project proposals. Pages 1-3 in the handout were a total ranking of the projects by median score. Page 4 called out just the project proposals that ranked "high." Pages 5-8 are a presentation of high and medium projects by category (the categories included *Education and Workforce Development*, *Physical Projects*, *Physical and Technology Infrastructure*, and *Programs and Initiatives*). All the categories that were used stem from the Evaluation section, specifically the Regional Investment component. That categorization also mirrored the grouping structure used in the *Project Description Summary* document. Pages 9-11 were another representation of the projects grouped by categories; however, the projects that scored low were also shown. Page 12 is a listing of the project proposals that ranked either high or medium during the EDA evaluation process completed by staff. Pages 13-15 are an overall listing of projects assessed under the EDA evaluation process. This list includes projects that scored low.

### c. **Ranking Structure**

After the explanation of the results, Mr. Matuszko then reinforced the need to establish a method or structure for the prioritization of regionally significant projects for the CEDS report. He explained that it is staff's recommendation that projects be identified and listed in the report using the following structure: (1) a listing of just the high ranking projects; (2) a list of the high and medium projects by category; (3) a listing of projects that meet the EDA's investment priorities; and (4) an appendix listing all of projects considered. Mr. Matuszko then asked the Committee members for input.

The Committee then began to discuss the scoring results and proposed ranking methods. The Committee's comments made during this discussion included:

- ***A concern surrounding the completeness or lack of information provided for some of the project proposals was raised.*** Staff agreed that there was a great disparity among the submitted project proposals. Mr. Matuszko noted that in hindsight maybe staff should have filtered the proposals. However, it was staff's and the Committee's intention to gather a broad spectrum of economic development projects from throughout the region. Mr. Matuszko mentioned that projects lacking information or that weren't as well developed need to be identified in a certain way for next time. It was suggested that implementation measures could be built in to assist project proponents develop their proposals and to refine the solicitation process.
- ***A difficulty that arose during the evaluation process centered on identifying whether a specific project would or could ever be a reality (i.e. long shot proposals).***
- ***Another difficulty mentioned focused on determining the capacity of a proposal to move forward.***

Mr. Matuszko mentioned that staff expected the evaluation process to be difficult. He talked about the fact that Committee members had to take a leap of faith with many proposals. Staff anticipated project proposals that were really good ideas and represented the most value or potential would rise to the top. From his perspective, Mr. Matuszko felt that the process had worked. He then mentioned again, that it is the Committee's responsibility to identify a method to prioritize the project proposals and how it should be presented.

There was some additional Committee discussion on the scoring results and proposed ranking methods. The Committee's comments made during this discussion included:

- ***A Committee member felt the evaluation/scoring criteria was heavily weighted towards planning proposals and not physical development projects.*** Staff then explained that there is a lot of latitude from EDA in how projects or priorities are presented, that's why staff has recommended that projects be called out or broken up by category. By using this method, projects pursuing funding from a non-EDA source would be listed in the report and utilize those benefits.
- ***It was also mentioned that projects not possessing information that showed a readiness to move forward were not able to receive higher scores.***
- ***There was another concern raised that noted many of the project proposals lacked information regarding funding, whether that be potential or secured.***

- **A Committee member asked for a staff interpretation or overall reaction to the results of the scoring and rankings.** Mr. Matuszko explained that the scoring results were fairly consistent. There weren't any wildly erratic scores. There was a good degree of fairness. There were some surprises as to what projects were identified as high priorities, such as River School Redevelopment, Adaptive Reuse of Mills, Monument Mills Reuse Planning. Projects that represent a high economic value to the region did rank fairly well, such as Greylock Glen, the Life Sciences Center, WiredWest, etc...
- **Another element that was identified as missing in the evaluation criteria was Geographical Dispersion.** Staff explained that there was some geographic dispersal, but that the rankings were a little south county heavy. Mr. Karns also mentioned that he was concerned about the lack of workforce development proposals. However, given the three proposals that were submitted it was a little surprising that the Industry Workforce Pathways proposal was not ranked higher.
- **With the mindset of this being a regional economic document and not just an EDA document, a concern was raised regarding the lack of the following elements education/workforce development piece, a lack of public/private partnerships, and a process for dialog.**
- **The scoring criteria could have been standardized.**
- **Are the projects that were submitted and reviewed a complete list of the regional's important economic projects?**

As a result of the discussion points mentioned above, the Committee then began to discuss how the projects could be prioritized. Mr. Matuszko explained that staff tried to develop a process or mechanism that was as transparent and objective as possible, while keeping in mind the level of information that had been submitted. A Committee member asked for some clarification from staff regarding the EDA priorities. A brief discussion of the EDA's funding priorities and the underserved or distressed areas in the county followed. A Committee member suggested that before a prioritization of projects can happen it should be decided whether this report is intended to be an EDA document or a much broader economic planning document for the region. Mr. Matuszko said, staff has been operating under the impression that the Committee had already decided that the document would be a regional economic planning document.

After discussing the initial evaluation results, the Committee questioned the completeness of some of the information gathered from project proponents and questioned whether certain assessment criteria were underscored or under emphasized. There were six fundamental elements to identifying regionally significant economic projects called out by the Committee members that included:

- Readiness to proceed from a concept or idea to an actual "on the ground" economic development project;
- Availability and current status of other funds that would increase the likelihood of a successful project;
- The necessity of the proposed project as a prerequisite to enable, enhance or allow other economic development projects;
- Potential impacts or unintended consequences from a project that might have long term detrimental effects;
- Geographical dispersion of projects throughout the county; and
- Capacity of those involved with the implementation of the project proponent to actually implement the project.

Mr. Matuszko followed with a discussion of two potential options for moving forward. The first was the initiation of a broader discussion of the project proposals within the context of the six elements above. The second was a solicitation to communities, entities and stakeholder groups throughout the region requesting comments on the initial ranking of the project proposals. A Committee member noted the fact that we had to start somewhere, the Committee set and implemented a process, and that there is time over the next year to adjust and refine the process to address the missing elements.

A Committee member asked how the prioritized project lists would be used going forward, what is the next step? Mr. Matuszko then began to discuss the Implementation section. The complete discussion of this topic is listed below under the 2011 CEDS – Implementation agenda item.

Following the brief conversation of the Implementation section, the meeting discussion transitioned back to the prioritization of project proposals. A Committee member asked why we didn't just prioritize the projects solely in terms of EDA eligibility. Mr. Matuszko explained that although the EDA does not have hard and fast requirements for how the prioritized list should look, the EDA does encourage the presentation of a broader listing of regionally significant projects. A Committee member thought it was very striking to see the regionally high list next to the EDA list, there were major differences. Staff mentioned that if the focus of the CEDS report was to access EDA monies exclusively, there just aren't areas within the county that meet the EDA's qualifier for underserved or economically distressed population areas. Mr. Matuszko identified which communities in the region that meet the EDA's qualifier

for underserved or economically distressed (Pittsfield, North Adams, Adams, Florida, and Hinsdale). Mr. Karns explained that EDA funds have limited application within the county. From his stand point, Mr. Karns suggested that it would be better to identify a relatively small list of projects (say 3-5) that may meet the EDA's criteria. He also mentioned that just listing economic projects within the region is a step in the right direction.

A Committee member raised a question concerning how communities and projects proponents were going to be allowed an opportunity to comment on the listings. Mr. Matuszko explained that there is a 30-day public comments period built into the process. Concerns were voiced as to whether the comment process should be initiated now rather than later, thus making the process as iterative as possible. A suggestion was made to send a solicitation out to all the entities that were ask for projects for proposals, regarding the initial project list. A concern was raised as to whether this would open the door for a flood of input, further diluting the evaluation and prioritization process thus fare. It was then mentioned that the solicitation of support and input is imperative for communities and the overall process, since communities stand to be impacted the most. A Committee member then referenced the need for communities to certify the CEDS report. Mr. Sexton explained that there was no community approval process. He further explained that the EDA only encourages the CEDS report be accompanied by letters of support from communities within the region and the CEDS Strategy Committee's approval of the final document. A Committee member asked where the locust of the project prioritization rests. Mr. Matuszko explained that that is a responsibility of the Committee.

From this discussion, Committee members suggested that a letter be mailed to all project proponents asking for input on the initial listing of regional significant project priorities. It was noted that recipients of this letter should receive the following items: a copy of the evaluation criteria, a copy of the overall ranking of projects, a copy of projects ranked by category and summarization of the project description. Committee members emphasized that this is not a "resubmission."

To bring some organization to the discussion, Mr. Matuszko then asked for input from the Committee as to what they wanted to use the solicited information for. From his perspective, he explained that there are two ways the solicited information could be used, which were: for informational purposes moving forward or the Committee could consider comments and information received to further refine the list of prioritized projects. A Committee member questioned whether there was a capacity or time to complete a second solicitation. It was suggested that maybe this process should be conducted after the reports publishing.

To clarify the suggestion made by the Committee, Mr. Matuszko asked for a motion speaking to the Committee's suggestion.

**Ms. Klefos made a motion asking BRPC staff to solicit project proponents for comments regarding the initial prioritized list of projects. The letter should include copies of the information presented on pages 1-8 of the handout (the overall ranking of projects and the projects ranked by category) without scores, a copy of the evaluation criteria, and summarization of the project description. This motion was seconded by Ms. Hazard. Mr. Matuszko then asked for unanimous consent, Ms. Epstein opposed to the motion. Seeing no other objections the motion passed.**

To make clear the intent of the informational request, Mr. Karns spoke to the fact that this solicitation should not be seen as a resubmission of project proposals. He also noted that comments should focus on the potential inaccuracies of the listing, speaking to projects that are prerequisite to other projects and to how the list advances overall economic development in the region. Staff will refine the language of the mailing internally. To get a sense of timeline from the Committee, Mr. Matuszko explained that staff would open the solicitation period for about a week and a half. Staff would then try to get copies of the responses to the Committee the Friday before the March 8<sup>th</sup> meeting. Committee members felt the timeline was acceptable.

Mr. Matuszko then moved the discussion to a continuation of the Implementation agenda item.

## **5. 2011 CEDS – Implementation**

Mr. Matuszko explained that the Implementation section is made up of activities and actions that the Committee identifies as important to focus on over the next 1-5 years. He mentioned that staff is proposing two types of implementation measures including: (1) broad sets of activities that could or should be implemented throughout the region modeled from the CEDS Goals and Objectives, and (2) sets of actions under each goal focusing on projects. The project specific actions could be drawn from the prioritized list project proposals. Mr. Matuszko highlighted a number of concepts mentioned today that could be developed into activities, such as working with project proponents to better develop their concept and developing better evaluation criteria to analyze the impacts of project proposals. He then mentioned, in terms of the prioritized projects, that really projects that ranked the highest should be developed into implementation section.

Mr. Sexton briefly explained to the Committee the methodology staff is proposing for the listing of implementing activities and actions. He mentioned that an obstacle to developing this section was the identification of partnering or sponsoring organizations and the review of their long-range action plans. The identification and gathering of this information is important ensure an organization that does not have the capacity or the willingness to implement a certain activity or action is not listed within the report. Staff is in the process of gathering this information.

Mr. Matuszko asked the Committee whether they felt the framework was headed in the right direct. A committee member felt that there was a column missing from the framework that spoke to "Next Steps." Staff explained that they envisioned the "1<sup>st</sup> Milestone" column as accomplishing the missing component. Committee members asked that the title of the "1<sup>st</sup> Milestone" column be changed to "Next Steps." Mr. Sexton asked that further comments be submitted to him as soon as possible by e-mail.

Mr. Matuszko clarified that the Committee was supportive of the proposed framework. The Committee agreed.

#### **6. 2011 CEDS – State Cooperation, Consistency and Integration**

Briefly Mr. Matuszko mentioned the proposed language for this section of the report. Mr. Sexton explained that the proposed language is still in flux. This instability is the result of on-going communications between staff and State representatives regarding the future plans for economic planning at the State level.

Mr. Matuszko asked that any comments be sent to Mr. Sexton.

#### **6. Next Meeting (Tuesday, March 8th, 2011 at 12:30pm)**

Since the CEDS Strategy Committee was unable to establish a list of regionally significant economic development projects, Mr. Matuszko asked whether members were amenable to adding a second meeting in March. A Committee member asked how the addition of another meeting would affect the overall schedule for the CEDS project. Mr. Matuszko clarified that the project had to be completed by April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2011, due to a contractual obligation between BRPC and the EDA. After Committee members looked at their calendars, it was agreed that the next meeting would be held on Tuesday, March 8<sup>th</sup> at 12:30pm and that an additional meeting would be scheduled for March 22<sup>nd</sup>.

#### **7. Other Items?**

No items were raised.

#### **8. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 2:20pm.

#### **Documents distributed at the meeting included:**

Meeting Agenda

Draft Minutes from the January 25, 2011 CEDS Strategy Committee meeting

A document containing Project Updates for past CEDS priority projects

A copy of the draft language for the *Implementation* section

A copy of the draft language for the *State Cooperation, Consistency and Integration* section

A handout containing the evaluation/scoring results