

JAMES MULLEN, Chair
SHEILA IRVIN, Vice-Chair
GALE LABELLE, Clerk
CHARLES P. OGDEN, Treasurer

NATHANIEL W. KARNS, A.I.C.P.
Executive Director

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

Tuesday, March 22, 2011, 12:30 PM

2nd Floor Conference Room, BRPC Office, 1 Fenn Street, Pittsfield, MA 01201

Committee Members

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

BRPC Staff

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

Public

Allison Johnson X Joe Scelsi X

Meeting Minutes

1. Call to Order

At 12:40pm on March 22, 2011 a meeting of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Strategy Committee was convened. 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 March 8, 2011 meeting of the CEDS Strategy Committee.

Mr. Girouard made a motion to approve the minutes, which was seconded by Ms. Dobrowolski. 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 next agenda item.

4. 2011 CEDS – Berkshire CEDS Project Priorities

Mr. Matuszko started by explaining that at the last meeting, staff had presented the CEDS Strategy Committee with a proposed method for listing and prioritizing the project proposals. Per the discussions at that meeting, a number of changes were suggested by the Committee regarding the proposed list. The results of those modifications are represented in the revised Project Priority List before the Committee. Seeing that there were a number of Committee members present that weren't at the last meeting, Mr. Matuszko briefly discussed the changes. He began by discussing the "Projects Representing the Greatest Needs Regionally" list. It was noted that the title of this list was changed to better reflect the Economic Development Administration's requirements. At the request of the Committee, staff re-evaluated the projects in the Regional Transportation Plan to determine if there were any regional projects that needed to be incorporated into the Regional *Highway Access Improvements* project grouping. Per this review, it was identified that there were an additional three projects that should be added to this grouping, including: Route 8/Friends Street Intersection project (Town of Adams), Route 7/20 Corridor Access Management Improvements project, and Route 20 Traffic Improvements. Mr. Matuszko asked the Committee if there were any comments/concerns pertaining to this grouping. Seeing none, he transitioned the discussion to the categorized project lists.

Under the "Projects that Enhance the Region – Physical Development Category" list, Mr. Matuszko explained the following changes:

- **The grouping of the Gravel Bank, North Adams plaza and Old Route 8 Corridor projects into a project grouping entitled Route 8 Corridor Redevelopment.** Staff explained that the decision to group these projects was based on input received from the project proponent and discussion at the last Committee meeting. A Committee member questioned the title of the grouping; it was thought that the title may give readers the impression that this was a roadway project. Mr. Karns explained that while the project was not specifically a roadway improvement project, the projects in this group were all located along the Route 8 corridor. Mr. Matuszko also mentioned that while the Old Route 8 Corridor project did include the redevelopment of a small section of roadway, the overarching intent was to open up adjacent lands from redevelopment. *It was decided, by the Committee, that the name would remain unchanged.*
- **The grouping of the Ashuelot Park Development, Hubbard Avenue Improvements and the Schnopps-Robert projects into a project grouping entitled Hubbard Avenue Development Area.** Mr. Matuszko explained that these projects are interconnected, in that if the Hubbard Avenue was not improved there are capacity issues that could make full build-out the Ashuelot Park, Schnopps-Robert Site, or other parcels difficult. The Committee, at the last meeting, identified the Hubbard Avenue project as a prerequisite to the development of the surrounding area.
- **A Committee member asked for clarification as to whether a project could appear on two different lists.** Mr. Matuszko explained that that couldn't happen. He did clarify though that the "Berkshire Creative Initiative" is present on multiple category lists, but this is possible because the Berkshire Creative Initiative contains projects in different categories. Staff explained that each project would have a project summary in the Project Priority List section of the CEDS report. Committee members were briefly shown the project summary framework.
- **A Committee member was concerned about placing roadway improvements on the "Projects Representing the Greatest Needs Regionally" list when the project seemed to be more locally based.** Mr. Matuszko explained that while a roadway improvement project may seem to only address a local issue, the decision to identify this as a regional project was based on the broader impacts. If this project was combined with other roadway improvements regional, the results would greatly improve region's overall highway access and circulation.

Seeing that much of the comments expressed by Committee members revolved around specific project information, Mr. Matuszko transitioned the discussion to the Project Narratives. Mr. Matuszko explained that for each project a narrative would be developed to explain the project. The narrative would include information such as Project Name, Project Location, Project Summary, Funding Sources and Job Creation. He explained in greater detail that the Economic Development Administration really wanted to see information pertaining to funding and job creation, essentially speaking to the amount of investment each project would generate.

A Committee member asked whether it was possible to add an element speaking to the "Linkages" of each project. It was explained that this linkage information may help identify leveraging and the localized dynamics of each project. Through a further discussion, by the Committee, it was suggested that the additional field be labeled "Related Linkages" or something similar. A Committee member offered that each project should be able to stand alone and cautioned that through the linkages discussion a project does not become tied to another project. Mr.

Matuszko asked whether Committee members supported the proposed change to the narrative structure, no objections were raised.

Mr. Matuszko then transitioned the discussion back to the changes made to the project category lists. Mr. Matuszko asked if there were any further comments regarding the "Projects that Enhance the Region – Physical Development Category" list? The Committee Speaking specifically to a couple projects in the South Sub-Region list, a Committee member noted that a number of those properties were about to change hands. With this in mind, the Committee member asked whether property owners needed to consent to the list of their property. Staff explained that the listing of projects was not legally binding. As a practical matter, staff explained that contact with project proponents will be ongoing and during the annual Status Reports the project narratives will be updated to reflect project changes and support.

A Committee member questioned the placement and location (in the Central Sub-Region) of the Berkshire Mall/Civic Center/hotel project. Seeing that the project proponent was present at the meeting, Mr. Matuszko invited him to speak on the question. Mr. Scelsi explained that there is no civic center currently in Berkshire County. He also explained that the location is not set, but initial thought focused on the availability of the new access road and a surplus of parking. He also mentioned that the project is regional focused and the intent is to expand the customer base of the region by drawing from new client pools. Mr. Matuszko then noted that the merits of each project have not been evaluated. To this point, individuals assessed the merits of each project through their scoring of the project proposals. He then explained that the Committee could initiate that discussion; however, he cautioned that such an evaluation should be done to all projects not just one. To clarify the discussion of the civic center, Mr. Karns noted that there is not a facility of the appropriate size in the region that is capable of handling a large convention (i.e. Boat Show, Tournaments, etc). Following further discussion, the Committee determined to leave the project on the list. Mr. Scelsi also mentioned that there needs to be a regional shift from communities competing for businesses that already reside in Berkshire County to attracting new business. He mentioned further that with each new business comes new jobs and that is a benefit for the whole county.

Mr. Matuszko shifted the discussion back to the project category lists. Mr. Matuszko briefly highlighted the changes that were made to the Project that Enhance the Region – Physical and Technology Infrastructure Category, the Program and Initiative Category, and the Education and Workforce Development Category. Following this explanation, Mr. Matuszko asked for any questions on the category lists? A committee member asked whether a project could be added speaking to agricultural. It was further explained that agriculture has been emphasized throughout this process as an important regional element. Within all the proposed lists there is only one project listed that speaks to agriculture. Not disagreeing with the Committee member, Mr. Matuszko explained that the adding of projects, especially those without proponents, is a larger question. He asked, "If the Committee was to add a project for agriculture, why not for other areas?" Mr. Matuszko suggested that it may be better to incorporate this question into the Implementation section. In many ways, the priority projects are just a small component of a larger document. Committee members concurred, in that through the Implementation Section the Committee could identify and develop solutions for identified gaps in the project solicitations and listings.

A Committee member reinforced the importance of incorporating an action step emphasizing the importance of re-evaluating the project priority lists. This mechanism will provide some amount of reassurance to project proponents that this process is ongoing and that within a year there will be another chance to have a project listed.

To ensure the Committee was in agreement that the project lists should not be re-opened for unsolicited projects; Mr. Matuszko asked the question to the Committee. The Committee concurred.

Mr. Matuszko then transferred the floor to a Committee member that had a question regarding the overall structure of the list. That Committee member's question focused on whether one comprehensive listing of all the projects, with high and medium rankings, should be added in addition to the categorized list. According to the Committee member, it was felt that an overall comprehensive list would better show what types of projects were really regionally significant. Another Committee member asked what the project appendix was going to include and whether this appendix could accommodate a comprehensive list of projects. Staff clarified that the appendix, as proposed, would include the listing of the other projects not included in a prioritized list. Staff also cautioned against the use of multiple lists because it was thought that two lists may be confusing and in certain instances it could be harmful to "low" projects. A Committee member asked why the projects couldn't just be listed alphabetically. Staff explained that at the last meeting the EDA representative had said that listing of projects alphabetically was not acceptable. It was also mentioned, by a Committee member, that pitting one project against another was not a good idea.

Based on the concerns raised during this discuss, Mr. Matuszko tried to explain why and how the current project prioritization structure was developed. The "Projects Representing the Greatest Needs Regionally" listed projects are the truly regionally significant projects. The projects listed in the "Project that Enhance the Region" categories may have regional impacts; however, because they are fundamentally different it wasn't possible to rank them

against one another (i.e. a physical proposal compared to a workforce training proposal). That is why the decision was made to list projects by categories. In the instance of the Physical Development category, specifically, the projects were further clustered because the impacts and benefits were truly sub-regional. Staff reinforced that it was an intentional and conscious decision to move away from the comprehensive list. To ensure the meeting progressed, Mr. Matuszko asked the Committee whether there was a motion to change the listing structure. Seeing that no motion and hearing much discussion on the lists, Mr. Matuszko asked the Committee for a motion to approve the Project Priority List as presented.

Mr. Girouard made a motion to approve the revised Project priority List as presented. The motion was seconded by Mr. Wilson. Mr. Matuszko then asked for unanimous consent, Mr. Geller opposed the motion. Seeing no other objections the motion passed.

Before moving to the next agenda item, Mr. Matuszko thanked the Committee for all their input and noted that the comments regarding the project narratives will be incorporated. He then inquired as to whether there were any additional comments. A Committee member made a cautionary note that highlighted the fact that some projects, during their development, will create unforeseen impacts or consequences. With that in mind, it was suggested that the Committee consider adding some language or a disclaimer. Another Committee member stated that the "project Priority Lists" are the CEDS selling sheet and that it would be inappropriate to incorporate a disclaimer here. Mr. Sexton mentioned that many of these projects are not static. They are in varying stages of development and as they develop there is a high likelihood that they may change.

It was also suggested, by a Committee member, that timeframe information be added to the project narrative. Mr. Matuszko said that was a good recommendation, since staff was examining how they were going to track the status of projects for the Status Reports annually.

The meeting discussion was then shifted to the Implementation agenda item.

5. 2011 CEDS – Implementation

To start the discussion of this agenda item, Mr. Sexton briefly explained to the Committee how the structure of the information presented in this section was developed. He noted that the input from the Committee at previous meetings, specifically the changing of the column titles, had been incorporated. A Committee member asked whether the "Target Completion" column will or could correlate to the timeframe information being incorporated into the Project Priority List section? It was suggested that this information could be helpful for the reader. Staff noted that this suggestion could easily be integrated. Mr. Sexton then explained that the "Regional Based Activities" were generated from strategic information gathered from other organizations (i.e. Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, Berkshire Community College, Berkshire County Regional Employment Board and others). The activities that have been incorporated, in the proposed Implementation section, were selected by staff on the bases of their correlation or consistent with the CEDS Goals and Objectives.

Mr. Sexton then posed a question to the Committee regarding whether all the priority projects should be listed in the Implementation section? A Committee member mentioned that it may be seen as a red flag if a prioritized project is not included in the Implementation section. Mr. Matuszko clarified that the Committee was supportive of incorporating the prioritized projects as action items? The Committee agreed.

Mr. Sexton asked the Committee how they preferred to review the proposed Implementing actions. Knowing that the discussion may take a while, Mr. Matuszko inquired as to each member's ability to stay longer than the allotted 2-hour timeframe. It was suggested, by a Committee member, that because the Project Based Actions were not integrated and the Project Narrative were not complete that discussion on this section be postponed until those elements are completed.

To ensure staff was on the right track for the proposed Implementation language, Mr. Matuszko asked Committee members for their first impressions of the proposed language. The comments and concerns raised by Committee members included:

- **Clarification was requested regarding listed organizations and their involvement, specifically in the context of their relationships to each, spheres of responsibility and so forth.**
- **It was suggested that the word "entity," in the first Regional Activity under Goal 1, be changed to "unified approach."**
- **A concern was raised regarding the establishment of an Economic Development District.** Seeing there was confusion surrounding the establishment of an Economic Development District (EDD), Mr. Matuszko identified that staff would provide the Committee with information regarding the EDD at the next meeting.
- **It was asked whether one Board or Commission could oversee multiple efforts.**

- **Will or is Berkshire Benchmark linked to Massachusetts Benchmarks?**

To help address these concerns, staff will initiate additional conversations with all the economic development related organization in the county to ensure that there is cooperation, support and understanding for the CEDS report and its implementation strategies. Mr. Karns did encourage Committee members to submit their comments to staff to alleviate lower level concerns and discussion at the next meeting.

Seeing disinterest among the Committee to continue the meeting past the two hour limit, Mr. Matuszko jumped ahead to a discussion of the next meeting. A discussion of scheduling can be found below in the Next Meeting section.

6. 2011 CEDS – Performance Measures

Mr. Sexton began by briefly explaining to the Committee what the Performance Measures were intended to accomplish and how the language was generated. He noted that following the release of the draft language to the Committee a couple changes had been made. Those changes were the result of additional discussions among staff and included the elimination of proposed measures 4 and 5. Mr. Sexton then noted that a number of the proposed measures are required by EDA regulations, specifically measures 1, 2 and 7. The remaining measures were developed, by staff, to track information that the EDA is interested in and to highlight elements raised in other economic planning documents developed specifically for Berkshire County. Those measures included the tracking of business start-ups as they relate to clustering industries and the collaborative and partnership efforts that have been initiated, maintained or expanded. A couple comments raised by the Committee included:

- **A measure should be added speaking to how has data gathering can be improved?**
- **It was suggested that measure 7 be expanded to include specific data characteristics that will be tracked such as demographic, economic, social and the others.**

To clarify that staff was on track with the proposed language, Mr. Matuszko asked Committee members whether they felt the language was acceptable. The Committee agreed, keeping in mind the comments that were just raised.

Mr. Matuszko then asked the Committee for any additional comments or questions. A Committee member inquired as to how the sourcing of data is planned to be handled throughout the report? Mr. Sexton explained that every piece of data incorporated into the report has been sourced. He then mentioned that there was not a requirement from EDA to list all the sources that were used within the report.

7. Next Meeting (Tuesday, April 12th, 2011 at 12:30pm)

Mr. Matuszko explained that the next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, April 12th. At this meeting staff would be looking for an endorsement from the Committee on the full report and to allow the opening of the 30-day public comment period. Knowing that there may be changes or edits that arise at this meeting, staff allotted a couple days to address revisions to the document and then distribute it for public comment on Friday, April 15th. Mr. Matuszko then mentioned that staff is expecting some comments to be submitted during the comment period. Staff will conduct an initial filtering of these comments. To address much larger concerns and to gain endorsement of the final document, staff is suggesting that another meeting be scheduled for Tuesday, May 17th. Before the document can be submitted to the EDA, staff will be presenting the full report to the BRPC Commission on Thursday, May 19th. Once the report has been approved by the Commission it will be transmitted to the EDA for approval.

To clarify why the approval process has been extended beyond April 30th, Mr. Matuszko explained that BRPC had secured an extension from EDA to complete the report by June 30th.

To ensure there was consensus for the revised schedule, Mr. Matuszko asked Committee members if there were any concerns or comments. The Committee agreed that the revised schedule looked acceptable. With that said the next CEDS Strategy Committee meeting was scheduled for Tuesday, April 12th, 2011 at 12:30pm.

The discussion was then transitioned to the Performance Measures agenda item

8. Other Items?

No items were raised.

9. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 2:30pm.

Documents distributed at the meeting included:

- Meeting Agenda
- Draft Minutes from the March 8th, 2011 CEDS Strategy Committee meeting
- A copy of the revised Project Priority Lists
- A copy of the draft Implementation section
- A copy of the draft Performance Measures section