

BERKSHIRE REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION
1 FENN STREET, SUITE 201, PITTSFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS 01201
TELEPHONE (413) 442-1521 · FAX (413) 442-1523
Massachusetts Relay Service: TTY: 771 or 1-800-439-2370
www.berkshireplanning.org

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 8, 2011, 12:30 PM

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

Committee Members

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

BRPC Staff

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

EDA Representative

Matthew Suchodolski X

Public

Andy McKeever X

Meeting Minutes

1. Call to Order

At 12:40pm it was determined that there were not enough Committee members present yet (quorum) to hold the March 8, 2011 meeting of the CEDS Strategy Committee.

2. Informational Presentation Matthew Suchodolski, EDA Economic Development Specialist (Tentative)

Since there were not enough Committee members present for a quorum, Mr. Matuszko asked whether Mr. Suchodolski, EDA Economic Development Specialist for Massachusetts, would be willing to give his presentation as an information talk to the Committee members that were present? Mr. Suchodolski agreed. To ensure compliance with Massachusetts Public Meeting laws, Mr. Matuszko explained to all individuals present that Mr. Suchodolski's presentation would be for informational purposes only. He further noted that without a quorum, no actions or motions could be made by the Committee at this time. With that said, Mr. Matuszko handed the floor to Mr. Suchodolski.

Mr. Suchodolski began the presentation by explaining that he is an employee of the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) and is the Economic Development Specialist from Massachusetts. He then noted that he was not present to help, but rather to help partner. He subsequently mentioned that the CEDS process is designed to be "regional;" so in no way, shape or form is he present to tell the Committee or the citizens of Berkshire County

what they should do with this CEDS. The Berkshire CEDS is the economic development plan for the region, not EDA's. The EDA's regulations and guidance provide a framework for entities, like BRPC, to work towards the development of a regional CEDS. A CEDS is an evolving process and document designed to help grow regional economies. Mr. Suchodolski identified that the most important takeaway, from the presentation, should be that CEDS's are regional documents not EDA documents. The CEDS should be focused on helping and growing the economic vitality of the region through job creation, retention and the charting of private investment. During the course of Mr. Suchodolski's presentation, he spoke to the following topics and concepts:

- **Brief history and background of EDA;**
- **Discussed what a CEDS is and how it is supposed to be used;**
 - Creating an economic roadmap to diversify and strengthen regional economies
 - Integrates a region's human and physical capital planning in the service of economic development
 - Continuing economic development planning process developed with broad-based and diverse public and private sector participation. It must set forth the goals and objectives necessary to solve the economic development problems of the region
 - Benchmark by which a regional economy can evaluate opportunities with other regions in the national economy
- **EDA's role within Massachusetts;**
- **Project priority list requirements and methods for presenting project information within the CEDS report; and**
- **EDA funding/project eligibility.**

Following Mr. Suchodolski's presentation, there were a number of questions asked by individuals in attendance. Those questions included:

- **How does the EDA define "substantial population loss?"** *Mr. Suchodolski explained that the EDA considers the combination of two factors when examining the eligibility criteria: number of citizens lost and time span of loss.*
- **How does the EDA evaluate project applications?** *Mr. Suchodolski explained that project proposals are examined in-house, there is a two-tier evaluation process, and each project is given a ranked/scored against the eligibility criteria (Highly Competitive, Competitive or Not Competitive). He mentioned that it is his job to guide, partner and work with project proponents to make their application as competitive as possible. Under current funding constraints, Mr. Suchodolski explained that his regional office has received approximately \$28-33 million annually (last two-years). In FY'2011, for every \$6 of requests coming in the EDA was able to get \$1 onto projects. In an instance where project proposals meet all the criteria and are determined to be highly competitive, an administrative decision is made allocating funds to specific projects.*

Mr. Matuszko distributed an informational summary of how BRPC staff understood the EDA's funding criteria and eligibility requirements; however, he encouraged everyone present to visit the EDA's webpage for additional information or contact the EDA directly. Mr. Matuszko then thanked Mr. Suchodolski's for providing an informational presentation. He then checked to see whether there was now enough Committee members present to begin the meeting. Seeing eleven Committee members present, Mr. Matuszko called the meeting to order.

3. Call to Order

At 1:35pm on March 8, 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.

4. Approval of Minutes

Mr. Matuszko asked for approval of the meeting minutes from the February 15, 2011 meeting of the CEDS Strategy Committee.

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

5. 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.

6. 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 to prioritize the project proposals. Following that presentation, Committee members entered into an in-depth conversation focusing on the evaluation criteria and the ranking results. As a result of that discussion, Mr. Matuszko mentioned that staff was asked to solicit comments from project proponents regarding the initial project rankings and to gather additional information about their project, as it pertained to the six fundamental elements.

From that solicitation, Mr. Matuszko explained that a number of project proponents had decided to respond. Those responses were distributed to all Committee members last Friday for review and a copy of the responses has been made available as a handout at this meeting. He then briefly mentioned the proponents (City of Pittsfield, City of North Adams, Berkshire Creative and Berkshire Chamber of Commerce) and projects for which comments were submitted that requested changes to the project listing. He also noted comments received for a couple of projects that generally supported their project listing.

Mr. Matuszko then explained to Committee members that the focus of this meeting was to establish a method for listing and prioritized projects. Before discussing staff's proposed method for listing and prioritizing projects, Mr. Matuszko inquired as to whether any Committee members had comments pertaining to where the discussion left off at the last meeting or more importantly how to proceed with the listing of projects? From the information presented by Mr. Suchodolski, Mr. Matuszko was struck by the great deal of leeway EDA allows for the listing of projects within the CEDS report. A Committee member then mentioned that it seems as though the EDA gives more emphasis to the "projects" listed in the CEDS report, as opposed to how the projects are listed. Mr. Matuszko followed the commented with a clarification of the benefits to completing a CEDS, which included: the development of an economic blueprint for the region and a mechanism to allow organizations and project proponents to access EDA funds. Mr. Matuszko then mentioned an unintended consequence that staff had realized regarding the impacts of project listing on the ability to pursue funding from other sources. Another Committee member mentioned that they were taken back by the quality and quantity of information submitted within project applications. Due to this lack of information the evaluations/scoring process was very difficult. It was suggested, by a Committee member that maybe projects should simple be listed alphabetically, as opposed to prioritizing them. Mr. Matuszko deferred to Mr. Suchodolski for direction. Mr. Suchodolski referenced the guidance that had been shown during his presentation, which highlighted the fact that the listing of projects must be prioritized in one way, shape or form. Mr. Matuszko clarified that an alphabetized list of projects would not work.

A Committee member then suggested that an examination of the median scores may result in the identification of gaps or natural breaks. From these breaks, there is the possibility that projects could be divided and grouped to a greater detail. Mr. Matuszko explained that that was similar to staff's initial concept of breaking the projects up into high, medium and low groupings based on the median scores. The Committee member concurred with staff's statement, however, explained further that the projects could be divided into smaller groups. Other Committee members agreed, however, there were suggestions that the more detailed groupings of projects should be aggregated by sub-region, community or category. From this discussion, Committee members asked for staff's recommendation.

Mr. Matuszko explained that staff's grouping or categorizing of projects was a combination of three methods. The proposed methods took into consideration the initial scoring results of the CEDS Strategy Committee and the additional comments submitted by project proponents, as well as staff's general knowledge of project proposals and their interconnections with one another. The three methods proposed by staff included:

1. **Listing project proposals that were identified as "Game Changers" or "Regionally Significant Projects list" individually or by way of grouping proposals together.** (*It was noted, by staff, these projects or groupings of projects were seen as impacting the entire county.*)
2. **Listing the remaining projects by category** (*i.e. Education and Workforce Development, Physical Projects, Physical and Technology Infrastructure, and Programs and Initiatives*).
3. **Listing of projects within the "Physical Projects" category by sub-region.** (*The sub-regions would include North, Central and south.*)

Knowing that the "Physical Projects" category list produced much discussion at the last meeting, Mr. Matuszko spoke to the methodology behind listing projects that have direct impacts to communities in specific areas (sub-regions). Projects in the northern portion of the county don't have direct impacts to the County's central or southern communities. Mr. Karns also noted that this was the methodology used in the economic planning document of the 1990's, the precursor to the 2001 CEDS. This categorization recognizes that there are sub-regions within the

county, predominantly due to geography. A handout, explaining staff's proposed listing method, was distributed at this point in the meeting. To ensure Committee members better understood the concepts proposed by staff, Mr. Matuszko urged Committee members not to jump ahead in the handout. Page 1 of the handout, provided a listing of the projects that have the greatest potential for regional impacts. Mr. Matuszko went project by project discussing the projects or groups of projects list on the page. He also explained that many of these projects were prerequisites or directly affected economic development activities or projects throughout the county. Mr. Karns noted that many of the regional projects were identified in the *Regional Evaluation* section as weaknesses or threats in the region. Staff noted that many of the projects listed in this category received high scores during the evaluation.

Comments raised regarding staff's proposed listing methods included:

- **Why were all the projects grouped under the Regional Highway Access Improvements proposal, which ranked low were ranked low and still made it to the list?** *Mr. Matuszko explained that all the projects in this group were identified as prerequisites to other regional developments and are listed in the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP); therefore, staff recommended they should be identified as region-wide projects.*
- **Another comment pertained to the grouping of projects and why more projects were not grouped initially (i.e. Hubbard Avenue with the Ashuelot Park and Schnopps-Roberts sites)?** *Mr. Matuszko explained that the grouping of proposals in the regional projects was intended to do just that, group projects. In the instance of Hubbard Avenue, staff determined it was a project that impacted the central portion of the county rather than the whole county. He also mentioned that other projects could be grouped together.*

Hearing the Committee's comments, Mr. Matuszko then began to discuss in greater detail the second listing method, categories. Before moving the discussion forward, he mentioned that the first method of listing projects was intended to identify a relatively short list of projects, all of which had a true regional impact. To clarify the information presented by staff, a Committee member asked whether every project regardless of ranking was going to be listed in the report. Staff explained that a listing of all the projects would be provided in an appendix. Only projects that ranked as "high," "medium" or that were authorized to be listed by the Committee would be discussed in greater detail in the report. These projects would also represent the Project Priorities List.

To ensure that staff was headed in the right direction with the proposed listing methods; Mr. Matuszko asked whether Committee members were generally supportive of the method? Committee members concurred.

At this point in the meeting the digital recorder stopped working. Therefore, there are no recorded records of the meeting minutes beyond this point. Information and discussions presented below are from the memories and hand written records of BRPC staff.

The CEDS Strategy Committee concurred with staff's suggested methods for listing project priorities; however, there were specific projects that Committee members wanted to discuss. Mr. Matuszko asked the Committee whether they had interest in going through the Regionally Significant projects one-by-one and then projects with a "Low" ranking. Committee members approved of this structure for finalizing the project priority list. In instances where there were concerns surrounding the listing or location of a project proposal a motion was requested by staff to establish the placement of the project proposal. With that said, Mr. Matuszko began to discussing the project proposals.

Discussion and motions are listed below by project or project group:

- **Regional Telecommunications Network:** *There were no concerns regarding this project proposal.*
- **Pittsfield Municipal Airport:** *A Committee member asked staff to provide an explanation of the regional economic impacts stemming from the airport improvements. Mr. Karns explained that the airport's clientele primarily consisted of corporate jets and regional connector flights. He then mentioned that many of the region's businesses and companies utilize the airport to transport clients and employees. Without the improvements, people would either have to travel to Albany, NY or Hartford, CT. Although there is another airport located in North Adams, this airport lacks similar safety upgrades to handle larger corporate jets. Mr. Matuszko asked the Committee for a motion.*

Ms. LaRoche made a motion recommending that the Pittsfield Municipal Airport Improvement project be kept as a Regionally Significant Project. This motion was seconded by Ms. Fruscio. Mr. Matuszko then

asked for unanimous consent, Ms. Epstein opposed to the motion. Seeing no other objections the motion passed.

- **Regional Highway Access Improvements:** *While the Committee had no problems with including a project grouping of regional highway improvements, there were concerns surrounding the inclusion of “low” ranked projects. The Committee asked staff to explain how the project grouping was determined and why “low” ranking projects had been included on this list. Based on input received during the project comment period, staff explained that there were a number of project proposals that had been identified to have regional implications. Mr. Matuszko explained that without completing the list of regional highway improvements economic growth specifically that of manufacturing and warehousing would be inhibited. While many of the projects listed in this group were ranked as a “low” priority, many of them were prerequisites for other projects to be implemented.*

Ms. Klefos made a motion to add a project proposal that just spoke to regional improvements.

Following this motion, Committee members discussed whether to include a list of project proposals within the broader proposal for Regional Highway Access Improvements. Staff provided Committee members with a more detailed explanation of the regional impacts for each of the projects listed under the broader project grouping. Mr. Matuszko asked Ms. Klefos whether she wished to modify her motion.

Based on the Committee’s discussion, Ms. Klefos decided to withdraw her motion.

Mr. Bolton made a subsequent motion that recommended the project grouping entitled “Regional Highway Access Improvements” be kept and that the projects listed under this grouping be limited to this regional highway improvement projects listed in the Regional Transportation Plan. The motion was seconded by Ms. Fruscio. Mr. Matuszko then asked for unanimous consent, seeing no objections the motion passed.

- **Berkshire Creative Initiative:** *While most of the projects listed under the “Berkshire Creative Initiative” grouping were ranked either high or medium, Committee members questioned the inclusion of the “Creative Education Initiative” and “Berkshire Festival” projects in the listing. Mr. Matuszko explained that while all the Berkshire Creative project proposals were ranked individually, they had been submitted as a bundle. Staff decided to separate the proposals because each project had been submitted with its own solicitation form and could be implemented independently of other projects. A number of Committee members began discussing whether the projects belonged as a regional project grouping. As the project proponents for these projects, Ms. Fruscio explained that all of the projects proposed are envisioned to be regional in nature and not focused on one community or sub-region.*

Mr. Hoffmann made a motion to move the Berkshire Creative Initiatives project grouping out of the Regionally Significant Project listing to the appropriate project category listing and to keep the two “low” ranked projects in the listing. This motion was seconded by Ms. Klefos. Mr. Matuszko then asked for unanimous consent, seeing no objections the motion passed.

- **Alternative Energy and Energy Infrastructure Improvements:** *There were no concerns regarding this project proposal.*

With the review of the Regionally Significant Projects listing complete, Mr. Matuszko asked the Committee whether there were any projects missing from this list. A number of Committee members suggested that the Passenger Rail project proposal be added to the list regionally significant list. Mr. Matuszko asked if there was additional discussion on the suggestion or whether there was a motion for the recommendation.

Ms. Klefos made a motion to include a Regional Passenger Rail project grouping, including the Passenger Rail CT to Pittsfield and East to West Passenger Rail Enhancements projects, to the Regional Significant Project listing. The motion was seconded by Mr. Geller. Mr. Matuszko then asked for unanimous consent, Mr. Bolton objected the motion. Seeing no other objections the motion passed.

Mr. Matuszko asked whether there was any further discussion on this list or if other projects needed to be added to the regionally significant list? Seeing none, Mr. Matuszko then transitioned the discussion to the “low” ranked projects. A Committee member suggested that the “Hubbard Avenue Improvements” proposal be move up into a category listing. During discussion on this suggestion, a Committee member recommended that a project grouping be created including the Hubbard Avenue Improvements, Ashuelot Park Development and the Schnopps-Roberts Site projects. Mr. Matuszko asked for a motion.

Ms. LaRoche made a motion to create a project grouping of the Hubbard Avenue Improvements, Ashuelot Park Development and the Schnopps-Roberts Site projects, and to move this grouping to the Physical Development category under the Central Sub-Region. This motion was seconded by Mr. Hoffmann. Mr. Matuszko asked for unanimous consent, seeing no objections the motion passed.

Mr. Matuszko then asked whether there were any other projects that the Committee wished to have moved up into a category listing. Seeing none, Mr. Matuszko acknowledged that the meeting was over its allotted time and suggested that discussion on the Implementation agenda item be continued to the next meeting. Committee members agreed.

7. 2011 CEDS – Implementation

Due to a lack of time this item was not discussed at this meeting.

8. Next Meeting (Tuesday, March 22th, 2011 at 12:30pm)

The Committee agreed to hold the next CEDS Strategy Committee meeting on Tuesday, March 22, 2011 at 12:30pm.

7. Other Items?

No items were raised.

8. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 3:10pm.

Documents distributed at the meeting included:

- Meeting Agenda
- Draft Minutes from the February 15, 2011 CEDS Strategy Committee meeting
- A Project Comments Packet, containing responses that were submitted by project proponents during the project comment period.
- A handout containing staff's proposed methods of listing priority projects.
- A handout containing staff's understanding of the EDA's funding criteria and eligibility requirements.