

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, May 17th, 2011, 12:30 PM
2nd Floor Conference Room, BRPC Office, 1 Fenn Street, Pittsfield, MA 01201*

Agenda

1. Call to Order
2. Approval of Minutes (Tuesday, April 12, 2011)
3. Public Comments (Non-Agenda Items)
4. Discussion of Public Comments ----- **Action Item**
5. Endorsement of the 2011 CEDS, as amended ----- **Action Item**
6. Next Steps
7. Next Meeting (Tuesday, May 24th, 2011, if necessary)
8. Other Items?
9. Adjournment

City and Town Clerks: Please post this notice pursuant to M.G.L., Chapter 39, Section 23B

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, April 12, 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 (Alt) X Kevin O'Donnell X
Keith Girouard X Mike Nuvalle X Laury Epstein AB Mike Supranowicz X Lauri Klefos X
Michael Hoffman X Christine Ludwizewski X Eleanore Velez X Deanna Ruffer X
Ann Dobrowolski (Alt) X Helena Fruscio X Tim Geller AB Robert Wilson X Brenda Burdick AB
Mark Berman AB

BRPC Staff

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

Public

Allison Johnson X Joe Scelsi X Andrew McKeeves X

Meeting Minutes

1. Call to Order

At 12:35 PM on April 12, 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.

Ms. Dobrowolski made a motion to approve the minutes, which was seconded by Ms. Fruscio. Mr. Matuszko then asked for unanimous consent, Mr. O'Donnell abstained, 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 – Implementation

- **Economic Development District**
- **Massachusetts Benchmarks**

To start the discussion, Mr. Matuszko explained that the Implementation Section represents the meat of the report and a structure for the implementation of the CEDS. He mentioned that staff hoped to review each of the proposed implementation measures to ensure the language as presented is correct and to verify that no items have been missed. Before Mr. Matuszko transitioned the discussion to Mr. Sexton, he asked the Committee whether there were any broad observations that Committee members wished to make about the proposed language. At this point in the discussion, no comments or issues were raised by Committee members.

Mr. Sexton then briefly explained to the Committee how staff arrived at the revised implementation language. Specifically, he noted that input from the Committee had been incorporated, information obtained from project proponents had been updated (Status and Next Steps) and the priority projects had been incorporated as “Project Based Actions.” Before beginning the review, Mr. Sexton briefly mentioned some of the key aspects of the implementation tables. Mr. Sexton then began to discuss each of the implementation measures, line-by-line.

The comments and concerns raised by Committee members, regarding the implementation measures, included:

- ***A Committee member suggested the word “Coalition” could be eliminated from the first two measures.*** Staff explained that the word “coalition” could be easily removed without altering the title’s intent.

Since there were questions raised at the last meeting, regarding an Economic Development District (EDD), Mr. Sexton provided the Committee with a short explanation of district designation. He specifically discussed the benefits an EDD may generate for the region (access to Planning Partnership grant funds), as well as touched on general EDD information (7 designated districts in Massachusetts). To clarify how an EDD is designated, he discussed the Economic Development Administration’s requirements as provided in Section 304.1 *Designation of Economic Development Districts: Regional Eligibility* of Chapter III in Title 13. A Committee member asked, “Who at the State needed to sign-off on the CEDS to meet the EDD designation criteria?” Mr. Sexton said that staff is current researching this requirement. Another Committee member questioned how an EDD would be funded. Mr. Sexton explained that some districts are partially funded through the Planning Partnership grant funds, a 50/50 match grant program. Mr. Matuszko explained that the EDD information was meant to inform the Committee. As any project or implementation measure progresses the aspects and elements of that project or program would be fully developed.

Another proposed implementation measure that raised a question at the last meeting was the “Berkshire Benchmarks” proposal. A Committee member had previously asked whether this measure would incorporate information from MassBenchmarks. Mr. Maloy provided the Committee with background information pertaining to the Berkshire Benchmarks and MassBenchmarks data clearing houses. He also mentioned that the Berkshire Benchmarks gathers data from a variety of sources, at county and community levels, making it accessible via the internet and developed some indicators related to the data. A difference of the two data clearing houses is that MassBenchmarks focuses primarily on economic data, where as Berkshire Benchmarks covers a variety of data sets. Mr. Sexton asked whether there were any questions regarding this implementation measure? Seeing none he transitioned back to a line-by-line discussion of the proposed implementation measures.

The comments and concerns raised by Committee members, regarding the implementation measures, included:

- ***It was identified that the “Pittsfield Economic Development Authority” (PEDA) should be removed from the Business Development Assistance proposal.*** *A Committee member clarified that PEDA is a property owner and was not authorized to provide business assistance services. Staff indicated that the edit would be made.*
- ***The “Small Business Development Center” should be re-worded to read “Massachusetts Small Business Development Center Network.”*** *It was explained, by a Committee member, this change was suggested to reflect the full range of resources that were accessible to the Massachusetts Small Business Development Center Network at the national, state and college levels. Staff indicated that the change would be made.*
- ***It was mentioned that the Commonwealth’s Division of Career Services is implementing the LAZER program, which could fit under Business Development Assistance measure.*** *A Committee member clarified that this program is meant to gather and make accessible industry sector data.*

- **A committee asked for clarification regarding how the “Regional Activities” were developed?** *Mr. Sexton explained that based on the goals and objectives, established by the Committee, staff identified existing programs and initiatives being undertaken by other organizations that were in line with the intent of the goals and objectives. In those instances where a program or initiative wasn't in place, staff worked with organizations to develop a program that would fulfill the goal or objective.*
- **It was identified that “Pittsfield Economic Development Corporation,” in the Facilitate Access to Loan Programs implementation proposal, should be changed to “Pittsfield Economic Development Authority.”** *Staff indicated that the change would be made.*
- **A Committee member questioned whether the Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation (BTCF) should be identified under the Angel Fund Network proposal?** *Staff explained that while BTCF doesn't directly work with businesses it does manage a large portfolio of investors that could be utilized to business start-up funds. Another Committee member followed up by asking why the Berkshire Chamber of Commerce was identified as the Activity Sponsor?* *Mr. Sexton noted that business retention and attraction activities, previously administered by the Berkshire Economic Development Corporation, was merged into 1Berkshire. In the interim these activities are not being administered by any organization. A committee member reinforced that an Angel Fund Network is a collaborative effort of multiple organizations. It was noted that some Committee members were concerned whether any organization in the region had the capacity or skills necessary to manage such this program. Mr. Matuszko suggested that the sponsor and partners for this implementation proposal be left as TBD. It was suggested, by a Committee member, that the next steps should also be modified to include “Identify organization partners,” “Identify a sponsor” and “Secure funding and resources to implement.” Another suggestion was to change the Status of the proposal from “Active” to “Concept.”* Following additional discussion on this topic, by the Committee, it was determined that Mr. Matuszko's suggestion, the changes to the Next Steps and the Status of the proposal should be made.
- **A concern was raised regarding the placement of project based actions within the Implementation section.** *Mr. Sexton explained that the Committee decided, at the last meeting, that the priority projects should be incorporated into the Implementation section. The Committee member clarified that the placement of priority projects within this section gives emphasis to projects that shouldn't necessarily get it and would reflect or support the project solicitation process that had minimal screening. The Committee member also indicated that the solicitation process was flawed. Mr. Matuszko tried to clarify the intent of the concern, specifically asking whether the comment was suggesting the complete removal of the projects from the Implementation section or whether projects should be listed under goals? The Committee member further stated that the placement of priority projects within the implementation section places them in the context of regional projects and regional commitments. While those projects may be important to certain individuals or groups it is disconcerting to place them on a regional implementation list and to direct resources to those projects over the next year. The Committee member thought it was the intent of the Committee to work with project proponents to refine and develop their proposals, but that that wouldn't necessarily be a regional emphasis, in terms of limited resources as a regional level. Another Committee member clarified that the decision to incorporate projects into the Implementation section, at the last meeting, was based on an attempt to eliminate inequities among projects listed as implementations actions. Committee members didn't want certain projects to be listed as implementing actions if they all projects weren't going to be listed. Mr. Matuszko asked the Committee whether there was consensus to eliminate the project based actions. Mr. Sexton also mentioned that other CEDS documents have used different methods, such as using one project based implementation measure to reinforce the progression of projects development or every project has been listed as an implementation measure (similar to the revised implementation languages). After further discussion, Mr. Matuszko asked the Committee for a motion from the Committee directing staff how to modify the language of the Implementation section.*

Ms. Klefos made a motion to remove “Project Based Actions” from the Implementation section and keep the “Regional Activities.” The motion was seconded by Ms. Ruffer. Mr. Matuszko then asked for unanimous consent, Ms. LaRoche opposed, seeing no other objections the motion passed.

- **A result of the last item discussed, it was suggested that staff incorporate language that captures the broader regional concepts/priorities without identifying specific projects.** *The Committee member further clarified that the proposed language could be incorporated in this section as a couple of paragraphs or additional implementation measures. Mr. Karns explained that this suggestion would help to draw attention and give importance to projects without creating inequity among projects. A Committee member concurred with Mr. Karns, in that the identification of broader regional concepts would help to lessen disproportionate representation of specific projects, level the field for limited regional funds and resources. From further discussion some ideas, identified by the Committee, for incorporation as broad regional concepts/priorities included telecommunications, infrastructure, site development, creative*

industry, etc. Mr. Matuszko asked the Committee for a motion from the Committee to direct staff how this information should be presented.

Ms. Klefos made a motion to develop new “Regional Activities” encompassing broad regional concepts/priorities that reflect the removed “Project Based Actions,” without listing specific projects. The Motion was seconded by Mr. Bolton. Mr. Matuszko then asked for unanimous consent, seeing no objections the motion passed.

Mr. Matuszko asked whether there was interest among Committee members to continue reviewing the Regional Activities. Seeing general support for continuing the discussion, Mr. Matuszko began a line-by-line discussion of the remaining implementation measures.

The comments and concerns raised by Committee members, regarding the implementation measures, included:

- **It was suggested that the “Healthcare Pipeline” proposal be combined with the “Industry Sector Initiative” proposal.** *To clarify the suggestion, the Committee member explained that the Healthcare Pipeline seemed too specific and that it may fit well as a Next Step. Staff indicated that the edit would be made.*
- **Could language referencing or researching the “Quality of Life” need to attract people (workers) to the region.** *Staff explained that the regional retention and attraction program, listed under the Coordinated Economic Development Activities, may address the concern. Mr. Karns suggested that the Annual Workforce Blueprint may better address the concern. To clarify the focus of the concern, Mr. Matuszko asked whether the concern focused on emphasizing the Quality of Life needs for individuals. A Committee member felt this suggestion was too specific if identified as a stand-alone activity. Another Committee member mentioned that the workers for each industry are completely different and that it would be better to add language to the Next Step field of the Annual Workforce Blueprint proposal, focusing on the critical Quality of Life needs for workers. After further discussion, by the Committee, it was decided that language be added in the Next Step field of the Annual Workforce Blueprint.*
- **It was recommended that the language of the Implementation section be generic and not specific.**
- **A concern was raised regarding the “Berkshire Light Compact,” specifically what this proposal hoped to achieve.** *Mr. Matuszko explained that this is a new initiative being encouraged by Berkshire County’s legislative delegation to advocate for energy efficiency programs, effective consumer advocacy, a competitive electricity supply and more green power options. Mr. Karns then suggested it may be beneficial to incorporate this proposal as one of the elements of the broadly discussed Energy measure, much like the “Alternative Energy and Energy Infrastructure Improvements” proposal. This would consolidate implementation measures and provide a means to identify the regional priority of energy better. After further discussion, by the Committee, it was decided that a summarized proposal should be developed to highlight the region’s energy needs.*

Hearing no further comments or concerns, Mr. Matuszko moved the discussion to the next agenda item.

5. CEDS Strategy Committee’s Endorsement of 30-day Public Notice

Mr. Matuszko began by explaining to the Committee the remaining steps necessary to complete the CEDS process. Specifically, he noted the EDA requirement for a 30-day public comment period and that the final report needs to be sent to the EDA by June 30th. He then mentioned that staff was hopeful is there was general support for the Implementation section that the draft report could be distributed for public comments. He explained that Mr. Sexton has been working diligently to address the comments and edits that have been submitted for the other sections of the report. Mr. Matuszko then asked whether there was a motion regarding the announcement of the public comment period?

Mr. Hoffman made a motion authorizing the distribution of the Draft 2011 Berkshire Comprehensive Economic development Strategy for public review. The motion was seconded by Ms. Ludwizewski. Mr. Matuszko asked for further discussion. Items that were raised are discussed below:

A Committee member urged staff to contact all agencies and organization to ensure they were supportive and willing to be listed as a sponsor or partner under the implementation measures. Mr. Matuszko explained that staff has already contacted most of the agencies and organizations identified, but that staff would double check with each entity. Another Committee member cautioned the use of the word “endorsement.” The Committee ember also mentioned that staff should be very explicit that this draft report has not been endorsed by the CEDS Strategy Committee, the BRPC (full Commission) or the communities of Berkshire County. Mr. Matuszko acknowledged that staff did not intend the motion to endorse or approve the full report in any way, shape or form. Mr. Karns clarified

by explaining that staff was just looking for authorization from the CEDS Strategy Committee to announce the 30-day public comment period.

Mr. Matuszko then asked for unanimous consent on the motion, seeing no objections the motion passed.

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

Mr. Matuszko explained that the next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, May 17th. Knowing that there may be a large amount of comments to address following the public comment period, Mr. Matuszko suggested that another meeting in May be tentatively added. The Committee agreed that a second meeting should be tentatively scheduled for May 24th.

7. Other Items?

No items were raised.

8. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 2:30pm.

Documents distributed at the meeting included:

- Meeting Agenda
- Draft Minutes from the March 22nd, 2011 CEDS Strategy Committee meeting
- A copy of the revised language for the Implementation section
- A copy of the draft Project Priority List narratives

Draft

30-Day Public Comment Results

As of noon on Friday, May 13, 2011

Table of Contents for Comments Received

(Alphabetically Listed)

Comments Received

Responding Entity (Signer)

American Institute for Economic Research (*Steven Cunningham*)

Citizen (*Patricia Soldati*)

City of North Adams (*Mayor Alcombright*)

City of Pittsfield (*Deanna Ruffer*)

Lee Bank (*Richard Aldrich*)

Pittsfield Economic Revitalization Corporation – *April 15, 2011 Meeting Minutes*

Town of Dalton (*Kenneth Walto*)

Town of Great Barrington (*Sean Stanton*)

Town of Monterey (*Jonathan Sylbert, Wayne Burkhart and Scott Jenssen*)

West Stockbridge Village Association (*Joseph Ray Jr.*)

Western Massachusetts Enterprise Fund, Inc. (*Michael Abbate*)

***Additional editorial suggestions, not included in this packet, were received from Roger Bolton.
Those comments will be addressed in the final report.***

(This page has been left blank intentionally.)

Comment

American Institute for Economic Research
(Steven Cunningham)

250 Division Street • PO Box 1000 • Great Barrington, MA 01230 • www.aier.org

Steven R. Cunningham, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Education

Phone: (413) 528-1216 x3118
Fax: (413) 528-0103
E-mail: Steven.Cunningham@aier.org

May 9, 2011

Thomas Matuszko
Berkshire Regional Planning Commission
1 Fenn Street, Ste 201
Pittsfield, MA 01201



Re: 2011 Berkshire County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Project

I am writing in support of the WiredWest project, as part of the Regional Telecommunications Network. We believe this project is critical for Berkshire County and Western Massachusetts as a whole.

The high-performance internet access offered by a fiber-to-the-home network, as proposed by WiredWest, will be critical to enabling future commerce in our region, and is in fact necessary for the success of future economic development initiatives. It will positively impact for-profit and not-for-profit businesses of all sizes, including AIER. These services are essential for any firm to operate effectively in the modern digital world. It will attract new entrepreneurs to the region, stimulate innovation and provide good quality employment opportunities. And it will provide the necessary means to diversify our economy from its dependence on the service sector.

WiredWest's proposed solution will also add to local tax bases and bolster property values recently reduced by a stagnant real estate market.

Without the type of last-mile solution WiredWest is forwarding, our region will continue to receive patchy service from last-generation technologies, which will not provide the necessary bandwidth or reliability to fully participate in the modern digital economy. The Massachusetts Broadband Institute's fiber-optic middle mile has been funded and is being implemented – but it's critical to support the creation of a robust network from end-to-end by creating a future-proof fiber-optic last mile as well, through the WiredWest initiative. We suggest that the Berkshire CEDS survey continues to rank the WiredWest project, as part of the Regional Telecommunications Network, as the highest priority of "Projects Representing the Greatest Needs Regionally."

I was involved in a similar project a few years ago in western North Carolina, and have personally seen the difference this technology can bring to a region. The time has come.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Steven R. Cunningham". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Steven R. Cunningham
Director of Research and Education

Comment

Citizen
(Patricia Soldati)

From: [Tom Matuszko](#)
To: ["Patricia Soldati"](#)
Cc: ["Dan Sexton"](#)
Subject: RE: WiredWest is Critical
Date: Monday, May 09, 2011 12:48:22 PM

Patricia,

Thank you for your comment.

Tom Matuszko
413-442-1521 ex 34

From: Patricia Soldati [mailto:patricia@purposefulwork.com]
Sent: Saturday, May 07, 2011 9:26 AM
To: tmatuszko@berkshireplanning.org
Subject: WiredWest is Critical

Dear Mr. Matuszko,

I am writing to underscore the need for a WiredWest fiber-to-the-home solution for 40+ families who live in an unserved/underserved area of West Stockbridge, MA. The intersection of West Center / West Alford Roads and environs currently has no cell service, no DSL or other high speed Internet, and, for most, no cable television service. (Those who do have cable TV are serviced by Charter Communications who provides no Internet or HDTV access.)

While all of these services are critical, we are especially concerned with the absence of high-speed Internet. Among us are small business owners who struggle every day with slow access, inability to download/upload files, and poor productivity. We are parents who need high-speed services for educational purposes for our kids. And, we are second homeowners who would spend more time in the Berkshires given an Internet situation that appropriately supported business operations. And finally, we are all concerned about the resale value of our properties; while anecdotal, the realtors we've spoken to over the past year tell us that buyers are not much interested in properties without high-speed Internet connections.

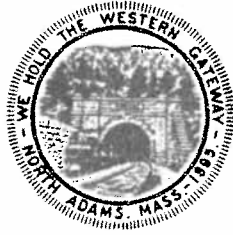
We are intimately familiar with the great efforts of WiredWest. Please be sure to keep this technology solution HIGH on your radar. It is critical to our town and individual businesses.

Sincerely,

Patricia Soldati
124 West Center Rd.
West Stockbridge MA
(413) 232-7950

Comment

City of North Adams
(Mayor Alcombright)



CITY OF NORTH ADAMS, MASSACHUSETTS

Office of the Mayor
Richard J. Alcombright

May 12, 2011

Nathaniel W. Karns, Executive Director
Berkshire Regional Planning Commission
1 Fenn Street – Suite 201
Pittsfield, MA 01201

RE: “Comprehensive Economic Development Study” (CEDs)

Dear Mr. Karns,

I offer this letter of support for the new 2011 CEDs document that your agency has been working on so diligently on for the last several months. I cannot stress enough how important it is having this study, especially given the fact that the last one was from 2001. It is very important that Berkshire County continues to recognize and formulate its current economic challenges in a way that helps to solidify our respective communities, while at the same time fostering a mechanism to access needed funds from the Federal Economic Development Administration.

I am an avid supporter of quality economic development throughout the county, yet one in which allows for smart and sustainable growth, as we try to build, promote and live within a new creative economy. As you are aware, Berkshire County has not always enjoyed the economic success relative to the balance of our Commonwealth, thus one of the driving reasons in the compilation of a new CEDs. Any type of quality project that can be built within this county must be given financial opportunity as we move forward in stressed economic times.

I am very pleased with the final product that the CEDs has produced, and am very proud that the City of North Adams through the efforts of Mike Nuvalle was an integral part of the process. I would also like to stress how important it is hereafter, that the study’s annual updating be conducted so that we can stay abreast of the every changing economic challenges that face us, and I very much want North Adams to be part of the continued efforts.

Sincerely,

Richard J. Alcombright
Mayor

RJA/mn

10 Main Street • North Adams, Massachusetts 01247

Comment

City of Pittsfield
(Deanna Ruffer)



The City of Pittsfield, Massachusetts
Department of Community Development

Deanna L. Ruffer
Director

James M. Ruberto
Mayor

May 12, 2011

Mr. Thomas Matuszko
Assistant Director
Berkshire Regional Planning Commission
1 Fenn Street, Suite 201
Pittsfield, Massachusetts 01201

Dear Mr. Matuszko:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Berkshire Regional Planning Commissioner's draft Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). The City continues to be concerned about the lack of emphasis on the most significant regional economic development need in Berkshire County; that is the over arching need for a limited access connector from the Massachusetts Turnpike through Pittsfield and north to North Adams.

We again ask BRPC and the Advisory Committee to reconsider the regional significance of the reconstruction of the McKay Street Parking Garage. This facility provides parking for more than a 1,000 employees, customers and visitors. This 15+ year old structure is in dire need of \$7-10 million dollars of upgrades. The design work for this project has been completed and is ready to go out to bid. The lack of upgrades to the parking garage are impeding efforts to attract a new owner or tenant(s) to the former KayBee Toys Building with over 75,000 square feet of Class A commercial space; a building that has previously and can again house more than 300 new employees. This parking facility also serves the Beacon Cinema, which brings more than 190,000 people a year to our downtown, as well as many restaurants and retail businesses located downtown. This project is not only located in a designated Growth District and high priority development area for the Commonwealth, it is also one of the few projects which is actually located in an Economic Development Administration eligible area.

Finally, while we appreciate the diligent work of the CEDS Advisory Committee, I – like the majority of the members of the Advisory Committee – have repeatedly questioned the process. As the Advisory Committee has said repeatedly, the process was problematic. As a result, the resulting document has limited value and should not be used for any purpose other than meeting the pre-requisite requirement for accessing Economic Development Administration grant programs.

Sincerely,

Deanna L. Ruffer
Director

City of Pittsfield – City Hall – 70 Allen Street – Room 205 – Pittsfield, MA 01201
(413) 499-9368 or (413) 442-5661 fax

Comment

Lee Bank
(Richard Aldrich)



May 9, 2011

Tom Matuszko
Assistant Director
Berkshire Regional Planning Commission
1 Fenn Street, Suite 201
Pittsfield, MA 01201-6629

Re: Support for the 2011 Berkshire Comprehensive Economic Development Survey

Dear Tom,

Lee Bank supports the WiredWest initiative. We must expand broadband service for our homes, governments, businesses and schools that are currently un-served or under-served throughout communities in Western Massachusetts.

Broadband is essential for economic development in Western Massachusetts. We need it to attract businesses to locate here. We need it to compete and succeed in our modern economy. Broadband has become a necessity for our communities.

The WiredWest initiative will stimulate employment in Hospitality, IT, Manufacturing, Healthcare and Education. It's implementation will create jobs in construction. WiredWest will enable the latest techniques in the classroom for teachers and students. It will streamline our local government operations. It will allow businesses to compete and locate in Western Massachusetts. And it will positively impact real estate values in the region.

Lee Bank supports the efforts of WiredWest to build this advanced fiber-optic network in the Western Massachusetts Region.

Very truly yours,

Richard G. Aldrich
Senior Vice President

Comment

Pittsfield Economic Revitalization Corporation
(April 15, 2011 Meeting Minutes)

MINUTES
PITTSFIELD ECONOMIC REVITALIZATION CORPORATION
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING
FRIDAY, APRIL 15, 2011
8:00 A.M., CITY HALL, COUNCIL CHAMBER

1) Roll Call

Members Present:

Jay Anderson
Marshall Raser
William Mulholland
Laurie Green
Deanna Ruffer

Members Absent:

Barry Clairmont
Robert Cohen
Brian Johnson
Mark McKenna
Matthew Scarafoni
Richard Vinette

Also present:

Ann Dobrowolski, DCD Community Development Specialist
Deborah Courtney, Executive Secretary
Thomas Matuszko, Assistant Director, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

2) Minutes: March 11, 2011

William Mulholland moved to accept the minutes of March 11, 2011 and it was seconded by Marshall Raser and unanimously approved.

3) 2011 Berkshire Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Program: Presentation by Thomas Matuszko and Daniel Sexton, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Ann Dobrowolski introduced Thomas Matuszko, Assistant Director of Regional Planning Commission. Mr. Matuszko said that he has been working for the last 8 to 10 months on the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Plan (CEDS), a document to include economic development activities in the region. He stated that this document will enable municipalities to tap into grant funds from the Economic Development Administration (EDA). Jay Anderson asked if municipalities received funding in the past? Mr. Matuszko replied, yes but there

has not been any approved CEDS plan approved for a number of years and that the Town of Lee received emergency planning funds when the mills closed down. We need to build upon the assets that we have is one accomplishment he stressed. How to retain businesses we have already here and how to help them grow. Key element is: is the workforce capable of responding to changing times and meeting the needs of industry? Recognize that we have infrastructure and community improvements to obtain development, as well as a good transportation network. Continue to work on transportation. They will address in the plan buildings and sites that could be redeveloped and reused before development of greenfields. Broader picture. One requirement from EDA is that they have to approve the CEDS to allow us to take advantage of funds. We have to have a priority list of projects. There were a total of 80 different project ideas that were received.

The thirty day public comment period will start and then the committee will reconvene and determine what to do with comments and keep advancing the approval process. BRPC will approve it and send to EDA for their approval as well. Their outline is based on federal regulations. Jay Anderson asked if there is an existing economic development district. Thomas Matuszko replied no and in order to obtain that it requires communities and EDA's approval. We are trying to explore if there is an interest in doing that. This will open it up, if we had a district, to a broader area.

William Mulholland suggested including the Compact for Higher Education goal that all citizens in Berkshire County achieve 16 years of education or training. That was a collective goal to get that workforce to be developed here and stay here. The younger kids are having bachelor degree which is important for their future and it will add a lot of clout as part of our work goals. Thomas Matuszko said he will bring that forward as a comment.

Jay Anderson stated that he will look to see if PERC is identified appropriately in the implementation plan. Jay Anderson thanked Mr. Matuszko for coming and he left the room at 8:40 a.m.

D. Ruffer commented that after serving on the advisory committee there was a flawed project solicitation process that resulted in important projects being left out, i.e. a north-south limited access highway and upgrades to the McKay Street parking garage, which is vital to the downtown and shovel-ready. The process also allowed projects that lack credence and are still in the concept stage to make the priority project listing. The City of Pittsfield has not yet determined how it will comment on the draft plan.

4) Promotion Committee: Progress Report on Communication and Marketing Project

Ann Dobrowolski reported that there have been meetings with Winstanley Partners to focus on the website design and there is a meeting on April 25 at Winstanley Partners to go over the website design.

5) Closed Session:

On a roll call vote a motion was made by William Mulholland to enter into Closed Session at 8:45 a.m. and it was unanimously approved for the purpose of discussing the portfolio report. For the record the application of DMM Enterprises, Inc. D/B/A/ Balance Rock Investment Group for Department of Business Development Technical Assistance Grant in the amount of \$5372.00 was approved.

The board came back into regular session at 8:55 a.m.

6) Other Business

Ann Dobrowolski informed the board about an invitation from MassPIRG on a transit session next Thursday, April 21st at the Lichtenstein Center at 5:30 pm. They have also invited the legislative delegation and BRTA.

She said that Massachusetts Community Business Partnership will be hosting a roundtable discussion on Tuesday, April 26th from 3:00-5:00 pm in Greenfield. They are considering forming a group that will help support CDC's for activities and services that provide direct benefits to small business owners.

Dun & Bradstreet approached us to join to get services to see who is pulling our credit report and enter more financial information. Jay Anderson concluded that we don't need it.

Deanna Ruffer added that this Monday, the FY12 HUD (our FY13) budget was published. She said that she expects a 10 percent reduction in funding so far. She is trying to keep additional funding to PERC for Technical Assistance and loans. She said that she has learned that the Federal FY11 HUD (our FY12) budget has resulted in approximately a 16.2 percent reduction in funding. That will make it tough for her staff and she is attempting to keep all staff in place but it is tough and she is doing a balancing act as to whether it is a dramatic drop to reduced staff level as well as program levels. Her position to the Mayor was that she cannot afford to lose staff and that the grant program should not be penalized. She will meet with the Mayor next week to adjust for the 16.2 percent drop. There is a Public Hearing scheduled at 7:30 on Wednesday the 27th of April. She informed the board that she is expecting more cuts in the FY12 (our FY13) budget.

Marshall Raser made a motion to adjourn at 9:10 a.m. The motion was seconded and unanimously approved.

Comment

Town of Dalton
(Kenneth Walto)



TOWN OF DALTON

Town Hall
462 Main Street
Dalton, MA 01226-1601

Telephone (413) 684-6111

Fax (413) 684-6107

April 6, 2011

Mr. Thomas Matuszko, AICP
Assistant Director
Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

RE: Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, CEDS, - Project Prioritization

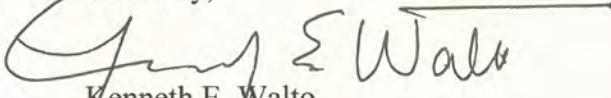
Dear Mr. Matuszko:

Thank you for taking the time to attend our last meeting in order to thoroughly discuss the CEDS process and prioritization methodology. We appreciate having one of our Commission members on the Strategy Committee as well.

We are writing to ask that the priority for Ashuelot Park be upgraded to the highest level on the following basis. Ashuelot Park is a regional development located in both Dalton and Pittsfield. Crane & Co. has made a commitment to consolidate its stationery division there, utilizing 150,000 square feet in the underutilized manufacturing plant known as AP1. This operation could have been easily located, or outsourced outside of Berkshire County. Therefore, the retention of 300 well paying jobs is significant both regionally and locally. Moreover, the company is also relocating non-woven product manufacturing to the other underutilized building known as AP2. Non-wovens are innovative high technology polymer products and therefore significant for the county's economy. There are on-going alternative energy projects tied to the park and Crane. This may have a significant impact on the company's need to rely on imported oil and may also result in district electric generation for the park and the company which will create new jobs as well. Lastly vacant land on the site allows for future related operations creating an important economic synergy.

Taken as a whole, development of Ashuelot Park provides a significant regional economic engine worthy of the highest evaluation for regional importance.

Sincerely,


Kenneth E. Walto
Chairman
Development & Industrial Commission



Comment

Town of Great Barrington
(Sean Stanton)

Kevin O' Donnell
Town Manager

E-mail: kodonnell@townofgb.org
www.townofgb.org



Town Hall, 334 Main Street
Great Barrington, MA 01230

Telephone: (413) 528-1619 x2
Fax: (413) 528-2290

TOWN OF GREAT BARRINGTON MASSACHUSETTS

OFFICE OF THE TOWN MANAGER

May 11, 2011

Thomas Matuszko
Berkshire Regional Planning Commission
1 Fenn Street, Ste 201
Pittsfield, MA 01201



Re: 2011 Berkshire County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Project – Public Comment

This letter serves as Town of Great Barrington's support for the WiredWest project, as part of a Regional Telecommunications Network. We believe this project is critical not only for the Town of Great Barrington, but for Berkshire County and Western Massachusetts as a whole.

The high-performance internet access offered by a fiber-to-the-home network, as proposed by WiredWest, will be critical to enabling future commerce in our region, and will be fundamental for the success of future economic development initiatives. It will positively impact businesses of all sizes, including our home-based businesses, equipping them to survive and thrive in the modern digital world. It will attract new entrepreneurs to the region, stimulate innovation and provide good quality employment opportunities. And it will help to continue diversifying our economy from its dependence on the service sector.

WiredWest's proposed solution will also help to stabilize the local tax base and bolster property values recently reduced by a stagnant real estate market.

Without the type of last-mile solution WiredWest is forwarding, our region will continue to receive patchy service from last-generation technologies, which will not provide the necessary bandwidth or reliability to fully participate in the modern digital economy. The Massachusetts Broadband Institute's fiber-optic middle mile has been funded and is being implemented – but it's critical to support the creation of a robust network from end-to-end by creating a future-proof fiber-optic last mile as well, through the WiredWest initiative. We suggest that the Berkshire CEDS survey continues to rank the WiredWest project, as part of the Regional Telecommunications Network, as the highest priority of "Projects Representing the Greatest Needs Regionally."

Sincerely,

Sean Stanton, Chairman
Board of Selectmen Town of Great Barrington

Comment

Town of Monterey

(Jonathan Sylbert, Wayne Burkhart and Scott Jenssen)



TOWN OF MONTEREY

435 Main Rd. P.O. Box 308
Monterey, MA 01245



May 2, 2011

Thomas Matuszko
Berkshire Regional Planning Commission
1 Fenn Street, Ste 201
Pittsfield, MA 01201

Re: 2011 Berkshire County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Project – Public Comment

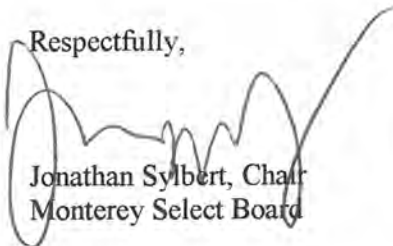
This letter serves as the Town of Monterey's support for the WiredWest project, as part of the Regional Telecommunications Network. We believe this project is critical not only for our town, but for Berkshire County and Western Massachusetts as a whole.

The high-performance internet access offered by a fiber-to-the-home network, as proposed by WiredWest, will be critical to enabling future commerce in our region, and is in fact necessary for the success of future economic development initiatives. It will positively impact businesses of all sizes, including our home-based businesses in Monterey, equipping them to survive and thrive in the modern digital world. It will attract new entrepreneurs to the region, stimulate innovation and provide good quality employment opportunities. And it will provide the necessary means to diversify our economy from its dependence on the service sector.

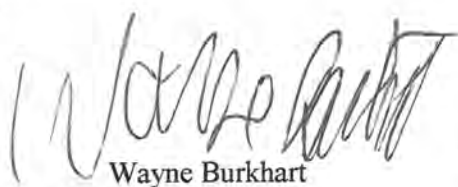
WiredWest's proposed solution will also add to our local tax base and bolster property values recently reduced by a stagnant real estate market.

Without the type of last-mile solution WiredWest is forwarding, our region will continue to receive patchy service from last-generation technologies, which will not provide the necessary bandwidth or reliability to fully participate in the modern digital economy. The Massachusetts Broadband Institute's fiber-optic middle mile has been funded and is being implemented – but it's critical to support the creation of a robust network from end-to-end by creating a future-proof fiber-optic last mile as well, through the WiredWest initiative. We suggest that the Berkshire CEDS survey continues to rank the WiredWest project, as part of the Regional Telecommunications Network, as the highest priority of "Projects Representing the Greatest Needs Regionally."

Respectfully,



Jonathan Sylbert, Chair
Monterey Select Board



Wayne Burkhart



Scott Jensen

SB/mn

Phone: 413.528.1443 x114 Fax: 413.528.9452
townmont@verizon.net

Comment

West Stockbridge Village Association
(Joseph Ray Jr.)

From: [Tom Matuszko](#)
To: ["Joseph Roy"](#)
Cc: ["Dan Sexton"](#)
Subject: RE: West Stockbridge Village Association supports Wired West
Date: Monday, May 09, 2011 12:46:57 PM

Joseph,

Thank you for your comment.

Tom Matuszko
413-442-1521 ex 34

From: Joseph Roy [mailto:joeroyjr@me.com]
Sent: Monday, May 09, 2011 9:24 AM
To: Thomas Matuszko
Subject: West Stockbridge Village Association supports Wired West

May 9, 2011

Thomas Matuszko
Berkshire Regional Planning Commission
1 Fenn Street, Ste 201
Pittsfield, MA 01201

Re: 2011 Berkshire County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Project – Public Comment

This letter serves as The West Stockbridge Village Association's support for the WiredWest project. Our membership is made up of many West Stockbridge businesses throughout our town. We understand that The WiredWest project is part of a Regional Telecommunications Network. We believe this project is essential for any business in West Stockbridge, Berkshire County and Western Massachusetts as a whole.

As stated in The 2011 Berkshire Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy [draft,] "The lack of high speed internet service has been an impediment to economic development across Western Massachusetts for well over a decade..." The high-performance internet access offered by a fiber-to-the-home network, as proposed by WiredWest, will be critical to enabling future commerce in our region.

We hope The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission will support all efforts to rank the WiredWest project, as part of the Regional Telecommunications Network, as a high priority.

Best Regards,

Joseph Roy, Jr
Clerk

West Stockbridge Village Association
PO Box 231
West Stockbridge, MA 01266

<http://www.weststockbridgetown.com/merchants.htm>

Comment

Western Massachusetts Enterprise Fund, Inc.
(Michael Abbate)

From: [Michael Abbate](#)
To: "dsexton@berkshireplanning.org"
Subject: 2011 Berkshire CEDS
Date: Thursday, April 21, 2011 2:19:46 PM

Dan:

I read through the Berkshire draft CEDS and it is a treasure trove of information about Berkshire County we will use in our programs. Great work and thanks for including WMEF in the document. We look forward to expanding our efforts in Berkshire County.

Michael Abbate
Director of Finance & Administration
Western MA Enterprise Fund, Inc.
4 Open Square Way, Suite 407
Holyoke, MA 01040
(413) 420-0183 ext. 102
(413) 420-0543 fax
mabbate@wmef.org
www.wmef.org

This message and any attachments may contain confidential or privileged information and are only for the use of the intended recipient of this message. If you are not the intended recipient, please notify the sender by return email, and delete or destroy this and all copies of this message and all attachments. Any unauthorized disclosure, use, distribution, reproduction or taking action in reliance upon this information by persons or entities other than the intended recipient is prohibited and may be unlawful.

30-Day Public Comment Results

As of noon on Monday 16, 2011

Table of Contents for Comments Received

(Alphabetically Listed)

Comments Received

Responding Entity (Signer)

Berkshire Chamber of Commerce (*Mike Supranowicz*)

Citizen (*Eileen Vining*)

Citizen (*Holly Aragi*)

Citizen (*Paula Melville*)

MassDevelopment (*Kelsey Abbruzzese*)

Sheffield Land Trust (*Kathy Orlando*)

***Additional editorial suggestions, not included in this packet, were received from Roger Bolton.
Those comments will be addressed in the final report.***

(This page has been left blank intentionally.)

Comment

Berkshire Chamber of Commerce
(Mike Supranowicz)

May 2, 2011

Nathaniel Karns, Executive Director
Daniel J. Sexton, Planner
Berkshire Regional Planning Commission
1 Fenn Street, Suite 2011

In response to the public comment period regarding the 2011 CEDS project, please see the following suggestions:

- Has the BCRPC or CEDS Committee discussed or determined through any studies that sites and structures are “contaminated?” (page 59) Or should it read that these sites and structures have been labeled contaminated? Do not believe the example of the river is needed nor does it add value to the project.
- 1BerkshireStrategic Alliance, Inc. is moving forward (page 64). With the recent announcement of the hiring of a CEO, 1Berkshire Strategic Alliance, Inc. is well prepared to guide the region’s economic development efforts and has been recognized by the Mass Office of Business Development as such, I would suggest the word potentially be removed.
- A limited access highway (page 76) would truly be the most positive economic growth mechanism for many regions in the county, including the William Stanley Business Park with its rail access. The report may benefit by not including language that indicates this project is not feasible, unless there is objective published data that suggests otherwise.
- Cost to end users (page 77) should be taken into consideration when facilitating and/or supporting renewable energy generation, would like to see “cost effective” built into the line item.
- Is it possible that naming locations for projects that merit county benefits could have adverse effects by such naming? Will a sports complex project in a community other than the named one in the report be considered for funding ion an equal basis as one named? If not, the committee should reconsider the naming on any such projects in the report.



Michael Supranowicz
President & CEO

Comment

Citizen
(Eileen Vining)

From: vining
To: dsexton@berkshireplanning.org
Subject: comments on CEDS
Date: Monday, May 16, 2011 11:37:21 AM

Please accept these brief comments on the CEDS Plan. I firmly believe that preservation and even expansion of our agricultural resources and opportunities should be a key element of any economic development plan. Support of agriculture should be a strong component of any plan for the future of the Berkshires, as it is an essential element of our scenic resources and tourism attractions, a vital food source that should be preserved for the future, employment for our populace, and a backbone of open space preservation and maintenance of our environmental integrity. I would like to see more emphasis on this in the Economic Development Plan.

I also inquire whether a request for comments on this Plan has gone to members of the BRPC through the town planning boards. I apologize for our oversight if it did, but as a member of the Egremont Planning Board, I do not recall seeing this request and would appreciate more time for our board to have the opportunity to review the plan and comment on it.

Thank you.

Eileen Vining

Comment

Citizen
(Holly Aragi)

Pine Island Farm

1474 Hewins Street
Sheffield, Ma 01257

Phone (413) 229-8354

Fax (413) 229-2903
Louisaragi@gmail.com

5/16/2011

Dear Berkshire Regional Planning Commission,

I am writing to you today to let you know how important it is that the agricultural enhancement and economic development support elements of Comprehensive Economic Strategy and should be a priority supporting the agricultural economic development for Sheffield and neighboring communities.

My name is Holly Aragi, and my husband is Louis Aragi Jr. of Pine Island Farm in Sheffield Massachusetts.

Operating on a full time basis, Pine Island Farm is set up as a partnership owned and operated by Louis T. Aragi Sr. and Louis T. Aragi Jr. Father and Son, who both possess a wealth of experience and knowledge with regard to farming. Lou, Sr. has over forty years of dairy experience. Lou, Jr. grew up on the farm and has, literally, been involved in the dairy operation all of his life. (He would be my husband)

We employ seven full- time employees and five part-time employees that are on the farm throughout the year. Five seasonal workers are on the farm June thru October to assist with crop management and harvest.

There are approximately a thousand head of Holstein dairy cattle that make up the herd at Pine Island. At the present time the farm generates approximately 12,000,000 pounds of milk annually. Four hundred and seventy cows are being milked and sixty cows are dry. Another five hundred or so fall into the category of young stock and replacement stock-day old calves to springers.

We own 479 tillable acres devoted to growing corn solely for the farms herd. We also harvest 521 acres for hay.

Alternative Energy and Energy Infrastructure Improvements are important to the farm. Currently, the final stages are being finished on a anaerobic methane digester, which when becomes functional it will significantly affect the surrounding environment. The primary focus in establishing the digester is to both “mine the farm waste” for conversion into beneficial by-products and effectively use those digested by-products. (Heat Source,

electricity, fertilizer, compost-bedding materials.) Therefore, better control and management of the farm's waste products will not only impact the environment, the farm site and the neighboring landscape but, with full implementation of this digester, it will impact the farm expenditures and future revenue for the farm.

Running a successful dairy operation in Massachusetts is a challenge. Up to the challenge, through thoughtful, creative planning and by making solid business decisions, we have developed a dairy operation that relies heavily on the farms natural resources (landmass and field crops).

The cropland provides vast scenic views for travelers to take full advantage of as they pass through Southern Berkshire County. They can take advantage of the many stages that the crops go through to get to be a final product for our cattle-feed.

The farm also believes that the "Berkshire Farm -to-School Feasibility Study is extremely important to continue. Educating our youth on the importance of "where food comes from" without such knowledge future generations will have grave consequences. The program has been a real outreach for our school system in which three of our children attend. We are always looking for support for agricultural resources and keeping this in the vision is very important. The communities must always continue to be educated on an ever- changing life style we know as farming.

I just want to thank you for the program and the goals that have been set in all the areas of the provision, but they all must remain a vital part of our region and communities and continue to move forward.

Sheffield is a very small community of farmers, and not many of us remain in our area. Without the support from our local community and outreach programs like yours, the likelihood of a business like ours to try to sustain for future generations are very slim.

Please take the time to support local agriculture in the community, and we appreciate the great support you give to our livelihood.

Farmers are a dieing breed. Without all types of agriculture from big farms to small they all play an extreme importance in everyone's life. We all need to agree that without farms none of us eat !!!

Sincerely,

*Holly Aragi
Pine Island Farm, Sheffield, Massachusetts*

Comment

Citizen
(Paula Melville)

From: [Paula Melville](#)
To: TMatuszko@berkshireplanning.org; DSexton@berkshireplanning.org
Subject: Comment on Draft 2011 Berkshire County CEDS
Date: Saturday, May 14, 2011 11:17:43 AM

From Adams resident Paula Melville, 10 Summer Street:

In the spirit of full disclosure and clarity and stipulating what needs to be stipulated, I would consider it an affront to the townspeople of Adams -- and therefore must object strenuously -- if this document were used to offer a project or a tenuous connection between projects to effect the satisfaction of the purpose of the Chapter 676 (Greylock Glen) legislation of 1985, which was "to create a regional economic facility area."

Please stay out of our fight to see right done by the Town of Adams by the Commonwealth.

Consequently, perhaps the heading on page 80 should relate then to the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail project.

More brownsfield funding is desirable.

The promotion of north Berkshire County as a destination, in general, could be helped through advertising the circuit of routes 8 - 2 - 7 and for Adams, in particular, as a place to walk (our Polish Mile, the Rail Trail, and the acres of the Glen/Mount Greylock area.)

Thank you.

Comment

MassDevelopment
(Kelsey Abbruzzese)

From: [Abbruzzese, Kelsey](#)
To: dsexton@berkshireplanning.org
Subject: berkshire comprehensive economic development strategy - comments
Date: Monday, May 16, 2011 9:11:34 AM

Hi Daniel,

Great work with this year's Berkshire CEDS - just a couple of comments. If you could include the Massachusetts Office of Business Development in the Business Development list and MassDevelopment in the Brownfields Assistance list, that would be terrific. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Thanks for giving us the opportunity to comment.

Kelsey

Kelsey Abbruzzese
MassDevelopment - Communications Director
160 Federal St., 7th Floor
Boston, MA 02110
617-330-2086 (o)
617-448-9077 (c)
follow us on Twitter @MassDev

Comment

Sheffield Land Trust
(Kathy Orlando)

From: [Sheffield Land Trust](#)
To: [Dan Sexton](#)
Subject: Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Comments
Date: Monday, May 16, 2011 11:56:52 AM

Hi Dan,

I am writing to comment on the Draft Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and to thank you and the committee for recognizing the importance of including our natural resources and the agricultural sector and resources in the CEDS. Agriculture and our landscape and natural environment are key economic foundations of our region– and have been since the first settlers here.. I am going to focus on agriculture in my comments, as it is most specific in the CEDS and much of what is said about agriculture can be applied to our landscape and natural resources in general.

I understand that logistics and the process for developing the Berkshire Blueprint made it difficult to include agriculture as a “cluster” when the Blueprint was done, so it is even more important that the CEDS process was such that the value of agriculture and enhancing agricultural economic development to the agricultural industry, individual producers and those industries which agriculture support (such as tourism based on the landscape, local foods, quality of life, etc) and the region as a whole has been highlighted.

The comments are in order of when the topic arises in the CEDS.

1. My first comment is the suggestion to add “agriculture” or “agricultural” to “The Vision for the Berkshires” statement. I recall someone saying that agriculture could be seen as falling under “natural resources” and some people do see it that way, but there are also many people who might not think of that and for whom it would be valuable to specifically mention agriculture so it doesn’t fall through the cracks.

I imagine that the “Vision” is going to be one of the most frequently cited elements of the CEDS – for grants, publicity, etc – and having agriculture listed would open doors for additional sources of funding and could attract more resources to agricultural economic development itself and to the rest of the CEDS in general, especially with the Governor’s emphasis on supporting working landscapes and farms and the growing emphasis on food security and food systems in the foundation world. It also will help those in the more traditional “economic development:” arena who are more likely to be in the category of those who would not instinctively think about “agriculture” when reading “natural resources” interpret the intention of the CEDS more accurately. Agriculture being broken out in Master Plans and Open Space and Recreation Plans also speaks to specifically mentioning agriculture in the CEDS “Vision” statement. It could be integrated smoothly as follows, or however else it makes sense to the committee.

The Vision for the Berkshires: To create a diverse and robust economy that creates sustainable prosperity for all its residents. While capitalizing on the region’s heritage, intellectual vigor, cultural assets and **AGRICULTURAL AND** natural resources we will encourage innovation, collaboration and entrepreneurial spirit.

2. It would be valuable to incorporate an agricultural reference into the Alternative Energy Plan, with projects like the Howden Farm solar panels (which Rep. John Olver helped secure funding for) and the Pine Island Farm

methane digester (which MA Technology Collaborative, USDA Rural Development and others sources are helping to make possible) being good examples of projects already existing and in process that generate jobs while being constructed and, in the case of the digester, ongoing jobs once built. Those benefits being on top of providing alternative energy itself.

3. Redevelopment of the Gt. Barrington Fairgrounds should remain a top priority in the final CEDS, with all the richness and related value-added businesses, land conservation and community development elements listed and those that could be added, such as incorporating the need for more and better slaughter and processing capacity (noted and also in the Berkshire Farm-to-School Feasibility Study), community kitchen and marketing, etc. People drive from hours away to go to Agricultural Fairs in surrounding states and in other Massachusetts Communities, we have an opportunity to direct some of that income and those jobs here not only for season fairs but in a year-round local marketplace.

4. The Berkshire Farm-to-School Feasibility Study is also a key priority, with all the links mentioned in the existing CEDS. And it would also be valuable to expand this to the other regional institutions like the hospitals to take advantage of the tremendous buying capacity for an item like local hamburger that could be produced. Connection to efforts by the local Agricultural Commissions (led by the Alford, Egremont and Sheffield AgComs) related to local slaughter and processing capacity and creating a feasibility study/business plan would be valuable. The Berkshires has an unusual opportunity within our food system with our strong base for supply and built in demand. It would also make sense to tie in to the fledgling Agricultural Education and FFA (Future Farmers of America) programs in the Southern Berkshire Regional School District and Berkshire Hills Regional School Districts to coordinate and leverage maximum resources and ensure that these programs are sustainable and supported regardless of school budgets so that the resources available through them (including linking students, businesses, farms, nonprofits, etc) are constant.

5. I would also urge that the final CEDS incorporate housing for farmers and farm labor, as this is a challenge particularly in South County where housing prices can be prohibitively high and where in some towns population is growing rather than shrinking.

In closing I would urge the committee to maintain as priorities in the final CEDS agricultural economic development in general in addition the specific agriculturally-related projects so far identified, as well as related value-added, land conservation, community development and other correlated and off-shoot projects. With a national and regional focus on food and agriculture, this is an ideal time to make the investment here and draw some of those resources to our communities to help us enhance our economic development.

I look forward to reading and helping to implement the final plan. Please don't hesitate to be in touch with any questions, and thank you again.

Sincerely,

Kathy Orlando

Executive Director, Land Protection

Sheffield Land Trust

P.O. Box 940

Sheffield, MA 01257

(413) 229-0234

fax 229-0239

shefland@bcn.net

www.sheffieldland.org