

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for Berkshire County, Massachusetts 2001

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Williamstown • Windsor

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U.S. Department of Commerce

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy
for
Berkshire County, Massachusetts

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission
March 2001

COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY
for
BERKSHIRE COUNTY, MASSACHUSETTS

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I. Introduction

i. Berkshire CEDS Program

The Economic Development Administration Reform Act of 1998 introduced new federal regulations to enact the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) program which replaced the previous Overall Economic Development Program (OEDP). As described by the Economic Development Administration, the purpose of the CEDS is to “establish a process that will help create jobs, foster more stable and diversified economies, and improve living conditions.” The CEDS program encourages a coordinated local planning process that involves individuals and local and regional entities to work together in guiding the economic development activities of their region. The Berkshire County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committee was formed to accomplish this task. Regional strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats were assessed. These elements were used as a guide to create the strategies and action plan for the accomplishment of the regional vision and goals. Specific projects and programs that fit these objectives were identified throughout the region and prioritized for implementation within the action plan. The process is documented in the following text. Procedures are also identified to update economic development activities in the region and to evaluate the CEDS process on an annual basis.

ii. The Berkshire CEDS Region

Berkshire County, as the westernmost region of Massachusetts, is bordered on the north by Vermont, on the west by New York, on the south by Connecticut, and on the east by the Massachusetts counties of Franklin, Hampshire, and Hampden. The county represents a true region, being well-defined by physical features, geographic relationships, political boundaries, historic traditions and internal social and economic interdependence.

Berkshire County is comprised of two cities and thirty towns and has an area of 605,437 acres or 945 square miles. Elevations range from 3,491 feet at Mount Greylock, the highest point in the state, to 594 feet in Williamstown on the Hoosic River. Two main rivers drain the county, the Hoosic in the north - which flows west eventually joining the Hudson - and the Housatonic in the south - which flows south through Connecticut to Long Island Sound. The nearby valley lands contain nearly all of the region's development. Rough terrain dominates the area, with the Taconic Mountains running down the western border and the Berkshire Hills lying along the eastern edge. The climate is generally cooler than neighboring regions to the east (Connecticut River Valley), west (Hudson River Valley), and south (CT.).

Approximately eight percent of the county is developed, mostly for residential purposes. The remaining land (92 percent) is characterized by water bodies, public and recreational open space, and “open” farm, forest, meadow and wetlands- largely low intensity land uses.

The 1990 United States Census recorded 139,352 persons, a decrease of 4% from 1980. The county's historical peak population of 149,402 was recorded by the 1970 Census. According to the Census Bureau's most recent population estimate for the county, the population decline has continued since the 1990 Census. The Census Bureau estimates the county population for 1999 at 132,218, a drop of about 5% from 1990, and 9% from 1980. According to the 1990 Census, about 97% of the county's population is white, with blacks and Asians comprising most of the balance. People of Hispanic origin (any race) comprise about 1% of the total population, and the total minority population numbers approximately 5,175 or 3.7%. About 3.6 percent of the population is foreign-born.

While much of the land area in the Berkshires is rural in character, the economic base is dominated by non-agricultural industries. Nearly half of the regional population is concentrated in its two cities, Pittsfield with 45,296 and North Adams with 15,549 (1999 Census estimates). The region's three largest employers are Berkshire Health Systems in Pittsfield, employing close to 2,000 workers, and General Dynamics Defense Systems and Williams College, each employing over 1,000 workers. Per capita personal income in the county (for 1998) was \$27,731, ranking it 10th of the 14 counties in the state, and about 83% of the state average of \$33,496. The labor force is approximately 66,000, or 50% of total population. The annual average unemployment rate for the region for 1999 was 3.8%.

Berkshire County is located about 2¹/₂ hours from both Boston and New York City and about 1 hour from Albany, NY and the Springfield/Hartford metro area. The outstanding beauty of its natural resources has made this region famous as a vacation destination. A large seasonal population of urbanites have second homes or stay in resorts and motels, camp at the numerous state parks, visit friends, or simply drive through the area. Pastoral amenities are complemented by major cultural facilities such as Tanglewood, Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Arts, Clark Art Institute, Norman Rockwell Museum, Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, and the many well-regarded theater venues, including Shakespeare and Company in Lenox, Berkshire Theater Festival in Stockbridge, Williamstown Theater Festival, and Barrington Stage Company.

The Massachusetts Turnpike (I-90) provides prime highway access to the county, while other major routes (US Routes 7 & 20 and State Highways 2, 8, & 9) also transect the region. There are also several bus and rail lines in addition to public airports in North Adams and Pittsfield, and a private airport in Great Barrington.

II. The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Process

i. The Berkshire CEDS Committee

Members of the Berkshire County CEDS Committee, formed in November, 2000, represent a variety of groups and stakeholders from throughout the County with an interest in improving the regional economy. The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission formed the Committee, using members of the Berkshire Council for Growth as a starting point. However, BRPC sought committee members from outside this regional group, acknowledging that members should represent all regions of the Berkshires (north, central and south), both genders and a variety of races and disciplines.

The CEDS Committee includes a diverse representation across the region's geography from various community sectors and interests including local government public leadership, economic and business development organizations, employment and training organizations, community groups, women, minorities, aged and disabled, as well as health, education and social service fields. This is accomplished by the organization of membership and the recruitment of members from different sectors that have a broad range of knowledge and skills.

Of the twenty-seven committee members, nine are female and two are minority; some are young entrepreneurs, others are involved and active retirees. Several members represent the major cities in the region and one of its neighborhood associations; 7 represent the northern part of the region, 10 represent the central portion of the region, 3 represent "South County" and 7 represent regional interests. People from Education, Human Services and Health Care, Employment and Labor, Non-Profits and Private Industry, Community Development Corporations, Economic Development and Business Incubators, Financial Institutions, Foundations, and old and new economy Entrepreneurs have committed time and thought to this initial committee. Several of the region's major industries are represented. Four committee members come from regional alliances or networks in technology, applied technology, and the plastics industry.

A detailed list of the CEDS Committee members and a breakdown of organizations and interests represented by its diversity (age, gender, race and ethnicity, regional location, etc.) can be found in **Table 1**. The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is defined by the EDA as a participatory planning process that will "help create jobs, foster more stable and diversified economies and improve living conditions." It is the dynamic and evolving process of guiding the economic future of the region that is appropriate to the character of that region. The CEDS process requires input and collaboration of key players in the region. The coordination of these participants has resulted in the formation of the Berkshire County CEDS Committee. The CEDS Committee is a formal team of Berkshire County citizens who meet to discuss the economic development needs and abilities of this region.

TABLE 1	COMMUNITY	AFFILIATION	RACE / SEX	SECTOR
Ballen, William	Central	Mt. Greylock Reg. School District; Berkshire Assn. Of School Superintendents	White, Male	Education
Barton, Bob	North	Northern Berkshire United Way; Northern Berkshire CDC	White, Male	Community Organization
Bennett, Joe	Central	Westside Neighborhood Resource Center	Black, Male	Community Organization
Fagan, Julie	Regional/South	Berkshire Council for Growth; Berkshire Applied Technology Council	White, Female	Regional Organization
Filpi, Mike	Central	Central Berkshire Labor Council; Berkshire County Reg. Employment Board	White, Male	Labor
Girourard, Keith	South	CDC of Southern Berkshire; Berkshire Connect; Small Business	White, Male	Local Organization
Guachione, Deborah	Regional/Central	Congressman Olver	White, Female	Government
Hotman, Les	Central	Office of Community Development	White, Male	Local Government
Karns, Nathaniel	Regional/Central	Berkshire Regional Planning Commission; Berkshire Connect; Berkshire Council for Growth; Berkshire Housing Development Corp.	White, Male	Regional Organization
Kemp, John	North	Berkshire Technology Alliance	White, Male	Technology Business
Kerwood, Matthew	Central	Massachusetts Office of Business Development; Berkshire Council for Growth; Pittsfield City Council	White, Male	State Government
Leitch, James	North	Town of Adams; Northern Berkshire Industrial Park Development Corp.	White, Male	Local Government
Marden, Alan	North	City of North Adams; Northern Berkshire Industrial Park Development Corp.; Berkshire Council for Growth; Corp. for Business Work and Learning	White, Male	Local Government
McCann, Thomas	South	Norman Rockwell Museum; Berkshire Regional Planning; Berkshire Council for Growth	White, Male	Regional Cultural Organization
Morris, Caroline	North	Prospect Foundation; Berkshire Council for Growth	White, Female	Training
Mulholland, William	Regional/South	Berkshire Community College; Berkshire Applied Technology Council	White, Male	Training and Education
Pearson, Yvonne	Central	Downtown, Inc.	White, Female	Local Organization
Putnam, Heather	Regional/North	Berkshire County Regional Employment Board; North Adams School Committee; Berkshire Council for Growth	White, Female	Employment, Training and Education
Rochelo, Don	Central	Berkshire Plastics Network; Medium-sized manufacturing	White, Male	Manufacturing Business
Schiff, Gary	Central	First Massachusetts Bank; Berkshire Council for Growth	White, Male	Financial
Singer, Vicky	Regional/Central	Berkshire Enterprises; Berkshire Council for Growth	White, Female	Local Business
Stucker, Virgil	North	No. Berkshire Health Systems; REACH Foundation	White, Male	Health / Human Services
Velez, Eleanore	Regional/Central	Berkshire Latin American Council	Hispanic, Female	Community Organization
Vinette, Richard	South	Lee Community Development Corporation; Pittsfield Economic Revitalization Corp.	White, Male	Local Organization
Whitehead, Richard	Central	Berkshire Community College Board; Berkshire United Way	White, Male	Education; Community Organization
Zavattaro, Sharron	North	Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts; Berkshire County Regional Employment Board	White, Female	Employment, Training and Education
Zink, Sandra	Central	Berkshire Applied Technology Council; Medium-Sized Manufacturing	White, Female	Manufacturing Business; Training

ii. Staff Support

Development of the Berkshire County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy was funded by the region's two cities of North Adams and Pittsfield. The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission provided staff support, including preparing the CEDS report and provided assistance coordinating meetings held in the region. Executive Director Nat Karns, Associate Planner Sean Loughlin, and Planning Associate Kate McNulty-Vaughan staffed the CEDS Committee. Dr. John Mullin and Dr. Zenia Kotval, both with the University of Massachusetts' Center for Economic Development, provided oversight of the process, facilitated the three regional meetings, and offered their professional insights at every phase as this effort unfolded in the region. Their extensive attention to the review of the final report as a singular statement of the region's vision, and expertise in helping formulate goals and objectives to achieve that vision, have contributed to the region's ability to achieve consensus and gain the momentum necessary to carry the strategy forward.

iii. CEDS Meetings and Process

There were four Berkshire County CEDS Committee meetings held to develop the CEDS.

- Prior to the first meeting, the Committee members were sent general information about the Economic Development Administration and the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy process, as well as some general information on the region's economy. At the first meeting the Committee generally discussed its roles and responsibilities and also brainstormed strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and strengths facing the region.
- The second meeting followed up from the first, with a discussion on the key areas of concern and the identification of key goals and objectives for the Berkshire region.
- The third meeting focused on project prioritization. The Committee was sent a project matrix that identified key information on the submitted projects. A project prioritization sheet was also created in order for them rank projects based on their relation to the CEDS goals and objectives; job level, creation, retention and improvement; community distress; and project readiness.
- Prior to the fourth meeting, a draft of the CEDS was sent to the Committee for their review and input. The last meeting focused on the review and endorsement of the document and the future work of the Berkshire CEDS Committee.

Projects that the Committee prioritized were not only submitted by committee members, but by individuals to whom they forwarded project profile forms. Project profile forms were sent to all Town Administrators in the Berkshire region. There was also an accompanying letter describing the CEDS process.

Meeting agendas and minutes, as well as committee correspondence can be found in **Appendix A**. Further detail on the Committee's actions can be found in the Economic Development Projects and Selection Process on page 65.

iv. CEDS Committee Work Program

The overall plan for the CEDS Committee is to establish and maintain a work schedule for the itself, as well as its subcommittees in order to be reactive and proactive. Subcommittees will investigate the following areas:

- Site and brownfield development;
- Business development (revolving loan funds and various support mechanisms); and
- Workforce development.

A letter will be sent out in March, 2001 to the CEDS Committee to form subcommittees. Upon the formation of them, committee goals and timelines will be outlined to ensure CEDS Committee initiatives move forward in a timely manner and that findings of the committees are incorporated into the CEDS Annual Update by late Fall, 2001. The Committee has decided to make January 1st of each year the time to submit CEDS Annual Updates.

The CEDS Committee will:

- Become better educated about regional priorities and the EDA process, and how they relate to projects and the CEDS for Berkshire County;
- Re-visit the goals and objectives annually and re-formulate them accordingly;
- Review the overall CEDS document and make updates as necessary;
- Continually watch the progress of projects, acknowledging new ones and seeing that existing projects within the CEDS are updated;
- The CEDS Committee and its subcommittees will communicate with each other to ensure that subcommittee goals and timelines are met;

Each subcommittee will prepare a 1 to 2 page summary of the progress that has been made by their respective committee by September, 2001. The summary will relate to general committee developments in relation to the identified goals and objectives, as well as progress made overall, such as with partners and resources the subcommittees have used as tools in the process.

III. The Berkshires and Its Economy

Labor Market Areas in the Berkshires

The Berkshire region consists of three labor market areas: the Census-designated Pittsfield Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), the North Adams Labor Market Area (NA LMA) and the Great Barrington Labor Market Area (GB LMA). Data about this region will be looked at through these 3 labor market divisions, as well as the county as a whole compared to Massachusetts, and the United States. Four small communities that align the eastern border of the county and counties to the east are combined as a group as the “balance of Western Massachusetts,” by the Massachusetts Department of Employment and Training. These four communities – Becket, Peru, Washington, and Windsor (labeled MSA+) can generally be considered part of the Pittsfield MSA (as MSA+), though clear differences at times exist from trends exhibited by communities in the MSA.

The thirty-two communities of Berkshire County are listed below in **TABLE 2** by MSA and Labor Market Area with their most recent U.S. Census population estimates:

TABLE 2

Labor Market Areas: Population Estimates, 1999					
Pittsfield MSA*	83,565	North Adams LMA	27,177	Great Barrington LMA	17,824
Adams	8,690	Clarksburg	1,532	Alford	399
Cheshire	3,418	Florida	705	Egremont	1,176
Dalton	6,751	Hancock	381	Great Barrington	7,666
Hinsdale	1,834	New Ashford	195	Monterey	771
Lanesborough	3,017	North Adams	15,549	Mount Washington	129
Lee	5,586	Savoy	698	New Marlborough	1,238
Lenox	5,070	Williamstown	8,117	Otis	1,051
Pittsfield	45,296			Sandisfield	651
Richmond	1,629			Sheffield	2,950
Stockbridge	2,274			Tyringham	355
				West Stockbridge	1,438
MSA+	87,217				
Becket	1,516				
Peru	759				
Washington	619				
Windsor	758				

Labor Market Area:
Defined by MA DET in conjunction with the U.S. Dept. of Labor

*Metropolitan Statistical Area:
Defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as a relatively freestanding Metropolitan Area with a large population nucleus, together with adjacent communities that have a high degree of economic and social integration.

MSA+: Pittsfield MSA and Becket, Peru, Washington and Windsor

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program

- The varying sizes and interests of the region’s communities, added to the challenge of the region’s geographical size and topography, often compound its “distance” and sense of isolation from the state capital and state affairs. Sharing borders with three states (Vermont in the north, New York to the west, and Connecticut in the south, and cordoned off by three

other western Massachusetts counties (Franklin, Hampshire, and Hampden also experiencing economic challenges), the Berkshire region's large land area, physical attributes and diminishing population present difficulties in maintaining economic vitality and capacity. These same features also present stumbling blocks in developing regional consensus and working collaboratively.

- The previous Overall Economic Development Program (1993) prepared for Berkshire County also identified the county's historical struggle to "act as one cohesive region" (p. 13).

A. Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics

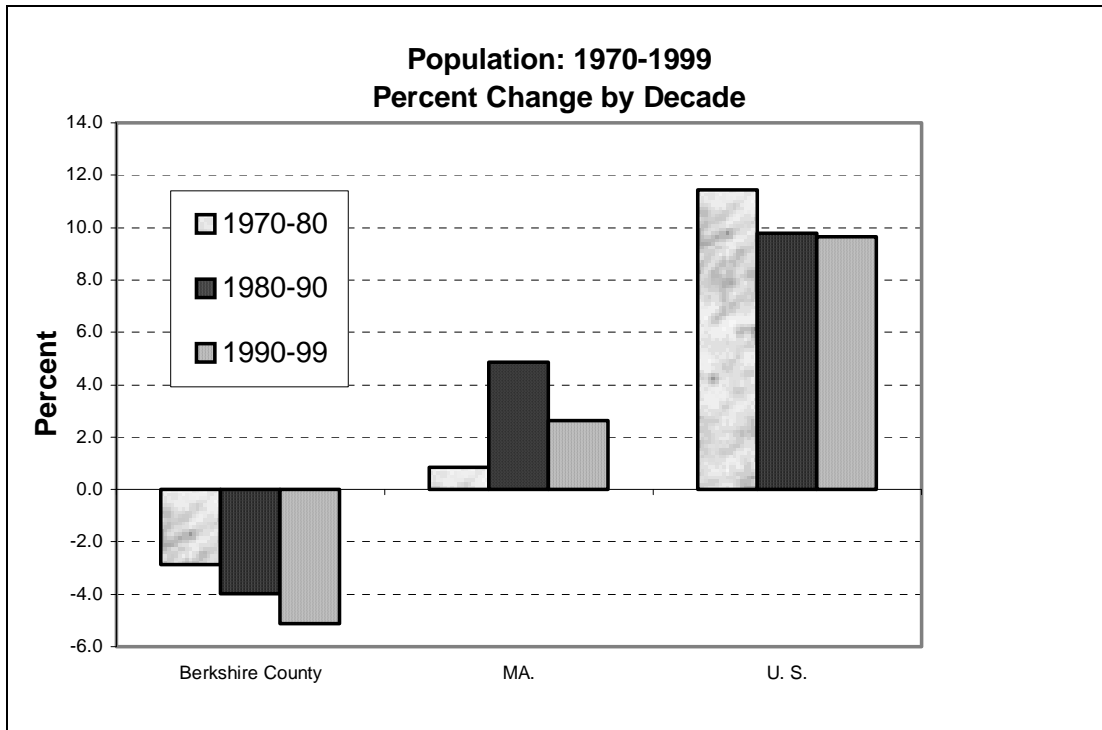
i. Population Trends

The Berkshire CEDS region is comprised of the 30 towns and 2 cities of Berkshire County. According to the 1990 Census, the City of Pittsfield, centrally located as the regional "hub," is the largest community in the region, with a population of 48,622. The City of North Adams, located in the northern part of the county, with the second largest population (16,797) serves as another regional population center. Adams (9,445), Dalton (7,155), Great Barrington (7,725), and Williamstown (8,220) comprise the next set of "larger" communities in the region. Great Barrington also serves as a population and economic center for the southern portion of the county.

There is great population variation from community to community in this region with two communities in the range of 5,000 to 6,000, twelve others from 1,000 to 4,000, and another twelve under 1,000. The two smallest communities are Mount Washington (135) located in the southwest corner of the county and New Ashford (192) in the north. Fifteen of the region's communities experienced their population peak years prior to 1900 when the region was dotted with farms and large farm families inhabited the landscape. By 1970 Berkshire County had reached its population high of 149,402, and manufacturing employed nearly a third of the workforce. At the same time the region was becoming increasingly known for its cultural attractions in theater, music, and dance, along with its recognizable recreational opportunities leading to its current "destination" status for tourists and second homeowners.

- The population of this region has been on a downward trend since the 1970's: from 1970 to 1980 the County lost approximately 4,300 people – representing about 3% of its population. In contrast the state gained almost 1% while the U.S. population grew about 11 and a half percent.
- From 1970 to 1990 and into the 1990's the region as a whole lost population at an escalating rate per decade (from about 3% to 4% to 5%: losing over the past three decades over 17,000 people or roughly 11 and a half percent of its 1970 peak population (See **Figure 1**).
- Massachusetts over that same period grew 8.5%. At the same time the U.S. population grew relatively steadily – and on a faster track than the state and in stark contrast to this region: for a three decade growth of 34% from 1970 to 1999.

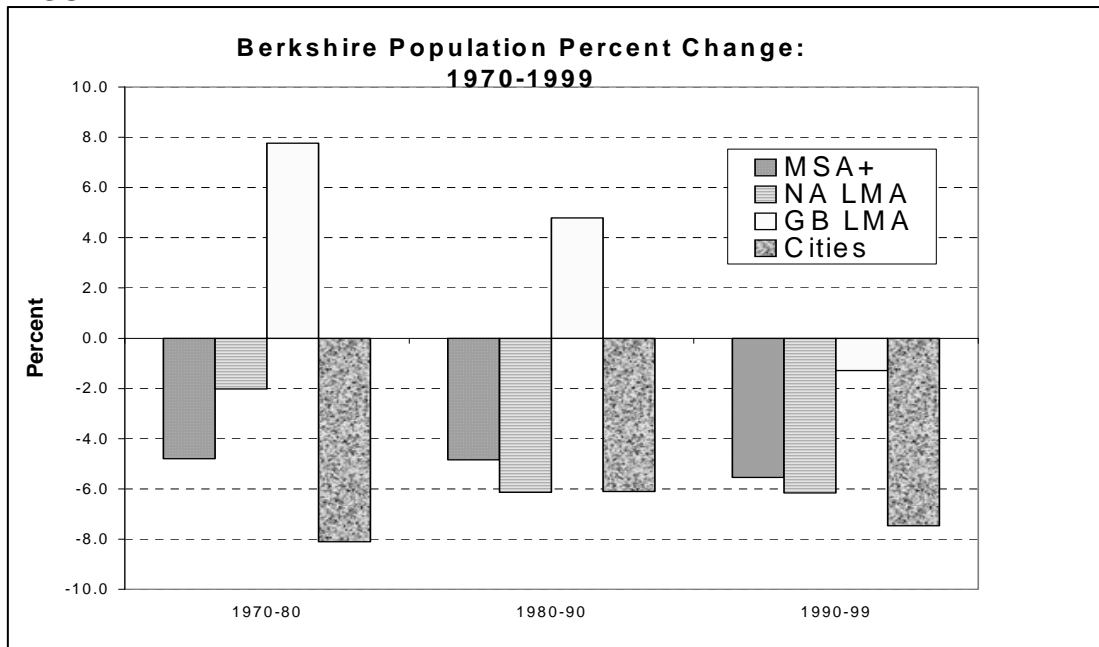
FIGURE 1



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

As indicated in **Figure 2**, there are significant differences between the rate of loss among the Labor Market Areas and Pittsfield MSA, and the region's two cities.

FIGURE 2



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

- Within Berkshire County: loss of population was not consistent from community to community or the Labor Market Areas over the prior thirty-year period. The Great Barrington LMA overall grew 11.5%, 3% over the state growth rate of 8.5%, while the North Adams LMA dropped about 14%, and the Pittsfield MSA dropped 16%. Population in the two regional cities combined dove 20%: 1 out of every 5 city residents in 1970, by 1999, had relocated or was gone. **Table 3** below summarizes population changes from 1970 onward.

TABLE 3

Population Change: 1970-1999					
	1970-80	1980-90	1990-99	1970-1999	
Community	% Chge	% Chge	% Chge	Chge	% Chge.
Berkshire County	-2.9	-4.0	-5.1	-17,184	-11.5
MA.	0.8	4.9	2.6	485,999	8.5
U. S.	11.4	9.8	9.6	69,388,782	34.1
Pittsfield MSA+	-4.8	-4.8	-5.5	-14,708	-14.4
North Adams LMA	-2.0	-6.1	-6.2	-4,311	-13.7
Great Barrington LMA	7.8	4.8	-1.3	1,835	11.5
Cities	-8.1	-6.1	-7.5	-15,370	-20.2
Bal -W MA	53.3	15.1	0.5	1,593	77.4

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

ii. Age Cohorts – Median Age

- The 1990 Census revealed important demographic differences between Berkshire County, the state, and the U.S. Approximately 26% of the total population of the U.S is under the age of 18. With 22.7% of its population under 18, Berkshire County closely matches the state at 22.5%. Significant to note is that in contrast to Berkshire County higher percentages of the nation's population are found in the age cohorts under age 55. From age 55 on Berkshire County outstrips both state and national percentages with higher percentages of our total population in these older cohorts. Note the age distributions below:

TABLE 4

	Population by Age & Median Age, 1990						Median Age
	% of Total Population:						
	<18	19-34	35-54	55-64	65+	85+	
Berkshire County	23	26	24	10	17	1.9	35.9
MA.	23	30	24	9	14	1.5	33.6
U. S.	26	28	24	9	13	1.2	32.9
MSA+	23	25	25	10	17	1.9	36.4
North Adams LMA	20	33	21	9	16	1.9	32.9
Gt. Barrington LMA	24	22	26	10	17	2.4	37.4
Cities	22	28	23	10	17	1.8	34.8

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1990

- Of concern for this region is the low percentage of the age 19-34 cohort compared to national (and state) levels, on top of the Berkshire region's lower percentage of population under 18 years of age.
- Seventeen percent (17%) of the county's population is 65 and over. Massachusetts on the whole has a smaller percentage (13.6%) and the U.S., even smaller, at 12.6%. Berkshire County's share of 85+ is about a third higher than the nation and a quarter higher than the Commonwealth's share.
- The Median Age of the nation's population is 32.9 years; Massachusetts is slightly higher at 33.6 years of age; Berkshire County, with a median age of 35.9 years is a full 9% older than the national median.
- The Labor Market Areas and MSA reflect this "older" median age as well, with the exception of the North Adams LMA at 32.9 years – apparently matching the national median age. However, the median is probably skewed by the presence of two of the three residential colleges in the county (Williams College and the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts) in this LMA. With a total LMA population of 28,958, students living in the LMA unduly affect the median age, representing it as much lower than it is in actuality. The transient, rather than "rooted," nature of these students masks the median age of this sub-area population, which may be substantially higher than the Census figures reflect.
- According to Census estimates (1999) the "group quarters" population peaked at 6,330 in 1991, and has remained stable at 5,887 since 1997. "Group quarters" includes populations ranging from prisoners, to the elderly in nursing homes, to college students. That drop may be inaccurate, though a drop in college enrollment at the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts has occurred. A number of elderly housing facilities have been sited in the county in the past decade, a factor which may help maintain the 1991 estimate, perhaps even responsible for an increase in the 65+ and 85+ cohorts.

iii. Gender, Racial and Ethnic Diversity

- 1990 Census data on the breakdown of males and females in the CEDS region indicate that the County as a whole mirrors the state with a slightly larger female population (52%) than male – not significantly different from the national norm (51%). Several communities have larger percentages of females (Adams, Great Barrington, North Adams, and particularly, Washington with 54.5% of its population female).
- The racial and ethnic composition of Berkshire County is far less diverse than the nation or the state. The 1990 decennial Census indicated that the total minority population (non-white and persons of Hispanic origin) was 5,175, or 3.7% of the total county population. According to the most recent (1999) Census estimate, the region's minority population increased to 5% of the total population. The overall decline of the county's population may be one factor in the rise in that percentage. The region's minority population, though increasing, is still considerably less than the state at about 12% and the U.S. at 24.4% according to 1990 Census data.
- Another factor in minority growth may be the increasing immigrant population. There is growing anecdotal evidence of an increase in the immigrant population of the county. A recent study conducted by the United Way (August, 2000) suggests an influx of both Russian/Eastern European and Latino or Hispanic people. Estimates vary widely as to the

Labor Force Trends, 1983-99

	1983-1999:		1990-1999:	
	# of Workers:	% Chge	# of Workers:	% Chge
number of individuals or families, and little demographic information is extant. It has been suggested that an estimated 140-150 Russian/Eastern European people now live in the Berkshires. An estimated 70% have professional degrees. The Latin American community has been estimated to have grown anywhere between 2,000 to 6,000 individuals, or about 800 families. Twenty-percent of Latino adults are believed to hold professional degrees.	14,581,000	11.5	5,196	-7.4
U.S.	27,818,000	24.9	14,581,000	11.7
MSA+	4,731	-10.2	4,278	-9.3
North Adams LMA	-3,310	-20.4	-1,495	-10.4
Great Barrington LMA	405	3.9	577	6.2
Ches	8,661	46.8	3,959	27.4

- U.S. Census population estimates released for 1999 also indicated a growing Hispanic population: 515 more Hispanic people in the region- an increase of 36.6% from 1990. Early Census 2000 data nationally are also showing increasing numbers of people of Hispanic ethnicity, and expanding the numbers believed to have been under-counted in the 1990 Census.

- The CEDS Committee has acknowledged the importance of better utilizing the talents of minority and ethnic populations within the Berkshires.

B. Labor Force Characteristics

i. Employment

- Data from 1990 to 1999 from the Massachusetts Division of Employment and Training indicates a substantially different trend over time between the Berkshire County workforce and that of the state and the nation.
- The number of people (age 16+) in the nation's workforce grew almost 12% in this period, while Massachusetts added about 35,900 workers or 1% growth. Berkshire County saw 5,196 members of its workforce relocate or drop out of the workforce pool, a decline of 7.4%.

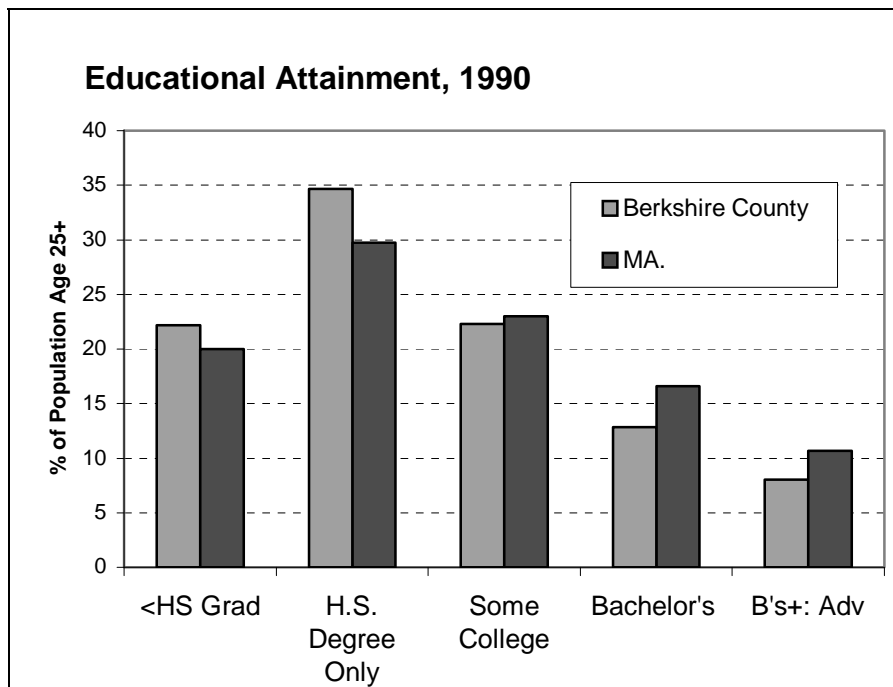
TABLE 5

Labor Force Trends, 1983-99				
	1983-1999:		1990-1999:	
	# of Workers:	% Chge	# of Workers:	% Chge
Berkshire	-8,446	-11.5	-5,196	-7.4
MA	300,000	10.1	35,900	1.1
U.S.	27,818,000	24.9	14,581,000	11.7
MSA+	-4,731	-10.2	-4,278	-9.3
North Adams LMA	-3,310	-20.4	-1,495	-10.4
Great Barrington LMA	-405	-3.9	577	6.2
Cities	-5,681	-16.8	-3,969	-12.4

- From its high point in 1984, when 73,454 people were part of the Berkshire labor force and unemployment was 5.6%, the labor force in the county dropped to 64,717 people (the current (1999) countywide annual average unemployment rate is 3.8%).
- Labor Market Areas within the county varied over this period in their rate of loss of workers. The North Adams LMA labor force from 1983 to 1999 dropped 3,310 workers, or 20.4% in contrast to Great Barrington LMA which experienced a loss of 3.9%, or 405 members of its workforce. The Pittsfield MSA lost the most workers (5,433) representing about 12% of its total workforce. The two cities, with a combined workforce of 33,836 in 1983, lost a total of 5,681 workers, or about 17%. In 1983 that workforce total represented 46% of the workforce in the county. In 1999, it totaled 43% of the county workforce. The North Adams LMA and the Pittsfield MSA also experienced declines in their share of the regional workforce.
- The current (1999) annual average unemployment rate statewide is 3.2 and the national figure is 4.2%. Berkshire County has rebounded from an early 1990's recessionary high unemployment rate of 11.2%, which exceeded by 2 percentage points the state rate of 9.1%. The rate of decline in unemployment for both the state and the Berkshire region seems to be tapering off at this point, largely viewed as a natural result of a number of factors: workforce shrinkage due to relocation, early retirement or workers dropping out of the workforce pool, as well as the mismatch between the skills of available workers and needs of the workplace.

ii. Educational Attainment

FIGURE 3



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1990

Educational attainment – or the level of education or skills which characterizes the population of the county – is typically lower than the Commonwealth as a whole, and closer to the nation’s percent of its population with (at least) high school degrees (U.S.: 75%; Berkshire County: 78%). Berkshire County residents who are age 25 or older also mirror the national rate for college graduates (at minimum): 21% to the nation’s 20%, while overall in Massachusetts the rate is 27%.

- A greater percent of the Berkshire population (age 25+) has *only* a high school degree: about 35% compared to the state’s 30%, an improvement from 1980 Census figures. In 1980, 39.4% of Berkshire County residents had only a high school education, surpassing the state at 36.4%. While Berkshire County has shown movement towards higher levels of education, Massachusetts as a state has enhanced its reputation for highly educated citizens, and the Berkshire population is still playing catch-up – failing to distinguish itself as the state has in educational attainment.
- According to the 1990 Census, the percent of the Berkshire population (age 25+) with a Bachelor’s degree (13%) and above a Bachelor’s or Advanced/Professional degree (8%) still lags the state: Bachelor’s: 16.6%; Bachelor’s+: 10.6%. The two cities together, as well as the North Adams LMA, fall below the county in the percent of population with those levels of educational attainment. Berkshire County’s educational attainment levels are summarized below:

TABLE 6

Community	Percent of Population Age 25+:				
	<HS Grad	Only H.S. Degree	Some College	Bachelor's	Bachelor's+ or Advanced
Berkshire County	22.1	34.7	22.3	12.9	8.1
MA	20.0	29.7	23.0	16.6	10.6
MSA+	21.3	35.2	23.2	12.8	7.5
North Adams LMA	27.0	34.2	18.2	11.7	8.9
Great Barrington LMA	19.2	32.8	23.4	14.9	9.7
Cities	24.3	36.1	22.1	10.9	6.7

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1990

- Residents in the region have access to higher education (Associate’s Level) and technical training programs at Berkshire Community College in Pittsfield. The Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts in North Adams also offers undergraduate and graduate level programs

accessible to both day and evening students. Two other residential private colleges serve the region: Williams College and Simon's Rock. Simon's Rock offers high school age students the opportunity to enroll in college programs. The University of Massachusetts also offers a MBA program in Pittsfield. Additional opportunities for technical training or skill-building are viewed as critical to workforce development in the region.

- Dropout rates in the region's school districts in 1997-98, shown in **Table 7** are near or below the state's dropout rate of 3.4% in 1994-95. However, there are two exceptions with Adams-Cheshire at 4.1% and Pittsfield at 5.1%. Though not severe, school districts in general face continual challenges to keep students in school and help them perform well.

TABLE 7

Dropout Rates, Berkshire County, 1994-95					
Massachusetts	Annual Dropout Rate (9-12) vs. State Average (3.6%)	Dropout Rate (9-12) in 1994-95 vs. State Average (3.4%)	% Planning to Attend 4-Yr. College (1997-8) vs. State Average (53.2%)	% Planning to Attend 2-Yr. College (1997-8) vs. State Average (18.6%)	% Planning to Work (1997-8) vs. State Average (16.2%)
Adams-Cheshire (Pittsfield MSA)	3.9	4.1	49.6	29.8	3.1
Berkshire Hills (Great Barrington LMA)	1.6	0.8	45.9	24.1	12.8
Central Berkshire (Pittsfield MSA)	1.4	3.6	53.5	28	12.7
Lee (Pittsfield MSA)	1.6	1.5	31.8	47	13.6
Lenox (Pittsfield MSA)	0.0	0.4	69.1	20	9.1
Mount Greylock (North Adams LMA)	1.6	0.8	65.1	23.9	8.3
No. Berkshire Voc. (North Adams LMA)	1.4	0.9	35.6	19.8	26.7
Pittsfield	5.2	5.1	42.9	32.4	11.0
So. Berkshire (Great Barrington LMA)	3.8	3.6	35.7	21.4	30.4

Source: Massachusetts Department of Education, November 2000.

iii. Income Sources

TABLE 8

Income -- Sources	Number of Households	Percent of Households with Income from:				Self-Employed:	
		Wage & Salary	Social Security	Public Assistance	Retirement	Farm	Non-Farm
Berkshire County	54,531	72.9	33.1	8.5	20.8	0.8	12.6
Massachusetts	2,244,406	78.0	27.0	7.7	16.3	0.7	11.9

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1990

- The percentage of households with income from Non-Farm self-employment is also somewhat greater than for the state.
- According to 1990 Census data Berkshire County has a significantly smaller percentage of households with wage and salary income, and greater percentages of households reliant on Social Security, Public Assistance, and Retirement income sources than the state as a whole. The region's higher median age suggests that the number of retired and older residents accounts for that difference.

TABLE 9

Mean Income	Mean Income:					
	Wage & Salary	Social Security	Public Assistance	Retirement	Self-Employed: Farm	Self-Employed: Non-Farm
Berkshire County	\$36,610	\$7,893	\$4,345	\$7,835	\$9,364	\$18,104
Massachusetts	\$45,022	\$7,649	\$4,711	\$8,571	\$7,867	\$23,101

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990

- Berkshire County income levels by source on the whole are less than Massachusetts overall, with the notable exception of Social Security and Farm Self-Employment Income.
- Estimated Per Capita Personal Income in Berkshire County has increased over this decade from \$20,385 in 1990 (10th of 14 counties) or roughly 88% of the state level to \$27,731 in 1998 with a rank of 10th in the state – but dropping to 83% of the state's average per capita income.

TABLE 10

Estimated Per Capita Income by County, MA: 1997.		
County	1990 Per Capita Income	1997 Per Capita Income
Barnstable	\$23,453	\$30,199
Berkshire	\$20,385	\$27,200
Bristol	\$18,161	\$24,188
Dukes	\$23,159	\$29,945
Essex	\$22,828	\$30,866
Franklin	\$18,317	\$23,779
Hampden	\$19,589	\$24,795
Hampshire	\$18,347	\$23,928
Middlesex	\$27,004	\$37,326
Nantucket	\$31,302	\$41,240
Norfolk	\$27,717	\$37,436

TABLE 11

Estimated Median Household Income by County, MA: 1997.	
County	Estimate
Barnstable	\$40,791
Berkshire	\$37,284
Bristol	\$38,866
Dukes	\$40,852
Essex	\$44,187
Franklin	\$38,330
Hampden	\$36,746
Hampshire	\$42,287
Middlesex	\$53,268
Nantucket	\$48,151
Norfolk	\$54,528

Plymouth	\$20,497	\$27,402
Suffolk	\$24,966	\$33,860
Worcester	\$20,061	\$26,463
Massachusetts	\$23,210	\$31,239
United States	\$19,156	\$25,288
Rank of Berkshire Cty	10 of 14	10 of 14

Plymouth	\$49,165
Suffolk	\$36,260
Worcester	\$40,489
Massachusetts	\$43,015

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis

- Income information collected by the 1990 Census for Households, Families, and Per Capita show striking differences between communities in the North Adams LMA, Pittsfield MSA, and the Great Barrington LMA. Within Labor Market Areas and the MSA income ranges vary greatly.
- In terms of Household Income, for the North Adams LMA the Median ranges from a high of \$33,949 (Williamstown) to North Adams with the lowest Median at \$22,100, or 65% of the highest median. The MSAs highest median is \$47,857 (Richmond) with Adams lowest at \$25,060, or 52% of the high median. In the Great Barrington LMA the highest Median Income is reported at \$48,750 (Tyringham) and the lowest (Sheffield) at \$29,243, or 60% of the high median.
- Family Income Medians from the 1990 Census indicate the same disparities among communities in the LMAs and the MSA, with broad range of income levels.
- **Table 12** highlights the high and low median figures for the LMA's and MSA and the county, state, and U.S. median family income figures, according to the 1990 Census:

TABLE 12

Income: Household, Family, Per Capita, 1989						
Community	Households		Families		Per Capita	
	Median	Average	Median	Average		
NAdams Clarksburg	\$32,414	\$35,454	\$38,454	\$40,370	\$13,139	
NAdams Florida	\$29,808	\$32,231	\$32,279	\$34,724	\$11,345	
NAdams Hancock	\$32,656	\$40,550	\$40,577	\$48,977	\$17,075	
NAdams New Ashford	\$32,143	\$37,403	\$32,083	\$39,136	\$13,374	
NAdams North Adams	\$22,100	\$27,133	\$30,894	\$33,699	\$10,963	
NAdams Savoy	\$33,438	\$34,992	\$39,063	\$38,286	\$13,892	
NAdams Williamstown	\$33,949	\$42,314	\$43,763	\$52,138	\$14,728	
MSA Adams	\$25,060	\$29,183	\$31,589	\$35,585	\$12,790	
MSA Cheshire	\$36,803	\$38,726	\$42,406	\$43,509	\$14,298	
MSA Dalton	\$36,518	\$45,896	\$45,298	\$53,549	\$17,061	
MSA Hinsdale	\$33,714	\$37,339	\$37,880	\$40,981	\$13,948	
MSA Lanesborough	\$36,429	\$43,777	\$39,805	\$47,099	\$16,688	
MSA Lee	\$33,613	\$39,570	\$42,363	\$47,783	\$15,289	
MSA Lenox	\$34,500	\$43,463	\$44,225	\$53,800	\$16,822	
MSA Pittsfield	\$29,987	\$37,080	\$38,005	\$44,905	\$15,426	
MSA Richmond	\$47,857	\$60,839	\$50,726	\$65,791	\$22,359	
MSA Stockbridge	\$35,405	\$47,703	\$46,023	\$55,124	\$18,215	
GtBarr Alford	\$39,063	\$59,684	\$46,719	\$70,721	\$24,613	
GtBarr Egremont	\$31,437	\$42,345	\$38,365	\$47,361	\$17,752	
GtBarr Great Barrington	\$32,345	\$37,745	\$40,244	\$45,020	\$14,206	
GtBarr Monterey	\$29,659	\$37,129	\$33,500	\$42,044	\$15,120	
GtBarr Mount Washington	\$42,188	\$60,226	\$43,750	\$71,167	\$23,794	
GtBarr New Marlborough	\$30,577	\$42,735	\$32,562	\$47,068	\$15,498	
GtBarr Otis	\$30,817	\$35,877	\$33,750	\$38,054	\$13,398	
GtBarr Sandisfield	\$32,417	\$39,284	\$37,188	\$41,604	\$13,745	
GtBarr Sheffield	\$29,243	\$44,134	\$34,492	\$50,383	\$17,535	
GtBarr Tyringham	\$48,750	\$58,459	\$47,292	\$59,613	\$21,926	
GtBarr West Stockbridge	\$32,132	\$41,394	\$37,437	\$46,399	\$16,248	
Becket	\$31,435	\$37,076	\$32,989	\$39,217	\$12,942	
Peru	\$34,688	\$36,526	\$39,231	\$39,898	\$12,478	
Washington	\$40,250	\$47,239	\$44,861	\$51,414	\$15,915	
Windsor	\$44,474	\$47,576	\$48,828	\$51,266	\$16,909	
Berkshire County	\$30,470	\$37,453	\$38,128	\$44,702	\$14,857	
MA	\$36,952	\$45,472	\$44,367	\$53,017	\$17,224	
United States	\$30,056	\$38,453	\$35,225	\$43,803	\$14,420	

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1990

iv. Poverty

Recently released U.S. Census figures for poverty (1997 based on 1998 Current Population Survey) estimate that 13.3% of all people of all ages nationally live in poverty. In Massachusetts that figure is estimated to be 10.7% statewide, and Berkshire County the rate is 11.3% (11th in the state).

TABLE 13

County estimates for People of All Ages in Poverty for Massachusetts, 1997.		
	Number	Percent
State and County	Estimate	Estimate
Massachusetts	649,293	10.7
Barnstable	18,547	8.9
Berkshire	14,783	11.3
Bristol	61,556	11.9

Dukes	931	6.7
Essex	74,648	10.6
Franklin	7,461	10.5
Hampden	72,537	16.6
Hampshire	12,798	9.4
Middlesex	103,324	7.3
Nantucket	340	4.2
Norfolk	32,148	5.0
Plymouth	40,461	8.6
Suffolk	129,133	20.7
Worcester	80,628	11.1

TABLE 14

County estimates for People Under Age 18 in Poverty for Massachusetts, 1997.

	Number	Percent
State and County	Estimate	Estimate
Massachusetts	250,244	17.0
Barnstable	6,912	15.5
Berkshire	5,577	18.2
Bristol	25,043	18.8
Dukes	319	10.1
Essex	29,994	17.0
Franklin	2,922	16.5
Hampden	31,647	26.9
Hampshire	3,500	11.3
Middlesex	33,979	10.9
Nantucket	106	6.0
Norfolk	9,828	7.0
Plymouth	16,935	13.2
Suffolk	51,621	35.4
Worcester	31,862	16.8

Source: U.S Census Bureau, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates Program, November 2000

- Estimates for people under age 18 in poverty, in both Massachusetts and Berkshire County, are demonstrably higher: Massachusetts with 17% of that population cohort (250,244) and Berkshire County even higher at 18.2%, or 5,577 under 18 living in poverty, ranking the County 11th of 14 in the Commonwealth.

The “Lodestar Project,” conducted by United Way analyzed data from the 1990 Census and isolated a number of important, but not unusual, characteristics of the poor in the Berkshires:

- While the vast majority of poor families are white (94%), the incidence of poverty is higher for black families – 26% of all black families are below the poverty line.
- Two-thirds of poor families have a female head of-household (64%).
- One-third of poor families have a head of household without a high school diploma.
- Children under 18 years of age continue to be the single largest group of the poor – in the Berkshire region, as well as the state and nation. Whatever the measure, it is clear that recent estimates indicate that both the so-called “rural poor” in Hampden, Hampshire, and Berkshire Counties (and “urban poor” in Suffolk and Bristol Counties) – especially children – are cause for concern.

C. Economy and Industry

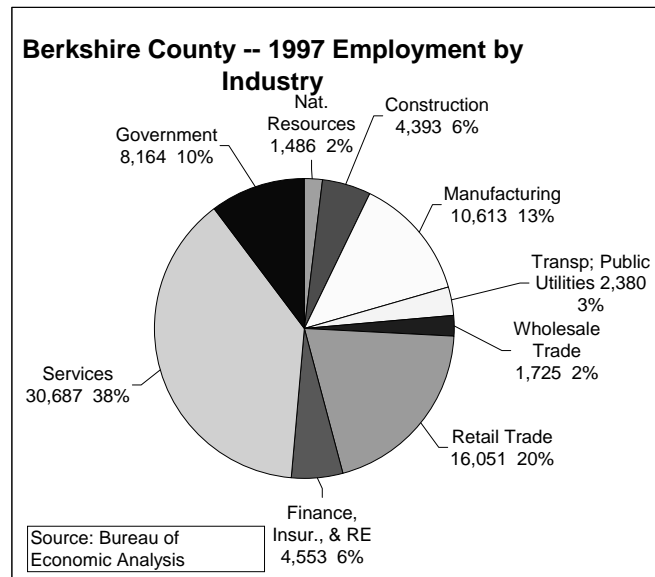
- **Table 15** provides a summary of establishments, employment, and receipts of major industries in the region, according to the 1997 Economic Census, as well as the average pay per employee by major industry sector. Jobs in manufacturing and business/professional services pay notably higher wages than jobs in services and retail trade expected to compromise a substantial share of total employment in this region.

TABLE 15

1997 Economic Census						
Summary: Major Industries						
	Establish. Total	Receipts (\$1,000)	Annual Payroll (\$1,000)	Number of employees for pay period of March 12	Avg. Pay** Per Employee	
Berkshire County						
Manufacturing	207	1,422,961	344,731	9,176	37,569	
Wholesale Trade	136	D	D	^1000-2499		
Retail Trade	832	1,280,734	137,730	8,513	16,179	
Accommod. & Food Serv.	485	247,325	75,553	7,060	10,702	
Real Estate, Rental & Leas	122	43,926	7,547	410	18,407	
Services:						
Profess., Sci., & Techn.	247	129,333	50,560	1,420	35,606	
Admin. & Support	126	79,865	28,952	1,537	18,837	
Educational Services	18	7,597	3,070	109	28,165	
Healthcare & Soc.Asst.	268	254,571	113,652	4,334	26,223	
Arts, Entertainmt., Rec.	52	22,428	7,629	842	9,061	
Other Services*	231	62,692	18,736	1,074	17,445	
D: Withheld to avoid disclosing data of individual businesses.						
^ Range given to avoid disclosure						
*Except Public Administration						
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1997 Economic Census; **Core data only from U.S. Census						

- The economy of the Berkshire region has undergone significant change over the past thirty years. The relatively small size of the regional economy and its legendary dependence on a handful of manufacturing businesses represented a serious blindspot for the Berkshire region as the 1980s unfolded.
- While manufacturing claimed 30% of Massachusetts' total employment by 1980, in the Berkshires, the proportion was 40%. The early 1990s saw the effects of a nationwide recession and defense "downsizing," shifts in employment taking place among industry sectors, and technology driving productivity, significantly affecting the Berkshire economy. The loss of roughly half of the region's employment in high-paying manufacturing jobs sent a chill throughout the region with a domino effect on the overall business/industry atmosphere. The Berkshires, with its small and self-contained economy and with comparatively few of the information technology and biotechnology firms which generate a substantial share of the growth seen elsewhere in the state, had insufficient diversity to offset manufacturing losses.

Figure 4



- Figures show that from 1970 to 1997 the manufacturing workforce was cut in half (from 22,329 to 10,613) due in large part to the shutdown of Sprague Electric and Arnold Printworks in the northern part of the region, and downsizing and mergers involving General Electric (Transformer and Defense Systems Divisions) from the mid 1980's into the late 1990's.
- Despite the sizable loss of manufacturing jobs from 1970 to 1997, the total number of full and part-time jobs in the Berkshires grew twenty-one percent. That trend is expected to continue with the number of jobs growing to 99,395 by the year 2025 – a twenty-four percent increase. Within what sector that job growth occurs will have a lasting effect on the region -- from a land use, income, and Gross Regional Product standpoint.
- According to current figures (1997), manufacturing employment now ranks third in its share of total employment. Services with 38.5%, and Retail Trade (combined with Wholesale Trade) at 22% comprise the largest categories of employment in the Berkshires. Employment in all sectors except manufacturing has shown an increase over the 1970 figures, a trend that will not uniformly continue to 2025. Employment in Retail and Wholesale Trade is expected to drop from 22% of total employment to 18%, and the share of total employment held by a number of other sectors is expected to change as well.
- Job growth within the other major sectors of the regional economy is slated to continue and remain roughly the same proportionally out to 2025 with changes in the Retail Trade sector (1,200 fewer jobs in businesses offset by an expansion in restaurant jobs) over 1997. Changes from manufacturing to increasing numbers of service jobs, and changes within the sectors can be expected to affect overall wages and income in this region.
- Services are expected to continue to climb in employment to almost 50% of total employment by 2025. Healthcare makes up the majority of services, led by Berkshire Health Systems, the largest employer in the region with close to 2,000 employees. Employment in healthcare will continue to be strong, as a result of the region's aging

population and continued interest in this region for retirement. The growth trend in Services (doubling its employment between 1970 and 1997) is forecast to continue – but at a lesser pace – a 57% increase over its current level by the year 2025.

- The Service sector encompasses a range of activities, which account for a boost to the regional economy through employment opportunities. **Table 16** shows the breakdown of service employment from 1970 and 1997 and estimated out to 2025, as its percentage of total Berkshire employment, reflecting the trend nationwide, substantially expands.

TABLE 16

Employment in Services:1970, 1997, & 2025			
Percent of Total Berkshire Employment			
	<u>1970</u>	<u>1997</u>	<u>2025</u>
Healthcare	8.3	13.2	18.1
Social Services	2.5	5.9	7.2
Hotel & Recreat.	3.3	5.8	7
Educational	3.6	5.7	6.8
Profess & Mgr.	1.7	2.9	3.8
Business	1.5	2.7	3.3
Personal	1.8	2.3	2.3
Total:	22.7	38.5	48.5

Source: BRPC-REMI-1999

- By 2025 half of all service jobs (and fully one quarter of all jobs) are expected to be in healthcare or social services occupations.
- The combination of Manufacturing and Services has long dominated employment in the region, and is expected to continue to provide more than half the jobs available. Manufacturing’s loss of job share has been, and will continue to be, taken up by the expansion of Services probably with negative wage effects -- similar to the national trend.
- Manufacturing, nevertheless, will continue as the most significant component of the regional economy. With less than 10% of all employment in 2025, the value of manufacturing sector output will account for almost 30% of total GRP. In contrast, in 2025 approximately half of total employment will be workers in a variety of Service jobs, yet, the value of their productivity will remain at about a quarter of the region’s total GRP.
- Economic forecasts provided by the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission using the REMI model indicate that while the service sector will continue its upward trajectory in numbers of employees, high technology, high productivity manufacturing will continue to be the structural and economic base of the region’s economy. Berkshire County’s future base is very much tied to its strong past manufacturing base industries – though with substantially fewer employees, but unprecedented output value as measured by Gross Regional Product. **Table 17** shows the changing relationship over time between employment numbers (jobs) and value in GRP terms:

TABLE 17
**Manufacturing & Services: Jobs,
Productivity & Value (GRP)**
(In 92\$)

	1970			1997			2025		
	Jobs	% of Total: Employment GRP		Jobs	% of Total: Employment GRP		Jobs	% of Total: Employment GRP	
Manufacturing	22,329	33.8	34.0	10,613	13.3	24.7	9,154	9.2	28.2
Services	15,080	22.8	15.8	30,687	38.3	25.8	48,081	48.4	26.8
Retail Trade	10,492	15.9	10.4	16,051	20.1	11.2	16,635	16.7	10.4
Government	7,448	11.3	12.5	8,164	10.2	9.8	8,814	8.9	7.2
Construction	2,981	4.5	6.2	4,393	5.5	4.9	5,112	5.1	4.5
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate	2,901	4.4	12.5	4,553	5.7	14.2	5,171	5.2	12.9
Transportation, Public Utilities	2,326	3.5	5.4	2,380	3.0	4.7	3,119	3.1	4.8
Wholesale Trade	1,461	2.2	2.3	1,725	2.2	3.7	1,622	1.6	4.3
Natural Resources*	1,104	1.7	0.8	1,486	1.9	0.9	1,687	1.7	0.9
Total	66,122	100	100	80,052	100	100	99,395	100	100

*Natural Resources includes Farming, Mining, and Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing Services

Source: BRPC,
REMI, 1999

- According to an analysis of employment in the Berkshires by the Berkshire County Regional Employment Board (“Blueprint”) 9 industry segments (**Table 18**) are defined as “critical” to the region since these 9 provide the preponderance of employment opportunities, or about 78% of the jobs – in the region.

TABLE 18

Health & Human Services	12.6%
Travel & Tourism	14.0%
Retail	13.6%
Education	11.2%
Paper/Plastics	8.7%
Construction	5.3%
Finance, Insurance & Real Estate	4.1%
Business Services	2.8%
Applied Technology	2.5%
Total:	78.3%

- Major employment growth has pushed business services into a more prominent role since the 1998 Regional Employment Board Blueprint, and along with 5 other industry sectors with growth rates in employment in excess of 10%, represent the region’s “emerging” industries:

TABLE 19

Industry:	Growth Rate:	% of Workforce Employed:
Business Services	25	2.8%
Misc. Retailing	18	4.5%
Spec. Trades Contractors	18	2.6%
Gen'l. Building Contractors	18	1.0%
Amusement & Recreation	15	2.3%
Personal Services	12	1.2%

- Concerns have been raised both by the Blueprint’s recognition and the Massachusetts Department of Employment and Training’s publication on regional workforce trends that much of the job growth taking place in the Berkshires is in low wage segments of the service and retail sectors.
- Current low rates of unemployment in the region (and the state) have contributed to constraints on growth and expansion due to the difficulty experienced by regional businesses in recruiting qualified employees with job skills and technical abilities matching employer need. While unemployment rates overall in the County have dropped since the early 1990’s recession and continue to be lower than the national rate, they remain higher than the state average.

i. Small Business – Non-Employer Statistics

The role of small or “micro” businesses is of interest in the region for its importance in economic development – especially because of changes in where and how people work. Advances in telecommunications technology and the growth of personal computers in the home have meant many more people can – and do – work at home as self-employed contractors and consultants. Corporate downsizing and “outsourcing” of business activities have contributed to this trend.

At the national level self-employment has been increasing at a faster rate than wage and salary employment. Data from the Bureau of Economic Analysis for 1998 for the Berkshire region indicate that proprietorships (both farm and non-farm) represent about 18% of total regional employment, and have increased in number about 2.8% from 1994. Massachusetts, in contrast, has fewer sole-proprietorships proportionally (14.9% of total employment) but data indicate a faster growth rate in their numbers – about 7.8%.

Few statistics exist on these businesses because most federal programs gather data on wage and salary employment, but increasing attention to entrepreneurship and its role in spurring business development is changing that.

Many small, or single person businesses are part-time; others are or become full-time businesses. Both play a role in a family or household’s total income, and have the potential to grow into substantial business activity in terms of receipts and employment. Since small businesses or sole proprietorships are particularly vulnerable to business conditions and costs, their volatility can also make their existence difficult to track over time. Nevertheless small businesses or self-employment can add job opportunities, supplement retirement or other household/family income, and occasionally turn into a dynamic source of employment for a region. Identifying and responding to the needs of micro and small business enterprises – a

growing segment of overall business activity can have valuable economic development implications.

The Berkshires have seen significant “homegrown” small business success stories: the multiple businesses begun by the Fitzpatrick family (such as Country Curtains, The Red Lion Inn and Housatonic Curtains), as well as CompuWorks and K-B Toys.

Data from the 1997 Economic Census (Non-employer Statistics) indicate that about 8,797 non-employer establishments exist in the Berkshires, adding approximately \$293.5 million to the region’s economy. Of this number employment is spread among the industry sectors as indicated in **Table 20**.

TABLE 20

1997 Non-employer Statistics	
All Industries:	Establishments
Berkshire County Total:	8,797
<u>Industry Sector with Highest Number of Establishments:</u>	
Profess.,Scien.,&Tech. Services	1,530
Construction	1,285
Other Services	1,131
Retail Trade	889
Health Care & Social Assistance	845
All Industries:	Receipts (\$1,000)
Berkshire County Total:	\$293,475
<u>Industry Sector with Highest Receipts:</u>	
Construction	\$61,873
Retail Trade	\$42,803
Profess.,Scien.,&Tech. Services	\$39,922
Real Estate, Rental & Leasing	\$38,720
Other Services	\$24,659
Health Care & Social Assistance	\$20,874

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

ii. Economy and Industry: Past and Present

A study done by the Arthur D. Little Company in 1990 in response to expected layoffs at GE in Regulator and Inductive Products (RIP) and Ordnance highlighted the changing scenario in the economic picture in the region at that time, and offers a confirmation of the direction that the CEDS Committee has chosen through its goals and objectives. The study recommended that the region target its resources on the plastic products and printing and publishing industries to stem the loss of employment in manufacturing and support sectors that bring income into the region. Selected base –and notably high-wage and high value-added – industries were recommended as the focus of regional strategies: plastic products, mold building, specialty papers and products, paper industry machinery, data processing.

Another recommendation was to focus on “building from within” since existing companies and local start-ups accounted then (and still do) for the bulk of regional growth. This “homegrown” phenomenon continues to be a critical factor in the Berkshire regional economy and underpins the necessity to support the expansion of existing companies and industries and the formation and growth of new ones to lay the foundation for future economic growth.

Those efforts have paid off and are believed to be responsible for a remarkable growth in export sales by industries in the Pittsfield metropolitan area. The International Trade Administration ranked this region 22nd in percent growth of export sales from 1993-1999, a 184.6% increase which outranked all other metro regions in the Northeast. With total sales of \$219.6 million in 1999 the region is still dwarfed by the volume of much larger metro areas and by dollar value ranks 187th of 253 areas. Nevertheless, this level of export sales growth is remarkable for a region of this size and represents a substantial boost to the regional economy. It is also a measure of the Berkshire region’s ability to take charge of its economic future with a strategy that will contribute to a high standard of living for residents by supporting the performance of “world class” and internationally-competitive companies.

The Plastics Network now numbers about 40 companies with an estimated workforce between 2,200 and 2,500. With its ongoing commitment to training, the Network supports an industry cluster that is believed to be the most productive it’s ever been with booming employment and a growth potential forecast at 10–20% a year for the next ten years. According to the Network, the plastics industry will be a major employer in the region in 10 years. The high level of productivity experienced by the industry is due to the quality of worker – high paid, high skill – and the use of robotics and technology which increases worker output three to four times over. The Network played a key role in linking together the people, businesses, and the resources behind this impressive growth – in expanding high-end employment opportunities, in output, and in advancing workforce skills.

D. Issues Influencing Economic Competitiveness

Since the late 1970’s Berkshire County has served as a “canary in the mine” signaling the onset of economic hard times and recession as unemployment and layoffs occur in this region earlier, unemployment spikes higher – and sooner – than the state, and the recovery doesn’t quite equal that of the rest of the state. Finding additional or innovative ways to buttress the regional economy (especially the North Adams LMA, MSA, and the cities) against the effects of business cycles and structural change is of critical importance in maintaining a robust economy.

There are a variety of other factors within the region that also affect the economic development and those who live and work here. Among those factors are workforce development, housing, downtowns, land and building availability, infrastructure, regulatory environment & taxation, financial resources, the environment, energy, health & social services and government.

i. Workforce Development

Workforce development and educational and skill attainment are a major source of concern in the Berkshires – a concern raised in virtually all studies focusing on the region’s economy.

The future of the regional economy is dependent on stimulating the growth of an able workforce to meet the needs of existing and new companies:

- Recruiting or training enough skilled workers for available jobs in all sectors, but particularly in services, high tech manufacturing, and emerging information and other technology-related businesses;
- Creating enough “good jobs” so employees laid off in one industry can find comparable employment opportunities within the Berkshire region;
- Maintaining a sufficiently diverse economy to attract and recruit additional workers and their families to the region and satisfy the employment needs of “dual earners” (“trailing spouse”);
- Improving the skills and education of the region’s population with the goal of raising income and matching skill levels with industry and business needs;
- Developing a workforce environment that supports the “trainable” employee.

Regional forecasts suggest continuing pressure to meet the need for workers in the service sector for hands-on, lower level healthcare and social service workers to serve the expanding older cohorts (65+ and 85+) which reside in this region. Competition for workers currently exists as a result of the population decline experienced by this region and the lower proportion and numbers of younger workers and families here. The lower wage scale of many of these service sector jobs suggests a continuing problem with raising income levels in this region.

Pressure to fill jobs associated with the tourism “industry” with its long history and many venues in this region also adds to the ongoing dilemma in the region of supplying enough workers for all industry sectors and meeting the need to provide a highly skilled/educated workforce for the increasingly technology-driven workplace of manufacturing and high tech or information tech businesses, while filling exploding numbers of positions requiring communication and service skills.

As a long-term goal, increasing efforts and targeting of resources in workforce development is of critical importance to maintaining a vital base economy with wages and salaries that can support a high standard of living for the regional population. The decline in the workforce in this region and the growing need for additional (any) workers, and especially higher numbers of educated or skilled workers, are serving as serious constraints on growth in the economy of the region. While historically attracting jobs to a region was considered a positive sign of opportunity, the emphasis now is on adding high-wage, high-skill employment – fewer, but “better” jobs.

Regional businesses have indicated a need to add substantial numbers to their workforce including Interprint, Inc., Data Flute CNC; General Dynamics Defense Systems; Hi-Tech Mold and Tool; Marland Mold, member companies of the Berkshire Plastics Network; and Crane and Company.

A number of strategies have been used to meet workforce needs including temporary employment exchanges for foreign student interns in the hospitality industry. Berkshire Health Systems recently recruited 50 nurses from the Philippines to ease staffing shortages in its long-term care facilities. General Dynamics has resorted to offering \$1000 bonuses to employees who make successful job referrals.

By engaging in a long term effort to raise the education and skill levels of Berkshire residents, to address through cooperative ventures industry needs for skilled workers, to raise the workforce participation rates for minority, low-income, or immigrant workers the Berkshire region will begin to address a pressing regional workforce development need.

ii. Housing

- The rate of new housing production in the Berkshire region is lower than the state’s average of new housing since 1940.
- The number of homes built prior to 1940 in Berkshire County is considerably higher than the rest of the state, with 46% of the existing housing stock built prior to 1940, versus the rest of the state at 39%.

TABLE 21

	Number of Homes Built, Per Decade				Total: 64,324
	Pre-1940 29,449 (46%)	1940-1959 12,404 (19%)	1960-1979 15,104 (24%)	1980-1990 7,367 (11%)	
North Adams LMA	6,354	1,880	2,979	886	12,099
Pittsfield MSA	18,275	8,441	8,665	4,021	39,402
MSA+	481	294	1,117	612	2,504
Great Barrington LMA	4,439	1,789	2,343	1,848	10,419
State	39%	20%	27%	14%	100%

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990.

- This fact, coupled with cost and time associated with adequately renovating the housing stock, is a challenge to homeowners and businesses. The age of the housing stock does not fulfill the need for low maintenance modern housing attractive to many workers.
- Housing affordability, especially for low and moderate income families, has become another important issue, with substantial percentages of both homeowners and renters paying over 30% of their income for housing (**Table 22**). The slow rate of building in Berkshire County in recent years, compared to state and national rates, add to the difficulties/constraints of an already limited and older supply of housing options available. Communities in the region also face increasing pressure to provide “temporary” or seasonal housing options to the many visitors and summer/seasonal workers in this limited market – with high seasonal demand and its accompanying effects on housing prices and availability.

TABLE 22

Housing Affordability & Income Levels, 1990				
		Paying >30% of Income:		% of HH's
	Community	% Owners	% Renters	Low/Mod Income
North Adams LMA	North Adams	16.8	40.6	54.1
North Adams LMA	Williamstown	20.2	40.1	38.9
North Adams LMA	Florida	17.7	44.4	38.1
North Adams LMA	Clarksburg	16.0	43.4	37.3
North Adams LMA	Savoy	18.9	44.4	34.8
North Adams LMA	Hancock	14.5	57.7	34.7
North Adams LMA	New Ashford	10.7	35.7	23.6

Pittsfield MSA	Adams	15.3	38.8	50.1
Pittsfield MSA	Pittsfield	17.3	41.1	37.9
Pittsfield MSA	Lee	21.1	29.7	32.2
Pittsfield MSA	Stockbridge	23.6	33.7	31.5
Pittsfield MSA	Lenox	25.4	46.5	31.0
Pittsfield MSA	Dalton	20.4	26.3	29.1
Pittsfield MSA	Hinsdale	26.2	29.1	29.1
Pittsfield MSA	Cheshire	22.4	23.2	27.4
Pittsfield MSA	Lanesborough	21.2	39.9	24.1
Pittsfield MSA	Richmond	21.4	39.6	14.3
Great Barrington LMA	Monterey	23.5	50.8	43.9
Great Barrington LMA	Great Barrington	25.4	46.5	41.4
Great Barrington LMA	West Stockbridge	32.3	39.8	40.3
Great Barrington LMA	New Marlborough	30.8	29.9	39.8
Great Barrington LMA	Sheffield	32.8	44.4	38.7
Great Barrington LMA	Egremont	23.1	39.3	38.3
Great Barrington LMA	Otis	17.9	52.5	38.3
Great Barrington LMA	Sandisfield	25.5	35.7	34.5
Great Barrington LMA	Tyringham	21.7	0.0	30.1
Great Barrington LMA	Alford	28.4	25.0	29.8
Great Barrington LMA	Mount Washington	21.9	0.0	17.0

	Becket	30.5	45.8	35.3
	Peru	29.7	55.0	32.7
	Washington	19.5	45.5	24.4
	Windsor	21.2	0.0	22.5
	County	20.0	40.0	n/a
	State	23.6	40.5	n/a
	United States	19.5	41.2	n/a

iii. Downtowns

Market shifts and consumer preferences have left regional downtown centers without the retail and small business activity which once defined them. Vacant (or under-used) buildings which line the main thoroughfares of North Adams, Adams, and Pittsfield, in particular, offer redevelopment potential with a focus on maintaining the viability of downtown places as centers of employment, cultural and entertainment opportunities. Smaller communities in the region also have experienced the abandonment of downtown sites and buildings. Feasibility studies focusing on suitable options for reuse and market analysis are critical needs to provide information for decision-making and planning for redevelopment.

Renewed interest in reuse of historic mill buildings which line the waterways in the Berkshires led to a comprehensive inventory of mills along the Hoosic River in 5 Northern Berkshire communities. Thirty mills were inventoried and found to be in fair to good condition with owners

committed to continuing their use and networking on common problems. Reuse potential was affirmed by the discovery that 28 of the 30 were partially or fully occupied.

iv. Land and Building Availability: Commercial and Industrial Sites

Meeting the needs of “home-grown” businesses with long roots in the region for spaces of varying sizes to accommodate expansion, or entrepreneurial “start-ups” for incubator support and space has become more crucial as regions throughout the nation and state offer inducements for relocation outside the area. The necessity of “ready” sites with zoning and approvals in place, infrastructure already built, and good transportation access is critical to successfully compete in keeping (and recruiting) business and industry. These issues have been a major concern expressed by the Council for Growth and state economic leaders in formulating statewide strategies in “Choosing to Compete” (1993) as well as a number of other studies.

Numerous regional studies and assessments have focused on the lack of and/or inadequacy of industrial sites available to businesses for relocation into the region and existing firms needing sites and buildings suitable for expansion. Despite the loss of manufacturing which has taken place over the past thirty years, there is not a surplus of well-serviced and “shovel-ready” industrial sites or empty buildings available.

Reuse or redevelopment has been hampered by the lack of investment in maintaining or upgrading existing buildings for new purposes and a legacy of site and building contamination – most notably the General Electric site in Pittsfield but also involving over 100 potential brownfield sites regionally and innumerable commercial buildings. The recent settlement of the several decade standoff between the Environmental Protection Agency and General Electric over PCB contamination of its Pittsfield industrial site and the expectation of remediation and clean-up has brought renewed vigor to regional interest and efforts to market these valuable commercial/industrial parcels (“brownfields”). The GE site is considered a linchpin in the success of efforts to revitalize manufacturing in the region by enabling a key location once more to serve as a hub of industrial activity central in the region. The Pittsfield Economic Development Agency (PEDA) has been designated to oversee reclamation and redevelopment of the 45 acre site and 1.5 million square feet of office and manufacturing space. The size and location of the site, which offers existing infrastructure and road and rail connections, and its ability to support heavy machinery for use in large industrial manufacturing are important factors in its potential role. In addition, GE has promised the City of Pittsfield \$12 million in direct economic aid, including \$1 million per year for 10 years to offset the loss of tax revenue. Many reports, despite covering a period spanning almost two decades, repeat the same findings:

- Industrial land is in short supply due to the region’s terrain which largely restricts “intensive land uses” to the narrow valleys where “floodplains, wetlands, and existing ...development” act as further constraints.
- Advance planning of well-serviced industrial sites (water, sewer, and good access) is a rarity in the region which tends to be reactive, providing for development as it occurs.
- New industrial zones are not identified and rezoned in advance of project development, which puts the burden of delays and the risk of an uncertain outcome on site developers and prospective businesses.

- Much of the existing industrially zoned land is either not developable or already developed, or used for other potentially conflicting purpose, such as housing or retail.
- Zoning practices further inhibit ease/readiness for development by requiring Special Permit procedures or relegating industrial zones to “out-of-the-way” areas lacking appropriate utility, road or rail, and infrastructure support or access. Few of the existing zones allow industrial uses “by right.”

Popular perceptions of the negative impacts from industrial and commercial activities also contribute to resistance to the creation of new industrial zones. The Berkshire region, with its strong environmental interests and preservation instincts, has long been a battleground over siting of large projects, whether recreational housing, commercial/retail complexes, or large industrial development projects. Finding and setting aside suitable parcels for industrial usage continues to be a challenge in the Berkshires. Reclamation and redevelopment of Brownfields, abandoned or unused mills and other former industrial buildings and sites are of regional importance and strategic interest.

The condition of the environment in the Berkshires is extremely important in preserving the region’s natural resources. Consequently the environment imposes constraints on future development in the region. This makes it more important that the approximately 133 contaminated sites in the region be assessed and prioritized for potential re-use and clean-up. The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission is pursuing a brownfield grant for a Berkshire Brownfield Reclamation Program.

The recent “Sites Strategy” noted that:

- Mid-range to large-scale (50-100+ acre) sites simply are not available for prospective development;
- Sites on the market lack development readiness – facing a variety of pre-development hurdles, including environmental concerns or Brownfields issues; inadequate or unavailable infrastructure, utilities, or access; and/or incompatible existing uses or private multiple ownership – all of which present delays and costs which may be avoidable outside the region.

Berkshire County Industrial Site Survey: Site Opportunities and Needs, January, 1983

This study was prepared by Berkshire County Regional Planning Commission as a joint project with the Berkshire County Development Commission and the Massachusetts Department of Commerce and Development.

- One of several studies attempting to “gather a list of available industrial sites” which quickly changed its focus since “little readily developable industrial land of reasonable size that was serviced with sewer and water” existed.
- Instead, this study – like so many others – would outline the need for “ready” sites and discuss zoning and other constraints on the availability of developable industrial land as a critical factor in the Berkshires’ economic future.

- According to this study, expanding the supply of industrial land would involve:
 - Sewer and water service extensions;
 - New Access Roads;
 - Zoning improvements ranging from more industrially zoned land to expanding “by-right” uses; expanding Special Permit Areas; allowing industry in vacant non-industrial buildings; restricting non-industrial use of industrial zones;
 - Changes in development practices, including more efficient use of land (p.18); building and site reuse; and environmental land use regulations implemented by boards and commissions in a substantive – not “nit-picky” – way.

vi. Infrastructure

The availability and capacity of infrastructure has long been recognized as a key determinant of economic growth. The Berkshire Region has, in general, an adequate capacity in its municipal water and sewer systems to support economic growth, although there are some identified deficiencies in a few municipalities. The region is well served by railroad service, particularly east-west, although there is a need to upgrade the tracks for a Class C railroad serving the region and northwest Connecticut. The regional highway system is the most deficient of the components of the regional infrastructure and has long been recognized as a key impediment to economic revitalization. For a region its size, the Berkshires are well served by airports and improvements are called for at the two public airports in the region. Until very recently, the region’s telecommunications infrastructure was recognized as a key impediment to regional economic revitalization. With the success of Berkshire Connect, that impediment is being resolved, resulting in a regional telecommunications network that is competitive to that found in major metropolitan centers.

Railroad Service

The Berkshires are well served by railroads, particularly east-west. CSX Railroad’s New England Division Main Line runs through the central Berkshires, through West Stockbridge, Richmond, Pittsfield, Dalton, Hinsdale, Washington and Becket. The Guilford Railroad’s Fitchburg Route Main Line runs through Williamstown, North Adams and Florida, with a spur serving Adams. The Housatonic Railroad is a Class C railroad running from northwest Connecticut through Sheffield, Great Barrington, Stockbridge, Lee, Lenox to Pittsfield where it joins the CSX Main Line. Amtrak uses the CSX line for passenger rail service with a stop in Pittsfield.

The significant physical rail improvement needed is to upgrade the tracks of the Housatonic Railroad in order to improve safety and speed on that line. Such an upgrade would also allow the use of the track for a regional scenic train, the Berkshire Scenic Railway. Passenger rail service is extremely limited with only east-west service once a day serving Boston (evening) and Albany (where service to Chicago or north-south is available). Enhanced service to Boston would be desirable but is not immediately likely.

Highways

Long recognized as an inhibitor to regional economic growth and development, the regional highway system is the principal infrastructure weakness. The Mass Turnpike (I-90) runs east-west through the region, with a full interchange in Lee and a half interchange in West Stockbridge, providing good highway access to Lee in particular. Other east-west routes are winding two lane roads that wend their way across the mountains to the east and west and go

through the middle of small towns, making access to either I-91 to the east or I-87 to the west time-consuming and difficult.

Due to the mountains to the east and west, the principal corridor for transportation, as well as development, in the region runs north south and consists of Routes 7, 20 and 8. This network generally consists of 2 lane highways, with some 4 lane sections. Very little of it consists of limited access highways that are important for economic development purposes. It runs through the downtowns of multiple towns and cities with the traffic negatively impacting efforts to revitalize those downtowns and with traffic flow considerably slowed by congested conditions and the large number of traffic lights. Taken together, these conditions present serious transportation limitations in terms of regional economic competitiveness.

The North-Central Berkshire Access Study has just been released in draft form for public comment. This Major Investment Study's purpose is to arrive at recommendations regarding how best to improve access in the northern and central parts of the region for inclusion in the Berkshire's long-range transportation plan. Over the coming weeks, it is hoped that the Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization will reach consensus on whether new roadway facilities are needed or improvements to existing roadways will suffice. Data provided by the study indicates the need for a new interchange in west Lee/east Stockbridge to Route 7 from the MassPike, a western bypass of Pittsfield (last studied in 1988) and corridor protection and upgrades along Route 8 from Pittsfield to northern Berkshire County. There are a number of other improvements called for in the draft of the study that are warranted but do not deal with the most significant regional access issues.

Airports

The Berkshires are within 1 hour of Albany International Airport and 1 ½ hour of Bradley International Airport in Hartford/Springfield, both of which provide competitive air passenger service. Within the region, Pittsfield and North Adams have municipally owned airports without scheduled passenger service. Pittsfield Airport has adequate facilities for corporate jets except in marginal weather conditions. Great Barrington Airport is a private field serving small passenger planes. North Adams Airport has an up-to-date master plan that provides for safety improvements but no expansion of the airport. The Pittsfield Airport Master Plan has just been submitted to the Federal Aviation Administration for approval. That master plan calls for extension of the runway and installation of instrument landing systems to allow use of the airport in marginal weather conditions by the classes of planes that currently can use the airport only in clear weather. These improvements in Pittsfield are considered by several major employers to be necessary to serve their needs for corporate air service.

Telecommunications

As the Berkshires have attracted or developed information technology businesses and as traditional manufacturing has become much more technology dependent, the need for much improved telecommunications service at a much more competitive cost became a major regional issue. In 1997 Berkshire Connect was created as a collaboration of the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission and the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative. The goal of Berkshire Connect was to provide a telecommunications infrastructure that was competitive in quality and cost with that found in major metropolitan areas. In February 2000, an agreement was signed between Berkshire Connect, Global Crossings, Ltd., and Equal Access Networks to build a competitive high speed telecommunications infrastructure serving the region and provide competitively priced service throughout the region. As of February 2001, a significant part of

that infrastructure has been installed with two years remaining in the agreement. Completion of that infrastructure will meet the original goal for Berkshire Connect.

Water Supplies

In the Berkshires, most densely settled areas are served by public water supply systems. Half, or sixteen, of the communities in the region supply municipal water to all or a portion of their community. There are currently five private water companies supplying small neighborhoods or portions of towns. Public water allows a safe and reliable water supply source and encourages growth in those parts of town served by the system.

The City of Pittsfield is the largest water supplier in the region. Drawing from four reservoirs in the surrounding communities, Pittsfield experiences a demand of approximately 9.5 million gallons per day. Water is pumped from the reservoirs, undergoes treatment, and is delivered through an extensive network of pipes to most homes and businesses in Pittsfield.

Water supply service and water main extension policies can affect the location, type and density of new development. Communities with water service, and the capacity to expand service, with clearly defined extension policies can attract certain types of development. In Pittsfield, for instance, the developer assumes water main extension costs and the lines become part of the municipal water distribution system. Residents who later choose to connect to the system only need to pay a hookup fee.

The following communities have municipal water supplies, from one or more sources: Adams, Cheshire, Clarksburg, Dalton, Egremont, Great Barrington, Hinsdale, Lanesborough, Lee, Lenox, North Adams, Pittsfield, Sheffield, Stockbridge, West Stockbridge and Williamstown. For the remaining communities without municipal water supplies or for those that are not hooked up to their community's supply, water is obtained from individual wells or springs. Generally, the water supplies are adequate to support regional economic growth. The Lenox reservoirs are currently being studied due to a problem with a dam. That will require some investment to adequately protect that water supply in the immediate future.

Wastewater Treatment

There are eight publicly owned wastewater treatment plants in the Berkshire region. Combined, these plants serve approximately 70% of housing units within the region. Most of the municipal systems in the Berkshires are operating under capacity, with average monthly flows ranging from 2% to 92% of design capacity. The Hoosac Water Quality District (HWQD) located in Williamstown but serving Clarksburg, North Adams and Williamstown is at 100% design capacity and Lee is currently exceeding its permitted discharges.

Many communities with public sewers rely on aging sewer lines. Due to the high cost of maintaining and upgrading infrastructure, lines are generally upgraded only on an as needed basis, often after a break or leak. Inflow / Infiltration into sewer lines are significant issues in Williamstown, North Adams and Lee and contribute to the wastewater treatment plant issues in these communities, which inhibit growth or development opportunities.

Solid Waste Disposal

Solid waste disposal in Berkshire County is handled in two main ways, the most popular of which is the use of transfer stations. Twenty-nine of the county's communities use transfer stations for waste disposal. At a transfer station, materials that can be recycled (aluminum cans,

glass, paper) are separated out, and the remaining waste is then hauled away to large commercial landfills outside of the County or to ECO/Pittsfield, a privately operated regional resource recovery facility (formerly known as Energy Answers or Vicon).

Approximately 50% of the waste stream generated by the entire region is handled by ECO/Pittsfield through municipal contracts (City of Pittsfield) or contracts with private haulers serving individual communities in the region, or member towns of the Northern or Southern Berkshire Solid Waste Management Districts. At the ECO/Pittsfield facility solid wastes are burned and the steam produced is used by the nearby Crane Paper Company, reducing its energy-related operating costs.

vi. Regulatory Environment and Taxation

In Massachusetts municipal governments (including boards and their agents) are responsible for overseeing compliance with a host of regulatory and/or advisory functions: zoning and planning, wetlands protection, and health provisions, for example. While Massachusetts General Laws frequently set out specific schedules or timetables which must be adhered to by local regulatory or advisory boards, each community through its "local control" can set and interpret its own standards (within guidelines).

Economic development activity in the region then is subject to 32 differing sets of "rules" which control where, how much, and what kind of activities are allowed, and can prescribe hours of operation, site planning and parking requirements, among other conditions or requirements. The lack of clarity and consistency in regulations and zone definitions among communities is a significant barrier to regional economic development and siting of projects.

Each community in the Berkshires also sets its own tax rate. Only 5 of the 32 communities in the region set different rates for residential and commercial property: Adams, Florida, New Ashford, North Adams, and Pittsfield. Generally, rates for commercial property in the Berkshires have been considerably lower than those in more urban portions of the state.

Average FY 2000 tax bills on a single family home in three communities (Florida, Hancock, New Ashford) were under \$700, with Florida's bill the lowest at \$594. The majority of communities sent out tax bills averaging in the \$1000-\$2000 range, with 10 communities' average tax bills above \$2000. Communities with the highest average tax bills in FY2000 were Williamstown (\$2,860), West Stockbridge (\$2,740), Richmond (\$2,739), and Great Barrington (\$2,615). Proposition 2 ½ has restrained annual property tax growth to a 2 ½ % increase.

vii. Financial Resources: Access to Capital and Credit

In the 1993 statewide strategy for job creation and economic growth, Choosing to Compete access to credit and capital was cited as a significant barrier to economic development in the Berkshire region. While a number of local financial institutions (banks, credit unions) served the banking needs of the general public, the lack of major, large scale commercial lending and the "marginal presence" of the Massachusetts quasi-public corporations (Mass Development Finance Agency, etc.) were felt to act as a constraint on regional economic activity.

Since that report, commercial lenders have merged, broadened their commercial lending portfolios and partners, and assumed a greater presence in the region. The Downtown Pittsfield Loan Pool formed by a consortium of local banks, for example, has played an instrumental role

in providing redevelopment monies for several key downtown initiatives including the redevelopment of the Central Block.

In addition, the formation of a venture capital firm, Berkshires Capital Investors and its spin-off/affiliate, "Village Ventures Services, Inc.," has filled a regional need for venture capital available for start-up and entrepreneurial entities, as well as second stage funding for expansion of small, niche technology and other businesses in need of further levels of capitalization. Regional firms benefiting from these financial opportunities include eZiba.com, Streetmail.com, Inc., Berkshire Wireless, Inc., and PRG. The success of these and other new startups in the Berkshires, employing about 300 workers, has been attributed to available venture capital support. The presence and support of this cluster of "new economy" businesses has led to a growing regional reputation ("Silicon Village") and media attention to the Northern Berkshires as a desirable location for e-business.

From the point of view of Village Ventures the lack of competition from large established venture capital companies in small markets similar in size and location to the Berkshires has, in itself, provided an economic opportunity: starting up similar franchise venture funds in small markets.

Nevertheless, there is some consensus that a regionally-based revolving loan fund could bridge financial gaps which still exist for area businesses and enterprises. Supporting projects with strong local/regional support that might find it difficult to otherwise acquire bank financing in downtown locations is seen as very important.

viii. Environment: Preserving Regional Qualities and Character

While there is great interest in fostering a regional environment that welcomes new jobs and economic diversity, there is an equally strong interest in protecting the environment, and saving the landscape from degradation often associated with development, especially commercial and industrial. High value is placed on the open spaces, the rural feel and cultural attractions, the hillsides and riverways, and the historic and archeological integrity of regional places. Nowhere is this more clearly stated than by responses to the recently completed North-Central Berkshire Community Values Survey where respondents rated the following in the top 15 of 34 "transportation-related issues":

- Preserving water resources (1);
- Preserving cultural attractions (2);
- Maintaining region's rural character (6);
- Maintaining/improving air quality (11);
- Protecting open space (12);
- Maintaining views from region (13);
- Preserving archeological/historic sites (14);
- Protecting rare/endangered species (15)

In fact, when asked to rank the "top three" transportation-related issues, survey respondents ranked "preserving water resources" first, and "maintaining the region's rural character" third.

Yet, regional concern about transportation deficiencies also rose to the top of the rankings, with "improving the ease of auto and truck travel in and out of the region" and "directness and ease... within the region" taking second and fourth places. While capturing the strong preservation and environmental ethic which characterizes the Berkshires, the survey also

highlighted decades of growing consternation over transportation disconnections (both within the region and with neighboring regions) and inadequacies. These are believed to cost the region economic opportunities and jobs, as businesses and industries seek to reduce costs and improve speed and access to markets by their location choices. The value placed on community character and recognition of the distinctive qualities of communities in the region was emphasized as central themes of the Regional Plan for the Berkshires as a result of regional meetings and discussions.

*

Rivers, mountains and open-space characterize the Berkshire landscape. The Appalachian National Scenic Trail runs north and south through the region linking various state parks. Some primary attributes in the Southern Berkshires are Monument, East and Everett Mountains, as well as Bash-Bish Falls. Significant natural resources in the Central Berkshires include October Mountain State Forest, Beartown State Park, Pittsfield State Forest, Pontoosuc and Onota Lakes, Laurel Lake, Lower and Upper Goose Pond, Richmond Pond and Upper Reservoir. To the north lies the highest peak in Massachusetts, Mount Greylock (on the Mount Greylock Reservation), as well as several state forests such as Clarksburg State Forest, Savoy State Forest, as well as the Forbush Wildlife Sanctuary in Hancock.

The economic implications of the natural resources in this region cannot be understated. The mixture of rivers, mountains, farms, and fields are what attract vacationers and second-home owners. The importance of agriculture as an economic force is declining but the open-space and scenic beauty this activity provides is essential to the natural resource mix of the region. Because the region's environmental attributes are a major factor in attracting new businesses to the area, especially with regard to tourism, care must be taken so that new development does not bring significant negative environmental impacts.

The region undoubtedly has some environmental constraints, due to the mountainous terrain and that a lot of the region is held in State Forests and Parks, resulting in development limitations. However, the region's natural resources provide the opportunity for tourist and natural resource-based economic development.

ix. Energy: Costs and Availability

Energy costs in the Berkshires are high compared to many other regions in the U.S., with manufacturing production fuel costs notably higher than the national average – by almost a third. The importance of the manufacturing sector to the region raises concerns about power dependency and cost as factors of production which may affect regional retention and growth of its manufacturing base industries.

Recently, utility deregulation and energy cost and availability issues in California have put issues of availability and cost back on the public policy agenda due to their economic impact. As a consumer, and not a producer of energy, the Berkshire region will largely watch the national debate on increased production and resources from the sidelines. Future costs, conservation measures, and experimental or alternative energy/power production require strategic regional (Northeast) attention to ensure regions (Berkshire) competitiveness.

x. Health and Social Services

Berkshire Medical Center in Pittsfield, an affiliate with the University of Massachusetts Medical School, is the major hospital in the region, providing 24-hour emergency care. The Hillcrest Campus of the Berkshire Medical Center in Pittsfield provides outpatient services and non-emergency walk-in care. There are also two other hospitals in the region, Fairview Hospital to

the south in Great Barrington and North Adams Regional Hospital to the north in North Adams. Berkshire County also has a network of some 400 agencies offering a broad range of social services.

xi. Government

Local

The Berkshire region is comprised of two cities (North Adams and Pittsfield) and thirty towns. The two cities have a mayor/city council system of government. In North Adams, all nine councilors are elected at-large. In Pittsfield, four councilors are elected at large and seven are elected from wards. Both city councils meet twice a month to conduct city business, with committee meetings as needed.

The thirty towns are governed by Boards of Selectmen (or Select Boards), usually consisting of three members. The boards in Adams, Great Barrington, Lenox and Williamstown have five members. Most Boards of Selectmen meet weekly; others meet anywhere from one to three times per month to conduct town business. A Town Administrator or Town Manager oversees municipal businesses and operations on behalf of the Select Board in the following communities: Adams, Becket, Clarksburg, Dalton, Florida, Great Barrington, Hinsdale, Lanesborough, Lee, Lenox, Richmond, Sheffield, West Stockbridge and Williamstown. Major budgetary and other policies are decided upon once a year at a town meeting (generally held in May). In all but two Berkshire County towns, all registered voters are eligible to participate and vote at annual (or special) town meetings. In Adams and Lee, representatives are elected to participate and vote in the town meeting. All board meetings and town meetings are posted as to the time, place and purpose of the meeting, and are open to the public.

Regional Government

Unlike most other regions of the nation, county government in New England, with comparatively few functions and limited jurisdictional authority, has not played a vital role in regional governance. Recent legislation passed by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts signaled the end of county government statewide, with the dissolution of Berkshire County government taking place on June 30, 2000. While certain county functions (registries of deeds and county jail) were transferred to state agencies, other services and programs are now being administered by municipalities in the region under cooperative agreements. The Berkshire region will continue to be referred to as a "county" by the U.S. Census Bureau.

State

Berkshire County is represented in state government by one state senator (Andrea F. Nuciforo, Jr.) and four state representatives (Daniel E. Bosley, Christopher J. Hodgkins, Shaun P. Kelly and Peter J. Larkin). The Senate District, along with House District 2, includes communities in Franklin, Hampshire and Hampden Counties. The other districts lie completely within Berkshire County.

Federal

Massachusetts, like every state, is represented in Congress by two U.S. senators. Our senators are Edward M. Kennedy and John F. Kerry. The United States Representative from the First Congressional District is John W. Olver.

IV. Evaluation of Regional Issues

i. Statement of Issues Facing the Regional Economy

Overview

- (1) The number of individuals in the workforce, as well as the amount of skills that they have, are impediments to economic expansion. Furthermore, the lack of diversity within the Berkshire population has been a downfall; minority populations have been key to labor force population growth elsewhere.

While the population of Massachusetts and the United States continued to grow, Berkshire County as a region has been in decline since the 1970's. Moreover, the region's cities as economic and population centers have experienced a downward trend of significance to the region. The 1990 Census recorded Berkshire County's population as 139,352, which represents a steady decline from its 1970 peak of 149,402. The newest (1999) Census Estimate of population is 132,218, returning the Berkshire CEDS region population to a figure close to its 1950 Census population (132,966). Forecast data suggests that that trend has "bottomed out" and population is expected to increase over the next decade and into the future. This change will be contingent upon economic opportunity identified with this region.

The population of Berkshire County itself has a smaller share (4%) of minority / Hispanic origin residents than Massachusetts (12%) and the United States (24%). In general, this population group experiences many of the same issues and challenges as similar populations elsewhere, such as less education, income and connection to the workforce.

Workforce development is seen as a critical issue in the region. The demand for skilled workers, especially for additional workers with higher levels of education and technical / technological skills, communication, and managerial abilities is rapidly increasing. Meeting this demand has put pressure on regions nationwide, but is particularly troublesome for non-metro regions, which do not have the educational opportunities and infrastructure / network of technical training or colleges, or the sizable pool of workers to draw on to train and retrain.

(2) Manufacturing is still the regional economy's base. However, economic diversification is extremely important, for example, encouraging the development technology-based industries.

Manufacturing (even in its current "downsized" form) continues to drive the regional economy, both in workforce wages and value of output. Manufacturing industries and their high-end, high skill jobs are vital to this region in providing a base of economic opportunity that can support a thriving region.

Overall, unemployment in Berkshire County has historically been higher than state averages. Berkshire County wages and income are also lower than the state on average – but similar to U.S. averages. Lower than average wages, which may serve as an inducement to economic growth or industry / business relocation to this region, continue to present problems for individuals, families, and households trying to cover the costs of living in the Berkshires.

(3) Community and housing quality are important characteristics to have to retain and attract workers within the Berkshires. Furthermore, stronger collaboration among Berkshire communities is definitely needed to improving the region's economic competitiveness.

Housing issues are emerging as critical to the resurgence of the region. There is not a wide variety of housing available and in some portions of the region affordable housing is very scarce. Furthermore, infrastructure capacity and availability remain issues, such as the provision of utility lines, road and rail access, water and sewer limitations and telecommunications services, among others. There is also a limited inventory of sites and buildings needed for expanding or relocating firms.

The “aging” workforce and looming retirement of “Baby Boomers” suggest a further tightening of an already squeezed labor force. Finding workers, as well as appropriate housing, employment, wages and training for them are all issues the region is going to face more and more. Creating vibrant downtown areas that are attractive as living / socializing places for younger workers is an important issue.

Continuing fragmentation of the region’s economic development resources is problematic. Yet, there is evidence of improvement in regional coordination of economic development projects and initiatives and marketing of the region. This “gelling” of regional thinking and strategizing is resulting in growing partnerships, networks, and coordination of interests and resources:

- Towards developing regional housing needs assessment and action plan;
- Towards redevelopment and reclamation of industrial / brownfield sites;
- Towards a regional plan for developing a “ready” inventory of buildings and industrial sites to meet a range of space and site needs; and
- Towards coordination in recruiting, retaining, and retraining the workforce through a variety of workforce development initiatives and skill-building.

ii. Strengths, Advantages, Weaknesses & Constraints in the Berkshire Region

The Committee identified the following **REGIONAL STRENGTHS.**

Business Environment / Workforce Development

- Market incorporating some higher paying, technologically advanced jobs
- Economic development is being approached on a more “regional” basis
- Many home-based businesses in the region
- Talents coming from increasing numbers of immigrants
- Plastics community growing consistently
- Berkshire Connect
- Tourist-based industries

Regional Resources / Services

- Many second homeowners
- Pristine, natural surroundings
- Real estate values lower than the rest of State / United States
- Sense of safety and security
- High quality of life
- Good educational system

Social / Political

- The region’s youth
 - Entrepreneurial spirit
 - Return of intellectual capital and people from previous generation(s)
 - Increased collaboration between the public and private sectors
 - Renewed interest in downtown centers
 - Sense of safety and security
 - Residents are more bullish about the area
 - Economic development is being approached on a more “regional” basis
 - High quality of life
-

The Committee identified the following **REGIONAL WEAKNESSES**:

Business Environment / Workforce Development

- The nature of jobs has changed and we need more qualified people to fill those jobs
- Not enough professional jobs to keep people
- Lack of young professionals who appreciate what the region has to offer. Consequently, talent goes elsewhere.
- Challenges taking care of the elderly and filling health care positions in general

Regional Resources / Services

- An older housing stock
- Inadequate transportation network
- Lack of developable land
- Real estate market has not transitioned into one that encourages investment
- Challenges taking care of the elderly and filling health care positions in general
- Lack of a university

Social / Political

- Negativity and inadequate communication of “good” news in the area
- Resistance to change
- Unevenness from community to community
- Lack of young professionals who appreciate the area
- Sense of political divisiveness / decisiveness
- Lack of a university

The Committee identified **REGIONAL ACTIONS** based on the region’s strengths and weaknesses:

Business Environment / Workforce Development

- Make educational system even better
- Utilize minorities in workforce development activities
- Utilize people who are here as opposed to focusing on recruitment of those who are not
- Increase workforce development
- Start foreign language education at younger grade levels like many other societies
- Create and embrace “home-grown” businesses
- Create technology center for professionals
- Increase number of consulting firms, particularly high-tech
- Capitalize on the ripple effect of cultural institutions

Regional Resources / Services

- Make educational system even better
- Increase the number of revolving loan funds
- Renovate older housing (retain character while improving efficiency)
- Rectify problems associated with renovation regulations
- Community development corporations should be strengthened
- Encourage people to relocate here

- A brownfield and land inventory assessment should be completed

Social / Political

- Create a stronger political network
 - Get rid of the “us” vs. “them” attitude
 - Change mindset
 - Embrace diversity and encourage motivation
 - Value and market the Berkshires
 - Encourage people to relocate here
 - Promote change
 - Foster partnerships that transcend artificial lines
 - Engage those who live here to participate in economic development efforts
 - Create outreach to Eastern MA
-

The Committee also identified the **MOST IMPORTANT REGIONAL ACTIONS:**

Business Environment / Workforce Development

- Build a skilled workforce
- Support small business economic development

Regional Resources / Services

- Improve transportation
- Assess available industrial land
- Improve housing

Social / Political

- Promote change
- Stop parochialism
- Improve communication
- Improve sophistication
- Create effective leadership
- Link communities
- Find catalysts to make things happen
- Create a stronger regional image
- Create a stronger regional consensus

iii. Economic Development Efforts, Partners and Resources

The three CEDS Committee meetings which took place from December, 2000 to February, 2001 represent a culmination of efforts by diverse groups in the region to coordinate their resources and leadership and analyze challenges to economic growth which act as barriers for groups, businesses, and ultimately the communities in this westernmost region in the state.

The twenty-seven member Berkshire County CEDS Committee, formed in December, 2000, represent stakeholders from the key organizations committed to improving the regional

economy through the adoption and support of a comprehensive regional plan for economic development.

A number of reports on the regional economy have targeted the lack of coordination and collaboration among economic development agencies, business and civic groups, community boards, etc. – and the sheer number of economic development “interests” and actors – as detrimental to developing a cohesive vision and strategy for the overall region. Since those reports were written, a substantive, ongoing effort has been underway regionally to seize opportunities for coalition-building and partnering to develop consensus on projects of significant benefit to the region.

The recently convened CEDS Committee takes that foundation and builds on it by providing the opportunity for leaders and stakeholders in the region to formalize the process: targeting specific goals and initiatives, identifying responsible partners across public and private realms for financial and management support, and committing to a multi-year regional strategy.

Listed below are key organizations – both public and private – and a brief summary of recent activities in support of regional economic development and/or recent assessments or studies which have fostered understanding of regional economic issues:

Berkshire Council for Growth

Leading the coalition-building effort has been the Council for Growth, established in 1998 as a regional outgrowth of the Cellucci Administration’s Berkshire Jobs Task Force. The Council and its committees, in partnership with volunteers from many private businesses and support from the Berkshire County Regional Employment Board and the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, have coordinated/spearheaded a number of important regional initiatives:

Websites:

To coordinate marketing the region and available jobs:
berkshiregrowth.com and berkshirejobs.com (established September, 1999) To promote business location and relocation opportunities: web site under development featuring interactive, searchable list of industrial/commercial sites or parcels and buildings available for business location.

Berkshire Applied Technology Council

Formed in 1997/1998 as a partnership of businesses and government, local schools, Berkshire Community College, and regional 4 year colleges, the Council’s mission is to establish the Berkshire region as a technology center of excellence. The Council’s goal is to address the workforce needs of manufacturing companies and industries in the region through a long-range strategy of technology-focused educational initiatives. Providing state of the art educational programs, financial assistance, training, and professional support targeting students and incumbent workers, the Berkshire Applied Technology Council addresses a key factor in attracting and retaining technology-based industries and firms – the need for technically trained employees. Berkshire Applied Technology Council has sponsored the following:

TECHPATH

This workforce/educational program was developed in 1997 as a **2+2+2** sequence to link high school to associate to baccalaureate degrees with a high technology curriculum specifically integrating local industry applications. The TECHPATH program is designed to be accessible to incumbent workers, as well as a seamless link in motivating and developing future high tech workers. Over 50 students are currently enrolled in the program.

Women on Tech Path Program

A collaboration with Berkshire Community College, this project will offer after-school training to 22 young women (from the 11 regional public schools) in engineering, graphics/animation, and information technology. A follow-up summer program – the Internet Academy – will also provide job shadowing and electronic networking components.

Berkshire Connect

A regional initiative cited by the Federal Communications Commission in 2000 as a national model for efforts to improve telecommunications access in rural or under-served areas with a cost-effective solution to help drive regional economic activity. The partnership agreement with Global Crossing/Equal Access Networks has resulted in building sufficient telecommunications infrastructure and services to support the needs of businesses and industry in this region at a competitive and affordable price.

Berkshire County Regional Employment Board (BCREB)

The BCREB is the local organization responsible for assisting employers with workforce development initiatives. It helps access the following programs: Workforce Training Fund, Department of Employment and Training, Berkshire Training and Employment Program, Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission, Advantage Employee Network and Full Employment Program. It also promotes the School-to-Work Initiative, Summer of Work and Learning and Welfare-to-Work Initiative. Two key documents published by the BCREB are its Workforce Blueprint (1998 & 2000 draft) and Workforce Needs Assessment (May, 2000).

Economic Development Organizations

There are a number of regional and local economic development organizations, each with defined geographic service areas and unique missions. These include:

- Berkshire Enterprises:
Berkshire Enterprises runs ten-week training programs addressing a wide range of issues that serve as the foundation for new entrepreneurs. The focus is on business plan development, financing, marketing and management.
- Berkshire Housing Development Corporation
- Berkshire Regional Planning Commission
- Berkshire Training and Employment Program
- Berkshire Visitors Bureau
- Community Development Corporation of Southern Berkshire
- Division of Employment and Training
- Lee Community Development Corporation
- Massachusetts Office of Business Development
- Northern Berkshire Community Development Corporation
- Northern Berkshire Industrial Park and Development Corporation
- Pittsfield Economic Development Authority
- Pittsfield Economic Revitalization Corporation

In addition, there are two major Chambers of Commerce, Chamber of Commerce of the Berkshires (a recent merger of the Central and Northern Berkshire Chambers) and the Southern Berkshire Chamber of Commerce, as well as a separate Williamstown Chamber of Commerce.

There are also active neighborhood and downtown organizations:

- Westside Neighborhood Resource Center;
- Downtown, Inc. (Pittsfield); and
- Adams Downtown Committee.

The City of North Adams and Pittsfield and the Town of Adams have professional community development staffs active in community, economic and housing development initiatives.

Regional Networks / Coalitions:

- **Berkshire Latin American Council:**
The Berkshire Latin American Council was formed in 1999 by a group of community members representing the increasing numbers of diverse Hispanic/Latino immigrants in the region. The Council's goal is to organize and bring together various cultural groups (Mexican, Honduran, Dominican, etc.) into one organization to address social and economic needs of this population. Currently, the Council is working with the City of Pittsfield, the Berkshire Center for Families and Children, and United Way on a grant for a bilingual coordinator for Latino issues relating to immigration and legal status, workforce participation, etc.
- **Berkshire Cultural Alliance:**
The Cultural Alliance represents the numerous arts organizations (music, dance, theater, etc.) and venues in the region. The purpose of the Alliance is to explore common marketing strategies and serve as a forum for issues relevant to the vitality of arts organizations in the region.
- **Berkshire Plastics Network:**
The Berkshire Plastics Network is a consortium of more than 40 independent companies representing virtually every discipline in the design and production of molds, components, and plastic products. Founded in 1986, the Network is believed to be the oldest business/industry network in the state. The Network has been a successful regional model of cooperative training ventures and offers the only accredited apprentice training of its type in the state. The Network's focus in recent years has been on education and training of workers for the region's plastics industries to fill the increasing need for skilled workers for this industry.
- **B-Tech:**
B-Tech (formerly Berkshire Technology Alliance) is a guild of artistic, business and technology professionals committed to building a thriving local community through responsible development and support of technology enterprise. Located in North Adams, B-Tech serves the interests of the developing "dot.com" technology businesses and industries in the region.

iv. Funding Eligibility

Several communities in the Berkshire region meet eligibility criteria according to Section 301 ("Eligibility of Areas"). For assistance under section 201 or 209 eligible areas must meet one (or more) criteria outlined: low per capita income (80% or less of national average: equal to or less than \$11,536); an unemployment rate at least 1 percent above the national average for the most recent 24-month period (threshold for 1998: 5.5%, and 1999: 5.3%); unemployment or economic adjustment problems either current or anticipated due to severe short-term or long-

term changes in economic conditions; or small areas suffering from poverty or high unemployment within larger communities experiencing less economic distress.

Low Per Capita Income:

The following page contains documentation required by Section 301 which shows low per capita income in Florida and North Adams, both communities located in the North Adams Labor Market Area, according to data collected during the 1990 federal Census. In addition to those communities there are several Census tracts in Pittsfield with documented levels of low per capita income. The following Census tracts in 1990 also met the criteria set forth in Section 301 as follows:

Pittsfield MSA:

Tracts located in Pittsfield with Per Capita Income (1989) below \$11,536:

- Tract 9001: \$10,655
- Tract 9002: \$10,930
- Tract 9006: \$10,224
- Tract 9012: \$7,580

North Adams Labor Market Area:

- Florida: \$11,345
- North Adams: \$10,963

Four out of the five Census tracts located in North Adams were below the Per Capita Income threshold in 1989:

- Tract 9211: \$9,451
- Tract 9212: \$11,497
- Tract 9213: \$10,340
- Tract 9215: \$11,100

Unemployment Rate:

Several communities in the Berkshire region continue to show persistently high levels of unemployment, despite recent good economic times experienced statewide. Average Annual unemployment rates for the years 1998 and 1999 are one percent greater than the national average for the communities of Savoy (North Adams Labor Market Area), and Adams and Hinsdale, both located in the Pittsfield MSA.

Overall the Berkshire region continues to struggle to redefine its economy since the severe loss of manufacturing employment which saw the economic bottom drop out in the 1980's and early 1990's. While the growing number of service sector jobs has softened the blow, shoring up and stabilizing the manufacturing sector by strategic programs and investment in improving workforce skills and education and meeting the needs of industry for adequate and ready sites and building space are critical to this region's economic future.

Section 301 Eligibility Criteria					
Unemployment Rates, 1998-1999		Areas Eligible		Per Capita Income	Areas Eligible
		1998	1999		
N. Adams LMA	Community				
N. Adams LMA	Clarksburg	4.1	4.3	\$13,139	
N. Adams LMA	Florida	4.8	4.4	\$11,345	X

N. Adams LMA	Hancock	1.2	0.3		\$17,075	
N. Adams LMA	New Ashford	5.6	3.3		\$13,374	
N. Adams LMA	North Adams	4.3	4.1		\$10,963	X
N. Adams LMA	Savoy	6.0	5.8	X	\$13,892	
Pittsfield MSA	Williamstown	2.1	2.2		\$14,728	
Pittsfield MSA	Adams	5.8	5.6	X	\$12,790	
Pittsfield MSA	Cheshire	4.5	4.0		\$14,298	
Pittsfield MSA	Dalton	3.6	3.4		\$17,061	
Pittsfield MSA	Hinsdale	6.6	7.1	X	\$13,948	
Pittsfield MSA	Lanesborough	3.9	3.4		\$16,688	
Pittsfield MSA	Lee	4.0	3.7		\$15,289	
Pittsfield MSA	Lenox	3.7	3.4		\$16,822	
Pittsfield MSA	Pittsfield	4.4	4.3		\$15,426	
Pittsfield MSA	Richmond	2.8	2.2		\$22,359	
Gt. Barrington LMA	Stockbridge	3.3	2.6		\$18,215	
Gt. Barrington LMA	Alford	2.2	2.3		\$24,613	
Gt. Barrington LMA	Egremont	2.0	1.9		\$17,752	
Gt. Barrington LMA	Great Barrington	2.8	2.7		\$14,206	
Gt. Barrington LMA	Monterey	2.3	1.8		\$15,120	
Gt. Barrington LMA	Mount Washington	1.4	4.1		\$23,794	
Gt. Barrington LMA	New Marlborough	1.5	1.6		\$15,498	
Gt. Barrington LMA	Otis	3.7	3.7		\$13,398	
Gt. Barrington LMA	Sandisfield	3.3	4.4		\$13,745	
Gt. Barrington LMA	Sheffield	2.4	2.2		\$17,535	
Gt. Barrington LMA	Tyringham	0.9	0.9		\$21,926	
	West Stockbridge	2.6	2.2		\$16,248	
	Becket	3.9	2.8		\$12,942	
	Peru	4.4	3.6		\$12,478	
	Washington	3.2	4.1		\$15,915	
	Windsor	2.9	3.4		\$16,909	
	County	3.9	3.8		\$14,857	
	Massachusetts	3.3	3.2		\$17,224	
	United States	4.5	4.3		\$14,420	

*Unemployment Rate at least 1% above national average for most recent 24 month period

*80% (or less) of the national average per capita income:

\$11, 536

Source: Unemployment Rates: Massachusetts Division of Employment & Training

1989 Per Capita Income: U.S. Census Bureau, 1990

v. Recent Funding

MassDevelopment, which acts as Massachusetts' economic development finance authority, provided \$63.9 million in development financing in fiscal year 2000 for projects throughout Berkshire County, ranging from funds for predevelopment assistance and brownfields site assessment, to financing for equipment purchases, mortgage guarantees, development loans and bonds, etc. This funding represented approximately 4% of the total financial assistance

from MassDevelopment available to communities and projects statewide. Three of the twenty projects receiving funding are located in the North Adams Labor Market Area, sixteen in the Pittsfield MSA, and one in the Great Barrington Labor Market Area.

Of a total of seventy-one Community Development/Technical Assistance program grants awarded statewide, five projects in this region received assistance for predevelopment or brownfields site assessment totalling \$150,000: the Mohawk Theater and Rte. 8 Shopping Center projects in North Adams; Shakespeare & Co. in Lenox, and the Perlman Recycling Facility and Pittsfield Plastics in Pittsfield. Four projects in the region (of ninety statewide) received a total of \$456,000 in Economic Development Lending: in Dalton an equipment loan for Berkshire Bridge & Iron Works; in Adams two development loans were awarded to the Northern Berkshire Industrial Park & Development Corporation; and a mortgage insurance guarantee for \$346,500 will back South Lee Associates, Inc. (Boyd Converting Co., Inc.) in Lee.

Five additional projects received funding from the Real Estate Services Program for development services out of 109 receiving funding statewide. Three of these went to projects in Adams (Renfrew Center, Adams Industrial Park, Rte. 8 Shopping Plaza); one award of \$15,000,000 went to the Pittsfield Economic Development Authority and another for \$2,000,000 to Lee for Quarry Hill.

MassDevelopment provided bond financing totaling \$40,015,000 for six projects in the region, including the Hillcrest Education Centers, Inc. in Great Barrington, Northern Berkshire Community Services, Inc. in Williamstown, Miss Hall's School and Pittsfield Plastics Engineering Corp. in Pittsfield, Shakespeare & Co. in Lenox, and Boyd Converting Co., Inc. in Lee.

Appendix B contains a list of all MassDevelopment funding for regional projects in fiscal year 2000.

Tracking Financial Resources in the Berkshires

At this point there is no central "clearinghouse" for information on community development or economic development funds sought or granted for projects or initiatives undertaken in this region. Funding for these purposes in the past has been sought by multiple agencies and organizations, and separate communities with minimal coordination of efforts or region-wide prioritization. As a result, a priority regional goal was established with the intent of improving communication and collaboration on economic development planning and activities for a better, targeted use of resources and a clearer vision of the desired future economy of the region. Establishing a central source for information about funding opportunities available, and tracking both applications for funding and resulting awards will enable the Berkshire region to develop needed expertise in seeking funding.

V. Action Plan

i. Vision Statement

The Berkshire region is known for balancing high quality of life and environmental values with high quality employment opportunities.

The Berkshire region is known for innovation and a spirit of cooperation, resulting in a regional economy, workforce and community life unsurpassed by any other region in the Commonwealth.

ii. Goal and Objectives

The purpose of this report is to establish the goals and objectives that will guide the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) of Berkshire County. These goals and objects are the result of the deliberations of the countywide CEDS Coordinating Committee. It should also be noted that they borrow liberally from the recently updated goals and objectives of the *Berkshire Council for Growth*.

The CEDS Committee has identified problems and challenges in the areas of intellectual capacity, physical capacity, financial / management support and organizational / economic development support.

However, aside from these categories, a more broad, general theme is that if the region wants to attract and/or retain workers who are the best and brightest, it is imperative that overall wages in the region are competitive. It is time to shift from the quantity of jobs to the quality of them. The CEDS Committee recommends that if investment in firms and projects creates new jobs, they should provide competitive compensation that leads to higher regional wage levels. Increasing workforce capacity, in order to support higher productivity and thus higher wages, is more important than creating additional jobs.

Goal 1: Maintain, strengthen and expand manufacturing-base industries in the region, as well as new technology businesses or industries.

We are very much aware of the structural changes that are occurring, as Massachusetts is likely to continue to attract software high tech and dot-com companies. We need to be part of that effort. We also need to remember that we still have a healthy manufacturing base in the region. It is smaller than ten years ago, however in terms of gross county product, it is actually growing. As well it is difficult to tell what the differences are between a modern manufacturing plant and a high tech service center. Manufacturing is not simply making 'things,' as it too integrates technological advances. Nowhere can this be better observed than through the lens of the Berkshire Plastics Network. In short, manufacturing continues to be a highly valued part of our economy. Yet, we need to embrace all industries by accommodating the varying needs that they all have. It is important to develop and support prosperous manufacturing firms and to seek opportunities to support other high-value sectors such as business and information services.

(Note: Objectives and activities associated with better serving manufacturing and other industries in the Berkshires lie within Goal #4, addressing physical development constraints. Addressing such constraints could have a huge impact on strengthening industries within the Berkshires. Site and infrastructure objectives and activities are identified under Goal #4).

Goal 2: Enhance workforce development initiatives.

Objective: Promote programs that enhance the skills of a varied workforce

Term: Short to Long

Programs through the Regional Employment Board and the Department of Employment and Training, among others, should continue to enhance the skills of new workers from a variety of sectors, as well as a wide variety of individuals seeking

skills enhancement or employment. We need to ensure that the region's schools and businesses are on the same wavelength. While linkages are in place, they undoubtedly should continue to grow and become stronger. Residents of the Berkshires need to be more enthusiastic and aware of the benefits of strong partnerships. The 2+2+2 Program should be further developed. The CEDS Committee noted a need for technical skill development, English as a Second Language and a strong desire for expanded continuing education (at both the undergraduate and graduate levels). Moreover, the participants have noted that there continues to be an extensive number of workers who have not been able to find permanent work (structural unemployment) and a rising number of unskilled immigrants. They are resilient, loyal, willing to work and willing to be trained. The needs of these workers should not be lost.

Activity: Prepare a targeted workforce development package with workforce projects submitted to the CEDS Committee this year.

The CEDS Committee will be creating a workforce development package with the workforce initiatives submitted this year (Applied Technology Center of Excellence; Community Cultural Center; Silicon Village Web Academy and the Technology Training Center).

Activity: Foster connections and develop programs that are responsive to the needs of minority and under-served populations.

Fostering connections and developing programs that can better serve minorities and under-served populations should be pursued. Such programs would identify ways that minorities and under-served populations can move up the employment ladder to fill existing needs for technically skilled, proficient workers.

Potential activities for future consideration:

- Developing a resource guide on job services and support available in the region.
- Assessing the transferability of the Berkshire Plastics Network training initiatives to other industries and sectors in the region.
- Expanding summer internships and employment opportunities with training initiatives across the region for high school age eligible workers.
- Creating a "matching service" for jobs geared to teens/college age for temporary and summer employment.

Goal 3: Regionally collaborate on a variety of planning initiatives supporting economic vitality and growth.

Objective: Continue to move the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy process forward.

Term: Short

It is important that the CEDS Committee continues to be proactive in moving the CEDS process along, utilizing the talents of Committee members, as well as outsiders (such as S.C.O.R.E., Service Corps of Retired Executives). Individuals such as these are often under-utilized and have the potential to be a tremendous resource for the CEDS Committee.

Activity: *Develop CEDS Committee, subcommittee capacity and regional partners in conducting CEDS annual business / regional economy scans and brainstorm to generate new programs and projects and re-direct those in place.*

Objective: Improve housing supply in the region.

Term: Long

While firms in the Berkshires have been able to recruit young or new professionals to the area to some degree, it is becoming increasingly difficult for them to find adequate, affordable housing.

The cost of housing, particularly in South County, has been rising quite rapidly: its rate of increase is far above the increase in wages. Some existing rental stock is also becoming revitalized. While this reinvestment is a positive sign of confidence in the area, it inevitably raises the cost per unit. Other rental housing continues to deteriorate and is unattractive to potential workers recruited to the region.

Activity: *It is recommended that the area undertake a housing study to rectify housing dilemmas to entice and accommodate new and existing professionals.*

Currently, the Berkshire Council for Growth has provided seed money for developing a scope of work, and several community forums have brought the issue into greater public view. There is broad regional interest and support for addressing the pressing need to improve housing stock and choices, and there exists the potential for ready partnerships (Southern Berkshire Housing Coalition; Navigator and foundations in northern Berkshires) on this issue.

Objective: Enhance Downtowns of Different Sizes and Character

Term: Medium to Long

The existence of vibrant downtowns with a wide range of quality shopping, cultural and entertainment experiences is critical to making the region more attractive to workers and families. Consistent efforts to improve all downtown areas across the region are needed, such as through the formation of downtown interest groups and fostering partnerships or downtown clusters. They could help communities see common challenges and brainstorm viable solutions and alternative pathways suitable to their community characteristics.

Activity: *Scope out a variety of community-driven strategies for downtown redevelopment of differing types and scales to offer a panoply of choices to communities of different sizes and character.*

Objective: Enhance Neighborhood Quality of Communities with Different Sizes and Character

Term: Medium to Long

As well as the quality of individual housing units, the quality and amenity of neighborhoods in some key communities in the region is an impediment to recruiting

skilled workers and families. Programs to evaluate neighborhood quality and make systematic improvements should be developed.

Activity: *Work toward the development and implementation of the Community Cultural Center project in Pittsfield.*

Activity: *Promote neighborhood advocacy, assessment and planning to tackle neighborhood issues: blight, housing development, traffic, safety and neighborhood amenities.*

Objective: Identify the economic implications of the aging in the Berkshires from an economic and human resources standpoint

Term: Medium

We recognize that Berkshire residents are aging. We also recognize that one of the greatest shifts in the 2000 census is the great growth in the age 85+ category. We are unprepared for the impacts of this new age group. They represent both an economic opportunity and a social cost.

Activity: *A study of the aging of the Berkshires and what it means to the region's economy is recommended.*

Potential activities for future consideration:

- Create a regional taskforce with partners across fields and occupations to consider issues related to the age population of the Berkshires: especially the growing 85+, 65+ cohorts, effects of the "baby boomers," and median age.

Goal 4: Address physical developmental constraints.

Objective: Develop strategies for siting companies.

Term: Short to Medium

This goal is directly related to Goal #1, maintaining, strengthening and expanding economic base industries in the region, especially manufacturing and new

technology businesses or industries. This could range from revitalized brownfields to improved old mills to new industrial parks and downtown revitalization projects. The Berkshires must be ready to meet the needs of a wide range of companies ranging from the newest dot-com to traditional manufacturing to new start-ups. Some companies need or desire modern space, some require cheap space and some find special value in an old mill building. For this reason it is imperative that the Region have a ready supply of such spaces on hand.

Activity: *Pursue partnerships, funding resources, and assistance to transform the Gravel Pit in North Adams into industrial site for manufacturing / high tech use.*

Activity: *Pursue restoration of the North Adams Venture Center (North Adams) and the Jones Block (Adams) for expanding high-tech businesses and promoting building re-use.*

Activity: *Support the Berkshire Council for Growth's initiative to develop, maintain and utilize a site / buildings / spaces inventory; disseminate it and promote sites through an interactive, searchable web site.*

Activity: *Pursue funding for analysis of industrial lands around the Pittsfield Municipal Airport, the Route 8 corridor in Adams/North Adams, and the Route 102 corridor in Lee.*

Activity: *Pursue funding for analysis of additional industrial sites, such as Lane Construction in Lee, Mountain Mill in Lee and the Berkshire Truck Plaza in West Stockbridge.*

Activity: *Seek funding for brownfield rehabilitation in the region and aggressively pursue funding from the Environmental Protection Agency's Brownfields Reclamation Program.*

The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission is pursuing grant funding for a potential Brownfields Reclamation Program for Berkshire County. The development of this program will be extremely beneficial in assessing the status and potential of brownfields within the region.

Future Activity: *Development of a first class industrial park.*

Term: Long

The region does not have such a facility at this time. Goals for such a facility would be to have at least one hundred acres, be environmentally clean, free of wetlands, appropriately zoned, have water/sewer/electric/fibreoptic access, within an hour of an airport and interstate and have truck access without interfering with a residential neighborhood. These requirements are the starting point from which a modern industrial park could emerge. It will understandably be challenging due to geographic constraints in the Berkshires. However, the region should start to identify potential areas and eventually develop such a facility.

Objective: Improve the region's infrastructure to support economic development.

Term: Long

Aside from sites for potential development, the infrastructure within the region (such as transportation networks, water / sewer and telecommunications) is also an integral part of economic development and needs further attention.

Activity: Improve Transportation Access for Pittsfield and Northern Berkshire County.

Without improved transportation access, limited access in the region will continue to be a disadvantage in retaining and attracting manufacturing firms that are vital to the region's economic health. Based on the most recent study, an interchange at the Massachusetts Turnpike in the vicinity of Route 7 and a western bypass of Pittsfield are important steps to meeting this constraint.

Activity: Analyze the Capacity, Condition and Needs of the Region's Water and Sewer Systems

Individually there is a lot of information. Collectively, we have not documented that to ensure that regionally we will have adequate capacity. Until such knowledge is available, it will be difficult to implement any economic strategy. This study could be modeled after the recently completed "Status of Old Mills Study" undertaken by the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission. A comprehensive assessment of water and sewer capacity and needs should be launched.

Activity: Continue to support the Berkshire Connect initiative.

The implementation of a high-speed, affordable telecommunications network from this initiative will retain and entice development within the region. Support for Berkshire Connect should be maintained.

Goal 5: Provide adequate financial and management support.

Objective: Improve access to capital and management assistance for Berkshire businesses.

Term: Short to Medium

Companies that start in one area tend to stay local. Moreover, the Berkshire Region has a long tradition of entrepreneurial innovation. For these reasons, there is merit in providing a 'nurturing approach' to startups in the region. Such assistance could include the creation of an applied technology center, the creation of an incubator facility or simply providing voluntary resources. In any case, these companies are quite valuable to the region and deserve to be helped.

Activity: *Seek capitalization of a Downtown Revolving Loan Fund from the Economic Development Administration and create a committee to oversee its operation upon receipt of funding.*

Activity: *Develop a Comprehensive 'Loan Packaging System.'*

This would accomplish three tasks. First, it would let investors know which banks are clearly interested in helping Berkshire companies. Secondly, it would focus on a revolving loan program that was intended to meet the micro loan needs of businesses in downtown locations. Thirdly, it would let growing businesses be aware of the strong venture capital framework now present in the Berkshires.

Potential activities for future consideration:

- Organize specialized teams / contacts for assistance to new businesses in all phases of business development; financial, management, business expansion, etc.
- Identify and publicize public, private and other available funding sources. A better tracking system of funding that is available and funneled into the Berkshires is needed.

Goal 6: Strengthen internal and external communication & outreach.

Objective: Continue to Promote Regional Economic Cooperation.

Term: Short to Long

The Berkshires, like other parts of Massachusetts, has a high tradition of home rule and has historically resisted regional cooperation. The work of the Council for Growth, the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, Berkshire County Regional Employment Board, and the CEDS Committee and other entities in promoting regionalism is greatly improving collaboration. However, we must further share infrastructure, financial resources and growth opportunities. We must also seek funding together and politically support each other's efforts. We need to build on the work of existing entities, partnerships and initiatives to constantly integrate ideas, without regard to borders. Through common sense, much of the 'stovepiping' and turf wars can be dramatically diminished.

Activity: Encourage region-wide discussion of the CEDS process and identified regional goals and objectives to facilitate development of partners and networks as catalysts to economic prosperity.

It is very important that the CEDS process is understood by communities in the region in order them to better understand economic development on a regional basis and, furthermore, understand all potential funding sources for economic development projects they wish to pursue.

Activity: Develop a regional retention and attraction program for firms and professionals.

This would be designed to determine how the region could keep its companies local and strong and how it could attract new firms. Enticing professionals to work here, particularly young ones, would also be a component. Indeed, it is believed that once a marketing plan is developed, there would be the potential to attract firms from the eastern part of the State and from adjoining states. However, the emphasis should be on promoting and supporting locally grown firms, while acknowledging and fostering new ones from the outside as they show interest.

Activity: Undertake a coordinated marketing campaign / acknowledge existing economic diversity.

It is critical that aside from just selling the assets that this area is known for, partners in the area need to strategically market the region. Berkshire County has many well-known cultural, historical, natural, recreational and educational assets. It is important to continually invest and pay attention to these things to maintain their positive impact. However, marketing efforts should not solely rely on them. These quality of life assets should definitely be capitalized, however, marketing should make it clear that our region has diversity and is capable of being even more diverse.

Activity: Build outreach capabilities by adding economic outreach professionals and increased technical assistance to our smaller communities.

Professionals could serve as grant writers, project evaluators and project facilitators. They could be "on call" to any community that required help.

Activity: Develop a regional benchmark against which to continually identify and assess strengths and weaknesses.

A number of regions around the country have begun to assess how they stack up against other regions. This type of work should provide ongoing support to regional marketing efforts and provide a reality check regarding where the region needs to improve.

Potential activities for future consideration:

- Develop a resource guide for accessing the array of social service agencies in the region to encourage partnering among service providers, and improve connections and accessibility for those in need of services.
- Increase dialogue addressing worker replacement and need for workers, housing and medical care issues, public safety and transportation issues.

iii. Economic Development Projects and Selection Process

The CEDS Committee for Berkshire County, Massachusetts felt it was important to acknowledge as many economic development initiatives throughout the region as possible, EDA eligible or not. The Committee was responsible for filling out project profile forms themselves if possible, and passing forms along to project candidates. Forms were also sent out to all Town Administrators in the Berkshires, asking them to submit projects to the CEDS Committee for consideration. Accompanying information regarding the CEDS process was sent along with the project forms as well.

All projects that were submitted were categorized. There were some general themes of projects: business development; workforce development; planning / feasibility studies; and infrastructure / site projects. Breaking the projects down into these categories allowed the Committee to view the myriad of projects with greater ease.

In addition to categorizing projects, the Committee used a score sheet that contained some of key project information. Job creation was seen as very important, with not just the number of them, but their creation, retention and improvement. Projects were given one point for each (maximum of three points total) in the job category.

Additionally, it was felt that distressed communities that have historically lagged behind the rest of the region or have experienced some difficulties present or past should be awarded one point.

The Committee felt it was important that the projects also be consistent with the goals of the Committee. One point was awarded for each goal that was met (a maximum of six points).

In the end, the ranking system facilitated the Committee's decision-making process, with the projects generally in concurrence with what the Committee found to be the most important goals. A remaining factor in the decision-making process was the stage of the project; projects in the final engineering plans / costs stage would be seen as more of a priority due to readiness than ones that were just in the early planning stage and not ready to proceed.

At the second to the last meeting the CEDS Committee distinguished between the projects that were EDA eligible and those that were not. From the project ranking sheet they were able to rank the projects based on their level of impact. The Committee identified the following priorities:

Committee Priorities:

- ◆ Continuing efforts to coordinate / cooperate on economic development strategies and initiatives;
- ◆ Revolving loan funds focused at downtown business development;
- ◆ Site projects, including downtown: physical preparation and feasibility studies; and
- ◆ Workforce development.

Strategic Regional Priority:

Overall, the regional priority for economic development is the reclamation and redevelopment of the General Electric site in Pittsfield, a 200+ acre site. The property could be a tremendous benefit to the region, but is facing significant remediation issues. The City of Pittsfield is also in the process of finalizing a consent decree that would allow the City to utilize certain sections of the GE property and receive incentives through GE. Despite its status as the highest regional priority, the Committee acknowledged the fact that this site will not be ready for use for some

time to come until site issues are worked out. However, the site will continue to be a high priority for upcoming CEDS updates.

SITE PROJECTS

1st Priority Project: North Adams Gravel Pit

The CEDS Committee for Berkshire County identified the North Adams Gravel Pit Project (through consensus) as this year's leading site development project. This project is the City of North Adams' priority #1 of 3 and entails the development of an 8.5-acre site into an industrial park and speculative building. The property is City-owned and ready to proceed. The estimated cost of the project is over \$7 million (with building construction) and approximately \$770,000 for site preparation without the construction of the building. The City of North Adams is committed to providing a funding match.

It is anticipated that upon completion of the project, 100-200 full-time jobs will be created and retained. Furthermore, the project was consistent with CEDS Committee goals:

Goal 1: Maintain, strengthen and expand economic base industries in the region; and
Goal 4: Improving the region's economic competitiveness through site and building development and reuse, and through targeted infrastructure improvements.

Further information on the project can be found in **Appendix C**.

2nd Priority Project: North Adams Venture Center / Jones Block Restoration

The CEDS Committee identified the North Adams Venture Center (submitted by the North County CDC), in conjunction with the Jones Block Restoration Project (Adams priority #2 of 6), as key downtown development projects to receive funding subsequent to the Gravel Pit project in North Adams.

Presently, the North Adams Venture Center exists as a business incubator with four tenants, owned by the North County CDC. Additional repairs to the building need to take place for the last phase of the project and funds are very much needed in order for this to happen. The project is clearly consistent with the goals of the CEDS Committee:

- Goal 1: Maintain, strengthen, and expand economic base industries in the region, especially manufacturing, and new technology businesses or industries; and
- Goal 4: Improve the region's economic competitiveness through site and building development and reuse, and through targeted infrastructure improvements.

Similarly, the Jones Block, owned by the Northern Berkshire Industrial Park and Development Corporation, is a vacant, fire damaged building in need of immediate attention and consideration. It is in the final planning stages and has the potential to have a huge impact in downtown Adams. It is consistent with goals of the CEDS Committee:

- Goal 1: Maintain, strengthen, and expand economic base industries in the region, especially manufacturing, and new technology businesses or industries; and
- Goal 4: Improve the region's economic competitiveness through site and building development and reuse, and through targeted infrastructure improvements.

The original Jones Block proposal from the Town of Adams was to update the completed feasibility study for renovation of the Block. However, the Committee felt funding would be better spent on the restoration of vacant, fire damaged building. Regarding funding, the Committee felt that both the Jones Block and the North Adams Venture Center should receive equal consideration, as they share similar goals, development status and meet different, but complimentary incubator markets. CEDS Committee members will be meeting to pursue a joint-project approach. It is expected that the Annual CEDS Update will have a detailed description of the project package for consideration for the next funding round.

The North Adams Venture Center and the Jones Block Restoration projects are key sites to improve, as they both address the issue of downtown revitalization, particularly in the Northern Berkshires. The Northern Berkshire region has faced more pronounced challenges in past years.

3rd Priority Project: Water / Sewer Expansion to Pittsfield Municipal Airport

At the present time, the airport is not connected to the City's water and sewer lines. This impacts not only the airport terminal itself, but constrains industrial development on and along the airport property.

At the present time, the City of Pittsfield is currently in preparing a Master Plan for the expansion of the existing runway configuration. This is largely due to the need to be in compliance with Federal Aviation Administration safety standards, however, the expansion is expected to better accommodate corporate jet traffic, or potentially commercial airline commuter service.

The expansion of water and sewer is important to the airport, as it affects potential industrial development along the airport property and the usefulness of the airport terminal itself.

The projects is consistent with goals of the CEDS Committee:

- Goal 1: Maintain, strengthen, and expand economic base industries in the region, especially manufacturing, and new technology businesses or industries; and
- Goal 4: Improve the region's economic competitiveness through site and building development and reuse, and through targeted infrastructure improvements.

SITE FEASIBILITY STUDIES

Aside from sites that are ready for construction, the Committee also felt there was a need for the assessment of potential industrial sites throughout the region. There are three key areas in the County (identified below) that an industrial site feasibility study could address. The Committee strongly believes that these areas are important for future industrial development, warrant funding for a study, and allow the region to better grasp the potential of industrial development in areas that appear to be prime locations.

- ◆ Industrial sites along the Adams/North Adams Corridor on Route 8;
- ◆ Industrial sites along the Route 102 corridor in Lee; and
- ◆ Industrial sites near the Pittsfield Municipal Airport, Pittsfield.

The Committee also acknowledged other feasibility studies that are worth pursuing:

- ◆ Feasibility study for the vacant truck plaza in West Stockbridge.
- ◆ Feasibility study for the Lane Construction site in Lee.
- ◆ Feasibility study for the Plunkett Hospital in Adams.
- ◆ Feasibility study for the Northeast Log Homes site in Great Barrington.
- ◆ Feasibility study for the Tannery Site in North Adams.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Regional Revolving Loan Fund-

The Town of Adams submitted the Adams Downtown Revolving Loan Fund (Adams priority # 3 of 6) for consideration. However, the Committee was concerned that if the fund was just for businesses in downtown Adams, its vitality might be hindered. Hence, the Committee proposed that the fund be regional in nature, focusing on establishing a regional revolving loan fund to encourage business development in downtown areas throughout the Berkshires.

The Town of Adams and the CEDS Committee will research the amount of interest there is in the region for a downtown revolving loan fund. While it appears it would be useful resource for businesses wanting to locate in downtown areas within the Berkshires, it is important that the Town of Adams and the CEDS Committee assess the level of interest to ensure that a potential loan fund is successful long-term. It is likely that the Town of Adams will coordinate the revolving loan fund for businesses interested in locating in Adams and other communities participating in the loan fund program. Currently, CEDS Committee members are developing a more detailed regional revolving downtown loan fund package, which will be part of the Annual CEDS Update.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Throughout the CEDS Committee process it became apparent that workforce development was on the minds of nearly all committee members. While bricks and mortar projects were seen as important economic development forces, building the skills of new and existing professionals in the Berkshire workforce was seen as just as critical.

Because of this, the CEDS Committee encouraged the submission of projects with a workforce development focus. Among the workforce development projects that were submitted to the Committee for consideration were:

- ◆ Silicon Village Web Academy.
The Prospect Foundation in North Adams is fostering the development of the Academy, which is up and running. The intent of the academy is to equip young individuals with the technology skills and leadership development to harness the strength of the Internet economy for social and economic empowerment and to meet the hiring needs of the growing high-tech community in northern Berkshire County. The program focuses on both hard and soft computer skills and runs at times that will accommodate learners still in school as well as those with jobs.
- ◆ Applied Technology Center of Excellence.
As part of the mission of the Berkshire Applied Technology Council, the Applied Technology Center of Excellence would be a collaboration between the industry, Berkshire Community College, the high schools, and government to ensure that a stream of technically focused

workers are available in the County. The Center would include industry-specific high-tech applications and would be a part of the Tech-Path Program.

- ◆ Community Cultural Center- The Community Cultural Center is intended to encompass education, business assistance, workforce development and socioeconomics for African Americans, minorities, low income and the working poor.
- ◆ North Adams Technology Training Center- This Center entails the provision of job skills training for individuals of all ages.

The Committee decided that instead of ranking each of these projects separately, they would put them together in a collaborative package. They felt that developing the consortium of workforce development initiatives will carefully target workforce development resources, such as towards younger people about to enter the workforce and/or minority workers.

The goal is to create a regional workforce development initiative to support the long-term growth of industries in our region and the retention and expansion of other sectors that increasingly rely on changing skills, including those in the information technology field. Virtually every employer is seeking communication and customer service skills, along with basic computer and math skills.

The rural character and relatively small scale of the region will enable us to bring all economic development and workforce planning organizations together as partners in this project. Additionally, the County is fortunate to be the home of outstanding educational institutions both public and private and within commuting distance of a number of others. This will enable us to develop a culture of education and training that will serve us well in this transition. It is a regional goal to better link the business, labor, education and the public sector to create a workforce responsive to this new economy. The unemployment rate of 2.9% (December 2001) compounds the significant need for training and education.

Keys to success:

- Berkshire County youth and adults need to acquire strong academic, thinking, reasoning, and teamwork skills, and proficiency in using technology
- The need for lifelong learning needs to be instilled into youth and adults
- Regional strategies need to provide for universal access to Internet connectivity and high-speed broadband connectivity, computing technology and facilitate training for technological literacy.
- Local leadership is the key to accomplishing this.

The CEDS Committee for Berkshire County will continue to work on the workforce development aspect the CEDS and workforce projects that were submitted to the Committee for consideration.

iv. CEDS Activities

The CEDS Committee will be engaged in forming programs and activities, as well as continuing strategic partnerships by Fall 2001. First, the project-related goals of the CEDS Committee are to:

- Seek EDA funding for the North Adams Gravel Pit;
- Develop a scope of work and seek funding for an Industrial Sites Feasibility (a study of three highest priority industrial sites);
- Seek funding for completion of the North Adams Venture Center (North Adams) and the Jones Block (Adams);
- Integrate separate, but very related workforce development projects into a consolidated project and seek funding; and
- Prepare the CEDS Annual Report for January 1, 2002.

The overall plan for the CEDS Committee is to establish and maintain a work schedule for the itself, as well as its subcommittees in order to be reactive and proactive. Subcommittees will investigate the following areas:

- Site and brownfield development;
- Business development (various businesses / revolving loan funds); and
- Workforce development.

A letter will be sent out in March, 2001 to the CEDS Committee to form subcommittees. Upon the formation of them, committee goals and timelines will be outlined to ensure CEDS Committee initiatives move forward in a timely manner and that findings of the committees are incorporated into the CEDS Annual Update by late Fall, 2001. The Committee has decided to make January 1st of each year the time to submit CEDS Annual Updates.

The CEDS Committee will:

- Become better educated about regional priorities and the EDA process, and how they relate to projects and the CEDS for Berkshire County;
- Re-visit the goals and objectives annually and re-formulate them accordingly;
- Review the overall CEDS document and make updates as necessary;
- Continually watch the progress of projects, acknowledging new ones and seeing that existing projects within the CEDS are updated;
- The CEDS Committee and its subcommittees will adequately communicate with one another to ensure that subcommittee goals and timelines are met;
- Each subcommittee will prepare a 1 to 2 page summary of the progress that has been made by their respective committee by September, 2001. The summary will relate to general committee developments in relation to the identified goals and objectives, as well as progress made overall, such as with partners and resources the subcommittees have used as tools in the process.

v. Performance Evaluation / Measures

An important element of the CEDS process is setting up performance evaluation measures to assess the progress of the region in meeting its goals and objectives, and evaluating the effectiveness of projects and initiatives undertaken to make a significant difference in the lives of the people of the Berkshire region. Measuring improvement in the “standard of living” or tracking “upward mobility” for people in the region can best be accomplished by looking at detailed data available in the decennial Census. Census 2000 information will provide a snapshot of the region as it is now and allow the region to assess improvement over 1990, but only a small portion of this data will be available this year. Nevertheless, Census data released will provide a set of regional indicators that can serve as a benchmark for the future.

What the CEDS Committee will do over the next six months to prepare for the Annual Report and its update of progress on the Action Plan is the following:

Keep the Process Alive:

- Find the resources and set up structures and systems to ensure continuation of the CEDS process and the ability to monitor and track projects, funding, results of initiatives, number of people served by programs, etc.

Go Public and Be Accessible:

- Establish subcommittees and track their meetings and discussions; promote diversity and inclusion in the process and decision-making; engage the public and communities in the process and strategy development through the Community Development Planning process;
- Work to improve communication about economic development activities and funding in the region.

Find Out What Worked and What Didn't:

- Work to improve CEDS partnerships;
- Prepare a critical assessment of the planning process just completed as a means of ensuring enthusiastic and diverse participation in the process in the future.

Agree on the Definition of Success:

Lower Unemployment –

- Track unemployment rates by community and Labor Market Areas.

Less evidence of need for social services –

- Partner with regional social service agencies (United Way, Northern Berkshire United Way) and employment agencies, etc. to get summary of social service requests as a means of monitoring need rising from unemployment, income pressures, etc.

Collect Evidence of Progress:

- Set up “clearinghouse” and mechanisms for information tracking;
- Track information relevant to progress and phases of projects;
- Track meetings, attendance, and activities fostering partnerships;
- Systematically track investment dollars, public and private, in support of initiatives and overall strategic goals and objectives;
- Investigate availability of data on vacancy rates: mills, downtown areas, industrial/commercial parks, etc.

- Track workforce development projects, Berkshire Enterprise business incubation, other regional initiatives which support CEDS goals.

The CEDS Committee will annually assess overall economic performance factors within the region and document trends and changes in relation to goals, objective and projects identified.

VI. Evaluation and Conclusion

i. Evaluation of Process

The CEDS Committee for Berkshire County has acknowledged the condensed timeframe to prepare this report. The last document that prepared was in 1993 (the former OEDP for Berkshire County), and there was much work to be done this year to move the CEDS process forward once again. Next year, with the help of subcommittees and a greater length of time to meet, it will be possible to prepare better-defined procedures and timelines for the Committee and its respective subcommittees to follow.

To start off, the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission will develop and administer a “feedback survey” to give all participants of the CEDS process to critique the process, project profile, meetings, timetable, document and other areas. This will provide information to support and improve the process, show commitment to meeting the needs and responding to concerns of participants, and keep the level of involvement and enthusiasm high to build advocacy for the regional strategy’s goals and projects.

One of the most time-consuming tasks of the CEDS process was educating individuals within the region about the CEDS process and project solicitation. Therefore, the formation of a subcommittee to solely work on projects will be a great asset. Furthermore, the formation of subcommittees will ensure that that the talents of the committee members will be appropriately utilized and that goals and objectives of the CEDS Committees are achieved through the projects brought to the Committee for consideration.

ii. Conclusion

In conclusion, the Berkshire region is facing challenges that it has faced for decades. Expectedly, the area has endured cyclical changes in its population and economic vitality. As a rural region, Berkshire County faces challenges that are undoubtedly more pronounced than in urban areas. Because of this fact, it is even more important for the region’s leaders to work together and put away region-wide fragmentation and make better use the ideas and innovations that are here. Otherwise, these ideas and innovations will not coalesce and formulate into initiatives that are more ‘regional’ and ‘comprehensive’ in nature. Ultimately, it is the goal of the CEDS Committee for Berkshire County to move economic development initiatives in the region forward and allow all regions and people of the Berkshires to benefit from them. This can only help the Berkshire region attain unprecedented levels of achievement and prosperity.

VII. Appendices

Appendix A: Meeting Agendas and Minutes; Correspondence

**Appendix B: Funding from Massachusetts Office of
Business Development**

Appendix C: Project Profiles and Prioritization

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