



Southern
Worcester
County
Economic
Development
Organization

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Planning Commission
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**Southern Worcester County Economic Development Organization
Executive Committee
Remote Meeting via Zoom
February 1, 2024
Meeting Minutes**

Present:

SWC EDO Exec. Committee Members:

Janet Pierce, CMRPC
Karen Pelletier, WRCC
Jeff Turgeon, Central Mass Hire
Brad Kadelski, Town of Brookfield
Jeannie Hebert, BVCC
Julie Holstrom, WBDC
Tony Sousa, Town of Oxford
Peter Dunn, City of Worcester
David George, Town of Holden
Joseph Laydon, Town of Upton

Guests:

David Sullivan, WRCC

CMRPC Staff:

Kerrie Salwa, CMRPC
Joe Sziabowski, CMRPC

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1. **Facilitated Roll Call:** Janet Pierce called the meeting to order at 3:05 PM. Joe Sziabowski facilitated a roll call of Executive Committee members in attendance. A quorum was present.
 2. **Review Minutes of the December 7, 2023, SWC EDO Executive Committee Meeting:** Jeff Turgeon made a motion to approve the December 7, 2023, minutes. The motion was seconded by Brad Kadelski. Joe Sziabowski took a roll call vote. The minutes were unanimously approved by the Executive Committee.
 3. **Discuss Board Membership:** Janet Pierce explained that the Board has not been able to assemble a quorum at its meetings since December 2022. She noted that having a quorum is important because the EDA encourages prospective EDA grant / project applicants to present before the Board. This may require flexibility on the part of Board members to attend off-schedule meetings to vote on project support letters. In January, CMRPC staff reached out to Board members to gauge their interest in remaining on the Board. Most members affirmed their continued interest, one said no, and the rest did not respond. Janet invited Executive Committee members to share their thoughts on what should be done about the Board's attendance problems.

Karen Pelletier observed that waiting and hoping for more Board members to attend the quarterly meetings has proven to be unsuccessful. She said that she was open to the idea of a smaller Board supplemented by active subcommittees.

David George asked about the response that CMRPC received from Board members when it emailed them to assess their interest in continuing to serve on the Board. He also stated that a smaller Board might be less representative of the region's diverse voices and interests.

Janet Pierce noted that the SWC EDO subcommittees will provide the opportunity for plenty of interested regional voices to participate.

Jeff Turgeon asked if there was a mandate concerning the composition of the Board (e.g., number of members, interests represented, geographic regions, etc.). He also asked if altering the composition of the Board would entail removing absentee / departed members and the seats they occupy or only replacing the members with new people.

A conversation about the Board's composition and attendance record followed. The most current list of SWC EDO Board members was shared via Zoom for members to follow along.

David George asked what the Board's composition would look like if absentee / departed members were removed from the Board list.

A few Executive Committee members voiced support for the idea of allowing proxies to represent Board members if they are unable to attend a meeting.

Tony Souza asked if there was a minimum number of Board members mandated by the EDA.

Janet Pierce stated that she and the CMRPC staff would review the SWC EDO Board bylaws, as well as possible alterations to the Board structure, and report back at the Board's March quarterly meeting.

4. CEDS Update: Kerrie Salwa shared with the Executive Committee that the 2023 - 2028 SWC EDO Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) was officially approved by the Economic Development Administration (EDA) in January 2023. The 2023-2028 CEDS will remain in effect until November 2028.
5. Committee Updates: Kerrie Salwa shared that the only SWC EDO subcommittee currently meeting is the Workforce Development Committee. The Committee is planning a career services summit on February 27, 2024, to foster relationships between municipal staff and the region's many workforce development organizations.

Kerrie noted that the SWC EDO Marketing and Municipal Capacity Committees were still being built out. Joe Laydon has volunteered to participate in the Municipal Capacity Committee.

There has been no update on the status of the Brownfields grant application that CMRPC submitted in late 2023. The EPA is expected to announce results in May 2024. If the application is successful, the grant will fall under the purview of the Responsible Development / Brownfields Advisory Committee.

6. Project Review: Kerrie Salwa reported that there are two pending EDA projects. The first involves the Massachusetts Biomedical Initiatives (MBI). MBI is in the early stages of talking to the EDA about funding opportunities.

Julie Holstrom introduced the second project. The Worcester Business Development Corporation's (WBDC) nonprofit arm, New Garden Park, purchased a 51-acre tract of land from Saint-Gobain abrasives in November 2022 in order to redevelop the site for advanced, sustainable manufacturing. New Garden Park received Brownfields remediation funding from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the City of Worcester, and environmental remediation and demolition work began in November 2023. It is now 35% complete.

The next step of the project is building out the infrastructure (i.e., roads and underground utilities) to make the sites ready for private development.

This morning, staff from the WBDC, New Garden Park, and CMRPC met with the EDA to discuss possible EDA funding for the infrastructure component of the project. Some challenges were identified at the meeting. As a result, the WBDC and New Garden Park are currently considering whether to only apply for funding for one of two roads that need to be constructed. The total cost to construct the new roads is estimated to be nearly \$10 million.

7. Partner Updates:

- Jeff Turgeon (Executive Director, MassHire Central Region Workforce Board): Jeff informed the Executive Committee that Central MassHIRE applied for a Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Brownfields Environmental Remediation Training Program grant. Central MassHIRE currently has a Brownfields Environmental Remediation Training Program, but the program's funding will run out this year. A renewal of the grant would allow Central MassHIRE to continue the program for two more years. Unfortunately, the grant application was unsuccessful.
- Peter Dunn (Chief Development Officer, City of Worcester): Peter reported that Worcester recently released the full draft of its Now | Next city-wide plan. The city is currently accepting comments on the plan through February 25, 2024. The plan's executive summary is translated into eight languages. The plan is for the City of Worcester's Planning Board to fully adopt the Now | Next plan in March 2024.

Peter also announced that the city recently launched a pandemic relief grant program for arts and culture nonprofit organizations.

- Karen Pelletier (Executive Vice President, Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce): Karen announced that David Sullivan will be leaving the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce (WRCC) to work for the Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities.

Karen reported that the Worcester Business Resource Alliance (WBRA), which acts as the SWC EDO Business Support Committee, has been meeting. The City of Worcester’s Inspectional Services Department will be a guest at the WBRA’s February meeting.

The WRCC will be hosting a Women’s Leadership Conference on May 2, 2024, at the DCU Center in Worcester.

- David George (Holden Town Planner): David talked about the following developments going on in Holden:
 - o Jefferson Mill: Mill redevelopment and village overlay zoning district
 - o Ad hoc committee to evaluate recreational amenities at Eagle Lake.
 - o Town is looking into brownfield property on Princeton Street
 - o Starbucks is relocating to a property on Main Street.
 - o Improvements to the Dawson Recreation Area.
 - o Acquiring 100+ acres for open space preservation and recreation.
- Jeannie Hebert (President, Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce): Jeannie shared the following updates from the Blackston Valley Chamber of Commerce (BVCC):
 - o BVCC is finishing up their current small business grant program
 - o BVCC is partnering with You Inc. on its Youthworks program
 - o The Blackstone Valley Hub recently hosted its first class in its new Electronics Lab.
 - o Grafton Job Corps students will graduate soon.

Jeannie also notified the Executive Committee of the following upcoming BVCC events:

- o Love Your Legislator Breakfast - Feb 16, 2024, at Galliford’s Restaurant and Tavern In Mendon, MA
- o Home and Business Expo - March 16, 2024

8. Review Meeting Dates: Joe Sziabowski shared the following upcoming meeting dates and venues with the Executive Committee:

- Executive Committee Meetings (first Thursday of the month):
 - o February 1
 - o April 4
 - o May 2
 - o August 1
 - o October 3
- Quarterly Board Meetings:
 - o March 21 (@ Central MassHire's Worcester location)
 - o June 20 (@ Polar Park)

- September 19 (on Zoom)
- December 12 / 19 (@ Unum building or MassDOT District 3 HQ)

9. Other Announcements: Janet Pierce made the following announcements concerning CMRPC:

- The next CMRPC Quarterly Commission Meeting will be held on March 15, 2024, at 7:00 PM. The focus of the meeting will be CMRPC's newly updated community snapshots.
- CMRPC will be releasing a new website soon.
- On June 13, 2024, CMRPC will hold its Annual Meeting and Awards Dinner at Wachusett Mountain in Princeton, MA.

10. Adjourn: Tony Sousa made a motion to adjourn. Julie Holstrom seconded the motion. Janet Pierce closed the meeting at 4:06 PM.