



Southern
Worcester
County
Economic
Development
Organization

c/o Central Massachusetts Regional
Planning Commission
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**Southern Worcester County Economic Development Organization
Remote Meeting via Zoom
September 4, 2025
Meeting Minutes**

Present:

SWC EDO Members:

- Elizabeth Cruz, LABO
- Peter Dunn, City of Worcester
- David George, Town of Holden
- Jeannie Hebert, BVCC
- Julie Holstrom, WBDC
- Karen Pelletier, WRCC
- Janet Pierce, CMRPC
- Tony Sousa, Town of Oxford
- Jeff Turgeon, MassHire Central

Guests:

CMRPC Staff:

- Trish Settles, CMRPC
- Kerrie Salwa, CMRPC
- Joe Sziabowski, CMRPC

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1. **Facilitated Roll Call:** Janet Pierce (JP) called the meeting to order at 3:05 PM.
 2. **Review Minutes of the April 3, 2025, SWC EDO Meeting:** Julie Holstrom (JH - WBDC) made a motion to approve the April 3, 2025, minutes. Tony Sousa (TS) seconded the motion. David George (DG) and Karen Pelletier (KP) abstained. The motion passed with five votes in favor (Jeff Turgeon [JT] and Elizabeth Cruz [EC] were not yet present).

3. **Committee Updates:**

(EPA Brownfields) Joe Sziabowski (JS) reported that CMRPC was awarded a FY2025 EPA Brownfields Assessment Coalition Grant. The grant is worth \$1,000,000 and the funds may be spent to conduct environmental assessment activities at eligible sites throughout CMRPC's service area, although target areas and sites identified in the grant will be focused on first. The grant begins in October 2025 and has a four-year performance period.

In the time since the grant award, CMRPC has participated in several events related to brownfields.

In June 2025, CMRPC collaborated with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, the Environmental Protection Agency, the UConn Technical Assistance to Brownfields program, and MassDevelopment to host a brownfields roundtable event.

In early August, JS and Kerrie Salwa (KS) attended the National Brownfields Conference in Chicago as part of mandatory training for the grant. Sessions at the conference covered topics such as grant administration, procurement, reuse and redevelopment, and financing strategies.

The next step in the grant administration process is to release a request for proposals or request for qualifications to hire a Qualified Environmental Professional (QEP) to conduct site assessment activities. CMRPC will also be putting together a Brownfields Advisory Committee (BAC) to assist with selecting sites for assessment work. CMRPC may be reaching out to SWC EDO members to participate on the BAC. JS asked the group if they knew of any other individuals who should be included on the BAC.

KP: Darnell Dunn, WRCC's Director of Business Recruitment.

JH - WBDC: I am happy to participate on the BAC. Can you filter around the prospective BAC list so that we can review it and provide further recommendations?

JP: How many individuals will the BAC consist of?

JS: That has not been determined yet. We will think about that and update you all on the BAC membership as it materializes.

JP noted that CMRPC has administered brownfields grants before and that the committee used to be part of CMRPC. However, after the creation of the SWC EDO, it transferred to the SWC EDO. CMRPC's previous grant had a two-year performance period. The grant required a number of extensions as sourcing projects proved difficult.

4. Project Review:

KS reported that she has been working on a prospective data center project. However, the project recently fell through.

JH- WBDC notified the group that WBDC obtained definitive site plan approval from the Worcester Planning Board for C Street as part of its Greendale Revitalization Project. Next, the project team will be seeking permitting approval from the Worcester Conservation Commission.

The project team will also begin preparing construction documents to present to the EDA for review by late fall 2025. Once this is complete, the project will go out to bid. Construction will start at the beginning of the next construction season.

The project team recently completed a year-long process to update the 100-year floodplain maps for the area with FEMA. The revised maps are currently out for the 90-day comment period. The new maps remove the Saint Gobain site and several surrounding properties from the 100-year floodplain. The maps will be in place at the beginning of December 2025.

Quadrants one and two of the Saint Gobain site have been fully demolished. Demolition work on quadrant three is currently underway using EPA funds. Demolition of quadrant three is 50 percent complete and should be finished by the end of October 2025.

JP: How did you remove the site from the 100-year floodplain.

JH-WBDC: Members of the project team felt that the floodplain maps for the site were inaccurate. The project team spent over a year working with FEMA to do analysis of site elevation, impervious surface, etc. to change the maps.

[JH-WBDC left the meeting at 3:30 PM].

5. EDA Funding Opportunities:

(EDA Planning Partnership) KS shared that CMRPC was invited to apply for EDA Planning Partnership funding in July of this year. The funding is intended to assist the region with implementing its Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). The funding is worth up to \$300,000, including a match from CMRPC. KS said that CMRPC should hear back from the EPA on the Planning Partnership application by October.

(EDA 2025 Disaster Supplemental) KS: Debra Beavin, the region's EDA representative, also informed CMRPC that the region was eligible to apply for EDA 2025 Disaster Supplemental funding due to significant flooding in Leominster in 2023.

CMRPC is pursuing two funding pathways, the Readiness Path and the Industry Transformation Path.

For the Readiness Path, CMRPC is proposing a study focused on the risk posed by high hazard dams in the region. These consist of a subset of the region's 572 dams. A secondary focus of the study will also be hydroelectric uses for dams. Applications for the Readiness Path may range from \$250,000 to \$500,000. Currently, CMRPC is targeting a \$350,000 ask.

For the Industry Transformation Path, CMRPC is proposing an application focused on improving the region's advanced manufacturing and bioscience industries. The Industry Transformation Path funds a portfolio of 3-5 construction or non-construction grants, generally ranging from \$20 million to \$50 million.

KS: I have talked to some of you about these grant opportunities already. We should put our heads together as an EDD and come up with project ideas for the Industry Transformation Path. Debra suggested that WBDC's Saint Gobain site could be a good candidate for a project.

JP: What is the match for the Industry Transformation Path and when are the applications due?

KS: 20 percent. The Readiness Path application is due between October and December. The Industry Transformation Path is due in March 2026.

JP: I'm sure we will hear more about these grant opportunities at future meetings.

[DG left the meeting at 3:40 PM].

6. Partner Updates:

- Janet Pierce (Executive Director, Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission - CMRPC): JP shared the following CMRPC updates:
 - CMRPC's transportation division is currently working on a number of significant studies:
 - Safety Action Plan (to be completed within a year)
 - Regional Housing and Transportation Plan (to be completed by Sept. 2026)
 - Vernon Street Bridge Study
 - CMRPC released RFPs and conducted interviews for each study to hire a consultant to carry them out
 - CMRPC's next Quarterly Meeting is on Sept. 11 at J. Anthony's Italian Grill on the Auburn / Oxford town line. The topic is the Imagine 2050 project.

Trish Settles (TS): The dam study will be exciting. CMRPC has already done a lot of work in that area through hazard mitigation plans and municipal vulnerability plans. Dams are a challenge to communities because there are so many different owners and some dams are

abandoned. The study will also build on the work that CMRPC has already conducted through the Milltown Caucus.

Representative Jim McGovern conducted his annual farm tour last week, and several CMRPC staff were in attendance.

CMRPC is also working on the Massachusetts Office of Outdoor Recreation Asset Inventory Grant. Discover Central Mass is CMRPC's partner on the project.

- Jeannie Hebert (President, Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce--BVCC): Jeannie Hebert (JH - BVCC) shared the following BVCC events and updates:
 - BVCC is currently helping regional businesses apply for workforce training grants. The State ran out of funding last time, so BVCC is trying to get local businesses to apply for the grant. Sometimes, businesses just need a little push.
 - The governor defunded the Regional Economic Development Organization (REDO) grant program. This is a blow to REDO partners. REDO is a great benefit to businesses and municipalities. BVCC and other REDO recipients sent a joint letter to the region's legislators urging them to override the governor's veto of REDO.
 - BVCC's annual meeting is in November. The keynote speaker will be Mike Kennealy, the former Massachusetts Secretary of Housing and Economic Development. Please reach out if you have nominations for awards.

- Karen Pelletier (Executive Vice President, Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce--WRCC): KP shared the following updates concerning the WRCC:
 - WRCC is recognizing long-time chamber members through "Legacy of Impact" awards at its next Breakfast Club meeting. WBDC will be one of the recipients.
 - The Worcester Business Resource Alliance recently visited the Worcester Regional Food Hub, which provides kitchen space for new food entrepreneurs.
 - The WRCC has been coordinating with the Massachusetts Executive Office of Economic Development (EOED) to host and raise awareness of EOED office hours for micro-businesses. Businesses looking for help or advice from the state may attend.
 - WRCC is visiting Washington, DC on November 4 to meet with elected officials and staff from the current administration to discuss regional issues and priorities.

- Jeff Turgeon (Executive Director, MassHire Central Workforce Development Board): JT reported the following updates concerning the MassHire Central Workforce Development Board:
 - MassHire Central is hosting a job fair at Polar Park tomorrow.
 - MassHire Central has noticed that jobs hiring has slowed down recently.
 - MassHire Central is in the process of selecting a vendor for its EPA Brownfields Job Training Program grant. Training curricula will include HAZWOPER 40, OSHA 10, and more. If you know of partners doing demolition or remediation work and need employees with these credentials, please reach out.

- Elizabeth Cruz (President, Latin American Business Organization--LABO): EC shared the following LABO updates:
 - LABO has created two new programs:
 - “Pathway to becoming bankable,” an 8-week program to start a business, have a business plan, and know your numbers. Businesses of varying longevity (new to three-to-four years old) have participated.
 - “Youth Empowered to Launch & Lead,” a program designed to equip and inspire young entrepreneurs.
 - October 3, 2025: Hispanic Heritage Celebration
 - December 5, 2025: Annual awards event at Mechanics Hall in Worcester
 - Unidos In Power—a statewide coalition to unite Latino leaders on issues like housing, economic development, health, education, and immigration—is hosting a talk on October 20, 2025, in Worcester on economic development, housing, Medicare and Medicaid, and immigration. Similar events have already been hosted in Springfield, Lawrence, and Boston.

JP: What types of business ideas did the students present?

EC: Some examples were jewelry, hair and shampoo, cookies, and art

- Tony Sousa (Assistant Town Manager, Town of Oxford): TS shared the following updates concerning the Town of Oxford:
 - Oxford will be embarking on a master plan update for 2027. The Town will be reaching out to CMRPC to help with this.
 - TS: I am excited for next week’s quarterly meeting at J. Anthony’s.

7. **Review Meeting Dates/Locations and Other Important Dates:** KS stated that the next SWC EDO meeting will be at 3:00 PM on Thursday, November 6, 2025.

8. **Other Announcements:** There were no other announcements.

9. **Adjourn:** JT made a motion to adjourn the meeting. JH-BVCC seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously with seven votes in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 3:53 PM.