



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  
November 6, 2025  
Meeting Minutes**

**Meeting Attendance and Materials:**

**SWC EDO Members Present:**

- Peter Dunn, City of Worcester (PD)
- David George, Town of Holden (DG)
- Jeannie Hebert, BVCC (JH- BVCC)
- Julie Holstrom, WBDC (JH - WBDC)
- Karen Pelletier, WRCC (KP)
- Janet Pierce, CMRPC (JP)

**CMRPC Staff Present:**

- Trish Settles, CMRPC (TS)
- Kerrie Salwa, CMRPC (KS)
- Joe Sziabowski, CMRPC (JS)

**Guests Present:**

**Documents:**

- Meeting Agenda
- Brownfields Advisory Committee  
Proposed Makeup
- Proposed 2026 SWC EDO Meeting Dates

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1. **Facilitated Roll Call:** JP called the meeting to order at 3:04 PM. JS facilitated a roll call vote of the members.
  2. **Review Minutes of the April 3, 2025, SWC EDO Meeting:** JH - WBDC made a motion to approve the Sept. 4, 2025, minutes. DG seconded the motion. The motion passed with six votes in favor:
    - PD: Yes
    - DG: Yes
    - JH- BVCC : Yes
    - JH - WBDC: Yes
    - KP: Yes
    - JP: Yes

### 3. Committee Updates:

**(Business Support - WBRA) KP:** The Worcester Business Resource Alliance (WBRA) continues to meet monthly at in-person meetings. The WBRA have been touring its members' workspaces. The last meeting was at the Better Business Bureau. The WBRA has also been involved in various charities and fundraisers.

The Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce (WRCC) is currently raising awareness of the services provided by "Women of Color Entrepreneurs" (WOCE), which offers training, support, and networking opportunities to women of color with businesses.

**(Workforce/Education) KS:** Jeff Turgeon (Executive Director, MassHire Central Workforce Development Board) and I have been talking with the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) about the critical need for more agriculture high schools in Massachusetts. Currently, there are only four agricultural high schools in the state. The Quabbin Regional School District is looking into the possibility of creating an agriculture program.

JP: Students may petition their school district to allow them to attend an agriculture high school. This can result in as much as \$50,000 in costs for school districts between tuition and transportation.

There were previous conversations between CMRPC, Ann Gobi (Director of Rural Affairs, Massachusetts Executive Office of Economic Development), Bay Path Regional Vocational Technical High School, and Tufts University about creating an agriculture school/program in Central Massachusetts. However, the idea did not materialize due to the high costs that would be involved. Despite this, the need for an agricultural program still remains.

JH-BVCC: An agriculture program was proposed at the Uxbridge High School about ten years ago. A benefactor had committed to providing millions of dollars for the program. However, the school committee voted the program down.

KS: I still hear that an agriculture program is a big need. Paying to send students to any of the state's four agriculture high schools is very expensive to municipalities. Agriculture programs teach a wide variety of curriculum centered around agriculture, including equipment repair/maintenance, dairy farming, entrepreneurship, marketing, and more.

**(Responsible Development/Brownfields Advisory Committee)** JS: CMRPC received a FY2025 EPA Brownfields Assessment Coalition grant. CMRPC staff are currently drafting a Request for Proposals to hire a Qualified Environmental Professional (QEP) contractor firm.

JS: At the last meeting, JH-WBDC asked if CMRPC could share the proposed makeup of its Brownfields Advisory Committee with the SWC EDO so the members could comment on it and suggest changes. JS shared his screen to show the "Brownfields Advisory Committee Proposed Makeup" file.

JS: The composition of the Brownfields Advisory Committee is broken down into the following categories: organizations, towns, and federal/state agencies.

JH-WBDC: Is there a chance that some of the organizations on the Brownfields Advisory Committee might end up coming before the Advisory Committee as project proponents/applicants? Should they be reconsidered because of this?

JS: This is a possibility. CMRPC will take this into consideration. Many of these organizations were on the Brownfields Advisory Committee for CMRPC's FY2018 EPA assessment grant. Committee members could recuse themselves if they had business before the Committee.

JP: How large was the Brownfields Advisory Committee was for the FY2018 grant?

JS: The size was similar. The structure of the proposed Committee for FY2025 is based off that from the FY2018 grant. A subset of the Committee will help CMRPC review Requests for Proposal responses from QEP firms.

JH-WBDC: Should private stakeholders be added to the makeup of the Brownfields Advisory Committee?

JS: They were not included in the Committee for the FY2018 grant, but I think including them would be a good idea.

JP: Will state and federal agencies on the Committee be voting members?

JS: I am not certain what the traditional policy is for that. I will check.

KS: State and federal agency partners would only serve in an advisory role.

JS: CMRPC staff will refine and possibly narrow the Committee makeup and present the final version to the SWC EDO at a later date.

JP: A SWC EDO meeting should be held in December or January to review and vote on the final Brownfields Advisory Committee makeup.

#### **4. Project Review:**

KS: CMRPC has halted work on its EDA 2025 Disaster Supplemental applications, the High Hazard Dam Study (Readiness Path) and the advanced manufacturing and bioscience industry project (Industry Transformation Path), due to the government shutdown and the uncertainty around the employment status of Debra, the region's EDA representative. CMRPC was not awarded EDA Planning Partnership Funds this year.

JP: Only one economic development organization in Massachusetts, the one staffed by the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission, was funded this year. Up to this point, funding has been provided every year. This would have been CMRPC's first year receiving funding. Fortunately, up to this point, CMRPC has paid for SWC EDO work using its own funds, so we are not reliant on federal funding.

#### **5. EDA Funding Opportunities Update:**

KS: The EDA funding opportunities update was already covered in the previous agenda item.

#### **6. Partner Updates:**

- Jeannie Hebert (President, Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce): JH - BVCC shared the following BVCC events and updates:
  - BVCC's annual meeting is on November 20th. The keynote speaker will be Mike Kennealy, the former Massachusetts Secretary of Housing and Economic Development and a candidate for governor.
  - The Whitin Community Center was awarded a \$1,000,000 Early Education & Care Provider Capital Grant from the State for renovations, including out-of-school time classrooms, with an additional programmatic space also in the works.

TS: I was recently at the 495/Metrowest Partnership Board meeting. Did you get the legislation for the Regional Economic Development Organization funding?

JH- BVCC: Yes, we got the override from the legislature. We are still waiting for the Request for Proposals to be released.

- Julie Holstrom (Director of Projects, Worcester Business Development Corporation): JH-WBDC shared the following updates:
  - WBDC and New Garden Park are nearly finished with demolition for the Greendale Revitalization Initiative at the Saint Gobain site in Worcester. I expect demobilization to happen by the end of the year and for equipment pull out to be complete by early 2026.

Now, we are focused on infrastructure, specifically the redesign of C Street. We have obtained our local permits and are cleaning up the plans to ready them for submission to the EDA and utility providers.

The anticipated timeline for the project is to go out to bid for C Street construction by late winter and hire a contractor by late Spring.

- Peter Dunn (Chief Development Office, City of Worcester): PD shared the following updates:
  - Worcester was awarded several Community One Stop awards, including a \$500,000 Site Readiness grant for the Denholm Building and a \$1,000,000 Housing Works grant through the MBTA Communities Catalyst Fund.
  - National Grid is holding up new development projects in Worcester. National Grid has not been able to keep up with the design and construction of utility upgrades to service new developments. The delay is only likely to become greater as more modular housing projects with timelines of 12 months or less begin.

The Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities requires that developers pay the cost of utility service upgrades for their projects. These high costs are harming the financial feasibility of projects.

Because National Grid is a private corporation, the State does not allow State funds to go towards upgrades to National Grid infrastructure. The City of Worcester feels that is unfair, as other municipalities with municipal electric providers may use State funds.

The City of Worcester is using State grant money to offset other developer costs, such as municipal permits and construction fees for water/sewer connections, trenches, sidewalks, and streets.

JP: The policy around State dollars is interesting. Douglas is using EDA funds to make infrastructure improvements, including extending a natural gas line. Perhaps federal dollars are different.

- Karen Pelletier (Executive Vice President, Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce--WRCC): KP shared the following updates:
  - WRCC is hosting its Emerging Workforce Forum on December 11.
  - WRCC is hosting the next session of its Manufacturing Roundtable series on December 12.
  - 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. Office hours take place monthly. This month, they will be on November 26 from 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM. Businesses looking for help or advice from the State may attend.
- David George (Town Planner, Town of Holden): DG shared the following updates:
  - Massachusetts Department of Transportation roadway improvements from Shrewsbury Street to Main Street are mostly complete. Minor items will be completed in the spring.
  - Holden has started work again on passing a bylaw to comply with the MBTA Communities Act.
  - Two significant development projects are in progress: Pine Tree Estates (96 units on 43 lots) and a 125-unit senior-restricted development.
- Janet Pierce (Executive Director, Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission - CMRPC): JP shared the following updates:
  - CMRPC will be presenting the results of its Climate Pollution Reduction Grant project at the next CMRPC Quarterly Meeting. The grant will be submitted to the Environmental Protection Agency by December 4.

**7. Review Meeting Dates/Locations and Other Important Dates:** JS shared his screen and displayed the “Proposed 2026 SWC EDO Meeting Dates” file.

JS: The proposed meeting dates for 2026 are the following:

- February 5, 2026
- April 2, 2026
- June 4, 2026 (Annual Meeting w/ Advisory Committee)
- September 3, 2026

- November 5, 2026

JS: Any thoughts or comments?

JP: There will also be an off-schedule meeting in December or January to vote on the Brownfields Advisory Committee. The June 4, 2026, Annual Meeting should be held in person.

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

9. **Adjourn:** JH-BVCC made a motion to adjourn the meeting. DG seconded the motion. The motion passed with six votes in favor:

- PD: Yes
- DG: Yes
- JH- BVCC : Yes
- JH - WBDC: Yes
- KP: Yes
- JP: Yes

The meeting was adjourned at 3:58 PM.