Southern Worcester County Economic Development Organization

c/o Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission
1 Mercantile Street – Suite 520
Worcester, MA 01608
508.756.7717 P
www.cmrpc.org

Southern Worcester County Economic Development Organization
Remote Meeting via Zoom
December 5, 2024
Meeting Minutes

Present:

SWC EDO Members:
- David George, Town of Holden
- Jeannie Hebert, BVCC
- Julie Holstrom, WBDC
- Joseph Laydon, Town of Upton
- Karen Pelletier, WRCC
- Kerrie Salwa, CMRPC – Alternate for Janet Pierce
- Tony Sousa, Town of Oxford
- Jeff Turgeon, MassHire Central

Guests:

CMRPC Staff:
Trish Settles, CMRPC
Joe Sziabowski, CMRPC

1. **Facilitated Roll Call:** Karen Pelletier called the meeting to order at 3:04 PM.

2. **Review Minutes of the August 1, 2024, SWC EDO Meeting:** Tony Sousa made a motion to approve the August 1, 2024, minutes. Jeff Turgeon seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously with nine votes in favor.

3. **Discuss Roles / Responsibilities and Meeting Schedules for the SWC EDO and the SWC EDO Advisory Council:**

Kerrie Salwa (KS) introduced agenda item 3. KS explained that the SWC EDO should discuss how often and when the SWC EDO Advisory Council will meet.

David George (DG) asked if the topic has been discussed internally at CMRPC and whether CMRPC has any proposals.

KS replied that CMRPC has discussed the possibility of the SWC EDO Advisory Council meeting quarterly or twice a year. KS added that she considered the SWC EDO committee work to be more

important at this point and that Advisory Council members could also participate in the committees if they wanted to.

Trish Settles stated that quarterly meetings of the SWC EDO Advisory Council was a good pace for economic development matters. Jeannie Hebert, Karen Pelletier, and DG all agreed.

4. **Committee Updates:** Kerrie Salwa (KS) shared the following updates concerning SWC EDO committees:
    - Workforce Development Committee:
      The Workforce Development Committee has continued to be involved in discussions with the Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA) and Quinsigamond Community College (QCC) concerning recruitment of mechanics to service the WRTA's bus fleet. The WRTA anticipates that several of its bus fleet mechanics will retire soon, so it is looking to recruit new workers to fill these vacancies.

      Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) is hosting "climate corridor" discussions. That is, WPI is bringing in stakeholders for roundtable discussions on how to build out a regional climate corridor. The conversations have focused on three themes: funding, training, and location.

    - Marketing Central MA Subcommittee:
      CMRPC is currently working on self-guided Instagram tours for the towns of Hardwick and Barre. Prior to this, CMRPC also completed a self-guided Instagram tour for the Town of Rutland.

      CMRPC will be hosting the Director of the Massachusetts Office of Outdoor Recreation (MOOR) on December 17, 2024, to discuss marketing eco-/agro-tourism in the region and linking regional trail systems. There will be a summit in spring 2025 covering these topics. More details to follow.

      KS highlighted that she has heard Central Massachusetts described as a "lodging desert."

    - Municipal Capacity Committee:
      The Municipal Capacity Committee has been discussing the prospect of shared planning and/or economic development services among some Central Massachusetts communities.

      Joe Sziabowski is currently working with the Town of Charlton on a permitting guide. KS said the guide could be a model for other communities.

      KS has been working with boards and commissions from the Town of Northborough to discuss development in the community and possible land use and zoning reforms.

KS reported that the Massachusetts Broadband Institute's Municipal Digital Equity Planning Program will be re-opening in 2025.

- Responsible Development / Brownfields Advisory Subcommittee:
  CMRPC recently applied for a Fiscal Year 2025 Environmental Protection Agency Assessment Coalition brownfields grant.

- Quality of Life Committee:

  The Age-Friendly Central Mass – Action Plan that CMRPC completed in 2023 in partnership with the Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative is being revisited for potential updates.

  Thanks to recent funding, CMRPC will also be developing a regional housing study in 2025. The plan will explore mixed-use development, workforce housing development, accessory dwelling units, and more.

  Trish Settles shared that CMRPC will be applying for Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization Grant from the National Park Service. The Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization Grant Program fosters economic development in rural communities through the rehabilitation of historic buildings in those communities. If awarded the grant, CMRPC will act as a grantee and award rehabilitation subgrants to projects in the region.

  Jeannie Hebert asked if nonprofits could apply for Paul Bruhn subgrants too?

  Trish Settles replied that she believed the answer was yes.

5. **Project Review:**

Kerrie Salwa (KS) reported the following updates:

- KS has a meeting with Jake Sanders from the AHF and Debra Beavin, the Economic Development Administration (EDA) representative for the region (CT, MA, & RI), to discuss potential EDA funding. Jake is putting together a workforce development grant proposal.
- The Town of Douglas is working on a potential project that has not been made public yet.
- KS is planning to apply for a Planning and Local Technical Assistance Grant from the EDA. Debra Beavin has told KS to review the region's CEDS goals and identify a suitable project. KS believes economic development planning in the Town Brookfield would be a suitable candidate.

Julie Holstrom (JH) updated the SWC EDO on the Greendale Revitalization Project being undertaken by the nonprofit subsidiary of the Worcester Business Development Corporation, New Garden Park (NGP).

- NGP was recently awarded a $2.6 million grant from the EDA to fund roadway and

infrastructure improvements at the project site.

- JH and NGP are currently working on the EDA paperwork.
- JH anticipates the roadway and infrastructure improvement project to go out to bid for construction in spring of 2025.
- JH thanked the SWC EDO and CMRPC for their help and support in acquiring the grant.
- JH reported that Debra Beavin was impressed with the size of the former Saint Gobain campus when she visited in July.

6. <u>Partner Updates:</u>

- <u>Karen Pelletier (Executive Vice President, Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce--WRCC):</u> Karen Pelletier (KP) shared the following updates concerning the WRCC:
    - Tomorrow, December 6, 2024, is the WRCC's annual meeting. The WRCC will be celebrating its 150th anniversary in 2025.
    - A new business accelerator in Worcester will have an April 7-10 startup week
    - WRCC recently partnered with Bisnow to host a "Worcester State of the Market" event on November 20, 2024.
    - Darnell Dunn, the WRCC's Director of Business Recruitment recently accompanied the Boston Chamber of Commerce on a visit to Toronto, Ontario, Canada.
    - KP overheard at a Discover Central Massachusetts Board of Directors meeting that Worcester has no regulations concerning Airbnbs, meaning they are technically not allowed.
    - On Tuesday, December 10, 2024, the Worcester City Council will vote to set the new rates for the City's dual tax rate.

- <u>Jeannie Hebert (President, Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce--BVCC):</u> Jeannie Hebert shared the following BVCC events with the SWC EDO:
    - The BVCC held their annual meeting on November 21, 2024. The theme was the future of work. Doug Howgate, President of the Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation, was the keynote speaker.
    - The BVCC hosted its Jingle and Mingle event on December 4, 2024, in Sutton, MA.
    - The BVCC will be hosting the following upcoming events:
        - Professional HR Roundtable on December 10, 2024.
        - AI Roundtable on December 17, 2024.
        - Private Shop Night at the Grafton Country Store in Grafton, MA on December 17, 2024.
        - Employee Handbook Workshop on January 23, 2025.

- <u>David George (Town Planner, Town of Holden):</u> David George shared the following updates concerning the Town of Holden:
    - Holden is hosting its Holiday in Holden event at the Town Hall on December 6 & 7, 2024.

- The Jefferson Mill renovation project is currently ongoing in the town, along with other projects.
- Sunnyside Motors, a car dealership in Holden, recently closed. The Town would welcome any leads or assistance in attracting a new tenant for the property.

- Joseph Laydon (Town Manager, Town of Upton): Joseph Laydon shared the following updates concerning the Town of Upton:
  - Upton has commissioned a feasibility study to evaluate the potential reuse of Holy Angels Church, the Thompson Block, and nearby vacant Town-owned properties. The study includes assessment of development scenarios and environmental delineation.
  - Upton has issued an RFP for the installation of water and sewer up Milford Street to support a new 126-unit development. A special town meeting recently approved an MBTA zoning amendment that covers the property.
  - Upton is working on a West Upton Strategic Plan. The plan complements the Upton Center Plan completed five years ago.

    Kerrie Salwa commented that Upton has such a strong Economic Development Committee.

- Tony Sousa (Assistant Town Manager, Town of Oxford): Tony Sousa shared the following updates concerning the Town of Oxford:
  - The Town of Oxford is looking to update its Master Plan in 2025. The Master Plan was last updated in 2017.
  - Oxford recently completed its Housing Production Plan.

- Jeff Turgeon (Executive Director, MassHire Central Workforce Development Board): Jeff Turgeon reported that MassHire Central has recently been working on grant applications concerning:
  - Serving the migrant population in the region
  - Cybersecurity training
  - Digital equity (statewide application)

- Julie Holstrom (Director of Projects, Worcester Business Development Corporation – WBDC): Julie reported that the City of Worcester also received a $2.8 million MassWorks grant to serve as a match for the Economic Development Administration grant that was recently awarded to New Garden Park.

7. **Review Meeting Dates/Locations and Other Important Dates:** Kerrie Salwa notified the SWC EDO that the next meeting would be held on February 6, 2025.

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

9. **Adjourn:** Tony Sousa made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Jeannie Hebert seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously with nine votes in favor.