



Southern  
Worcester  
County  
Economic  
Development  
Organization

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Planning Commission  
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**Southern Worcester County Economic Development Organization  
Remote Meeting via Zoom  
April 3, 2025  
Meeting Minutes**

**Present:**

**SWC EDO Members:**

- Elizabeth Cruz, LABO
- Jeannie Hebert, BVCC
- Julie Holstrom, WBDC
- Brad Kadelski, Town of Brookfield
- Joseph Laydon, Town of Upton
- 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 3:08 PM.
  2. **Review Minutes of the February 6, 2025, SWC EDO Meeting:** Jeannie Hebert (JH - BVCC) made a motion to approve the February 6, 2025, minutes. Brad Kadelski (BK) seconded the motion. The motion passed with seven votes in favor (Jeff Turgeon not yet present).
  3. **Update on Email Sent to SWC EDO Advisory Council:** JP reported to the SWC EDO that an email was recently sent out to the members of the former SWC EDO Board of Directors informing them of the Board's change in role. The SWC EDO Executive Committee has now taken over the role of the Board, and the former Board has become the SWC EDO Advisory Council.

JP recounted that the former SWC EDO Board of Directors was instrumental at the beginning of the CEDS process and during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The Board represented different industry sectors and interests from around the region.

The Advisory Council members will be invited to the June annual meeting. They will also have the opportunity to sit on the SWC EDO subcommittees if they wish to be more involved.

Kerrie Salwa (KS) noted that Lyndon Nichols from USDA expressed interest in sitting on a subcommittee.

4. **Committee Updates:** KS shared the following updates concerning SWC EDO committees:

- **Responsible Development / Brownfields Advisory Subcommittee:**  
CMRPC will be collaborating with Massachusetts Department of Transportation, the Environmental Protection Agency, the UConn Technical Assistance to Brownfields program, and MassDevelopment to host a brownfields conference in June 2025.

MassDEP heard that EPA brownfields grants will be awarded soon.

CMRPC is working with the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce to host a Construction & Real Estate Roundtable. The event will take place on April 29, 2025, from 11:00 AM to 12:00 PM at the Building Evolution Systems space in downtown Worcester. The participating panelists will include an engineer, a developer, and a real estate lawyer.

Jeff Turgeon (JT) joined the meeting at 3:17 PM.

- **Municipal Capacity Committee:**  
CMRPC has completed digital equity plans for Charlton, Millbury, and Worcester and is currently working on a regional plan for several communities in the Quabbin region. CMRPC is talking with additional communities about sending in applications.

Massachusetts Office of Outdoor Recreation (MOOR) Asset Inventory Grant Program: CMRPC's application has made it through the first round of review. CMRPC partnered with Discover Central Massachusetts on the application.

On March 26, 2025, CMRPC hosted a Department of Public Works Regional Roundtable. One of the topics focused on was workforce recruitment struggles.

KS noted that the MassHire Central Workforce Development Board and Quinsigamond Community College could assist towns with workforce development.

CMRPC is applying for an MVP Action Grant for a Blackstone River Economic Development Study. The study will focus on ecotourism and trails.

JP shared that CMRPC staff are also working with communities on Community One Stop applications. The Transportation Division is specifically assisting small and rural communities with Small Town Road Improvement Grant applications.

CDBG projects are also due April 14, 2025.

## 5. Project Review:

- KS reported that CMRPC is assisting the Town of Douglas with an application for EDA funds. The project is only in the abstract phase. It involves the installation of a \$4.1 million water storage tank to facilitate ongoing development in Douglas along Route 146. The application will be submitted to the EDA next week for comment. The EDA has advised prospective grant applicants to move forward with projects but not to depend on EDA funding.
- JH - BVCC informed the group that the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce (BVCC) is disseminating letters along with other chambers on several matters.

First, concerning the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' \$2.1 million debt to the federal government for mistakenly using federal pandemic funds to cover unemployment benefits. Per an agreement between the State and the Federal government, the principal on the debt will be paid for through the Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund, which is funded by a tax on employers. BVCC and other chambers are advocating that the debt should instead be paid for using the State's rainy-day fund.

Second, the BVCC has signed on to a multi-chamber letter concerning proposed cuts to SNAP by the President and Congress.

On April 16, 2025, the BVCC, the Charles River Chamber of Commerce, and other partners are hosting a town hall with Representative Jake Auchincloss.

JH-BVCC also notified that the group that the Grafton Job Corps is facing federal funding cuts.

- Trish Settles (TS) said that there were no federal partners at the recent APA National Planning Conference. The status of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding also appears to be unknown.
- JP shared the following updates:

Some transportation-related grants that CMRPC had applied for were discontinued.

The funding for CMRPC's Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG) was initially frozen but then opened again. CMRPC is restarting work on the plan in a limited capacity.

It will be interesting to see how federal funding cuts impact the state budget. If programs are cut, CMRPC has the flexibility to shift staff to different roles.

- KS noted that CMRPC has not received an invitation to apply for EDA Partnership Planning funding. However, the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) has reported that it expects no impact to the EDA’s long-term funding. CMRPC could apply for EDA Partnership Planning funding in the future.

## 6. Partner Updates:

- Elizabeth Cruz (President, Latin American Business Organization--LABO): Elizabeth Cruz (EC) shared the following LABO updates:
  - LABO will be hosting its annual Expo on April 12, 2025, from 12:00 - 4:00 PM at the DCU Center in Worcester. The Expo was first hosted in 2015, so this year marks the Expo’s tenth anniversary.
  - LABO recently graduated a Spanish-language Venture Accelerator class of 30 students.
  - LABO is hosting Supplier Diversity training, Venture Accelerator, and “How to Become Bankable” classes in April
  - LABO offers classes in English, Spanish, and Portuguese
- Jeannie Hebert (President, Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce--BVCC): JH - BVCC shared the following BVCC events:
  - May 12, 2025: Annual Charity Golf Tournament
  - Blackstone Valley (BV) Hub is offering a “New Americans Advanced Manufacturing Class”
  - The BV Hub is hosting an electronics class for high schoolers tomorrow
  - Omnitech is growing and would like the BV Hub to develop a training curriculum for them
  - JH-BVCC is meeting with Rand-Whitney soon
  - On April 22, the Town of Northbridge will be opening the improved Mumford River Boardwalk

JP- (to JH-BVCC and EC) Do you work with minority and women-owned businesses to do state supplier certification training?

- Joseph Laydon (Town Manager, Town of Upton): JL shared the following updates concerning the Town of Upton:
  - Upton’s Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) project along Route 140 in the center of town is still ongoing.
  - Upton is working on a planning project involving the delineation of natural resource areas.
  - Upton previously received a HousingWorks grant from the State to fund the extension of water and sewer along Route 140. The project is anticipated to break ground in April or May.
  - Upton has several debt exclusions for school projects on its town meeting warrant.

- Tony Sousa (Assistant Town Manager, Town of Oxford): Tony Sousa shared the following updates concerning the Town of Oxford:
  - Annual Town Meeting is May 7, 2025
    - Override for schools on warrant
    - Debt exclusion on warrant last year
    - Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) Zoning Bylaw update with CMRPC
  - The Lowes Pond Dam Repair Project, which involves renovating an abandoned private dam, will start in the Spring and finish in the fall of 2025. The Dam is located between Main St. and I-395.
  - MVP Action Grant: The Town is cleaning up a Town property for open space use; petroleum to pollinators.
  
- Jeff Turgeon (Executive Director, MassHire Central Workforce Development Board): JT reported the following updates concerning the MassHire Central Workforce Development Board:
  - MassHire Central, the BV Hub, and Worcester Public Schools are partnering to host an event for seniors not planning to attend college. The event is named “Senior Scoop.”
  - MassHire Central is starting up its Brownfields Job Training Grant. The grant will start in spring or summer.
  - MassHire Central is operating five training programs for migrants.
  - MassHire Central is applying for a wastewater treatment plant worker grant in May.
  - MassHire is partnering with Quinsigamond Community College on several programs: diesel technician (night-time program) and CDL certification for ex-prisoners.
  - The State-funded youth program is facing cuts next year.

JP - DPWs want employees with CDL and Hoisting licenses.

JT- We have a current grant to supply that training, but the need is far higher than the grant can support.

KS - Who sets CDL training costs?

JT - There are two entities that provide CDL training: Parker Driving Schools and New England Tractor Trailer School. The latter is cheaper but their performance has dropped. State fees are only a small portion of the cost of CDL training.

JP- Do towns cover training costs?

JT - The training capacity is there. The issue is who will pay.

JP- DPWs need to partner on shared procurement.

JT- You can get a group discount. We can share our bid.

BK - Brookfield is considering collaborating with other towns on this.

7. **Review Meeting Dates/Locations and Other Important Dates:** KS stated that the next SWC EDO meeting will be the June 5 Annual Meeting followed by meetings on September 4 and November 6.

CMRPC is hosting its Annual Meeting on June 12, 2025, at the Salem Cross Inn in West Brookfield.

8. **Other Announcements:** There were no other announcements.
9. **Adjourn:** JL made a motion to adjourn the meeting. JH-BVCC seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously with eight votes in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 3:58 PM.