



Southern
Worcester
County
Economic
Development
Organization
c/o Central Massachusetts
Regional Planning Commission

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**Southern Worcester County Economic Development Organization
Board of Directors
Remote Meeting via Zoom
March 17, 2022
Meeting Minutes**

Present:

SWC EDO Board Members: (Exec Cmte)*

Janet Pierce, CMRPC*
Karen Pelletier, WRCC*
Jeff Turgeon, Central MA Hire*
David George, Rutland*
Jeremy Thompson, 495/MW Partnership*
Tony Sousa, Oxford*
Jeannie Hebert, BVCC*

Josh Lee Smith, Westborough EDC
Kevin Shaughnessy, National Grid
Mackenzie May, Central Mass Grown
Alexandra McNitt, Chamber of Central
Mass South
Jon Weaver, Mass Biomed
Sheila Cuddy, QVDC

Guests:

David Dufresne, Warren
Elizabeth Cruz, LABO
David Sullivan, Worcester Regional
Chamber of Commerce

CMRPC Staff:

Trish Settles, CMRPC
Kerrie Salwa, CMRPC
Ryan Saul, CMRPC

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1. Meeting began at 3:05 p.m.: Karen Pelletier began the meeting at 3:05 p.m., but due to the lack of quorum, agenda items one and two were initially skipped, and the meeting began with agenda items three and four.
 2. Minutes: Due to the lack of quorum, the Quarterly Meeting minutes from December 16, 2021 and June 17, 2022 could not be approved and will need to be voted on at the next Quarterly Meeting.
 3. EDA Project Updates: Kerrie Salwa stated that several EDA applications have been submitted for various projects in the region. The Town of Southbridge successfully submitted their ARPA Travel, Tourism, and Outdoor Recreation application for a five mile rail trail project. The

Town of Douglas successfully submitted their EDA ARPA Economic Adjustment Assistance (EAA) application for a large sewer project. Kerrie and CMRPC have also been working with the group from Northeastern University on their life sciences focused application for the second round of the EDA ARPA Build Back Better Challenge.

Kerrie introduced David Dufresne from the Town of Warren to discuss the Town's project application for the EDA ARPA Non-Construction EAA funding opportunity, which has a March 31, 2022 deadline. David thanked the group for their time and the opportunity to present the project. There is a large mill complex in West Warren that DEXTrust Industries is looking to develop. DEXTrust has dealt with similar projects before and is looking to bring a significant number of businesses and job opportunities to the old mill complex. David said that the mill complex's closing over twenty years ago has been very detrimental to the town's economy. The mill was previously a facility that manufactured parachutes and other military equipment. Ever since the closing of the mill the Town has been trying to redevelop the area. The Town was approached by DEXTrust with a plan for redevelopment. Part of the plan is to get the Town to agree to facilitate the infrastructure improvements outside of the complex that are needed to sustain the redevelopment plans, which includes veterans' housing and manufacturing companies. Some of the required improvements are related to sewer, water, and roads. After the Town's discussion with the EDA, the EDA suggested that the Town complete a master plan to evaluate infrastructure needs and what is required from the Town to assist DEXTrust's plans. David also said the proposed master plan would identify needs to ensure that the site and Town at large can accommodate potential growth resulting from the project.

The Town will be voting tonight securing and dedicating ARPA funds to offset the 20% requirement for the EDA funding. The Town is also in the process of entering a partnership agreement with DEXTrust that states that the Town will be working in cooperation with the group to support their needs. David said the potential economic benefits of the project is exciting for the community. The EDA also suggested the possibility that the Town regionalize the project because there is the likely potential that other towns' residents will be employed by the project. David said that DEXTrust is looking at a three-year project to have the site running at full capacity. David believes that with the help of the EDA and the proposed master plan, the project can see progress in the near future. David thanked Kerrie and Trish for the help they have provided thus far and asked the group if they had any questions.

Alex McNitt asked if the developer already has businesses ready to move in, or if the Town has any assurances that this is the case. David said DEXTrust already has several businesses signed up to have space within the site, but that he was not sure how detailed DEXTrust would like him to be with that topic. David stated that many of the businesses are technology-based, one of which is a green-energy based initiative. This could be either thermal energy or reestablish the hydroelectric plant that exists at the mill complex. DEXTrust feels they can run the complex off of green energy, and that they may even be able to co-op the Town to offer electricity to residents at a reduced rate. Another idea that has been proposed is opening a "minute-clinic." This would have a significant impact for the community health of Warren, as residents currently have to travel to Palmer, Southbridge, or Worcester for medical services with

the closing of Baystate Mary Lane Outpatient Center. Other ideas that have been proposed are residential units and restaurants.

Jeff Turgeon said that his office and the Pioneer Valley office would be glad to help with any job training needs that arise as the project continues to develop. David said that DEXTrust is looking into an agreement with the school in Warren to create internship opportunities for the school's nursing program, as one of the potential projects at the site would require nursing services.

Kevin Shaunessy said he is very interested in connecting David to National Grid's Warren representative on the Community and Customer team. Kevin said that he would also like to connect David to National Grid's energy sales team that are interested in the new energy technologies available while also leveraging existing technologies. Kevin said that he would be reaching out to facilitate to the connection. David thanked Kevin and that the Town welcomes all input. David further explained that there is essentially two projects going, however. The Wrights Mill complex is a private entity that is the private developer of that entity. Then, the Town needs to evaluate what infrastructure improvements are needed to support increased needs from the redevelopment and growth at the mill complex. Janet said she will be sure to connect Kevin and David.

Kerrie thanked David for his time and for the explanation of the project. Kerrie said that she believes a Letter of Support from the EDO is the next step. Janet stated that due to the lack of a quorum a motion could not be made to provide a letter of support. However, Janet asked if there were any objections to providing a letter of support for the project. Alex McNitt asked if the project needed a vote for a letter of support, to which Janet stated that the SWC EDO Executive Committee has been operating in that fashion. Jon Weaver asked for explanation of the process for providing support letters and if by approving support for this project the group is not approving something else. Kerrie explained that there are several different ARPA funding opportunities available and that this was the ARPA Non-Construction EAA funding opportunity. Therefore, this project is in a different bucket of funding than Southbridge's EDA application or Northeastern University's EDA application. Jon thanked Kerrie and Janet for clarifying. A roll call to provide a support letter was conducted, and the group expressed unanimous support. Janet said that David would receive a letter of support, and David thanked the group again for their time and support.

4. EDD Designation Update: Kerrie Salwa said that CMRPC submitted all of the requested documentation for the designation status request a few weeks back. The EDA asked for additional information, which CMRPC submitted two to three weeks ago. The designation request is currently in a holding pattern and CMRPC will provide any updates when they become available.
5. Presentation: Kerrie Salwa provided a brief background of CMRPC's regional plan, Imagine 2050: A Vision for Central Massachusetts, the progress CMRPC has made with the plan thus far, and the plan's future timeline. Kerrie encouraged the group to think about how the three

elements of Economy, Environment, and Equity overlap and crossover one another when participating in the visioning session. Kerrie then introduced Sarah Adams and Mary Hannah Smith to present on the Environment element of the plan. Sarah introduced herself and explained that she would give a presentation that would provide an overview of the regional plan's Environment element, followed by a visioning session.

- i. **Presentation on Imagine 2050: A Vision for Central Massachusetts:** Sarah began with how the regional plan would define “environment” and emphasized the two-way relationship that exists between human life’s impact on the environment and the environment’s impact on human life. Sarah then explained how planning can have impacts on the environment and described the environmental planning work that takes place at CMRPC. Next, Sarah explained that she would be providing an overview of the past, present, and future environmental conditions of the region. Concerning the past, Sarah described the original inhabitants of the region, as well as reviewing past development trends, such as transportation infrastructure, that impacted the region’s environment. Sarah also listed some land use changes and challenges that took place in the past and described some of the past policy responses to those challenges.

Sarah then explained some of the present environmental conditions of the region, such as comparing the current land use conditions to the current land use and zoning policies. A brief overview was provided of the region’s municipal land use policies and related work CMRPC is undertaking, such as a zoning diagnostic of all 40 CMRPC communities. Current environmental considerations like climate change impacts, increased building of green infrastructure, and municipalities’ environmental efforts were also described. Sarah then outlined a SWOT analysis for the region’s environment.

Mary Hannah began the conversation about future environmental considerations by outlining some potential impacts, such as rising summer temperatures the region could see by 2080 depending on the amount of reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Mary Hannah then stated the four threats that the 2018 State Hazard Mitigation and Climate Adaptation Plan outlined: changes in precipitation; rising temperatures; extreme weather; and sea level rise. Mary Hannah explained the potential region-specific impacts and mitigation efforts related to each of these threats. The overview of future environmental conditions ended with a discussion about positive efforts Towns and organizations have made in the region. Specifically, Mary Hannah described how the Uxbridge’s environmental planning efforts will set the Town up for future success and commended the Blackstone Watershed Collaborative for its Needs Assessment Report and other work. She also highlighted positive impacts from Congestion Mitigation Air Quality projects in the region and the opportunities for improved resiliency from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

- ii. **Visioning Session:** As Ryan Saul began screen sharing the Jam Board, Mary Hannah explained that the visioning session was an opportunity for the group to express their vision for the region’s environment for the next 30 years. She encouraged the group to describe both considerations they would like to see and those that they would like to

avoid. The session began with the question prompt of, “After listening to the presentation about the environment of Central Massachusetts region: What would you like our Central Massachusetts environment to look like in 30 years? What concerns do you have about where our environment might be in 30 years? What should we try to avoid?”. Jeanie Hebert explained that having clean drinking water and water in general should be a top priority. Jeanie also said that not ignoring problems with issues like water, pollution, and recycling are also important. Mackenzie May commended the state or partnering with UMass on a Farmland Viability Plan. Mackenzie also explained that supporting institutions capable of the necessary research like UMass is critical because many of the region’s perennial crops and related food systems are especially vulnerable to climate change. More generally, Mackenzie said that agriculture as a whole is impacted by every aspect of the environment, from pests to water issues, so it is important to continue expanding sustainable farming practices and education for younger farmers. Alex McNitt said that one of the challenges with raising livestock for meat is the lack of meat processing facilities and that creating such facilities may be an opportunity to reduce the transportation emissions associated with shipping meat from elsewhere. Alex also expressed her hopes for the expansion of geothermal and hydroelectric energy technology in the region, as was referenced in the previous discussion about the Wrights Mill project in Warren. Mary Hannah agreed that there are opportunities in the region for retrofitting and modernizing such system. She also said that redevelopment in general can be a green practice, as it does not require clearing forest or farmland for new development. Alex made another point about the “online mall of America” and the impact that that has on small businesses and main streets. She believes that this will result in negative trends related to aesthetic improvements, walkability, and community engagement.

Sarah then provided a brief recap of the cross-cutting topics of the plan: infrastructure, education, quality of life, sustainability and resiliency, and municipal services and community vitality. The second question prompt asked, “How do you imagine these topics might impact our regional environment between now and 2050?”. Dave George answered that the cost of energy can cause strains on municipal budgets, which for many Towns can significantly impact many other services a town provides. In response, Sarah Adams asked if the group felt that rising energy costs may encourage some communities to electrify. Dave agreed that it may, but said that there are certainly still costs associated with this. Trish Settles said that often a challenge can direct a community toward an opportunity and that the region has approached many challenges with this sentiment in mind. Sarah asked the group how they felt the environment would affect the region’s infrastructure over the next 30 years. Alex said that she remains skeptical of increased public transportation and high speed rail. She explained that the difficulty of increasing public transportation when it does not exist extensively in the South County region and many people have to own a car currently. This makes her doubtful that increased public transportation would attract enough ridership to have a meaningful impact on the environment. Jeannie said that felt increased public transportation would make a big difference in the Blackstone Valley region, especially

with helping young people get to jobs. She referenced her experience with the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce's EdHub and stated that public transportation would help people get to work who do not have cars. Jeannie also said that she often gets calls asking if train service between Worcester and Providence would be resurrected. Mary Hannah and Sarah said that public transportation is certainly a significant topic in all three plan elements of Economy, Environment, and Equity. Sarah then asked specifically about the theme of Sustainability and Resiliency. Alex felt that infrastructure is deeply connected with sustainability and resiliency. She said that although infrastructure is needed for desired development, it needs to be built in a thoughtful and sustainable manner. Alex also said she believes that there is an opportunity and obligation to not send our waste to other countries. Instead, she believes waste should be repurposed, such as developing a new kind of pavement material. Jeanie agreed that there are ways to reevaluate disposable things to see how they can be repurposed. Alex followed up by saying that the region has the intellectual and technological strength and that it should incentivize innovation related to this topic. Kerrie agreed and thanked the group for their time and participation. Janet also thanked the group for their comments and asked if there were any questions. There were none.

6. Organization and Partner Updates:

- Janet Pierce: Janet said she had hoped that she could introduce Elizabeth Cruz, who is affiliated with LABO, and ask if she is Jose Rentas's appointed successor for the EDO. Elizabeth was no longer in the meeting. Janet asked Kerrie and Ryan to extend the invitation to the next Executive Committee to Elizabeth.
- Jeannie Hebert: Jeannie said that after a meeting with the Northbridge Finance Committee last night, the Chamber received \$188,000 in ARPA funding from the Town to expand the Blackstone Valley Education Hub (Ed Hub). Physical expansion will take place by expanding office space and adding robotics and electronics lab space. The Chamber will also be absorbing the space in the Heritage Corridor that it has been occupying since the flood incident occurred, which will expand space for the Ed Hub. These expansions will allow the Ed Hub to see more students and expand the curriculum offered. The Chamber's expo was Saturday, which was a great success. There were over 1,000 attendees and the Chamber received a lot of positive feedback.
- Alex McNitt: Attorney General Maura Healey is joining the Chamber for their Annual Meeting and luncheon at the Southbridge Hotel on Tuesday, April 12th. The Attorney General had planned on attending the same meeting in May of 2020, but this did not happen because of the pandemic at the time. The Chamber has kept that conversation going since then, though.
- David Sullivan: This past Tuesday, the Startup Worcester Open House took place at WorcLab. The event went well and was designed to showcase the progress entrepreneurs in the program have made thus far. The Worcester Regional Food Hub is running a program on Monday that will provide a "full ride" of technical support and access to the shared commercial kitchen for minority, women, and immigrant-owned food businesses. The Food Hub received \$3 million from a Congressional earmark that will be used to build out the lower level of Union Station to be the new Food Hub

headquarters. There will be an announcement for this funding at Union Station sometime next month. Janet asked if that funding would be enough to pay for the build out. David said that it is. The budget itself is \$3 million, and there is additional funding still coming in, so the funding will actually be above budget. However, David said given the old, challenging nature of the building, additional funding will allow the Food Hub to be prepared.

7. New Business: There was no new business.
8. Review Meeting Dates/Locations and Other Important Dates: session.
 - i. **Quarterly Meeting**: Kerrie said the tentative date for the net Quarterly meeting is June 16th, which is also the Annual Meeting. Janet asked the group if they would like to try for an in-person meeting. Alex McNitt stated yes, and Janet said that the group would try to have the Annual Meeting in-person.
 - ii. **Executive Committee Meetings**: The next Executive Committee meeting will be on April 7th at 3:00 p.m.
9. Other Announcements: There were none.
10. Adjourn: A motion to adjourn was made by Jeremy Thompson. Alex McNitt seconded the motion. The meeting concluded at 4:32 p.m.