



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
September 15, 2022
Meeting Minutes**

Present:

SWC EDO Board Members: (Exec Cmte)*

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

Jon Weaver, Mass Biomed
Sheila Cuddy, QVDC
Kathy Rentsch, QCC
Meghan Liddy, Kelleher & Sadowsky

Advisory Role:

Lydon Nichols, USDA
Kevin Kuros, MOBD

Guests:

Kyle Vangel, HR&A Advisors, Inc.
Joe Laydon, Upton

CMRPC Staff:

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

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1. Meeting began at 3:10 p.m.: Janet Pierce began the meeting at 3:10 p.m., but due to the lack of quorum, agenda items two and three were skipped. An informal roll call was conducted of the board members present.
 2. Minutes: Due to the lack of quorum, the Quarterly Meeting minutes from the December 16, 2021, June 17, 2022, and the March 17, 2022 could not be approved and will need to be voted on at the next Quarterly Meeting.
 3. Vote for SWC EDO Board of Directors New Membership: Due to the lack of quorum, this agenda item could not be visited and was skipped.
 4. EDA Project Updates: Kerrie Salwa stated that several EDA applications have been submitted for various projects in the region. The Town of Douglas successfully submitted their EDA ARPA

Economic Adjustment Assistance (EAA) application for a large sewer and water infrastructure project. The Town of Southbridge successfully submitted their ARPA Travel, Tourism, and Outdoor Recreation application for the Quinebaug Valley Rail Trail project. The Town of Warren successful submitted their application for EDA funding for the Wrights mill Master Plan. CMRPC has also been assisting the Town of North Brookfield on an application for EDA funding to support a major camera study of the Town’s sewer line. Kerrie reminded the group that the SWC EDO provided a letter of support for that project. CMRPC has been working with Jim Nyberg from the Town’s Sewer Department, and the application should be submitted in a week or two. Kerrie also said that WBDC may be submitting an application for EDA funding as well. Janet asked if there were any questions. There were none.

5. EDD Designation Update: Kerrie said that there have been no updates regarding the designation. She said that the most recent update CMRPC received was that the earliest any status update would be provided would be in October. Janet asked if there were any questions. There were none.
6. CEDS Update: Kerrie stated that CMRPC had been notified one week ago that its EDA Economic Adjustment Assistance application was awarded for \$294,550 in funding. The application was for funding support to develop and implement the CEDS for the years of 2023 to 2028. Kerrie said at the next SWC EDO Executive Committee meeting, she would like to organize a CEDS subcommittee to begin this process. The funds last from September 2022 to September 2023. Janet thanked Kerrie, Ryan, and other staff members for working to submit the application in roughly a week. Kerrie had received a phone call from Debra Beavin inviting CMRPC to apply for the funds. Janet said that the group believes that the funds are the remaining funds from the CARES Act, which is why the funding is for just a one-year time period. Janet said CMRPC looks forward to working with the board on updating the CEDS. She said the EDA portion of the funding is roughly \$146,000, and the balance is the CMRPC match. There is a signed and executed contract, and CMRPC will be beginning the process quickly. Janet thanked Debra and the EDA for inviting CMRPC to apply and for turning it around quickly. She asked if there were any questions.
7. Presentation on the Worcester Now | Next Citywide Plan, Kyle Vangel, HR&A Advisors, Inc.: Kerrie introduced Kyle Vangel, Principal with HR&A Advisors, who is the Project Manager for the economic development portion of the Worcester Now | Next Citywide Plan. Kerrie said she invited Kyle to present at this meeting after participating in the Economic Opportunity Working Group. Kyle began by providing an overview of the planning process and project team. HR & A Advisors is leading the economic development portion and aspects of the plan. Kyle provided an overview of the planning process’s goals and what it will and will not do. The plan aims to frame policy decisions by engaging with the community. Part of this process will involve reviewing past plans and trying to fill gaps between previous planning efforts. The guiding principles of the pan are equity, resilience, inclusivity, integrity, and innovation. Kyle also provided an overview of the Economic Opportunity Working Group that Kerrie mentioned. Economic opportunity is one of the three main areas that the plan will explore in-depth, along with housing and transportation. The working group focuses on this theme and held a first

meeting in summer 2022. The next meeting will be held in winter 2022/2023 and will involve discussing draft recommendations. Kyle said that the plan is broken into two phases over 18 months. Phase I, lasting from January 2022 to October 2022, consists of community engagement and gathering feedback and data. Phase II, lasting from October 2022 to May 2023, consists of developing a plan for action and finalizing the plan for approval by the Planning Board. Themes emerging from public visioning sessions related to economic opportunity have included enabling neighborhood-scale commerce, investing in workforce and job training, and how complete streets and public transit support economic development. Overall, some of the top patterns and trends identified from the economic development portion of the plan have been Worcester's "eds and meds" focused development, how the job market can reinforce inequities, and how entrepreneurship can contribute to wealth building and community quality of life. Kyle then asked for feedback on the planning process so far, and if the group wanted to add anything that they feel is missing.

Jon Weaver said he agrees with the entrepreneurship and eds and meds pattern. He also added that Worcester has "made it," and that the City and the region needs to recognize that and position itself to further become a regional hub. Jon said that accomplishing this is going to rely heavily on what happens in the surrounding communities. He specifically mentioned transportation developments and the production of adequate amounts of a diversity of housing options beyond just Worcester. Kyle said he would pass the transportation comments along to the firm leading the plan's transportation efforts. He said that the plan is working to understand how better transportation connections can be made and how the WRTA system can better integrate with the MBTA system. Kyle also said that housing has been a number one concern of many groups and individuals throughout the engagement process, and as such is one of the three main focuses of the plan.

Kathy Rentsch said that she believes housing will be the number one barrier to creating equal opportunity and for filling new jobs. She also said she agrees with Jon's point about transportation, and said she has seen the difficulties the lack of transportation can cause through her work in Southbridge and south county.

Tony Sousa asked if the future of the airport has been considered during the planning process. Kyle said that the airport has not been a focus of the plan so far. However, the plan is thinking about how certain areas of the City around the airport, such as the Mill Street area, can be further improved. Kyle said that Tony raises a great point with the airport and that the challenge of the airport has been more connectivity to more regional markets.

Kyle then presented some socioeconomic data that has been informing the plan so far. Worcester had the lowest employment growth of the Commonwealth's six largest cities. Education and healthcare had the highest share of employment in the City, and both their shares were higher than the Massachusetts share. Furthermore, there is a negative correlation between the percentage of IPOC populations working in the industries that have above average earnings. There are also significant disparities in income by race. Kyle also detailed how the plan will focus on entrepreneurship and the development of specific neighborhoods and commercial corridors. The Webster Square area will act as a pilot for neighborhood specific development.

Jon Weaver said that he feels that the current zoning guidelines are not aligned with what the City actually wants. He said at different places in the City, such as on Shrewsbury Street, there are odd patchworks of different zoning that can be restrictive to forms of desired development. He also mentioned the Biotech Park area as an example. Kyle said that although the plan will not actually enforce any changes, it will be recommending zoning changes, and he thanked Jon for that feedback.

Kevin Kuros said that part of what MOBD does is respond to RFPs that often involve foreign direct investment. Often times, such RFPs require a site to be located within 45 minutes of an international airport. Kevin said that this is an example of why the airport should be included as an important part of the plan. Kyle thanked Kevin for making that point.

Dave George asked Kyle if the core focus of the plan is just on the City or if the focus is also regional. Kyle said that although the plan will be taking significant account of the regional aspect of many topics, especially housing and transportation, the plan ultimately is focused on the City of Worcester. Dave also asked if the plan has considered venture capital funding, the number of patents coming out of the City, and maker space participation from people living in the neighborhoods the plan has identified. Kyle said that venture capital and patents have not been considered yet, but data is available for those topics and will likely be considered in some fashion. He said that maker space has been considered and that the plan is working to better understand the specific economic contexts of the different neighborhoods in the City.

Janet said that is great for CMRPC staff to be involved in the different working groups and thanked Kyle for involving staff. Janet and Kerrie thanked Kyle for joining today's meeting.

8. Organization and Partner Updates:

- Jeannie Hebert: Jeannie said BVCC is hosting its Back to Business Breakfast at 8:00 a.m. on September 29th in Millbury. Maura Healey will be the keynote speaker. It is a great opportunity for one-on-one questions and listen to her view on the future of Massachusetts. It is also a chance to advocate for the Central Massachusetts region. Jeannie invited anyone to attend or to submit questions beforehand. Janet said that CMRPC staff will unfortunately have a conflict, as MARPA and the Division of Local Services is hosting a municipal conference at Holy Cross that morning and afternoon.
- Jeff Turgeon: MassHire is working with the Massachusetts Restaurant Association on a state grant for growth and training for incumbent workers in the restaurant industry. They will also be working on a different project relating to workers newly entering the restaurant industry. MassHire is also partnering with several companies on a CDL certification and training opportunity. Jeff congratulated Kathy Rentsch on QCC's award for a workforce grant.
- Kathy Rentsch: Kathy said that QCC had been awarded a Donnelly Workforce Grant of \$504,000 for two years for the biomanufacturing on-ramp program. It will allow for QCC to continue with six more cohorts. The program will begin on September 26th and already has a waiting list. QCC is pleased with the employment results from the pilot programs, but will do more intensive vetting of candidates for this program, as the goal is 100% employment after graduation. Kathy thanked Jon Weaver and MBI

for their help and support with the process. QCC will also be beginning a program focused on training of those released from incarceration and seeking to reenter the workforce. This program will build off of a pilot program from the previous spring.

- Kevin Kuros: Tomorrow is the Manufacturing Mashup event at polar Park. MOBD will be attending and will have a table. Jeannie Hebert said BVCC will be in attendance as well.
- Meghan Liddy: Meghan said she has been watching the credit markets as interest rates have continued to rise. She thinks investment will continue because real estate is still a good investment compared to other forms, and there is still a lot of cash available to investors. However, she also thinks there will be an eventual slowdown in transactions as rates continue rising. Investors will want to recalibrate with the changing conditions.

9. New Business: There was no new business.

10. Review Meeting Dates/Locations and Other Important Dates: session.

- i. **Quarterly Meeting**: Kerrie said the date for the next Quarterly Meeting is Thursday, December 15th. The CEDS Annual Report will be reviewed at the meeting. She said she would like to try to have it in-person. Janet asked if there were any objections to that. There were none.
- ii. **Executive Committee Meetings**: The next Executive Committee meetings will be on Thursday, October 6th and on Thursday, November 3rd.

11. Other Announcements: There were none.

12. Adjourn: Due to the lack of quorum, no motion or roll-call vote of the board was conducted to adjourn the meeting. The meeting concluded at 4:06 p.m.