



Southern
Worcester
County
Economic
Development
Organization

c/o Central Massachusetts
Regional Planning Commission

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Worcester, MA 01608
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**Southern Worcester County Economic Development Organization
Board of Directors
Hybrid Meeting
Polar Park (Third Floor Board Room, Gate D Entrance)
100 Madison Street
Worcester, MA 01608
Remote Meeting Option via Zoom
December 15, 2022
Meeting Minutes**

Present:

SWC EDO Board Members: (Exec Cmte)*

Janet Pierce, CMRPC*`
Karen Pelletier, WRCC
Jeff Turgeon, Central MA Hire*
David George, Rutland*
Tony Sousa, Oxford*
Jeremy Thompson, 495/MW Partnership*
Peter Dunn, Worcester*
Julie Holstrom, WBDC*

Alix McNitt, CCMS
Mackenzie May, Central Mass Grown
Jon Weaver, Mass Biomed
Sheila Cuddy, QVCDC
Tim Loew, MassDigi/WPI
Kathy Rentsch, QCC
Jeff Howland, Shrewsbury

Advisory Role:

Kevin Kuros, MOBD

Guests:

Gary Bechtholdt, Northbridge
Andrew Golas, Charlton
Brooke Hultgren, Auburn
Brad Kadelski, Brookfield
David Sullivan, WRCC

CMRPC Staff:

Trish Settles, CMRPC
Kerrie Salwa, CMRPC
Ryan Saul, CMRPC
Wenzheng Wang, CMRPC
Elena Ion, CMRPC
Greer Jarvis, CMRPC

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1. Meeting began at 9:20 a.m.: Janet Pierce began the meeting at 9:20 a.m. Janet Pierce welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending the SWC EDO Quarterly meeting. Janet conducted a roll call of the board members present.

2. Minutes: Janet stated that the Board of Directors had to approve the meeting minutes from the March 17, 2022, June 17, 2022, and the September 15, 2022 Quarterly meetings. Julie Holstrom made a motion to approve the minutes from the March 17, 2022, June 17, 2022, and the September 15, 2022 Quarterly meetings. Kathy Rentsch seconded. Janet asked if there was any discussion. A roll-call vote of the Board of Directors was conducted. Dave George voted to approve the March 17, 2022, and September 15, 2022, Quarterly meeting minutes, but abstained from the June 17, 2022, minutes. Jeff Howland and Tim Loew both abstained from voting to approve the minutes from the three Quarterly meetings. The motion passed.
3. CEDS Annual Report: Ryan Saul explained that the CEDS Annual Report is meant to provide an update on regional socioeconomic data and updates on progress made on CEDS goals. Ryan said that the draft of the Annual Report has been sent out and said he hopes the Board has had a chance to review it. He said the Board can send CMRPC any questions or requests for edits and they would be addressed. Once the Board reviews and approves the Annual Report, it will be sent to the EDA before the end of the month for review. Kerrie Salwa repeated the aforementioned description to members present in the Polar Park board room because of Zoom audio issues. Kerrie thanked David Sullivan and Jeff Turgeon for their input into the Annual Report. Peter Dunn asked where the data came from. Ryan said most of the data is sourced from the Census. Some of it also comes from the Labor Market Information of the Department of Economic Resources from the state. Janet asked if there were any questions. There were none. She said if there are questions or edits requests, they should let CMRPC know, and edits can be inputted before the end of the month.
4. CEDS Priorities and Project Review: Kerrie said the Douglas project is continuing to move forward. The most recent EDA application that has been worked on is North Brookfield's sewer study. Kerrie said there were no other updates. Kerrie asked Julie Holstrom if WBDC is potentially applying for future EDA funding. Julie said that that would more likely be in the spring. More work needs to be done in terms of remediation to ensure shovel-readiness. Peter Dunn said it would be helpful to have a list of EDA programs with their relevant details so that this group can be prepared when opportunities are announced. He asked if there was a way to keep a running list of such programs. Janet thanked Peter and said it was a good idea. Janet asked if there were other questions. Janet said that the state has set aside funding for RPAs to assist communities with federal grants through DLTA. She said CMRPC will be sending out more details as they become available. Peter also said that he has not seen much info on the inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and which federal agencies funds are flowing through. Kerrie said that CMRPC could possibly put together a present for the January Executive Committee meeting. Trish Settles said that the aforementioned DLTA grant assistance opportunity should provide CMRPC with some more details on the IRA that CMRPC would share. Janet asked Kerrie to explain the Douglas project's update relating to gas. Kerrie said on Friday night Bob Minarik announced that Douglas had received approval for the gas extension the project needed. Janet said that the project should be all set to move forward now.
5. EDD Designation Update: Kerrie said that there have been no updates regarding the designation. She again said the designation request has cleared the regional office. The

request is now being reviewed by the federal office. Janet said it is exciting, as EDD designation was one of the first goals of the last CEDS. Janet said CMRPC would share the news as soon as it becomes available.

6. Board of Directors Membership Discussion: Janet said that because of the issues with attaining quorum at Quarterly meetings, she felt it would be beneficial to discuss the membership of the SWC EDO Board of Directors (BOD). Janet opened it for discussion whether to keep the number of BOD members at 27. She said that three members have retired and that she would like to hear if other members are still willing to participate. Janet also said that the process for appointing the board members has changed because the SWC EDO BOD is now a subcommittee of CMRPC. To appoint a member to the SWC EDO BOD, Janet would provide names of suggested new members to the Chairman of CMRPC, who would then decide whether to approve the members or not. Karen asked which three members retired. Ryan stated that they are Chris Faucher from Bay Path Vocational School, Anh Vu Sawyer from the Southeast Asian Coalition of Central Massachusetts, and Kevin Shaughnessy from National Grid. Ryan said there is also a vacant seat in the West subregional professional planning seat. Janet asked Brad Kadelski if he would be interested in this seat. Brad said yes. Janet asked if there were any objections. There were none. Janet said she would go through the process of having CMRPC's Chairman approve Brad Kadelski as a member of the SWC EDO BOD and thanked Brad for volunteering.

Janet asked what has been done with Anh Vu's vacant seat. Julie Holstrom suggested Mary Beth Campbell of the Worcester Community Action Council, Inc. as a potential replacement. Tim Loew asked about utilities being represented on the board. Ryan Saul said that Kevin Shaughnessy had set up Pamela Hill from National Grid as his replacement, but that she has not been confirmed as a SWC EDO BOD member yet. Tim said that for higher education, the group could consider someone from the medical school or from K-12 schools. Kathy Rentsch asked if anyone has reached out to Kyle Brenner, the Superintendent of Bay Path now. Kerrie said that her, Ryan, and Wenzheng has a great discussion with Kyle on December 7th. Kevin Kuros asked which university in the region has a focus on planning. Kerrie said that would likely be Clark or Worcester State.

Trish Settles asked if it is possible to have multiple people fill a seat, with members selecting alternates if they are unable to attend. Trish said the SWC EDO BOD could amend its operating rules to accommodate this structure, as was done with the Central Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization. Trish said that the quorum requirements would remain that same, as the total number of board members would not increase. Janet asked if there were any objections to that. Peter Dunn suggested that members could just name individuals as their proxies, that way there is not any increase in the actual total number of BOD members. Janet said that was a good suggestion and said that members could change who they chose as their proxies.

Kathy asked for the reason why 27 members were selected to sit on the BOD, and if 27 was selected because of nine members representing three categories. Janet said that the

categories were thought out to try to align with the goals of the CEDS. It was determined that there would always be three representatives on the BOD from CMRPC, WRCC, and Central Mass Hire. The other categories selected were professional planning staff (town administrators, town planners, etc.) from each of the six CMRPC subregions, appointed or volunteer members of municipal Economic Development Committees, chambers of commerce, industry sectors, non-profit or organizations representing disadvantaged populations or geographies, educational institutions, infrastructure, and real estate development. Janet asked if there was anything that may be missing. Janet asked if a possible expansion or changes to SWC EDO BOD membership would best be revisited during next year with the completion of the new CEDS. Peter Dunn said that that timeline would be most appropriate. Peter also said that someone may want to reach out to Thias Rentas because she may not realize that she is a member of this group. Thias was on the board of LABO, but recently left, so there may be some confusion with the SWC EDO BOD. Someone could confirm if she is interested in participating, or if she could identify a replacement if she is not interested. Trish asked if a proxy for Thias in the medical field could be identified. Tim said John Erwin from the medical school would likely be the most relevant contact. Tim said that the medical school may be good to have represented on the BOD, as they likely draw down the most federal funding in the region. Kathy said that she likes having Harrington Hospital represented on the BOD because it pulls Southbridge into the conversation and process. Trish said there is no representation from public safety. Janet said that it would be best to wait until the new CEDS process is complete before adding categories to the BOD membership. Kevin Kuros suggested representation from the Milford Regional Hospital, as it has begun to develop some satellite locations in different communities. Peter Dunn said that if there is a vacancy in education or another category, it may best to have representation from a hospital system and not the medical school because of the hospital systems' significance to the region's workforce. Julie Holstrom said that if Pam Hill cannot represent National Grid, Adrian Hubley from National Grid would be a good replacement. Janet thanked everyone for the great conversation and said the group would keep the membership as is for now.

Tim Loew said future representation relating to internet infrastructure and access may be a good idea. Janet agreed. Janet said that the Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI) recently released funding opportunities relating to this issue and asked Kerrie to explain. Kerrie said that MBI created the Municipal Digital Equity Plan program to help communities fund hiring a consultant to discuss issues and needs relating to internet access. Communities' feedback from this process will be included in the state's Digital Equity Plan.

Janet asked if there was any other discussion on Agenda Item 6. Dave George said that it sounds like the 27 members and corresponding categories were well thought out to align with the CEDS. However, enlarging the group could further strain meeting quorum requirements. Dave said he sees the issue as figuring out how to get members involved and attending the meetings so that the actions necessary to support the organization can be taken. Alix McNitt said that when invitations to SWC EDO meetings are sent out, the implication is that all BOD members are invited, but that only Executive Committee members are needed. She said that if it was reframed to encourage all members to attend every meeting, there may not be as

many quorum issues. Janet explained that the SWC EDO BOD Executive Committee is made up of nine BOD members and meets monthly. The Executive Committee has not had issues with achieving quorum with Executive Committee members. The quorum issues have existed with the Quarterly BOD members, which includes the whole BOD. Alix apologized for the misunderstanding. Janet asked the group if the calendar invitations are confusing. Mackenzie May said yes because it is difficult to remember that non-Executive Committee members do not need to attend the monthly Executive Committee meetings. Janet asked if sending calendar invites is more helpful than sending meeting details as regular emails. Julie Holstrom said calendar invites are helpful. Several group members agreed. Janet said that the agendas for all meetings are also posted on the calendar on CMRPC's website. Janet told the group to let CMRPC know if they do not receive the monthly invites. If something pertinent arises, such as funding opportunities, CMRPC will make sure the whole BOD is aware of meetings that will discuss pertinent matters.

Trish asked if the SWC EDO BOD had any subcommittees. Kerrie said the only current subcommittee, which is not officially a subcommittee of the SWC EDO BOD, is the Worcester Business Resource Alliance. Janet said right before March 2020, SWC EDO BOD subcommittees were in the process of being formed to implement CEDS priorities. Kerrie said that as the current CEDS process continues, the group can review creating subcommittees and the topic areas they would focus on. Kathy said that she would like to continue receiving calendar invitations in advance, so that she can continue to see the agendas for each meeting when they are added to the invitations. Trish asked if Executive Committee calendar invitations can be sent as "required" to Executive Committee members and as "optional" to non-Executive Committee members. Trish asked Ryan if that was possible, and Ryan said he would begin doing that. Janet added that anyone can always delete the whole series of a calendar invitation if they do not want to see it. Dave said that with a new year coming up, it may be a good time to reintroduce the concept and mission of the SWC EDO BOD, the difference between the full BOD and the Executive Committee, and basic expectations of participating. Janet asked if this should be discussed now or sent out later as an email. Peter said it would best be sent out later. Janet said that members' proxies could also view indicated attendance statuses on calendar invitations to determine if they need to attend. Kathy agreed that a general overview would be beneficial to reaffirm members' commitment or to identify replacements.

7. New Business: Janet asked Peter to explain the funding sources for the new construction near Polar Park that can be seen out of the board room window. Peter said that when Polar Park was being proposed, the state said they would support brownfields remediation efforts but would not fund the project directly. The City has tried to make the best use of state funding opportunities in the area of Polar Park, such as MassDOT funding to redo Kelley Square or the significant MassWorks grant for constructing the parking garage with 348 spaces. Madison Properties (Madison) has been the City's primary private development partner, as Madison owns much of the property around the ballpark. In an area referred to as "South of Madison Street," the first building that can be seen under construction will be 228 units of market rate housing, with associated parking, and first floor retail. Construction is projected to be done in the

summer of 2023. The other nearby parcel is projected to become a 125-room hotel, with a projected construction start date in spring 2023. The parcel with a parking lot is envisioned to become a life sciences research and development building. Behind the first residential building is another future residential parcel, which is envisioned to become at least 125 units of market rate housing with associated parking and the potential for some retail. Table Talk Pies has relocated to a new site in Main South. It took the legacy site and sold it to Boston Capital, who plans to turn the site into 83 units of affordable housing. Construction is underway. The City also received a MassWorks grant for about \$1.25 million to reconstruct Spruce Street and regain pedestrian connectivity in the area. A contract has been awarded to Lynch to complete the construction work. The next phase with the side of the street is working with a joint venture for potentially constructing 300 units of multi-family housing. This proposal will go before the Planning Board in January. Additionally, the most historic part of the Table Talk building is being saved for the pie store, which has been temporarily relocated. Yesterday, ground was broken in a project with V10 Development and Churchill James. The City sold some land that had been surplus from the ballpark construction and Churchill James privately purchased other land. They now control the block around Green Street, Plymouth Street, Gold Street, and Summit Street, and will be building 171 units of market rate housing with 16,000 square feet of retail. The retail will include candlepin bowling, which was invented in Worcester.

The development has involved a lot of change happening quickly, which has presented some challenges with construction, detours, parking, and other difficulties. Peter said that both of Madison's residential developments are committed to the state's Housing Development Incentive Program. There is a small amount of local tax relief and an investment tax credit piece from the state. The Churchill James developments are privately funded. The Boston Capital developments follow a traditional affordable housing funding structure, with DHCD subsidies, low-income housing tax credits, and some local dollars. Trish asked if there are jobs projections associated with these developments. Peter said there will likely be 250-300 jobs in the retail and hospitality industries that will pay \$15 to \$25 per hour. Jobs associated with the life sciences development would pay higher. Trish asked if there are construction jobs projections. Peter said it is difficult to make these projections and estimate the full-time equivalency.

Peter said that hopefully in 2023 or 2024, the building in left field will be complete. A foundation has already been built along with an underground parking garage. The building can be constructed in eight to ten months. The building is envisioned to be offices, life sciences space, accommodations, or some combination of those uses. Peter said that the developments are in a District Improvement Financing District (DIF). Polar Park's debt service will be paid off in several ways, including lease payments from the team, tax payments in the DIF boundary, occupancy taxes from the proposed hotel, and ancillary revenues from parking and advertising. The Covid-19 pandemic impacted development timelines, so it has been structured with Madison that Madison will receive greater benefits the quicker the projects move. The left field building has a targeted tax structure so that the schedule of payments incentivizes moving quickly. Kathy asked how many of all the housing units discussed will be affordable. Peter said out of the 800 proposed units, 100 will be affordable. Jeff Turgeon asked if a pedestrian bridge

was being considered in the area. Peter said no, as the City wants feet on the streets. Kevin said that he once saw a plan for two hotels with a shared parking lot in the parcel that is now envisioned to be just one hotel. Kevin asked if the City is better off with occupancy taxes from a hotel or an office building from a tax perspective. Peter said a hotel is more valuable. Janet asked how high the hotel will be. Peter said it will likely be six stories. Buildings over seven stories trigger the next level of building code, which is very costly.

8. Review Meeting Dates/Locations and Other Important Dates:

- i. Quarterly Meeting: Kerrie said the date for the next Quarterly Meeting is Thursday, March 16, 2023. The topic of discussion will be the CEDS. The meeting format and location is to be determined.
- ii. Executive Committee Meetings: The next Executive Committee meetings will be on Thursday, January 5, 2023, Thursday, February 2, 2023, and Thursday, March 2, 2023.

9. Other Announcements: Kevin Kuros said that MOBD has just accepted applications from REDO organizations, which include the 495/MetroWest Partnership, WRCC, and BVCC. REDOs are extensions of MOBD's offices that help to conduct outreach to businesses and act as the funding mechanisms with some additional appropriations from the Legislature. Yesterday, reviews from REDO applications were due. The program is incredibly oversubscribed this year. There is approximately \$2.6 million in funding, but there is \$7 million in funding requests. Past years have had \$5 million to \$6 million in funding, so there is less funding this year with equal demands for funding. MOBD is working hard to get the money out by the end of the year so REDOs can go about their planning. There are 71 projects of a wide variety, including wayfinding and signage improvements, façade improvements, and economic database work. Awards have to go out by the end of the year.

Kathy Rentsch said that QCC is collaborating with Central Mass Hire is working on programs funded by ARPA funding. Through ARPA, community colleges got significant amounts of funding to assist people who had lost their jobs or help individuals enter new fields. Training is happening at a rapid pace, especially in healthcare trainings for jobs like MA, CNA, etc. There is also training for fields like manufacturing and IT. The response from students and partners has been very positive. QCC successfully started programs in Southbridge, which had been a challenge in the past. QCC is also working closely with Worcester public schools and Worcester State to expand early college work and pipeline development with the Early College Worcester program. The expansion would QCC serving 25% of the eligible population in Worcester public schools. QCC received a planning grant for early college designation in Southbridge. If the designation is achieved, state funding is unlocked to support early college programs. Kathy feels Southbridge is well positioned to achieve designation. QCC has been doing early college programming with Southbridge consistently for two years through grant funding. However, achieving early college designation would be a significant further step.

Dave George said that the traveling Smithsonian exhibition titled "Crossroads: Changes in Rural America" will be coming to Rutland from December 18, 2022, until January 18, 2023. This is a significant accomplishment for the Town, as it was a competitive opportunity that only six

towns in the Commonwealth were selected for. The exhibit will be located in the lower level of the library with various events and focuses. Dave said he put a link with the exhibit details in the chat.

10. Adjourn: Julie Holstrom made a motion to adjourn, and Jeff Turgeon seconded the motion. A roll call of the Board of Directors was conducted. David Sullivan voted for Karen Pelletier. The motion passed. The meeting concluded at 10:31 a.m.