

# **SOUTHWEST REGION PLANNING COMMISSION**

## ***ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE***

### **MINUTES**

**January 11, 2023**

**Members Present:** Keith Thibault, Chairman, *Southwestern Community Services*; Sarah Bollinger, *Town of Swanzey*; Steve Fortier, *NH Department of Business and Economic Affairs*; Med Kopczynski, *City of Keene*; Danica Melone, *Town of Peterborough*; Ed Merrell, *Town of Jaffrey*; Cody Morrison, *Monadnock Economic Development Corporation*; Luca Paris, *The Greater Keene and Peterborough Chamber*; Sara Powell, *The Hannah Grimes Center for Entrepreneurship*; Ron Rzasa, *Town of Chesterfield*; Bruce Smith, *Town of Westmoreland*; Margaret Sharra, *Town of Winchester*; Scott Young, *Mascoma Bank*.

**Staff:** Todd Horner, *Assistant Director*; Sean O'Donnell, *Planner*.

**Guests:** Tom Bascom, *Town of Greenfield*; Davis Bernstein, *Office of Congresswoman Kuster*; Michael Branley, *Town of Swanzey*; Sara Carbonneau, *Town of Winchester*; Julie Glosner, *NH Small Business Development Center*; Rachel Roderick, *U.S. Small Business Administration*; Christine Roubidoux, *Town of Temple*; Julie Schoelzel, *Greater Keene and Peterborough Chamber*; Mark Tigan, *Winchester Economic Development Corporation*.

### **I. Welcome and Introductions**

Chairman Thibault called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. and introductions were made.

### **II. Minutes of July 13 and October 27, 2022**

**Motion: To approve the minutes of July 13, 2022 as submitted.**

**Motion by Med Kopczynski, seconded by Ron Rzasa. Approved by unanimous vote.**

**Motion: To approve the minutes of October 27, 2023 as submitted.**

**Motion by Med Kopczynski, seconded by Margaret Sharra. Approved by unanimous vote.**

### **III. South-West Collaborative Economic Development Region (SW CEDR)**

Todd Horner provided an overview of the South-West Collaborative Economic Development Region (SW CEDR), an initiative launched by the New Hampshire Department of Business and Economic Affairs (NH BEA) to enhance collaboration among regional economic development stakeholders and to improve communication between those stakeholders and state agency staff, particularly those housed within NH BEA.

Todd Horner noted that although there are similarities between the EDAC and SW CEDR, one key distinction is the respective geographic scale of each group. While the EDAC focuses on the Monadnock Region, the SW CEDR's area of interest includes both the Monadnock Region and the Upper Valley, loosely understood to extend throughout the service area of SWRPC and the Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Regional Planning Commission (UVLSRPC). SWRPC is co-facilitating the SW CEDR with UVLSRPC and NH BEA.

The SW CEDR is currently focusing on building capacity in the region to pursue grant opportunities for community and economic development projects. Recent federal legislation has precipitated a significant increase in federal funding opportunities. There is a question, however, about whether under-resourced, smaller communities and organizations will have the capacity to pursue these opportunities. The SW CEDR is currently collecting project nominations in order to identify those that could benefit from grant writing assistance. The CEDR has a limited amount of funding to invest in grant writing services for a few priority projects. Even though the CEDR won't be able to provide grant writing services to all nominated projects, it will endeavor to connect those projects with other technical assistance and funding opportunities.

Projects can be nominated at the following URL: [bit.ly/swcedr](https://bit.ly/swcedr). Nominating a project for SW CEDR assistance will also qualify it for consideration as a priority project in the *Our Economy: A Strategy for Southwest NH*, the latest iteration of the Monadnock Region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), currently under development.

#### **IV. Our Economy: A Strategy for Southwest NH**

##### **a) Analysis of Economic Mobility and other Metrics**

Sean O'Donnell provided an update regarding data analysis being conducted as part of *Our Economy: A Strategy for Southwest NH*. He discussed a variety of economic metrics, including workforce projections, economic mobility, and economic connectedness - a form of social capital that recent research has identified as being key to facilitating upward economic mobility. He also shared analysis from [tracktherecovery.org](https://tracktherecovery.org), an initiative of the research group Opportunity Insights that leverages big data to provide up-to-date information on economic trends since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. Presentation slides are attached.

##### **b) Review of Draft Goals and Objectives**

Todd Horner notified meeting attendees that draft goals and objectives for *Our Economy* are available online at <https://www.oureconomy.info/goals-objectives/>. These goals and objectives are intended to help set a strategic direction for economic and community development in the region. They also aim to create a map to facilitate partnerships and collaboration on matters related to community and economic development.

##### **c) Priority Project Solicitation**

Todd Horner reiterated that projects submitted via the SW CEDR nomination form will also be considered for inclusion in *Our Economy: A Strategy for Southwest NH*. Towns or organizations who sponsored a project that was previously accepted in the CEDS will receive a pre-filled form with information on file for that project. Project sponsors will be asked to make any necessary changes or updates to reflect the project's current status. Nominating a project for SW CEDR consideration is not required for inclusion in *Our Economy*, but doing so would be a good way to nominate the project for both initiatives through submission of a single form. For reference, the last slide from the meeting slide deck (attached) lists all projects previously accepted in the CEDS.

#### **V. Partner Updates**

Steve Fortier shared that the Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC) recently designated Cheshire County as economically "distressed." The designation qualifies NBRC applicants in Cheshire County for an 80-20 cost share (meaning 80% federal funding to 20% local match funding), up from the 50-50 ratio in effect during previous years. He also indicated that NBRC's definition of "infrastructure" will shift in 2023 to include a wider array of project types.

Mark Tigan said that the Winchester Economic Development Corporation has run into a particular barrier when pursuing NBRC funding. NBRC has indicated that they cannot invest grant dollars into extension of utility-owned electrical infrastructure. He mentioned that the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) has exercised flexibility on this point. Steve Fortier acknowledged that this is a factor currently constraining deployment of NBRC funds. Mark Tigan also noted that enabling applicants to count currently owned land assets as in-kind match would improve the ability of cash-poor organizations to access NBRC funding.

#### **VI. Other Matters**

There were no other matters.

#### **VII. Next Meeting**

The next meeting is scheduled for April 12, 2023.

#### **VIII. Adjourn**

The meeting adjourned at 2:43 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Todd Horner  
Assistant Director