

**SOUTHERN ALLEGHENIES
PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION**

**COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY
COMMITTEE**

**May 16, 2023
10:00 AM
SAP&DC
Altoona, PA**

MEETING MINUTES

I. Welcome

The following members were present at the meeting:

- Cindy Doherty, Penn Highlands Community College
- Blake Fleegle, Westwood Plaza Theatre
- Kellie Shaffer, Bedford County Chamber of Commerce
- Larry Myers, Schneider Electric
- Lindsay Baer, Somerset County
- Diana McClure, Keller Engineers, Inc.
- Matthew Price, Huntingdon County CVB
- Beth Futrick, Cherry Hill Farms

Others in attendance included:

- Steve Howsare, SAP&DC
- Zachary Lee, SAP&DC
- Dustin Bishop, SAP&DC
- Edward Locher, SAP&DC

Each participant received a meeting packet that included:

- CEDS Agenda

II. Regional Housing Strategy

Dustin Bishop welcomed the committee to the meeting and asked everyone to introduce themselves. He reviewed the topics of today's meeting.

He informed the committee that back in 2021 SAP&DC worked with Points Consulting on the Recovery and Resilience Plan. The plan was completed by the end of 2021 and Points Consulting stayed on board through June 30, 2022, to help with implementation efforts. The plan highlighted three key points: housing, workforce, and quality of place.

Finalized Housing Strategy

Housing has been a key issue in the Southern Alleghenies Region. A Regional Housing Strategy, Alleghenies Ahead on Housing, was recently completed by czb, Inc. Copies of the strategy are available here at the meeting today. If anyone on Zoom would like a copy of the strategy or the executive summary, email Dustin and a copy will be mailed to you. He reviewed some of the key points of the strategy focusing on the next steps.

Five main issues were identified in the housing study: declining number of households, vacant houses, lagging home values and rents, limited willingness to pay, and concentrated levels of need. Historically speaking, the average mark for how much income you expect to spend on housing is 30%. Due to low home value and the presence of low-quality options for housing, people are not willing to pay that 30% even if they can afford it. In the Southern Alleghenies Region, one out of every three households earn less than \$35,000 a year. Due to these factors, not many developers are building new housing. Developers would need \$1,500 to \$1,800 in rent and that is considered expensive here. These issues make a persistent pattern of soft demand and have hampered housing in the Region.

Part two talks about outputs and outcomes and highlights four main topics. Specifically, new and rehabbed rentals, and new and rehabbed single-family homes, and focuses on the supply side making sure that our Region has a strong supply of housing. The final three are the demolition of obsolete and blighted housing, expansion of affordable housing opportunities in stronger markets, and sufficient emergency services and shelter to help those who are most vulnerable.

It also discusses different tools and strategies that can be used for downtown units, including construction subsidies for income restricted housing, additional aid for emergency shelter construction or expansion, expanded regulation of rental conditions with strong enforcement, and land use and development regulation updates. Housing issues vary from place to place. Middle neighborhood preservation is also a good tool. Prioritize keeping these mixed neighborhoods from becoming completely dilapidated using financial support, rehab, acquisition and demolition, expanded regulation of rentals, and rental rehab subsidies for existing homes.

Implementation Efforts

Implementation will be completed at the regional, county, and local levels. Regional implementation efforts include the housing strategy itself, assisting in the formation of committees and coalitions, and sharing best practices.

County implementation efforts include updating plans to support housing activities and partnering with municipalities and non-profits. There is a section in the back of the strategy that provides an overview of each of the six counties with recommendations on how the strategies can be utilized by each county.

Implementation will be most difficult and most necessary at the local level. Things like resource commitments to fund new or expanded activities, changes to zoning and building code, and updating local plans to support housing investment. Our goal is to unite all three of these levels.

The Housing Advisory Committee used to develop the housing strategy can be used as a building coalition for implementation. Dustin asked for the committee's input on any other members who should be included in that coalition. During the development of the housing strategy, two roundtables were held, one on affordable housing and one on business. He shared the names that kept coming up at these roundtables and they provided valuable input to the strategy. There were many businesses interested in housing for their employees. Next steps would be to put these people and businesses into groups and coalitions to investigate projects that can be worked on. What are the specific neighborhoods that can be improved and then built outward from that. He asked for the committee's feedback. The committee recommended the following be added: Cheryl McElroy from Caldwell Banker, BCDA, Bedford County Chamber of Commerce, and some marketing people to keep the community informed on what is happening. A lot of people will assume affordable housing means low-income housing and will fight to keep it out of their area. Dustin talked a little about using the term workforce housing, meaning a companies' workers rather than low income. The meaning of the term would have to be explained as it could mean different things to different people.

Dustin asked for project-based thoughts on things to try to identify projects for neighborhoods in their counties or cities and then going outward to see who could be involved in that project from there. It was recommended Habitat for Humanity for each county be included as they would be project based. There was some discussion on mobile home parks. There are some upscale parks that can be very nice neighborhoods. Young professionals have been drawn to this as well as container homes or tiny homes. If you could develop these communities, you could draw young professionals. Locally, construction is expensive and then no one wants to pay the high rent. There was a project in Centre County that did a community with a clubhouse, pool, and gym that has both smaller modular homes and townhouses. The community was sold out before it was completed. It also contained a park and walking trail with a few small stores you could walk to. Most of the building being done here is high end and that is not what the area needs. Local mobile home dealers include Carl's Homes, Champion Homes, Carl Feather's Homes, and Gary's Homes. There are some communities like Friendship Village where people not only camp but live there year-round. This community is thriving.

Broadband is connected to this as well. You can't draw people without it. The Region continues to lose its youth because of the lack of broadband and housing. Dustin noted that he will keep everyone in the loop on the upcoming implementation efforts. Larry asked if the middle neighborhood preservation discussed in the tool kit giving the best bang for your buck are the areas that should be focused on. Dustin responded that it is a fair thing to say. A few of these would be good first projects to provide an early victory and then keep going. There are not a lot of State and Federal resources available for housing. The middle neighborhoods give us the chance to use smaller resources to start.

There used to be a lack of funding for broadband, now it is everywhere. That hasn't happened to housing, although it is beginning to be recognized by State Representatives. Larry noted that if there are specific pockets around the counties that need broadband, let Dustin know. Dustin also noted that there is a section in the back of the full report that

provides some detailed specifics on opportunities. The Plan is available on the SAP&DC website as well.

III. Regional Tourism Efforts

As part of the Recovery and Resilience Plan, there were three main issues identified. One of those was sense or quality of place. Projects that not only have positive impacts for the community but give a sense of place. As part of that effort, SAP&DC has reinvigorated part of its tourism efforts by hosting quarterly meetings of the regional tourism representatives to discuss their current efforts, issues, and funding opportunities, etc. This helps to keep the lines of communication going and create opportunities to draw those from outside the area.

IV. SAP&DC Project Portal

This project is in the early stages but will allow SAP&DC to be more aware of the current project needs in the Region. The project portal will be an online intake website where potential clients can input potential projects. This is currently in the RFP stage and staff hope to release the RFP on June 1st. This website will also be home to SAP&DC surveys and contain a frequently asked questions page. As part of the transportation program, forms are sent out to identify project needs. The intent is to create a single suppository for this data. Staff plan to have a consultant selected by July and have the website up and running by the end of the year. Participants were asked to provide anything they would like to see included.

V. CEDS Update 2024

The current Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is active from 2020-2024. The next update will cover 2025-2029. Staff are currently brainstorming on how to approach this update. Four of the six other LDDs are on the same time schedule and a statewide coordinated update is a possibility. A collaborated application would be submitted to EDA and the funding would be used to hire a consultant/firm to update the CEDS for all the LDDs statewide. This is still in the discussion stage and staff will keep the committee up to date on its progress. The work the LDDs do is very similar so a coordinated effort makes sense. If any of the committee has any input on this subject, please let either Dustin or Zack know.

VI. Adjournment Item

Dustin thanked everyone for attending. The meeting adjourned at 11:20 AM.

<p>NOTE: The next meeting of the CEDS Committee will be at a date and time to be determined.</p>
