

**SOUTHERN ALLEGHENIES
PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION**

**COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY
COMMITTEE**

May 20, 2024

2:00 PM

SAP&DC

Altoona, PA

ACTION SUMMARY

The following are the major actions taken by the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Committee at its regular meeting held on May 20, 2024, at the SAP&DC in Altoona, PA.

1. No action was taken at this meeting.

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MEETING MINUTES

I. Welcome

The following members were present at the meeting:

- Jennifer Sklodowski, SAP&DC
- Paul Johnson, FIDA
- Marty Malone, ACTS
- Diana McClure, Keller Engineering
- Larry Myers, Schneider Electric
- Matthew Price, Huntingdon County Convention & Visitors Bureau
- Steve McKnight, Altoona-Blair County Development Corporation
- Kelly Goodman-Shaffer, Bedford County Chamber of Commerce

Others in attendance included:

- Steve Howsare, SAP&DC
- Lee Slusser, SAP&DC
- Dustin Bishop, SAP&DC
- Matthew Bjorkman, SAP&DC
- Janice Streightiff, SAP&DC

Each participant received a meeting packet that included:

- Slides Handout
- CEDS SWOT Analysis Handout.

II. CEDS Review

Lee welcomed the committee to the meeting and noted that an email was sent out with the handouts for those attending on Zoom. He gave a PowerPoint presentation reviewing what a CEDS is and why it is needed. He reviewed the requirements of a CEDS including background studies; SWOT analysis; survey; prioritized goals, objectives, and strategies;

and measurable outcomes. The CEDS must also address regional economic development, resiliency, and equity. We are required to have a CEDS for EDA to fund projects in the Southern Alleghenies Region. He reviewed the goals from the 2020 - 2024 CEDS.

Lee then reviewed the background studies and asked what the committee thought might be missing or what they would like to add. Larry recommended leaving the Southern Alleghenies line out of the slide on population projections as it is well above the counties. Lee reviewed some of the highlights of the Alleghenies Ahead on Housing plan. He reviewed the numbers for Broadband unserved and underserved noting this is still a problem in the region. The committee asked how many total structures there are. Dustin looked it up on PBDA's website and replied that in the six-county region there are 207,000 structures. Of those 33,000 are unserved, which is about 14% of our region and 4% of the state. Underserved structures are about 10% for our region, which is disproportionately high in unserved and underserved statewide. Lee also reviewed the Economic Trends, Employment, Commuting, gross domestic product, wages and the regional economy. He questioned the 45% increase shown for durable goods manufacturing in 2022 as it seemed a little high. Matthew Price commented that the first CEDS he was involved in there was a comparison to Vermont. Our region is very similar, and we were at 70% of Vermont's statistics. Where we lagged was with what is done with the agricultural products, such as food processing, textiles, the things that take the agricultural outputs and add value to them. He wondered if we could get back to a comparison of those two industries, agricultural output vs value added products. The region just produces agriculture and sends it away. Diana mentioned that if you look at the Pennsylvania State Farmland Preservation Board's website it shows how many farms are in each county and how many have been preserved. It won't show the business being done, just the farms.

III. SWOT Analysis

The SWOT analysis is a required part of the CEDS. Lee started the analysis with a few ideas from the staff. Additions/deletions can be made by the committee. Matthew Price asked what statistics we have to back up the list. He doesn't believe strong schools should be in strengths. Steve McKnight added that school statistics come from standardized tests, so it depends on how it is measured. Kellie noted that pride in schools makes them feel strong. Matthew recommended we be cautious of statistical bias. Larry questioned the low utility bills.

Lee asked everyone to pick their top three to prioritize the list. He collected everyone's top three and added the committee's recommendations. He then did the same with weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The following list was created from the results.

DRAFT CEDS Committee SWOT Analysis

Selected strengths in order of priority

1. outdoor recreation opportunities
2. reliable highway infrastructure
3. proximity to major markets
4. low cost of living

5. a strong work ethic
6. VA Hospital (James E. Van Zandt Veterans Administration Medical Center)
7. strong agricultural sector
8. abundant natural resources
9. downtown revitalization efforts
10. cultural assets, historic architecture, and mountains

Discarded strengths

- growing GDP
- a variety and quality of institutions of higher education
- solid community identities
- high quality of life
- strong k-12 schools
- low electricity/natural gas prices
- sports teams
- good vocational schools
- a strong workforce delivery/training system/workforce development board

Selected Weaknesses (or “areas for improvement”) in order of priority

1. housing (lack of new, newer forms, affordable, and market-rate)
2. lack of childcare
3. local appreciation of economic progress
4. inconsistent access to broadband services
5. lack of investment in regional branding
6. lack of diversity
7. drugs
8. local government leadership/cooperation

Discarded weaknesses

- aging infrastructure
- local government capacity
- poor public transportation
- lack of family sustaining jobs
- weak outreach to new residents, the young, and those with poor English skills
- out-migration and in-migration
- blight
- poor road conditions
- poorly funded higher education
- commercial and office space vacancy
- barriers to workforce reentry from incarceration/drug abuse
- low business dynamism
- bad regional reputation
- hostility to progress
- not a diverse job market or economy
- lack of voluntarism
- emergency service capacities
- skill gaps in workforce

Selected Opportunities in order of priority

1. incentivizing market rate housing production and rehabilitation
2. growing outdoor recreation, winter recreation, trails, tourism, and agritourism
3. growing childcare options
4. attracting/supporting new businesses and encouraging existing business expansions
5. increasing broadband access
6. regional branding

Discarded opportunities

- growing industry sectors
- fighting blight
- increasing automation/AI
- enhancing workforce training
- collaboration amongst or consolidation of local governments/school districts
- improvement of infrastructure
- promoting the availability of properties for housing and businesses
- promoting nightlife, live music, and the arts

Selected threats in order of priority

1. aging and declining workforce and demographics
2. lack of local funding/tax base
3. lack of cultural and ethnic diversity
4. brain drain
5. changing regulations and taxation
6. economic downturns in industries

Discarded threats

- drug abuse
- loss of jobs
- global competition from markets with cheaper labor
- technology disruptions
- I-68 threatening the turnpike

Lee will consolidate the committee's responses and email it to them for one last review. It will then be turned into a survey. The results of the survey will be presented to the committee members and used to set the goals and objectives. The CEDS needs to be completed by the end of the year.

IV. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 4:00 PM.

NOTE: The next meeting of the CEDS Committee is at a date and time to be determined.

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ACTION ITEMS

Action Items	By Whom	Due Date
Consolidate the committee's responses and email it to them for one last review.	Lee Slusser, SAP&DC	Following the meeting
Send out a survey on the SWOT analysis.	Staff	No date given