

**SOUTHERN ALLEGHENIES
PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION**

**COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (CEDs)
COMMITTEE**

September 17, 2024

1:30 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 September 17, 2024, at the SAP&DC in Altoona, PA.

There were no actions taken at the meeting.

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MEETING MINUTES

I. Welcome

The following members were present at the meeting:

- Steve McKnight, Altoona-Blair County Development Corporation
- Rick Truscello, Cambria County Resident
- Kellie Goodman-Shaffer, Bedford County Chamber of Commerce
- Larry Myers, Scheider Electric
- Paul Johnston, FIDA
- Natalie Toma, Penn Highlands Community College
- Matthew Price, Huntingdon County Convention & Visitors Bureau

Others in attendance included:

- Steve Howsare, SAP&DC
- Lee Slusser, SAP&DC
- Matthew Bauerlin, SAP&DC
- Janice Streightiff, SAP&DC

Each participant received a meeting packet that included:

- Agenda
- CEDS Survey Summary
- First Draft of the Goals and Objectives for the Southern Alleghenies CEDS

II. CEDS Survey Results

Lee Slusser welcomed the committee to the meeting and gave an overview of the CEDS. At the last meeting a swot analysis was conducted. The results of that analysis determined the questions for the survey. He introduced Matt Bauerlin, the new Regional Planner at SAP&DC. Matt Bauerlin, Matt Bjorkman, and Ed Locher put together and administered the survey.

Matt noted that he sent a copy of the survey results to the committee members previously. He made note that 50% of the responses came from Somerset County with the rest being pretty evenly split among the other counties in the region. A total of 245 surveys from 88 municipalities were received. He reviewed the results of the survey with the committee. He will send the survey results out again following the meeting to be sure everyone has the chance to review them.

III. Draft Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

Using the survey results and the previous CEDS goals and objectives, staff put together the draft goals and objectives for the 2025 – 2029 CEDS. Lee reviewed the revised goals and objectives with the committee asking for feedback as he went. He offered to schedule a follow-up meeting if they needed more time to review them. The following changes were recommended.

General Comments

The committee felt that the support services for natural gas extraction were no longer relevant in the region and that could be removed. They also noted that solar farms are becoming a land use issue and resources are needed on how to manage these. Academia is underrepresented in the CEDS and should be included. It may not be a growing sector, but it is still a critical sector. The way business interacts with higher education is also changing. Manufacturing is adding training shops (welding) in their facilities to train the staff they need. Larry added efforts for power resiliency. No matter how many power co-ops you have the power all comes from the same source. Natural gas is the same there are two or three major players. Any way to bring resiliency? Also stormwater is an unfunded mandate. There is no way to fund stormwater projects other than through taxation based on the state supreme court decisions made over the last year. This prohibits economic growth. A suggestion was made to put together groups on each of the topics identified to discuss what they believe would work in each area. Lee thought that was a good idea but reminded the committee that the CEDS must be complete by the end of the year so we may not have time to complete that for this CEDS.

Specific Comments

Goal 1 Objective a Strategy 3 – Rather than just referencing KOZ/KIZ reference other economic development programs as well, such as low interest loans, enterprise zones etc. promoting a tool box of opportunities.

Goal 1 Objective b

It was felt that a lot of this could be under objective a in a list of tools with SAP&DC and the economic development agencies. The Alleghenies Angel Fund is now the Alleghenies Investment Fund (AIF). Lee will reach out to Steve McKnight to make sure all of the available programs are listed in the CEDS.

Objective C: Expand the tourism visitation program for the region and Lee added add and build recreational assets for tourists and residents alike.

Objective D is from the old CEDS and deals with retired households. Lee asked the group if they wanted to keep this in the plan. The committee felt that the retirement community continues to grow in the region so it should remain in the plan.

Objective E is supporting the growth of agriculture related business. Lee reviewed the Strategies. On Strategy 2 the committee suggested adding agritourism and diversification of use of land here due to the pumpkin patches, corn mazes, etc. that have been springing up in the region. Also, in the regulatory environment, do we want to continue to support Clean and Green or the Agriculture Lane Preservation that the counties can use to help the agricultural land stay agricultural land? Another suggestion was to promote the kitchen incubator concept like the one in Johnstown that was done to add value to the raw agricultural product. This could even be tied into the entrepreneurial efforts.

On Strategy 3 - Encourage direct-to-market sale of locally produced agricultural products, the committee added that with the wineries and distilleries, brew pubs, etc. has changed the face of this and is more inclusive than in the past.

Strategy 6 was added – Invest in the region’s expanding agricultural sector through expanding loan programs and working with permitting issues, after conducting some outreach with the agriculture sector.

Objective F Work towards measuring economic growth in terms of gross domestic product instead of merely employment, due to the shrinking workforce. Staff added this one. Lee asked the group for input. The committee recommended adding other wealth metrics such as wages and property tax base.

For Goal 2, Lee recommended holding off on this as it will need to be updated by Jennifer Sklodowski, the Director of Workforce Development, who is out of the office. Lee reviewed the previous goal and strategies with the committee noting that many of these are still relevant. Staff added Objective F – Support the region’s career and technology education centers and help them to secure funding for needed expansions with the support of local employers.

There was some discussion as to whether Objective G (Our workforce is not able to support enough high wage, white-collar jobs in management, professional services, finance, insurance, and information sciences. Such jobs require college degrees. Entry into these fields should be encouraged.) is still relevant. Huntingdon County representatives noted that they only have one accounting firm that can do audits. Bedford has almost no capacity for attorneys. They felt that this one should stay. Lee will add legal to the objective. Rick Truscello added that the region is not very welcoming to others who may want to come here to add to the economy. All the objectives seem to be looking for a way to rearrange what is already here. He would like to see a wider view of workforce development that embraces in migration. Lee reminded the committee that this topic is very political right

now. Steve McKnight recommended using the term people rather than immigrants. We want to attract as many people to the region regardless of their cultural backgrounds or circumstance. The areas demographics being 90% Caucasian is a weakness when attracting the next generation of workforce. The younger generation does not see race/ethnicity the same way older generations have in the past. They look for opportunities to interact with diverse people. Lee will work on the wording of this one and see what he can come up with to work on efforts to be more welcoming. Rick Truscello noted that one of the biggest reasons people might relocate to the region is the cost of housing.

The committee also noted that we should continue to work with the secondary education intuitions to add post graduate programs to their curriculum. This is a way to keep the adults that are getting their educations here in the area longer increasing the chances that they may relocate here. Someone added that St. Francis University has entertained the idea of adding aviation education at the request of the Johnstown Airport.

Goal 3: Maintain and Modernize Infrastructure to Make the Region More Competitive for Economic Development

Lee noted that this goal is basically transportation, water sewer, and telecommunications. Objective a is transportation which includes completion of Rt. 219, public transportation, pedestrian infrastructure and aggressively pursuing ARC Local Access Road applications. The committee requested that critical service airports be added to this objective.

Objective b is water and sewer projects. Look for funding to develop water and sewer projects in developable sites and neighborhoods and work with communities to identify critical water and sewer infrastructure that needs repair and/or replacement. The committee requested that stormwater infrastructure be added to this objective.

Goal 4 Adapt Communities to be More Attractive as Places to Live and Work.

Objective c supports entrepreneurial initiatives. Creators Square has changed sponsors and is now called Made in Johnstown. Need to update if it is to be included. A lot of the tools used to draw people to downtown are listed in Goal 1. Think about this one and the group can discuss again at the next meeting.

Objective d is to retain and recruit younger people to stay in and/or migrate to the Region. A lot more than what is listed can be done to attract young people. Post-secondary education should be listed here. Lee asked the group to give this some more thought and we can revisit it at the next meeting.

Objective e is to invest in communities and work to promote and enhance their assets. Lee reviewed the strategies and noted again that there is more that can be added here.

Objective f is build local leadership capacity. Updating Alleghenies Ahead was added to the strategies here. The plan is not due to be updated yet but coordination can begin to identify funding for the plan.

Goal 5: Invest in Areas that Influence Health and Well Being While Raising Awareness of Health Opportunities for All Residents

Lee reviewed the strategies and asked the committee if they thought it should remain as an economic development goal. The committee believes that this is still important. Every county has its own organizations tracking these key health indicators such as the mental health of our youth, the drug addiction problem, etc. It was decided to leave it in as is. It was also decided to add maternity and delivery care to this goal as several of the counties no longer have that care.

Goal 7: Build Resilience into the Regional Economy

This is the Southern Alleghenies Recovery & Resilience Plan that was completed three years ago and is also required by EDA.

Objective e is to protect critical infrastructure and build disaster-resistant future development. This may be a good place for the energy grid additions discussed earlier.

IV. Potential Additions, Amendments, and/or Changes

Lee asked the committee if there was anything else they would like to add. It was recommended childcare and/or early learning be added to Goal 3 Objective d.

It was requested that in the future the handouts have page numbers.

Staff will make the requested changes and schedule another meeting in a month or less to review the final draft. The final draft will then be presented to the Southern Alleghenies Board of Directors at their November meeting. Staff will send out a doodle poll to schedule the next meeting.

V. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 3:15 PM.

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