



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

May 1, 2024
1:00 p.m.

Southwest Region Planning Commission
37 Ashuelot Street
Keene, NH

Online: [Join here](#)
Phone: 1 646 558 8656
Meeting ID: 858 8542 7975
Password: 186507

AGENDA

- I. Welcome and Introductions
- II. Minutes of January 10, 2024
- III. Building Local Capacity for Economic and Community Development
 - a) Cheshire County Grant Writing Course and Technical Assistance
 - b) Technical Assistance for NBRC Catalyst Applicants
 - c) Other Resources
- IV. Partner Updates
- V. Other Matters
- VI. Next Meeting

SOUTHWEST REGION PLANNING COMMISSION
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MINUTES

January 10, 2024

Members Present: Keith Thibault, Chairman, *Southwestern Community Services*; Steve Dalessio, *Town of Walpole*; Steve Fortier, *NH Department of Business and Economic Affairs*; Cody Morrison, *Monadnock Economic Development Corporation*; Sara Powell, *Hannah Grimes Center for Entrepreneurship*; Ron Rzasa, *Town of Chesterfield*; Bruce Smith, *Town of Westmoreland*, Danica Melone, *Town of Peterborough*; Stephon Mehu, *Town of Swanzey*; Ed Merrell, *Town of Jaffrey*; Luca Paris, *Greater Keene-Peterborough Chamber of Commerce*; Margaret Sharra, *Town of Winchester*.

Staff: Todd Horner, *Assistant Director*; Tim Murphy, *Executive Director*; Jack Ahern, *Associate Planner*.

Guests: Julie Schoelzel, *Greater Monadnock Collaborative*; Catherine Bergstrom, *Greater Monadnock Collaborative*; Rik Ekstrom, *Community Housing Navigator*; Taryn Fisher, *NH Small Business Development Center*; Nancy Dubosque, *NH Small Business Development Center*; Robert Graham, *Office of Senator Hassan*; Julie Glosner, *NH Small Business Development Center*; Josh Green, *Town of Hinsdale*; Nicole MacStay, *Town of Peterborough*; Jamie Trowbridge, *Yankee Publishing*; Jeff Scott, *Chesterfield Resident*.

I. Welcome and Introductions

Chairman Thibault called the meeting to order at 1:02 p.m. and introductions were made.

II. Minutes of October 11, 2023

Motion: To approve the minutes of October 11, 2023 as submitted.

Motion by Steve Fortier, Seconded by Ron Rzasa. Approved by unanimous vote.

III. Promoting the Region: Updates from the Greater Monadnock Collaborative

Julie Schoelzel gave a presentation to provide updates on the work undertaken thus far by the Greater Monadnock Collaborative (GMC). Their primary objective is to promote the Monadnock region to recruit and maintain a modern workforce. In January 2020, GMC, then known as the Keene and Peterborough Chambers of Commerce, created a joint task force to promote tourism in the region funded by local organizations, businesses, and colleges. The region faces a “demographic timebomb”, a term used to describe a predicted decline in the working-age population, which was the driving force behind the initiative. New Hampshire ranks as the second oldest state in the United States and experiences regular declines in school enrollment. This trend is heavily exemplified in the Monadnock region, where businesses struggle to scale due to a lack of available employees.

Tourism is the primary focus of GMC at this stage of development. In-migration is key for future growth in New Hampshire, and getting people to visit is the first step in getting them to settle here. GMC has embarked on an advertising campaign for regional tourism, including branding, streaming ads, social media outreach, newsletters, web presence, and a visitor's guide. Their website launched in early 2023 supported by EDA grant funding and has

reached over 146,000 visits. Social media outreach, in collaboration with several influencers, has generated 16 million impressions. They have attracted over 600 newsletter subscribers and have received around 200,000 views on streaming ads.

Next steps include an NBRC grant that GMC plans to use in support of a marketing campaign targeting people ages 16 to 29. They plan to sustain the momentum their current ad campaign has generated and continue the current advertising to convert tourists to residents. Fundraising for match funds is underway. There was discussion and suggestions made on various ways to improve promotion efforts that included focusing on diversity and safety, having a GMC booth at local events, and highlighting historical and cultural resources.

IV. Partner Updates

Cody Morrison shared that Monadnock Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) staff has grown and they are looking for more area businesses to partner with. Their Bringing It Home initiative focuses on creating and supporting family based childcare services in the region. Their brownfields program is offering grants and loans for site clean-up. They are currently working on creating a local fund dedicated to housing projects. Last, MEDC has a loan program to support commercial financing and companies looking to expand. A website for this program will be launched soon.

Steve Fortier shared the upcoming dates for the two 2024 rounds of NBRC grant funding and gave an explanation of eligible activities. The first deadline is March 15, 2024, and materials are releasing on January 22nd. Regional information sessions will be held, dates are yet to be announced. Projects within Cheshire County are eligible to have NBRC grants cover 80% of costs and only require a 20% match in funds.

Tim Murphy shared that SWRPC had recently published an outdoor recreation guide geared toward children, the Monadnock Region Parks and Play Municipal Resource Guide. The guide provides municipalities and community stakeholders with recommendations for improving existing and developing new park and play spaces. He also explained that the state of NH would be issuing a digital equity plan that would allocate \$5 million over four years to expand broadband access, affordability, and digital literacy.

V. Update: Our Economy, A Strategy for Southwest NH

Todd Horner gave a presentation on the OurEconomy.info website he has developed as part of an initiative to create more understanding of economic conditions in the region. The goal is to connect people to funders, provide funders with a view of how their work can make an impact, and explore how to share potential economic growth amongst community members.

Poverty is an important trend to understand as its ramifications extend broadly to the community and can have an impact on funding eligibility. Poverty is measured in two ways by the federal government, Official Poverty Measure and Supplemental Poverty Measure. Supplemental measure is a more dynamic method that accounts for a wider range of variables, which can provide more accurate results. However, this method cannot be applied to local analysis. Poverty rates in Cheshire and Hillsborough Counties have decreased over the last decade, although certain communities such as Alstead and Marlborough have experienced sharp increases.

Exploring how local policy is creating or eliminating barriers for people to get out of poverty is a pivotal part of this initiative. Taking stock of what local resources and services are available and what organizations are addressing the challenges are a key aspect of that. Asking the question what prosperity without poverty would look like can generate new ideas and expand our understanding of the issue. Discussion on the topic provided some insight and ideas for solutions. Housing costs appear to be the main driver of poverty in the region. Fuel assistance programs can lend much needed relief to those struggling. The region does support a wide variety of options to help those in

poverty. Support for the broader economy serves as an effective means of combating poverty, but an understanding and accepting community is also a key element.

VI. Other Matters

There were no other matters.

VII. Next Meeting

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for April 10, 2024.

VIII. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 2:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jack Ahern
Associate Planner