**Minutes of Meeting of Rural Advisory Commission’s (RAC) Subcommittee on Economic Development**

November 29, 2016

12:00-2:00

Franklin Regional Council of Governments

Greenfield, MA

**Subcommittee members present**

Linda Dunlavy

Gailanne Cariddi, by phone

Wendy Morton Hudson, by Skype and phone

**Subcommittee members absent**

Konnie Lukes

**Also present**

Rita Farrell, MA Housing Partnership

Nat Karns, RPC Demographics Committee

Trish Settles, RPC Demographic and Infrastructure Committees

Judy Terry, RPC Infrastructure Committee

**Welcome and Introductions**

Meeting was called to order by Ms. Dunlavy at 12:00 and connections made to other members

**Acceptance of minutes**

No physical quorum was present so minutes were not adopted.

**Joint Discussion with Demographics and Workforce Committee**

The mapping previously presented to the Economic Development Committee was quickly reviewed with members of Demographics Committee. Both committees hope for some refinement to the mapping including:

* Be sure all Technical High Schools are represented on the maps
* CDC satellite locations should be added and the coverage should only include CDCs that provide economic development services
* Perhaps add entities like CISA or Berkshire Grown

Based on the mapping, members identified Service Center Communities as communities that provide a sub-region of rural communities with workforce development because the communities have all or some of the following services: community and state colleges or satellites; career centers or satellites; technical high schools; REBs. Members also identified where gaps exist across the rural community footprint and identified the communities of Great Barrington, Ware, Orange and Chesterfield as communities that have some services and could be enhanced to be a Service Center Community.

The Committees then discussed the idea of Targeted Village Centers that already are or could serve as rural commercial centers but need some kind of capacity improvement to fully flourish, be it improved sewer and water facilities, zoning changes, transportation improvements or other.

Members talked about the criteria that could be used to identify or define a Targeted Village Center community. Rita suggested that a research paper called, “Communities of Opportunity” could help in the discussion. Trish noted that criteria could include number of pre-existing jobs in a community or ability of an area to expand based on topology or other factors. Both committees agreed to continue thinking about possible criteria but agreed the concept has merit as an actionable item.

**Focus on Small Business**

Wendy presented her paper on ways that small businesses can be better supported across the state but especially to help rural areas. She noted that her primary objective is to help fill empty storefronts that all communities are struggling with. Wendy pointed out that the two most important issues to help reduce vacancies is revisions/elimination of Premium Pay Blue Laws and state building code changes to make it easier for retailers to share bathrooms, elevators and other expensive capital items. Rep Cariddi asked that we explore the issues of tax policies, building code and compliance issues that make it hard for small businesses to start up, and small business retention at our next meeting to better formulate an actionable item.

**Agriculture**

Judy and Trish joined the conversation to talk about agricultural issues, which is a crossover issue with the Infrastructure Committee. They pointed out that like our proposed support of small businesses/retailers, support of farmers is important to the rural economy of MA. Judy discussed the need for more agricultural tech schools in the state. Trish noted that students from central MA interested in being farmers often commute to Smith Voc in Northampton because it is one of few tech schools that still have an ag program. Judy also noted the decline in agricultural services like tractor sales and repair and banks and insurance companies that are familiar and comfortable with agricultural issues. They also both emphasized the need for small farm succession planning. Many rural MA farmers are aging and have no family heirs ready to take over the farm. As a next step, members agreed to pull out the recommendations from the MA State Food Plan that deal with rural issues, farming and succession planning to determine if implementation activities can be identified.

**Next Subcommittee Meeting**

12/12 at 12, CMRPC

Committee meeting concluded at 2:00.