

Massachusetts Rural Policy Advisory Commission
Report of the Economic Development Working Group Meeting
November 3, 2016 Franklin Regional Council of Governments, Greenfield, MA

Attendance: Members Cariddi, Donlevy, Hudson (via skype)

Guests: Jessica Atwood, Economic Development Program Manager, FRCOG and Ryan Clary, Senior GIS Specialist FRCOG

Remote participation was connected via Skype with Wendy Hudson 12:10pm and the meeting began at 12:16pm.

Jessica and Ryan reviewed with the committee members the data they had prepared at the request of the committee.

Highlights included information that 170 of 351 municipalities are rural; population of 830,000 equivalent to Boston, Worcester and Lexington

Population data generally: rural areas continue to decline from the 1990's and continue to become an older population in the west and Cape Cod areas; predominant in the areas are lower income, underemployment, lower education attainment, less likely to work in Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate service sectors, higher employment in Construction and manufacturing, more self-employed workers.

A discussion ensued on conditions needed to access jobs and create new jobs in rural areas.

Key issues

Committee members agreed that the data presented by Jessica and Ryan gave an excellent baseline of where we are currently.

Noted that only one Career Center in each of the rural areas; need for broadband and fixed route public transportation

Need for infrastructure in rural centers; water, sewer

Discussed Gateway Cities funding; need for dedicated funding for rural Massachusetts;

Concept of Anchor Communities discussed as each rural area had such a community anchor. Need to grow these community center areas.

Need for more specific data pertaining to the Anchor Community concept; empty store fronts, developable parcels, existing underused industrial parks, funding

issues such as in the community of Montague. Possibly create overlays, business clusters, zoning, skills, open parcels zoned business/industrial. (Main Streets and underutilized areas)

Assistance needed for businesses that are struggling in rural areas to help employers grow; some are home based, need access to capital, broadband. Good small business supports

Perceived need for Commonwealth to level the playing field for business development between rural and urban areas.

Research

Drill down on data.

Next Steps

Review additional data at next meeting.

Next meeting set for noon, Tuesday November 29 at the Olver Transit Center, 12 Olive Street, Greenfield

Committee adjourned 2pm