



North Country Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Committee
Information Session Minutes, Friday – November 19, 2021, 10 am to 12 pm
Via Zoom Conference w/ video and phone options

Staff: Glenn Coppelman, Stacey Doll, Kaela Tavares, Jared Cape

Committee Attendance: Sonya Salanti, Douglas Arion, Katy Kopp

Doug Arion, Tamara Roberge, Lise Howson, Anne Duncan Cooley, Kathy Fernette, Jac Cuddy, Chris Thayer

Guests: Benoit Lamontagne, NH BEA; Peter Corey, NCIC; Janel Lawton, State of New Hampshire BES Division; Catalina Celentano, Eversource; Pat Garvin, George Hunton

1. Welcome and Introduction Roll Call

Kaela opened the meeting at 10:05 provided review of virtual meeting with the following:

Roll Call – Completed as listed above.

2. Presentation & Discussion: 2024 Eclipse Plan – Lead by Doug Arion

Committee Member Doug Arion provided a presentation on the economic impacts of solar eclipses and presented on the upcoming 2024 solar eclipse, which will be a notable view from the North Country Region. Eclipses are rare and provide a valuable, and place-based opportunity to draw visitors to the region. This eclipse will occur in April, a time when there is limited visitor activity in the region and this may provide a valuable opportunity to plan in advance, work with businesses and other entities to promote the region as a viewing location and capitalize on this rare event.

Committee members discussed the impacts of weather, and current planning groups working on this topic. Staff from NCC will join this working group along with CEDS committee members.

Presentation slides available here:

<https://nccouncil.sharepoint.com/:b/g/EcxsDMHsFnpLiWOWX2z0YJMBmciJHKuV6yxE62YgGWSTyg?e=sHXpNa>

3. Participant Share Out

Benoit provided an update for the BEA. He is working with North Country businesses. Benoit is excited that the Canadian border is open and is talking with companies interested in coming to the North County.

Janel provided an update on the CEDRS. The Central-Southern and South-Western CEDRS are still getting setup. The Northern CEDR is looking at a mid-December kickoff date.

Catalina provided an update that Eversource is rebuilding transmission lines, increasing capacity.

Sonya provided an update on the Tillotson Fund. They are launching a DASH grant. The application is one question and requires a budget. These grants will range from \$250 to \$2,000. The grant application has a rolling deadline. There will be an informational session on December 8th. The PUC decision was concerning regarding NHSaves. They want to see the program supported. They invested in the Circuit Riders program and the decision was a surprising disappointment.

Catalina said that Eversource was also surprised and is trying to figure out next steps forward.

Peter provided updates for NCIC. They are supporting a number of grants such as for Littleton, Grafton County, Gorham, Whitefield, and more. They are providing gap financing for small and emerging businesses. NCIC has found that hospitality has had an active year, as is other industries. NCIC has applied for a Build Back Better grant for a regional, cross-sectors project. They are one of two NH applicants. Their project would focus on industry surrounding low-grade wood, improving infrastructure, and improving education. NCIC has a strong coalition of regional, cross-sector partners. The first phase award is \$500,000. After a successful first phase, a second phase grant of \$25 million to \$75 million could be awarded.

Katy provided an update for the Whitefield Economic Development Corporation (WEDC). Whitefield is seeing some business activity in its downtown. The WEDC collaborated with NCC and the Town of Whitefield on a popup infrastructure project. After a successful demo, longer term implementation is being pursued. The WEDC is looking to support existing businesses in town. Katy stated that the WEDC was also disappointed in the PUC decision on NHSaves.

Doug raised concerns on internet satellite and pushed for investment to quickly be channeled into broadband fiber for community efficiency and resiliency.

Glen provided an update regarding Carroll County Broadband. NCC has been partners with them for three years. Six communities joined together to perform a feasibility study that should be in draft form soon. Work is being done with members of the legislature to enable the formation of communication districts. New funding opportunities provide a positive outlook on helping build out the infrastructure. Glenn also mentioned that Lise would be retiring from CEDC by June 30th.

Stacey provided an update on the resiliency work being done by the council. This work includes a full year of outreach to a variety of stakeholders, qualitative data analysis, case studies, the creation of multi-media, and more. She shared a link to the *North Country Rising: An Introduction* video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t0D3XJ-rgTU>. She expressed support for the DASH grants to meet community needs.

Kaela provided an update on behalf of Chuck Wood for White Mountain Community College. The college's expansion project is looking for additional funding. They have purchased property during the spring. The expansion will start with an advanced automotive program. They need \$6.5 million and have raised \$5.5 million through the state and additional funds from the NBRC. They still need funding

to continue. They need \$1.5 million for the next phase. Kaela also provide a quick update that work on employer assisted housing initiatives is going on in Gorham and Colebrook.

4. Discussion: 2021 CEDS Strategy Update – lead by Kaela Tavares

Kaela gave a short overview of the process of the CEDS update. This update is the last annual update before a new CEDS plan is drafted next year. Based on information gathered in the past year, the current goals of the CEDS plan will likely endure into the next plan as they are systemic issues. For the current update, NCC will be focusing on updating the data and metrics. These metrics and data will likely be carried over into the next plan rewrite as issues in data scope, reliability, and continuity were caused by the pandemic for 2020. The update will also focus on reimagining the resiliency section, including components from the housing study, providing COVID resource information and data, and exploring the discussion on what the return to the workforce look like for our area.

Stacey further explained the resiliency section and how it will be informed by the resiliency plan work that she is doing. This section will continue to include discussion on natural disasters and will cover other aspects of resiliency. The North Country has assets such as natural, social, and cultural capital that need to be highlighted and leveraged when looking for financial capital. Some themes that have come out of talks are — that support for tourism over focuses on promotion and under focuses on infrastructure and workforce, the need to focus on physical and mental health, and supporting the basic needs of the workforce (housing, healthcare, etc.).

Kaela opened up the discussion for members to mention what they think is missing in the current plan. Peter Corey supports the inclusion of holistic industry support, not just promotion. Catalina concurred. She is also excited for the discussion on the uneven return of the workforce. Peter mentioned that balancing work and life has become more valued over the course of the pandemic.

Kaela stated that the vote on the update will occur in December. That meeting time will be decided by a survey. A physical quorum will be necessary to perform business.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:47 am.