

**NORTH COUNTRY COUNCIL
CEDS Committee Meeting
In Person and Virtual Meeting
Plymouth Enterprise Center
1 Bridge Street, Plymouth,
NH December 19, 2024
DRAFT MINUTES**

1. Call to Order

Angela Cleveland called the meeting to order at 11:00 AM.

2. Attendance (V = Virtual)

Members Present:

Brandy Thompson, Joseph Perez, Michelle Beaudin, Miguel Moralez, Benoit Lamontagne, Sara Young-Knox, Jason Achmoody, Ben Amsden, Sarah Waring, Richard Amore, Erin Talcott (V), Mike Morin (V), Chuck Henderson (V), Stephanie Weiner (V), Steve Fortier (V), Jessica Cyr (V), Tracy Hutchins (V), Robin Irving (V).

Staff Present:

Glenn Coppelman, Angela Cleveland, and Taylor Roy

3. Recast City: Presentation (How to Save Your Downtown with Small-Scale Manufacturing : Ilana Preuss, Founder)

Ilana Preuss is the founder and CEO of Recast City. Imagine creating good paying jobs, growing family incomes to afford housing, and attracting business and entrepreneurs to diversity the economy. Small-scale businesses create thriving downtowns and communities and can fill many of the needs. Main Street America conducted a survey and found that 1/3 of all storefronts on main streets are product businesses and the majority are owned by millennials and Gen Z individuals. This might be one of the missing pieces to retain young people in the region. Small-scale manufacturing is any business that creates a tangible product that you can replicate and package. Sio Ceramics is located in a micro storefront and sells in-store, online, at markets, and wholesale. A profit can be large with a small storefront footprint in the community. Another company called Woodhaven custom calls is located off the main street in a small Alabama town saw an opportunity arise during covid. People wanted to see how they manufactured the calls at their facility, so they created a small store front to attract more businesses and engage with the community. Shared spaces is another way to help multiple business in one location. Commercial shared kitchens are places where business can pay for hours each month to complete their production. This was they can sell their products in grocery stores because their product was produced in a commercial kitchen. This opens businesses up for more places and opportunities to sell their products. Challenges

that many communities face include lost jobs, low wage jobs, vacant storefronts, desolate town centers, and brain drain. The cost of renovating a vacant store front is oftentimes more expensive than a lease in the area. Many people who own vacant store fronts are taking the property as a tax loss on revenue their making somewhere else. Many ground floor storefronts are becoming vacant because if they change the pricing it will devalue their underwriting of the loan. Lastly, guaranteed leases prevent businesses moving into vacant storefronts. This can happen when a large chain pays for a lease for say 10 years but closes in 7, preventing competitors into the space. Real estate needs often times don't match was businesses truly need. More recently we're seeing that businesses need small less square footage. We want to eliminate the boom and bust cycle so communities can work toward a sustainable and consistent economy. Some towns rely solely on tourism to spur their economy and often times there are large wage gaps in which some people make very little money and others a substantial amount of money. So what do we do about it and how do we help businesses and in turn downtowns thrive?

Ilana described her story and how she recognized that small-scale manufacturing can be the solution or many communities. She has also written a book called *Recast your City*. On top of that they work with communities all across the country on how small-scale manufacturing can serve their needs to grow their economy. She believes that this business type is the missing piece for communities and doesn't require college, lots of space, or travelling. We want to aim for thriving businesses and downtowns, resilient local economies, and living wages.

To have communities thrive we must.

1. Invest in the residents
2. Invest in the community
3. Create new structures to support, scale and invest
4. And think long-term, but act now

We want to invest in people so we can raise wages and build wealth back into the community. This also includes creating more inclusive opportunities and fill storefronts including online. Filling store fronts can grow property values in the area and attract residents in the long-term. One coffee shop achieved this by having wholesale manufacturing in the back while maintaining their shop in the front bringing both higher profits while spurring foot traffic in this once desolate part of town. Over time more shops moved in and it became a thriving storefront area. Eventually this will also attract businesses owners outside of the community who have seen your downtown success and want to share in it.

In order to achieve this Recast has a program called Recast Leaders that work with communities to identify their goals, small-scale manufacturers in the community, needs, and implementing the initiatives. The application There is an

open call for applications so communities to apply, and are due by the end of January and there are 5-6 openings. We help build a team of important stakeholders from the community and set realistic steps to achieve their desired goals over the next 10 months. We provide direct coaching, mentorships, and previous projects to help clear the path to success. Each project can be tailored to the community based on their specific needs.

In San Luis Colorado the small 600 person town launched a shared retail space in their visitors center so the businesses in the community have more opportunities for exposure to visitors. This was a great solution because they don't have a formal main street/downtown area.

How do communities get started?

1. Partnerships and Connectors (Stakeholders in a community)
2. Zoning and Permitting barriers
3. Telling the stories of local business
4. Bring small-scale manufacturers together to collaborate
5. Fill storefronts

There were questions about the integration and collaboration with a maker space rather than a retail space. Some maker spaces are large enough where the education aspect is met along with small businesses. Maker spaces are a great partner in the community and connect you to many different people and businesses.

Recast mostly works with community leaders, economic development committees/teams, main St. organizations, regional entities and many more.

In terms of zoning we have resources to address challenges with small-business permitting. We also connect directly with communities about how potential changes could improve their economy. Many of the manufacturers are small and clean businesses not the typical "smoke stack" manufacturing that many imagine.

Plymouth Soap Works and Café Monte Alto is what comes to mind when most think of small-scale manufacturing in Plymouth. They also have a small business that makes wooden lawn games in the old feed store

Another question was what if some rural towns have no main street or collection of businesses? How would we use this method if there isn't really a core downtown area to focus on? Ilana said you should focus on an area of town that we want people to come together. This could be a town hall, park, or some other place where the community can come together. One community used the art center as the location to spur their business like job trainings.

A question was asked, If a community wanted to apply for the partnership who in the community would be responsible for running the “group” and what would the time commitment look like? Most of the time we get the application from the person who wants to lead the project it can be from the town or a partner. Anyone can apply for this as long as they focus on economic development. There is usually a team or 3 or 4 people who can get the work done that work with our Recast consultants. The cohort meets every two weeks for about an hour. The time commitment is about 4 hours/month and the heavier section of the program where interviews are conducted it will be about 30 hours/month.

How does a small community afford to do something like this, and can it be granted funded? How can we compete against other communities with more funding? Ilana said communities have applied and received Federal and State grants, revolving loan funds, and much more.

Commercial corridors are great places for small businesses to go especially if they have vacant spaces available. Wherever you want to build business we can help you do it.

4. Approval of Minutes

October 24, 2024 Minutes: Motion to approve by Michelle Beaudin. Second by Jason Achmoody. One abstention, approved unanimously.

5. CEDS 2024 Accomplishments and 2025 Priorities

Angela reviewed this year’s achievements as follows.

- ✓ Created a four-part webinar series focused on top issues in the North Country
- ✓ Updated the 5-Year CEDS Plan to include Industry Supplement
- ✓ Participating in a CEDS Peer Exchange Group hosted by NADO
- ✓ Refreshed the CEDS Webpages
- ✓ Recruited new members representing banking, childcare and outdoor recreation/economy.
- ✓ Refreshed the CEDS Priority Project Process
- ✓ Created a dashboard to visually display CEDS Priority Projects

The committee then reviewed the previous CEDS goals and strategies to help identify which ones are most important to them. The members voted anonymously for their preferred strategy under each goal and the results are as follows.

Goal #1: To support ongoing efforts to collaborate, share resources, build new partnerships, and strengthen existing ones within economic development that balances community capitals and regional needs.

- To maintain an active and supportive CEDS committee who provide connection and guidance for economic development while building relationships and trust with each other. (69%)

Goal #2: To sustain a culture of honoring and protecting the people, heritage, and landscape of the region.

- Improve the human systems that strengthen our regional economy by promoting creative housing options that are safe, diverse and desirable, high-quality affordability childcare, and access to food and healthcare systems. (60%)

Goals #3: To protect the natural capital of the region while investing in and supporting climate migration, adaptation, and regeneration planning and projects.

- Foster existing business retention, expansion, and transition to new markets as well as the start-up of new businesses, industries, and innovation centers that support climate mitigation, adaptation, and regeneration. (73%)

Goal #4: To provide support for business development, and innovation that supports workforce training, opportunity, livable wage, and work-life balance.

- Support and assist the region with efforts to attract new residents, retain the existing population, and retain the local workforce with the skills necessary to grow local industry, encourage entrepreneurship and innovation. (36%)
- Maintain and build new partnerships with resource organizations at the regional, state, and federal level who can provide business technical support and ensure regional businesses are aware of these resources. (36%)

Goal #5: To supplement what is missing in the skills, training, and education system that directly connects to industry needs in the region.

- Support school programming, workforce development, and innovation that provides opportunities for youth and young adults to stay, live, work, and play in the region and take a more active role in their economic future. (100%)

Goal #6: To understand income and equity disparities in the region, create plans for an inclusive environment with access for everyone, and measure progress over time.

- Ensure equitable access to basic needs to sustain life are available across the region including access to housing, food, transportation, heat, health and community services. (37%)

Goal #7: Study and learn from innovative models around the country and pilot them in the region.

- Attract innovation to the region by researching models that work in other areas and adapting those models to our regional and industry needs.(100%)

Goal #8: Retain and attract manufacturing and other skilled trades that provide good jobs, with year-round employment, livable wages, and advancement opportunities for this generation and beyond.

- Retain our next generation workforce and engage them in the potential for employment and advancement in these fields. (54%)

6. CEDS Priority Project Submissions Review

Members reviewed the list of projects submitted. Angela described some of the projects in detail and what they entail. There are a range of projects from agricultural, outdoor recreation, and arts/entertainment. One potential projects in Littleton is a welcome center to accommodate visitors that come to town each day. It was recommended that members review the project list further in depth after the meeting to help determine the criteria and importance. Next the committee reviewed the project criteria and how to “score” the potential projects. Members felt that the main goals in the criteria should be weight differently rather than being one point each. They recommended it be on a scale from 1 to 5. They also said they would like the someone from EDA there to remind them of what would make a good project and some of their criteria. Once the projects are approved they will be put on our CEDS GIS map viewer with past and ongoing projects.

7. Participant Share Out

The meeting ended with participant “introductions” and share out.

Mike Morin (NFC) The Gorham wayfinding project has rapidly progressed and they have support from the Town Manager and Select Board and will be moving forward in 2025.

Steve Fortier (BEA) The Northern Border Regional Commission funded projects will be announced in early January. Helped Dartmouth Health secure a \$1.26 million dollar workforce opportunity for rural communities grant.

Joseph Perez (Plymouth Town Planner) The town of Plymouth has a 10 year plan transportation project that they hope to get advanced and help redefine the Northern gateway/road into town near the Common Man to the National Guard. This also includes improved sight lines for vehicles entering onto the main road.

Brandy Thompson (Community Programs Director NH-VT USDA RD) There is a change in administration and Sara will no longer be working with us. For the next few months I can will be the contact until we get a new State Director.

Glenn Coppelman (North Country Council, Carroll County Broadband, CEDC)
CEDC Hat: Their new executive director will be starting in January.

Angela Cleveland (North Country Council) The next meeting will be on February 27th, 2024.

8. Adjourn

Angela Cleveland declared the meeting adjourned at 1:30 PM.