

**WEST MICHIGAN REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION  
CEDS MEETING MINUTES**

August 30, 2017  
City of Wyoming  
9:30 a.m.

**1. Call to Order.** J. Sandy, CEDS Committee Chair, called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m.

**CEDS Members present:**

Nora Balgoyen-Williams – Allegan County  
Jim Storey – Allegan County  
Travis Alden – Barry County  
Christian Borg – City of Grand Rapids  
Morgan Carroll – Ionia County  
Jim Sandy – Mecosta County Development Corporation  
Mike Scott – Montcalm County  
Tom Porter – Montcalm County  
Dan Massy – Osceola County Community & Economic Development  
Morris Langworthy – Osceola County  
Roger Bergman – Ottawa County  
Joyce Kortman – Ottawa County  
Tim Cochran – City of Wyoming  
Lillian VanderVeen – City of Wyoming

**Staff:**

David Bee – Director  
Nancy Murphy – Administrative Assistant

**Guest:**

Becky Huttenga – Ottawa County ACRE AgTech

**2. Approval of Agenda**

**A MOTION WAS MADE BY** R. Bergman to adopt the agenda as presented.  
**SUPPORTED BY** M. Langworthy. **MOTION APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**3. Approval of Minutes**

**A MOTION WAS MADE BY** R. Bergman to approve the minutes for the May 31, 2017, CEDS Committee meeting as presented. **SUPPORTED BY** M. Scott. **MOTION APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**4. Guest Speaker**

Becky Huttenga – Ottawa County ACRE AgTech

D. Bee introduced today's guest speaker, Becky Huttenga, who represents the Ottawa County ACRE AgTech program. She is here today to talk about opportunities for other counties based on Ottawa County's experience.

In 2010, the County Commissioners directed the Planning and Performance Improvement Department to try a new approach for economic development that did not duplicate existing services. The Department designed a project to create an agricultural technology business incubator, and received a USDA (U.S. Department of Agriculture) grant for a feasibility study. That study verified that there were many local entrepreneurs with agricultural technology ideas who would benefit from assistance to develop their ideas into businesses.

Ottawa County created a new model for their business incubator. Most business incubators have large facilities that include equipment and space that they make available to entrepreneurs. However, these capital assets require extensive maintenance and ongoing fundraising efforts to finance the facilities' operations. The County decided that it would be a more productive use of resources to focus on services instead, which is what is needed more by ag-tech entrepreneurs. Another feature of their program is that clients sign a contract that commits them to begin paying a portion of the incubator costs when their business starts making a profit.

The ACRE AgTech program needs new clients and partners, so the County is engaging in outreach efforts in order to make more people aware of the availability of services. They have issued press releases and are making presentations at meetings such as the one today, in addition to networking at local events.

The original project name was the Great Lakes Ag-Tech Business Incubator. They are now marketing their brand with a new name, ACRE AgTech, with a website, and presence on Twitter, and a newsletter six times a year, as well as a radio show (on the Michigan Agricultural Information Network) once a week. They are finding new ways to connect with potential clients and partners and sponsors. They also have gained national recognition, and have received inquiries from counties all over the state.

The program has also been growing its staff, and recently hired Doug Huesdash, who works 100 percent on business development. Gary Holt (working on Manufacturing and Engineering), and Dr. Charles Gould with MSU (Michigan State University) work as consultants to the project.

They now have five clients, and Ms. Huttenga described each of the companies –

- 1) Synergy Power – an alternative power source prototype
- 2) Digested Organics – an organic waste management company
- 3) TwoScoreTwo – an information technology company that offers blockchain technology, which uses the internet to transfer data (such as invoices, bank records). At this time, the technology is unhackable and very secure – it can't be broken into or stolen. It is used locally for farm hub applications, and can connect businesses to local farms to make local foods a more viable option.

4) New Era Green Energy – an anaerobic digestion that uses four chambers and is a new way to digest products. The process is more complete, faster, and more effective. The company is currently trying to get investors so that they can fund a pilot project. The fertilizer generated by their digester is high grade and environmentally friendly.

5) Energy Conservation Works – an alternative energy company concentrating on solar energy, creating prototypes, and working toward the goal of a smaller footprint.

A portion of ACRE AgTech's profits are invested back into the program, enabling it to be self-sustaining. They are also starting an innovative fund for start-up projects, working with credit partners. Later they plan to expand and take the incubator program to other counties. The Counties of Allegan, Montcalm, St. Clair, Leelanau, Huron, Barry, and Kent are possible future participants. They are always pursuing grants and looking for sponsors and businesses.

## **5. 2017 CEDS Report to EDA**

All Committee members had received a draft copy of the 2017 CEDS document. D. Bee reviewed the draft report. Comments included –

There are a few minor changes that will be incorporated into the final report, such as corrections to the list of Committee members. The final report will also include resolutions from the WMRPC and the CEDS Committee.

In 2012, we prepared the full CEDS report, which we do every five years. This year, we have a new format – the report is in a three-ring binder, so people can add future one-year interim report(s) to go along with the 2017 five-year report. We added Barry County, and also updated demographic data.

The Goals are on page 100. At their last meeting, the Committee decided to revise the annual goals to make the list more concise and easier to manage. Now there are three Organizational Goals and Objectives (which we have control over, and “will” do) and three Community and Economic Development Goals and Objectives (which we “should” do).

The reports lists the 2017 Community Projects. First are 30 EDA Targeted Community Projects, and later 12 Community Projects. The 30 EDA Targeted projects total \$240 million. This year we did not generate any projects in Barry County. Instead, we put a placeholder in the CEDS so that Barry County projects can be added at a later time. EDA no longer requires that a project be listed in the CEDS for future consideration for funding. The requirement now is that a project aligns with both community and EDA goals. The report also lists the evaluation criteria that are used to rank the projects.

J. Storey asked about the distribution process for the CEDS. He said that the report should go to the district offices of all the State legislators. L. VanderVeen added that we don't “bend the ear” of our local politicians often enough.

**A MOTION WAS MADE BY M. Langworthy to approve the “2017 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy”, for submission to the Economic Development Administration. SUPPORTED BY M. Scott. MOTION APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The 2017 CEDS will next be presented to the WMRPC at the September 15 Commission meeting. After the report has been approved by both the CEDS Committee and the WMRPC, there will be a 30-day public review period. A notice will be published in the local newspaper to inform the public of that review opportunity. After the final report is printed, a copy will be submitted to EDA, and distributed to Committee and Commission members.

## **6. WMRPC Staff Updates**

D. Bee distributed a Staff Update. The Update includes information in the categories of Economic Development, Transportation Planning, Member Projects/Initiatives, and Other. D. Bee highlighted a few of the items.

The current edition of our newsletter, *Region 8 Notes*, discusses our marketing efforts. J. Sandy commented that our organization mostly operates under the radar, and that we are more low-key than flashy. The best marketing is person-to-person contact, and for us to fulfill our goals of working with and assisting local communities within our region. D. Bee added that we recently prepared a new brochure which summarizes who we are and what we do. We also created a new Facebook page and activated our Twitter account.

## **6. Committee Member Roundtable**

Jim Storey – Allegan County. He mentioned the retirement of Larry Brown, who was the Director of the Allegan County Road Commission for 40 years. The new power plant will be dedicated the week of October 7.

Tom Porter – Montcalm County. The County is working on its financial situation.

Travis Alden – Barry County. The County is transitioning from an event-heavy season to economic development activity. Several local businesses are in an expansion mode. A company in Rutland Township is working on a \$100,000 expansion. Bradford White in Middleville is also expanding. An expansion at BCN in Hastings will create 100 jobs during the next three years.

There are ongoing talent issues in the work force. Higher wages are needed to sustain growth. In Hastings, high school graduates are participating in a program that involves employment at local businesses. They now have a functioning Brownfield Redevelopment Authority and projects are waiting in the wings, including a brewery in Middleville. Inadequate housing continues to be an issue, with prospective employees and residents not able to find a place to live.

Christian Borg – City of Grand Rapids. There is continued demand for the Brownfield Redevelopment program. Preparation work is in process for the restoration of the Grand River rapids downtown.

Dan Massy – Osceola County. Robots are taking over jobs, but that's not necessarily a bad thing. He cited an example where robots were installed to do some jobs, but the human workers moved up to better jobs with more pay. The County is usually ranked in the middle of unemployment data, but last month they were near the bottom. Reed City and Richmond Township will try again for a 425 agreement.

Roger Bergman – Ottawa County. Staff should look at the first three things on the list of job criteria to add more emphasis on created jobs that have a living wage. D. Bee responded that the creation of high-wage jobs is important to EDA.

Mike Scott – Montcalm County. He talked about solar energy. Farmers in Montcalm County have been approached related to solar and wind technology. He also mentioned medical marijuana.

Morgan Carroll – Ionia County. Manufacturing Day is October 6th. She talked about Redevelopment Ready Communities in Ionia County. There have been 80 to 100 tours for students at local businesses.

Jim Sandy – Mecosta County. He talked about the robotics program in the schools, which has a different focus now, with functional robots that can actually do a project for a company. The students are involved with national and international competition. The program is still just a club, and not part of the school curriculum. Ice Mountain wants to implement a \$36 million expansion. In agriculture, it will soon be time to harvest the crops.

Nora Balgoyen-Williams – Allegan County. She talked about a Michigan Works! outreach program directed at fulfilling the need for skilled trades workers. There were over 20 applications. Watson Township near US-131 did a white paper feasibility study for a water-sewer study. It is a prime location for development. She talked about Start Garden's 5x5 Nights, which is coming to Allegan County. Entrepreneurs pitch their ideas to five judges, for five minutes, for a chance to win \$5,000 to fund efforts to move their project forward; they also meet people who can provide expertise to help them. The Allegan County Fair starts September 8th.

Tim Cochran – City of Wyoming. Housing issues are rampant in the Grand Rapids area. A developer wanted to build 370 apartment units, and they satisfied every City standard, but they met resistance from the neighborhood. It's important to have a long-range vision to meet the needs of the community.

Lillian VanderVeen – City of Wyoming. She said "Welcome" to today's visitors to their town.

## **8. Other Business**

D. Bee said that Lee Shirey, our EDA representative, is in town. Three of four communities with potential EDA projects have submitted applications.

## **9. Adjournment**

**A MOTION WAS MADE By R. Bergman to adjourn. SUPPORTED BY M. Carroll. MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.** The meeting was adjourned at 11:15 a.m.

Attachment: Staff Update