

Regional Strategic Action Plan for Land Use, Transportation, and Economic Development Steering Committee

Second Meeting

March 1, 2007 Meeting Notes

SEDA-COG Board Room

6:30 p.m.

Attendance: Kate Fairweather (Governor's Action Team), Anna Griffith (Discovery Machine, Inc.), Kathy Hummel (CSIU), Jim King (Northumberland County Industrial Development Corp.), Cindy Bower (Rose Valley/Mill Creek Watershed), Charles Pollock (Bucknell University), Rob Postal (Mifflin County Industrial Development Corporation), Joan Sattler (DEP), Mike Schrey (AgChoice Farm Credit), Wayne Smutz (Penn State), Dan Vilello (DEP), Jerry Walls (Lycoming County Planning), Skip Wieder (Geisinger Health Systems), Jason Finnerty (Tri County Regional Planning Commission), John Mizerak (DCED), Leon Liggitt (PennDOT District 3), Tom Zilla (Centre Regional Metropolitan Planning Organization), Jim Zubler (Dwntown Lewistown Inc.)

SEDA-COG Staff Present: Kim Wheeler (CRC), Brian Auman (CRC), Mandy Burbage (CRC), Jerry Bohinski (ED), Betsy Lockwood (ED), Steve Herman (TP)

Introductions

- Kim welcomed the Steering Committee of the SEDA-COG Strategic Action Plan and introduced SEDA-COG staff.
- Steering Committee members not present at the November 1, 2006, kick-off meeting introduced themselves and explained what they do and where they are employed. John Mizerak, the state liaison within DCED for the Strategic Action Plan, introduced himself and discussed primary recommendations from the Pennsylvania State Planning Board's 2006 Report (hard copy distributed to committee members) that should support the Strategic Action Plan development. John mentioned that legislation influenced by the Planning Board recommendations should be forthcoming, to address: incentives for right-sizing municipal services, enabling municipal consolidation, encouraging multi-municipal planning, and coordinating state investments in economic development, land use, and transportation. The Planning Board will continue to promote its report and complete outreach with groups across the state as pending reform legislation is proposed.
- Kim informed the Steering Committee that SEDA-COG has a page on its website that will contain information and presentations related to the Regional Strategic Action Plan. The specific link will be forwarded to members, but it can be found by going to the SEDA-COG home page (<http://www.seda-cog.org/>), clicking "Services" and then "Business and Economic Development" from the left-hand menu.

Focus Group Outcomes

- Kim reviewed the outcomes of the focus group meetings held in each of the Regional Strategic Action Plan sub-regions. A diverse mixture of interests and expertise was included at the focus group sessions. Each focus group began by opening a dialogue about the primary economic development, land use, and transportation issues facing the sub-region. The groups then evaluated regional objectives – analyzing existing/potential barriers and recommended approaches to overcome them. A brief synthesis of the common themes heard throughout the focus group meetings was included in the packet for the Steering Committee. Kim went through the most common themes, including:
 - Need to provide & maintain quality infrastructure to support economic development (roads, rail, broadband, etc).
 - Too many municipalities – is barrier to planning effectively.
 - Business Tax Structure at state level is a barrier to economic development.
 - Graduates leave area to find jobs – need to create opportunities for them to stay and make a difference in their communities.
 - Need for better coordination between public/private sectors when planning for large investments and developments.
 - State permitting processes are too slow.
 - Concern that only attracting low paying service sector jobs.
 - Poor community perception or image.
 - Completion of I-99 Highway necessary.
 - Must address barriers to encourage adaptive re-use.
 - Need workforce training and re-training.

Kim mentioned that all of the focus group highlights will be compiled into a full summary document that will draw upon the common threads heard throughout the five sessions and compare and contrast some of the issues.

Kim then proceeded to go through the list of participants at each focus group, along with pertinent views that were expressed. Steering Committee members offered comments and sought clarification on some of the common themes.

- A definitive explanation was requested for the Mountain Top sub-region sentiment that zoning ordinances do not reflect local preferences for growth.
- A question was asked as to what was truly meant by the Middle Susquehanna Valley sub-region comment on competition between downtowns and economic development agencies. The feeling of the sub-region participants was that the downtowns and economic development agencies are often pursuing the same funding sources and trying to attract similar businesses. A comment was made that funds should be reserved for core communities; incentives should be offered for downtown redevelopment.
- A question arose over how SEDA-COG would effectively receive input from the general public on the Strategic Action Plan instead of solely relying on agency representatives or organized interests. During the summer of 2007 SEDA-COG staff will spearhead broader public outreach sessions to solicit

feedback on the Regional Action Plan principles. It is expected that these outreach meetings will involve over 50 members of the general public.

- It was asked if focus group participants mentioned specific state permits when they commented that state permitting processes are too burdensome and slow. Participants did not provide much specificity, but they did express desire for streamlined processes and referenced that other states utilize more efficient and consistent permitting structures conducive to fast tracking critical economic development projects.

Kim concluded the focus group outcomes discussion and stated that future meetings of the Steering Committee and other ongoing work will emphasize establishing a consensus vision for the region. The vision will be validated by the focus groups and past land use/economic development/transportation conference attendees. This vision will then be used to prepare definitive recommendations to be shared with the public for education and implementation purposes.

Discussion and Review of Regional Objectives and Action Steps

- Mandy Burbage led the Steering Committee members through a discussion of revised primary objectives and action steps initially identified as part of the Regional Conference on Transportation and Land Use for Economic Development that was held for the SEDA-COG region in 2005. Mandy referred everyone to the yellow document in the meeting packet to review the six primary regional objectives and accompanying action steps. The base information from the 2005 Conference was modified using feedback already received from the Steering Committee and Focus Groups held in the sub-regions.
- Mandy explained that a timer would be used to allot seven minutes for discussion on each of the objectives and related regional action steps and recommendations for Commonwealth support. Before getting started with the working session to validate and modify the objectives, members had a dialogue about usage of the term economic development. It was acknowledged that the Strategic Action Plan will consider a broad definition of economic development. The policy recommendations will not simply be worded so as to describe how land use and transportation decisions can support economic development, but instead the document will give equal standing to land use, transportation, and economic development, so that the spheres can be most effectively integrated for optimal decision-making.
- Comments on the objectives, regional action steps, and Commonwealth support recommendations are contained below.

Objective A – Create a regional plan identifying areas designated for development, redevelopment, and preservation:

- Some Steering Committee members expressed concerns and skepticism over economic development organizations actually working together in a coordinated way to accomplish the consensus regional vision.
- It was mentioned that regional action step #3 should also point out the role of rail freight in supporting a regional economic development structure. Similarly, the agricultural industry's importance was noted as being worthy of specific mention in the economic development framework in terms of tapping

into and enhancing existing business in the region. The potential of agriculture for increased energy applications (ethanol, biofuels, carbon sequestration, etc.) was seen as very key to the regional economy.

- Wording for regional action step #4 was emphasized as being right on target. The group felt this consensus vision is certainly the desired approach. Individual entities could operate in their best interest, but the balanced consensus vision should be what guides decision-making.

Objective B – Implement effective land use planning in the region:

- Many residents living in the SEDA-COG region cite their desire to maintain the predominant rural character. It was mentioned that the regional action steps might highlight maintaining a rural character as a land use strategy. Similarly, it might be beneficial to use language that low-impact, green development is promoted and achieved.
- It was proposed that the regional action steps address the lack of zoning throughout the region. Rather than mandates, education and incentives should be facilitated to create zoning ordinances in all municipalities, using local level decision-making guided by the regional vision.
- Regional action step #4 was noted as an important means that is oftentimes ignored. Every possible outlet should be used to disseminate clear and usable land use planning information to individuals currently lacking an adequate understanding of land use issues. Presentations to students, volunteer organizations, non-profits, and the like were seen as possible avenues to use.

Objective C – Revitalize, reinvest, maintain, restore, and improve existing communities through economic development and the preservation of natural, historic, cultural, and open space resources:

- County planning officers in sentence one of regional action step #1 should read as “county planning officials” instead.
- Incentives were mentioned as preferential to penalties referenced in regional action step #8. Companies leaving sites are often not in a financial position to pay penalties or they are concerned about marketing brownfield locations because of liability reasons. Incentives, however, could serve to achieve adaptive reuse and encourage reinvestment. Many residents will support this, but some will continue to object to public funds going to benefit private companies that should bear the costs of doing business at a site.

Objective D – Develop a broad, regional educational outreach about economic development, land use, and transportation for students, general citizenry, municipalities, and legislators. Raise awareness, define avenues to get involved, and stress the need to be involved:

- Educating future decision-makers is very important and should be a focus for all students, not just those in public schools (delete the word public schools from sentence one under regional action step #1.) Beginning the educational program in the sixth grade was noted as too late; students in elementary grades should be exposed to the principles.

- In addition to meeting essential curriculum requirements, an effort could be made to work with the Pennsylvania Department of Education to connect the land use principles with aptitude tests (e.g., current science tests).
- Agricultural education should be incorporated into #2 under recommendations for Commonwealth support.
- More incentives, not mandates, are needed to educate municipal officials on land use planning.
- State agencies could help to educate local officials early on before land use problems or controversies might explode (e.g., Governor’s Action Team might intervene early on to inform local officials about pending development plans and avoid major dissent over tenants and their operation’s impacts). This point returned the members back to earlier discussion on problems associated with government fragmentation, duplication, and inconsistent policies or bureaucratic processes. Streamlining is needed, and it was mentioned that a Unified Development Ordinance approach may help.

Objective E – Encourage comprehensive regionalization of services (including policing, water and sewer, marketing and tourism, waste management/recycling, and reduced government):

- The Pennsylvania Sewage Facilities Act (Act 537) is understood to be a significant barrier to regionalizing sewer services. Amending Act 537 to facilitate sewer regionalization should be included as a recommendation for Commonwealth support. Incentives and funding are fundamental to advancing regionalized sewer or other municipal services.

Objective F – Capitalize on the location of institutions and industry clusters in our core communities (which are already supported by existing infrastructure) by providing for their growth, expansion, and modernization as a strategy for strengthening the local economy:

- Commonwealth support recommendation #4 was identified as important for a competitive regional economy. However, it should be reworded to emphasize that government incentives should be eliminated for new retail development in “greenfields” instead of in all circumstances.
- Regional action step #3 should contain the word “existing” before regional business leadership groups.
- Commonwealth support recommendation #6 should not be limited to licensed institutions. The broader spectrum of institutions should involve local government when planning for growth and expansion. Many institutions such as colleges and universities are large economic drivers for the region, and they need to be engaged with the communities where they operate. A two-way street must exist for there to be proactive coordination.

What’s Next?

- Kim thanked everyone for their participation. She announced that the Focus Group summaries will be prepared shortly and distributed to the Steering Committee. The summaries, revised primary objectives, and other information will be available on the

project web site. Finally, a meeting will be scheduled with participants of the 2005 Regional Conference, and state agency staff will soon be meeting with SEDA-COG and other LDDs to review Strategic Regional Action Plan progress in Harrisburg.

Next Steering Committee Meeting:

Tuesday, April 10th, 2007 – 6:30 p.m. - SEDA-COG (unless informed otherwise)