MEETING MINUTES

I. Welcome

The following members were present at the meeting:
- Rick Trucello, Public Sector
- Larry Meyers, Schneider Electric
- Stacy LoCastro, SAP&DC

Others in attendance included:
- Donald Schwartz, Bedford County Planning Commission
- Mark Colussy, Huntingdon County Planning Commission
- Brad Zearfoss, Somerset County Planning Commission
- Brandon Carson, SAP&DC
- Brandon Peters, SAP&DC
- Zachary Lee, SAP&DC
- Matthew Bjorkman, SAP&DC
- Janice Streightiff, SAP&DC

Each participant received a meeting packet that included:
- Agenda
- Objectives and Outcomes

II. Welcome and Introductions

Brandon Carson welcomed the committee to the meeting and asked that they introduce themselves. He gave some background information on the CEDS and noted that SAP&DC is currently working on the five-year update. A SWOT analysis was completed to use to form the goals, objectives, and strategies, which will be used to prioritize the EDA projects in the region. He introduced Stacy LoCastro, SAP&DC Grants Coordinator, who will be completing the CEDS Update. In the past a consultant has been used for the update. Since
the Regional Comprehensive Plan, Alleghenies Ahead, was just completed; SAP&DC did not see the need to do the full planning process over again. The update is due to EDA by January 1, 2020, for their review. A survey was pushed out a few weeks ago and received 121 responses to date. The intent today is to review the data received, look at the survey results, and have a discussion on the goals, objectives, and strategies to determine what changes should be made. The draft document will then be put out for a 30-day public comment period and presented to the SAP&DC Board of Directors for approval at their November 20, 2019, meeting. The final document will be submitted to EDA for approval by the end of the year.

III. Review of CEDS Data

Stacy noted that the draft document to date was sent out to the committee in advance of the meeting for their review and comment. She used the last CEDS document as a template. Not much changed in the intro as it is just an overview of the region. The demographic trends section highlights population decline, wages, and housing. With the aging population in the region, there is a need for more senior living centers, nursing agencies, etc. At the same time, there needs to be an equal amount of effort put into making the community more attractive to young professionals. There was also some discussion on the controversial issue of combining school districts. As the number of students continues to decline, the cost of keeping all the schools open is too high. Down the line, communities will be forced to consolidate. There is also a declining number of Firefighters and EMS. Less citizens are volunteering and the positions that do pay, don’t pay much. The same positions in Maryland pay double the wage. Mark Colussy also noted that the region has aging infrastructure, with most built in the 1970s. One community in Huntingdon County actually found wooden pipes when completing a repair!

Stacy reviewed the housing data with the committee noting that Blair County has the oldest housing and Huntingdon County has the newest. There was some discussion about broadband as compared to other states. Wages and loss of jobs, particularly manufacturing, were also noted. This drives the decline in population. She also reviewed the commuting and agriculture data. Donald Schwartz, Bedford County, noted that while the number of farms has not changed there, the types of farms has changed. There currently are fewer dairy farms and more crops being grown. There has also been an increase in animal farms, including hogs, chickens, and ducks.

IV. Review of Survey

Stacy reviewed some of the comments with the committee. The main weakness identified in the survey included the lack of strong leadership and the need for consolidation of municipalities and school districts. The region also has a lower amount of college degrees than other areas.
SWOT analysis
Matt Bjorkman and Zach Lee gave an overview of the SWOT analysis. The process was to look for higher incidences of certain responses and put into complete thoughts. They searched the data and broke it down into broader categories. The findings were very similar to the findings from Alleghenies Ahead. Opioid use and Broadband needs have risen to a new level in recent years. There was some discussion as to whether broadband should be a standalone goal. Agriculture ranked in the top five on the last CEDS but did not rank as high now. Farmers don’t attend meetings or take surveys making it hard to get their information. The previous agriculture projects that were developed did not fare very well. Brandon discussed the shared use kitchen that was put together in Cambria County and how there has been very little interest shown in it. Even though agriculture is not as active as in the past, it is still important to the region. It was decided to move agriculture into another category and make broadband its own category. SAP&DC has an active Broadband Task Force that is actively looking into possible funding to develop projects in the region. The local service providers have asked for a seat on the task force, but recently have shown more interest in stopping the competition than participating in a project. The task force will work to put together a pilot project, that if successful, will be a model to deploy broadband in rural communities. Brandon Carson noted that based on some research done by another source, there is a consensus that some people move to those areas to avoid being connected, but he doesn’t think that is the majority. Stacy noted a correlation of several studies done that focused on the advantages and economic impact of having broadband. She offered to share the link to the document.

V. Goals and Objectives

Brandon Peters discussed the remaining goals and their strategies to decide if the committee felt they were still applicable and update where necessary. Mark Colussy added that Huntingdon County has a group called Partnership for Economic Progress that focuses on similar ideas. The group has five main priorities with three goals for each. Infrastructure includes telecommunications (cell and broadband), roadways, and rail. The Business Development category includes capital, tax incentives, and housing issues. Supply Chain includes state contracts (mostly related to the correctional facilities), goods and services, and agriculture. Workforce Development includes credentialing, attraction of youth, and tapping into the alumni databases. The last category was marketing, which includes a marketing campaign, molding Huntingdon’s identity, and to market buildings and land. This was correlated with the CEDS document. Mark said he can forward it to Brandon if he would like to look at it.

The group also discussed the importance of attracting not only youth but businesses in general. The area needs to appeal to anyone looking to relocate here. Zack added that many of the young people in the area plan to move away. The focus needs to be on retention as well as recruiting. This needs to be started early, elementary school age. Housing is also a factor in trying to attract people to the area. You see a lot of retirement housing being developed but very little that would be attractive to young professionals looking to relocate to the area.
Brandon will incorporate what was discussed today and provide the draft goals to the committee within the next week. The public comment period begins today but will be extended a little longer as the goals and objectives were not on the website today. The draft CEDS document will be presented to the SAP&DC Board of Directors on November 20, 2019, and then will be submitted to EDA.

VI. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 12:00 PM.

**NOTE:** The next meeting of the CEDS Committee will be at a date, time, and place to be determined.