

SoVT Zone CEDS Committee Meeting (Virtual)

8/12/2024

Introductions and summary of important information shared for committee:

Laura Sibilia opened the meeting with some review of upcoming dates:

- August 26th, in-person meeting 3-4:30 pm. We hope to gather in person but will also have a zoom option.
 - Location: Bank of Bennington Conference Room, 155 North St. Bennington, VT
(Thank you Kelly)
- CEDS public input meetings: September 25th and 26th in Manchester, Bennington, Wilmington, Brattleboro, and Bellows Falls. Committee members received invites to all events; you don't have to attend them all but we hope you'll help spread the word with your networks
- More information will be shared at the 8/26 meeting and we'll have social media postings you can share as well as email templates and flyer for sharing

Rachel Selsky of Camoin Associates got us up to speed

- Rachel and her team have reviewed data and will have a data report produced shortly
- Also coming ahead of the next meeting will be an updated objective and strategy framework (working on that in order to refine and prioritize strategies will be the goal of the 8/26 meeting)
- You'll get the framework in advance and are asked to review that and come prepared to discuss and revise.
- We are on track and full steam ahead!
- The updated project schedule is available [HERE](#)
- One more reminder for the public meetings September 25/26 – we are also hoping to have some time for committee members to 'brag' about successes from the previous CEDS

Facilitated Discussion About Objectives

Objectives:

- i. Increase our **population**
- ii. Improve our **physical infrastructure**
- iii. Enhance our **social infrastructure**
- iv. Expand our **business infrastructure**
- v. Develop our **economic development capacity**

Discussion Prompts:

- Within each objective, what is an issue/opportunity/focus area that has emerged since 2019?
- Within each objective, what is project/program that you think would have the greatest impact on achieving the objective?

Comments (summarized)

- Re: objective 1 (increasing population):
 - Allow continuation of refugee resettlement efforts (focus on retaining as well as new folks coming in)
 - We need to be clear about intentionality around naming and recruiting workforce in say top 5 sectors
 - Getting intentional about what our needs are and what is needed in Southern VT vs all of Vermont
- Gretchen noted that in resort areas that in addition to being an increase in second homeownership (after pandemic) – in Wilmington for example up to 68-70% second homeowners. There has also been an increase in second homeowners being LLC's, seeing lots of investment properties (used for STR etc) vs a community-minded population of second homeowners (investigate how is this affecting community social infrastructure)
- Making more efficient use of physical infrastructure (ie redevelopment of existing buildings and repurposing vs new builds), how this is affected by recent changes to Act 250 for downtown developments (change comes into effect in 2026)
- Senior housing as a true priority – are people living in the most efficient places? seniors having opportunities to move into smaller housing units that meet their needs and open up larger homes for families
- Private developers are finding it hard to access funding for housing projects (wf or senior housing) – the local housing agencies are focussed on higher population areas, leaving out the rural areas
- Another barrier to construction of senior/workforce housing is lack of construction workforce in our area – need to build the workforce to help meet our development needs
- Are our downtowns ready to add more people? Look at downtown infrastructure to support incoming population
- Need a burst of energy in the education sector/attracting new talent for education sector so our schools are more attractive – hard as most people are not sure what to do with this, but maybe attracting some new energy in the education workforce sector
- Are we moving fast enough and adequately efficient in how we are doing our planning. With a strategy for population growth that doesn't include new births, we are working in a competitive environment so we need to really work on how to be more competitive. Are we being effective enough in our planning to attract the same population other regions are also fighting for?

Emerging issues:

- Education system needs to be really looked at as a state
- Climate resilience has become more urgent – it seemed further in the future but now it's a real live issue.
- Problems of homelessness, mental health and addiction especially hurting downtowns as well as the individuals

- Danger of not having suffered as much damage in recent floods: we need to be sure to not be complacent even though we haven't had as much recovery as other parts of the state
- Make sure our schools have the resources for incoming refugee population (language and other supports)
- Understanding the contrast between talk 5 years ago about VT being attractive to Climate Change Refugees... to the 'new reality' with increased flooding and heat. What will that look like. Also political migration – how that might be on our radar.
- Opportunities and challenges around Artificial Intelligence – how that will affect our workforce (Laura also tied that into remote workers – metrics tying in local and remote workforce given greater connectivity and productivity opportunities)
- Re: Climate resilience, how it affects hospitality overall when parts of the state are affected
- Looking at gentrification of communities and how this is affecting the housing market
- How to talk about regional collaboration – resources for communities who lack capacity – especially around climate resilience which is difficult work for smaller communities; what are regional mechanisms that can help our community.
- Aging population is also a challenge for communities to face
- Business succession: this is happening fast as owners are aging out en masse – moving quickly now
- Also looking at older buildings that house businesses – many have deferred maintenance
- How can we help encourage sustainable redevelopment of buildings esp as ownership may be turning over
- Small businesses, small towns, and small developers are not able to accessing funding due to the complexity
- Also realizing that even though supports are available, small businesses don't seem to be developing their capacity (for example around accounting practices)
- Small ambulance services and other emergency services (as small businesses) have been a sector that is failing
- Laura states – focus on the drivers of the economy (school, housing, health care, services available) vs specific economic sectors as how we have been working. Look at things that all our businesses need
- Access to wider markets for local businesses
- Structures needed to provide services for people exiting homelessness – it's not just about the housing, but also the capacity in our service providers.
- Chronic lack of capacity at the local level for doing projects at the level that needs to happen (SB's can handle their yearly budget and roads but planning for infrastructure and larger projects isn't there. RPC's have some capacity but it is limited as well by its nature). Need to figure this problem out. Happening at a state level, but what can we do NOW for ourselves at a local level.