



Date: 08/24/20

To CWEDD Board, Staff, and Interested Parties
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SUBJECT AUGUST 2020 MEETING SUMMARY – SWOT & ACTION PLAN DISCUSSION

OVERVIEW

On August 20, 2020, 32 members of the Cascades West Economic Development District (CWEDD) met to discuss updates to the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). The August meeting focused on updating the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis and the CEDS Action Plan. A team from the University of Oregon’s Institute for Policy Research & Engagement (IPRE) facilitated the meeting. This was the second of the CWEDD CEDS update meetings.

Meeting Goals & Activities

The meeting had three main goals:

- Brainstorm what to add to or change about the SWOT Analysis
- Develop some guidelines for how to reformat the Action Plan
- Discuss appropriate scale and scope for the Action Plan

Before diving into discussion about the SWOT and Action Plan, the IPRE team reviewed responses to the questionnaire meeting attendees filled out as part of the CEDS Update Kickoff Meeting in July. Next, an IPRE team member presented an overview of the current SWOT content and gave attendees time to fill out a short questionnaire asking about updates to the SWOT. The meeting then split into three smaller breakout rooms to discuss the SWOT before coming back as a full group to share insights from small group discussions.

Next, an IPRE team member reviewed the current Action Plan, focusing on the goals and action item forms that were designed to provide details about how to implement each action. The IPRE team member also shared three examples of other CEDS action plans: [Eastern Upper Peninsula, Michigan](#); [Mid-Region, New Mexico](#); and [Southeast Alaska](#). Each CEDS illustrated a different approach to formatting the action plan. Attendees were encouraged to think about what aspects of these CEDS action plans they liked and disliked to help inform how the CWEDD CEDS Action Plan might be reformatted for the 2020 update. After the IPRE presentation, attendees again took time to fill out a short questionnaire about the current CWEDD Action Plan and split into three smaller groups to discuss updates to the Action Plan. After discussing the Action Plan in small groups, attendees came back together to share some insights from their discussion.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The following sections of this memo summarize the discussion around the SWOT Analysis and Action Plan from both small group breakouts and full group sharing. Note that IPRE will summarize and share

responses to the two questionnaires prior to the September CEDS Update Meeting, but those responses are not included here since both questionnaires remain open to gather feedback through September 4th.

SWOT Analysis

Meeting attendees considered the relevance of the current SWOT Analysis and provided feedback about what changes should be included in the 2020 CEDS update. In small groups, meeting attendees discussed the following prompts:

- What stood out to you while completing the questionnaire?
- What changes in (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) have occurred regionally?
- It can be useful to think backwards: we know some of the actions that need to happen regionally, so how do those tie back to regional (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats)?
- In what ways has COVID-19 highlighted changes in the SWOT for the region?
- Feedback from July meeting questionnaire suggests the continued need to incorporate resilience, equity, and collaboration within the CEDS. What changes to the SWOT analysis might reflect these?

Overall, meeting attendees affirmed that much the previous SWOT held true, but observed potential modifications that should be included in the update. Below, we highlight observations about modifications grouped by existing SWOT categories.

Marketable Strengths

- **Missing Industries** – Several meeting attendees pointed out industries that are important strengths in our region, but that do not appear to be clearly highlighted in the CEDS, including:
 - Food and beverage manufacturing
 - Wood products
 - Metals manufacturing (particularly for aerospace and other specialty metals manufacturing)
- **Missing Reference to Livability** – Meeting attendees also pointed out that one of our region's greatest strengths is livability and access to nature and outdoor recreation. This strength is not currently highlighted in the CEDS.

Regional Weaknesses

Connectivity/Infrastructure

- **Broadband** – Meeting attendees pointed out that the pandemic has underscored the importance of ensuring access to high-speed internet. Particularly in rural areas, the lack of broadband has made remote work and education extremely difficult. To ensure equity of access and opportunity, broadband development should be a priority of the 2020 CEDS. Lack of internet access has contributed to increasing disparities in prosperity in our region and beyond.
- **Infrastructure Readiness/Quality Last Mile** – At first glance, our region appears have great infrastructure resources. When it comes down to attracting businesses to locate or expand in our region, however, we have issues with the level of infrastructure development at many sites.

Businesses often back away when they learn the extent of upgrades/expansion required to bring a site into full operation.

- **East-West Connectivity** – Coastal communities have tremendous potential to grow an ocean-based economy, but lack of connectivity to the major markets and transportation systems in the valley continue to act as a barrier to economic expansion.
- **Aging Infrastructure** – The region continues to struggle with accessing funding to upgrade aging infrastructure.

Demographics

- **Lack of Skilled Labor Force** – While the region has good training centers and other training resources, it can sometimes be challenging to connect people with these resources. This means that the assets the region has to offer are underutilized.

Institutional Barriers

- **Lack of Regional Brand** – Despite a focus on creating a regional brand in the 2015 CEDS action plan, meeting attendees felt that the region still lacks coherent branding. One meeting attendee suggested that Travel Lane County might offer a good example of how to coherently brand a diverse region; the agency’s “Eugene, Cascades, and Coast” branding effectively demonstrates both diversity and cohesion within a region.

District-Wide Opportunities (Soon-to-be Strengths)

- **Millersburg Intermodal Center Development** – The conversion of a large mill site into an intermodal facility for freight transfer will become a major strength for our region once completed. The facility will help divert truck traffic from I-5 by offering an “inland port” where trucks can transfer their cargo to trains.

Potential Threats

Coordination

- **Unaligned Service Boundaries** – The CWEDD region (Benton, Lane, Lincoln, and Linn counties) overlaps with some service territories, but not all. For example, although workforce is a critical part of the economic development ecosystem, the District is served by three different Workforce Investment Boards. When many economic development service providers have different service territories, it can be difficult to execute a coordinated regional economic development strategy.

Taxes/Funding

- **Lack of Stable Tax Funding** – Since many economic development projects, particularly infrastructure-related ones, are costly, lack of funding stability threatens project planning and execution. Particularly as the economic recession caused by the pandemic begins to hit state and local budgets, it may become increasingly difficult to fund projects.
- **Lack of Capital for Early-Stage Companies** – Entrepreneurs in our region need access to capital that *does not* come in the form of loans that will have to be repaid. It will continue to be difficult for entrepreneurs in our region to thrive if they struggle to access manageable financing.

Miscellaneous

- **Lack of Affordable Housing Stock** – Housing is an increasingly pressing issue in our region. With limited access to affordable housing, it will be difficult to market the region as a place to live, work, and play. While each community faces its own unique housing challenges, housing on the coast is a particularly challenging issue due to vacation properties. Meeting attendees also pointed out that the *location* (not just the price) of housing can pose a threat as well. If affordable housing exists far away from employment opportunities, the overall costs for a household may still be burdensome due to commuting-related expenses. Meeting attendees acknowledged that housing solutions need to come from adjustments to both local and State policies. There may be a need at the State level to adjust policies so that localities have more/different land use tools at their disposal to promote affordable housing and affordable budgets.
- **K-12 Education** – Meeting attendees pointed out that K-12 education in our region, particularly in rural areas, needs a boost. This is an incredibly complex issue, but one meeting attendee pointed out that if we become better able to demonstrate to K-12 students that economic opportunity exists in their own hometown and region, we can start to combat the effects the brain drain and youth disaffection.
- **Lack of Representation of People of Color in Economic Development** – Several meeting attendees pointed out that the voices and needs of People of Color (POCs) have been left out of the economic development conversation in our region and beyond. Continuing to exclude these perspectives threatens equitable economic growth in our region. During this round of the CEDS update and moving forward with economic development work, economic developers should broaden representation of POCs in input and decision-making.

COVID Implications

Many meeting attendees commented on the changing landscape caused by the pandemic. While nobody knows what kinds of lasting behavior changes might result from the pandemic, two main (related) themes came out of attendees' discussion:

- **Employment Assumptions** – We may need to change our assumptions about how and where people want to work. With so many office-based workers realizing remote work may be an option, where people chose to locate for jobs may change in the coming years.
- **Housing Assumptions** – If employment patterns change, housing needs/desires are also likely to change. People may be more excited to live in smaller, amenity-rich communities if they are able to work remotely. People may also have different housing type demands if they now require a home office.

While it is probably too early to understand exactly how, changing employment and housing patterns are likely to lead to changes in our region's population and demographic make-up.

Action Plan

After reviewing the current CEDS Action Plan and looking at the three example CEDS action plans from the [Eastern Upper Peninsula, Michigan](#); the [Mid-Region, New Mexico](#); and [Southeast Alaska](#), meeting attendees reflected together on formatting and scale/scope changes that the CEDS update should consider. In small groups, meeting attendees discussed the following prompts:

Format of the Action Plan

- What has not worked with the existing format and why?
- What formatting changes would help improve the action plan?

Scale/Scope of the Action Plan

- Was the scale/scope of the 2015 action plan appropriate? Why or why not?
- Who should implement the CEDS?
- How much time should they spend on the CEDS?

During discussion, attendees stressed the importance of also considering how the CEDS is used in the region. Below, we summarize meeting attendees' comments during small and full group discussion.

Use of the CEDS

- **Who uses the CEDS?**
 - Primarily economic development practitioners, particularly in the public sector
 - Secondarily mayors, council presidents, and other elected officials who are more deeply involved with economic development
 - Elected officials may be aware of the CEDS, but likely do not consider it on a regular basis
 - Elected officials likely won't know about the CEDS unless staff specifically address it with them
- **How is the CEDS used?**
 - During funding applications (to demonstrate regional priorities)
 - During funding conversations with federal elected representatives
 - While the CEDS may not be used regularly, it is a critical document for big federal funding opportunities; a proposed project must be tied back to a CEDS priority to be considered

Format of the Action Plan

- **CEDS document is overwhelming** – For those who don't regularly interact with the CEDS (and even for some who interact with it more regularly), the CEDS does not feel approachable. While the 100+ pages of supporting materials may be necessary to keep, it would be useful to produce a more streamlined executive summary that could be used and referenced by more people on a regular basis.
- **Lack of accountability** – The current action plan tables in Volume I of the CEDS do not specifically assign actions to people or organizations and do not include metrics for determining success. While these elements are included in the Action Item Forms in Appendix A, meeting attendees found the action item forms confusing and therefore not a readily accessible tool for interpreting and executing the CEDS. Meeting attendees also pointed out that the measurements suggested in the action item forms are only "potential." Creating more clear and concrete metrics for the 2020 update would help with accountability.
- **Reformat the action plan as a Gantt chart with more implementation details** – To address the previous two issues, meeting attendees suggested an adaptation of the Southeast Alaska CEDS action plan concept. Attendees appreciated the type of details included in the Alaska plan and suggested that an improvement to readability would come from listing those same details in a Gantt chart style timeline. Such a chart would clearly illustrate what, who, and when, and associate metrics with each goal.
- **Formatting may be less important than increasing understanding of how to use the CEDS** – Many of those involved in economic development in our region are unaware of the CEDS. A top priority should be better communicating about the Strategy's existence and how to leverage it.

Scale/Scope of the Action Plan

- **Mixed feelings about the scale/scope of the CEDS** – Some meeting attendees felt the scale/scope was about right, but others felt it was overly ambitious (in part because very few actions for the 2015 have been implemented).
- **All economic development participants in the region should be responsible for implementation** – Some meeting attendees identified the COGs as facilitators, working to align economic development entities around the region behind implementation of the CEDS action plan. This could lead to the pursuit of more regional-scale opportunities than has previously occurred in our District.
- **The CEDS should take a broad view of economic development** – The CEDS is an opportunity to address all factors that contribute to our economic prosperity. That means taking a broader focus beyond business support and development. The CEDS should support coverage of basic needs and quality of life enhancements that together with business support result in a more prosperous region for all.
- **The CEDS should not supersede local priorities** – Local elected officials create priorities based on the desires of their constituents. These priorities can shift over time. The CEDS should be flexible enough that it can both set regional direction and allow for the elevation of local priorities (and changes in those priorities over time). Ideally, the overarching goals described in the CEDS could be used to align local priorities into larger regional projects. Regional projects often have greater impacts than disconnected local projects can achieve on their own.

NEXT STEPS

The IPRE team will use the input from this meeting, from the two questionnaires, and from CWEDD staff to begin drafting updates to the SWOT Analysis and Action Plan. The next meeting on **Thursday, September 17, 2020 from 9-11am** will primarily address updates to the Action Plan and the CEDS implementation structure.

LIST OF MEETING ATTENDEES

For a full roster of meeting attendees with affiliations and contact information, visit <http://www.ocwcog.org/economic-development/cascades-west-economic-development-district/ceds/>

Attendees

Alysia Rodgers	Dean Craig	Mary Walston
Austin Ramirez	Derrick Tokos	Pat Malone
Biff Traber	Ed Dreistadt	Paul Shuytema
Caroline Cummings	Jodi Mescher	Rachel Maddock-Hughes
Chris Workman	Greg Irvin	Robert Killen
Cindy Perry	Heather Buch	Sarah Means
Corey Wright	Jerry Sorte	Sean McGuire
Courtney Flathers	Jim Lepin	Sharon Konopa
Courtney Griesel	John Pascone	
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