

West Virginia EDD Region 11: Brook-Hancock Regional Planning and Development Council
EDA District Organization Evaluation
April 29, 2010

Present:

Dr. John Brown, AICP, Director, WV EDD Region 11 Planning Council

Mr. Patrick Ford, Executive Director, Business Development Corporation of the Northern Panhandle

Mr. Marvin Six, Assistant Director, Business Development Corporation of the Northern Panhandle

Ms. Barbara Zimnox, Senior Community Planning Specialist, WV EDD Region 11

Mr. Jerome Wallace, EDA Community Planner/EDS Delaware (desk audit)

Dr. D. Anne Cavalier, EDA EDR, West Virginia

Interview Location: Conference Room, Business Development Corporation, 3174

Pennsylvania Avenue, Weirton, West Virginia

Desk Audit: Philadelphia Regional Office

The Economic Development Districts in West Virginia were statutorily created by the West Virginia Legislature in 1971 (Joint Resolution and Articles of Agreement in West Virginia Code – Chapter 8, Article 25). The Brooke-Hancock Regional Planning and Development Council held its first meeting in 1969 and is comprised of Brooke and Hancock Counties in the northern panhandle. Neither county holds ARC distressed designation. The Brooke-Hancock Regional Planning and Development Council is a part of the Brooke-Hancock-Jefferson Metropolitan Planning Council. The physical offices are in Jefferson County, Ohio, at 124 North 4th Street, Steubenville, Ohio 43952 and the mailing address is P. O. Box 82, Weirton, West Virginia 26062. Local match is provided by the co-applicant, the Business Development Corporation of the Northern Panhandle.

This region of West Virginia, being situated between eastern Ohio and western Pennsylvania, was one of the leading steel production areas in the world in the early to late 1900s. Beginning in the 1980's, however, global competition began to erode this manufacturing industry. Weirton Steel, the largest, highest paying employer in the area, lost 13,000 between 1985 and today. The successor company, Arcelor-Mittal, only has 950 employees remaining in Weirton. Today, with the completion of the four-lane access road between Weirton and Pittsburgh and the Pittsburgh International Airport 20 minutes away, the Weirton economy is even more closely tied with the economic growth of Pittsburgh.

The mission of the district is given on their website (www.bhjmpc.org) and in the enabling legislation for Brooke and Hancock Counties:

“The Council will serve as the focal point for district planning. It will formulate district economic and community development plans and programs. It will consider and when feasible incorporate development policies and priorities. The Council will serve as the primary designate for relating needs, objectives and priorities to statewide development

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and program planning. Member counties include Brooke and Hancock as active participants in this process. Member incorporated communities including Beech Bottom, Bethany, Chester, Follansbee, New Cumberland, Weirton, Wellsburg and Windsor Heights will also be active participants in this process.”

The Executive Director is John C. Brown, AICP, brings 30+ years of economic development and planning experience to the organization. He, along with the staff members, is well educated and experienced. All have 20+ years of excellent service records in economic development and planning. Personnel are of sufficient numbers, education, training, knowledge, skills and abilities to adequately perform economic development and planning duties. (See Attachments 2, 8 and 9)

All financial data are in order and fully audited, with no findings. The Audit Report for June 30, 2009 is attached as supporting documentation. (See Attachment 10)

The Brooke-Hancock Regional Planning and Development Council Board is not compliant with EDA board composition requirement EDA Final Rule section 304.2(c), being primarily comprised of publicly elected officials from the service region. There is representation on the board for both workforce development and post secondary education. **There is no representation by labor or chambers of commerce. There is no separate CEDS Committee. (See Attachment 1) These issues were discussed and the leadership of the Council, finding that compliance with EDA composition would strengthen its efforts to engage the private sector and wanting to fully comply committed to bringing the board into compliance **by inviting new members in the under represented private sector, labor and chambers of commerce categories. New board membership will be submitted to the Philadelphia Regional Office that time after adoption/appointment by the Board of Directors on the most feasible timetable, but no later than the end of the second quarter of the new Partnership Planning Grant.****

Board meetings are held **quarterly and each county is represented at each meeting. Overall attendance, 38%, could be improved. The EDD goal in expanding the board to include members for compliance with EDA board membership will also have as a goal invitation of private sector members committed to improving participation through active attendance of meetings. The newly constituted board will continue to serve as the CEDS Committee. This is a small region comprised of two counties, eight municipalities for a total of 10 jurisdictions, with 9 of these as participating as active member jurisdictions. The 2010 Dues confirming letter from the Controller is attached for support documentation. (See Attachment 3)**

All meetings are public, with Public Notice requirements served by newspaper and internet (webpage) calendars and notice. Copies of the agenda and meeting minutes are available to the public by walk-in or mail requests of hard copies and by viewing

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these on the website (<http://www.bhjmpc.org/Newsite2/BH/index.html>) Copies of Public Notice and Public Agenda are attached. (See Attachments 5 and 6)

The District has a fully developed, comprehensive Personnel Policy and Procedures Manual (Attachment 11), including a Conflict of Interest Policy (Section 4.4) and a Sexual Harassment Policy (Appendices H, pages 56-59). No Whistleblower Protection Policy was found in the Personnel Policy and Procedures Manual and the leadership committed to adopting such a policy at the most feasible board meeting. After adoption, the policy will be forwarded to the Philadelphia Regional Office.

The Desk Audit was performed by and related information provided by Mr. Jerome Wallace, EDA EDS and Community Planner, who confirms that all WV Region 11 EDD reports are timely and accurate.

A major strength of this EDD is its decision two years ago to partner with the Business Development Corporation of the Northern Panhandle (BDC) and to work in true partnership. This is more fully realized by the utilization of the former director of the BDC providing succession and continuity through his part time service with the BDC. This partnership also has meant that, while the EDD Board is not in compliance with EDA board regulations, the EDD has effectively had private sector input since the BDC board is primarily composed of private sector members. This will make the remodeling of the EDD board by adding private sector members much easier.

Another major strength of this EDD is its geographic location. This EDD is in the northern most part of the West Virginia Northern Panhandle and is in some parts only 6 miles wide, with Ohio on the west and Pennsylvania on the east. Resources and opportunities from parts of three states come together here. The EDD and BDC have developed an initiative called "Three, Two, One": three states, two counties and one goal—economic revitalization for the region. Dr. Brown lives in Pittsburgh where he is active in civic endeavors and Mr. Ford was previously employed in Pittsburgh (2002-2008: See Attachment 9) serving in the city planning department and rising to Economic Development Director for the Mayor. The opportunities and connections with the City of Pittsburgh and important organizations, such as Innovation Works, are critically vital to the economic revitalization of the service region of WV EDD Region 11. Weirton is only a 15-20 minute drive from the Pittsburgh Airport and most of the flat, developable land in the region is in this corridor. As the technology-based, globally competitive industries grow in the Pittsburgh area, Weirton and the entire Northern Panhandle of WV can be poised and connected to grow also. Only a few years ago this geographic region, Pittsburgh through Weirton to Cleveland, was known as the "Rustbelt" and now the Pittsburgh and associated areas are becoming known as one of the fastest growing technology sectors in the United States.

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The EDD has engaged in several collaborative projects and examples are incorporated into this report at Attachment 4.

The two deficiencies identified, board composition and omission of a Whistleblower Policy, were discussed with a resulting commitment to address and correct these issues.

Both the EDD Director and BDC Director expressed sincere appreciation for continued Partnership Planning Grant support and for the funding in support of a regional economic development strategic implementation plan and stated that if not for the EDA funding of \$200,000 (Project # 01690875) this project would never have been possible, thus Weirton and the Northern Panhandle would not have had the opportunity to engage world class consultants to lead this effort.

The EDD Director, BDC Director, and the respective staff members are well qualified and available to continue the economic development Scope of Work, as agreed to in the most recent Partnership Planning Grant. The work of the EDD, in partnership with the BDC, is providing an effective environment for the growth and retention of private sector jobs and private sector investment.