Meeting Notes

MCEDC Advisory Committee

February 28, 2024

 Meeting Began at 9:15

In attendance: Sally Costello, Marshall Sheppard, Nicole Bogart (NEPRA), John Dorrer, Merrit Carey, Amy Winston, Jen Merritt, Nick Batista, Julie Hashem, Jay McCreight, Brian Whitney, Jake Harriman

Staff: Max Johnstone, Charlotte Nutt, Mathew Eddy

**Emerging Themes Summary.** From our meetings, we will build a rolling list of themes emerging here at the start of each meeting summary:

* Housing Supply and Costs, across all markets, are impediments to business development and in particular impacting the “missing middle”
* The midcoast is dominated by an aging population, the emergence of new Americans, and still suffers from reduced birth rates, presenting both opportunities and challenges
* Understanding the influx of climate migrants, short term rental investments, work at home strategies, and displacement of the local workforce are, as a group, needed to be better understood and addressed
* How do we communicate emerging issues and education about housing options?
* A clear barrier is an unskilled labor force unique to this midcoast’ s emerging economy (along with their inability to afford housing). What is the optimum workforce training program to meet the needs of a shifting midcoast workforce and the assets of the technical school training programs?
* What is the opportunity here in the MidCoast to capitalize on AI and automation across all business sectors?
* Lack of adult and childcare availability in the region is a barrier to business development and the need for a “nimble” workforce
* What business investment strategies should MCOG focus its support on, while partnering with very strong allies in CEI, MTI, and the Gensis fund?

February 24 Meeting Summary

Mat reviewed notes from the previous meeting. Charlotte Reviewed the following data package:

Measures of Industry and Workforce Sustainability: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/6b0fc339a54a4e7ba32cc4fa75f2b407>

* Group noted the needed to add governmental employment; that strong industry grouping allowed the region to sustain during business downturns
* Industry codes do not align with Wild oats, food production model
* Fishing industry is likely underreported, financially underrepresented
* John suggested examining some alternative, time in place data sets “burning glass”
* Noted a general concern around the sustainability in communities increasingly impacted by seasonal fluctuations (Boothbay Harbor)
* What is the correct metric to capture this shift to remote, work at home models; what is the village or community impact for workers remaining in their community? Is it a growth opportunity?
* Retail has remained strong
* Local workers moving inland and away, driven out by affordability
* Cultural shift away from working waterfronts and local fishing industry being forced to move

### Need to continue to meld MCOG with state and MTI cluster opportunities. The 7-sector investment strategy of MTI is in:

### Biotechnology

* Composites & Advanced Materials
* Environmental Technologies
* Forest Products & Agriculture
* Information Technology
* Marine Technology & Aquaculture
* Precision Manufacturing
* The region is positioned well in the food, agriculture and legacies industries
* New starts in the region could be better tracked using the Secretary of State incorporation data
* Infrastructure investment ($2.2 billion?) is key strategic part of economic growth
* Access to capital critical
* Take a fresh look at Pine Tree Zone benefits
* Understanding and developing a program that recognizes both the savvy and unsophisticated business owner
* Do we market and develop a strategy around the “rural renaissance”
* Historically low unemployment rate will not support new business development, without adjustments
* New Mainers are important to the economic and cultural vitality of this region
* Adult and childcare shortages are both system barriers to further business development; how is this shifted to an opportunity?
* Monitor Day care industry being complicated by equity investment companies purchasing local operators, losing control of services, taking advantage of public money, then taking money out of the operation and reducing services and beds.
* 65 is no longer a retirement age, need to focus employer options using age friendly jobs, creative solutions to invite the older worker back, flexible work schedules for old and young
* Addressing regional mental health issues, needs vs. availability as a result of the reduced interaction of the midcoast population