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New regional collaborative under consideration for Southeastern Massachusetts

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Recently Bridgewater State College, under the auspices of the Institute for Regional Development, hosted a discussion group of economic development practitioners and other stakeholders to explore the possibility of forging a mutually beneficial regional alliance at the college's campus center.

Situated in the fastest growing region in the commonwealth, the cities and towns on the southernmost part of I-495 and northern segment of Rte. 24 anchor a burgeoning regional economy with the potential to expand and attract more businesses and create even more jobs.

Don Sullivan from the Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic District presented a regional demographic summary which led to the roundtable discussion as to whether it would be feasible for the 20 proposed communities to band together in an effort to create a regional entity focused on economic development. This focus might take the form, for example, of sharing technical resources, lending expertise, exchanging ideas, co-operative marketing, and collaboration on infrastructure, transportation, and other regional issues. As Don highlighted: the new region has a growing population of 515,776 (2000 census); 195,646 housing units; a workforce of 286,577 with 5.2% unemployment; 36 industrial/office parks; 17 colleges/universities; 10 hospitals; high school graduation rates 84.5%; and the top employment sectors are retail trade, manufacturing, health care and social assistance, and accommodation and food services.

The group was enthusiastic about exploring this collaborative, fall meetings are planned to further identify stakeholders, define the new organization's mission, develop a work plan, and to engage state and regional legislative leaders in the collaboration.

Agencies represented included Metro South Chamber of Commerce, Taunton Area Chamber of Commerce, Cranberry Country Chamber of Commerce, Old Colony Planning Council, the Plymouth Regional Economic Development Foundation, the Industrial Development Commission of Taunton, Brockton 21st Century Corporation, the Town of Bridgewater, MassDevelopment, and Bridgewater State College.

As the economy rebounds the collaborative members feel companies will continue to seek available space and building opportunities in the I-495 South/Rte. 24 North areas which offer lower business operation costs, trained and productive work force, and excellent transportation access throughout Southern New England.

(Adapted from a press release issued from the Institute for Regional Development at Bridgewater State College)

Richard Shafer is the economic and industrial development director for the City of Taunton and chairman of SRPEDD's Regional Economic Strategies Committee.

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