

Smart Growth in Action

As part of occasional Smart Growth features, this issue highlights local activities.

Preserving Land, Preserving History

Land connects the present with the past, whether one is enjoying the same view of Mount Greylock that inspired Herman Melville, or farming land that has been in the family for generations. In recognition of the social and environmental importance of careful land use planning, two fundamental tenets of Smart Growth are the protection of open space and historic preservation. Berkshire County residents have also made these priorities, expressing support in Community Development Plans and Open Space and Recreation Plans. Such activities can take many forms, such as a Right-to-Farm By-law, Transfer of Development Rights and Open Space Residential Design, among other options. Two methods employed locally are Community Land Trusts and the Community Preservation Act.

Community Land Trust

There are two basic types of land trusts: conservation trusts, which acquire and protect open space and agricultural land; and Community Land Trusts, which also focus on housing and community development. Some local examples of the former include the Sheffield Land Trust, the Monterey Preservation Land Trust, and the area's largest example, Berkshire Natural Resources Council.

These organizations may use tools such as *Agricultural Preservation Restrictions (APR), Conservation Restrictions (CR) and Fee Transfer (FT) to fund land preservation. The groups help maintain active farms, protect sensitive habitat or scenic vistas. Some groups, such as The Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation and the Community Land Trust in the Southern Berkshires, pursue both affordable housing and land preservation. For more info. visit <http://berkshireplanning.org/6/5>



Community Preservation Act

The Community Preservation Act (CPA) allows communities to create a local Community Preservation Fund through a surcharge of up to 3% of the real estate tax levy on property. The revenue is designated for open space, historic preservation and low and moderate housing. The act also creates a state matching fund of more than \$25 million annually. Local municipalities must adopt the Act by ballot referendum. The Act stipulates that a Community Preservation Committee should recommend how to spend the funds.

Locally, Stockbridge and Williamstown enacted the CPA, joining 101 other communities in the state to do so. However, Lenox might be the next community to get involved. Kurt Gaertner from the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs will present information about the CPA to the Lenox Selectboard on March 1, during their regular meeting. A warrant article pertaining to enactment of the CPA will appear at the next town meeting. Anyone interested in attending the presentation is welcome.

***APR:** The State pays farmers the difference between fair market value and the agricultural value of the farmland, in exchange for a deed restriction to keep the land viable for agriculture.

Conservation Restriction: This maintains land or water in a predominately natural state by restricting its use, typically for agriculture or recreation.

Fee Transfer: A property owner may donate or sell land to a preservation group that will protect it from development.

Environmental Lecture Series

The Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts is hosting a lecture series titled, "From personal decisions to large-scale conservation efforts: an introduction to the diverse stewards of the environment." BRPC Senior Planner Lauren Gaherty is among the presenters who will offer a myriad of perspectives. The series runs thru May 2. For info. contact Elena at 413-662-5301.

Calendar

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| March 2 | Executive Committee | 3:30 p.m. | BRPC |
| March 2 | Highland Communities Initiative: Chap. 61: Understanding First Refusal | 7:00 p.m. | Shelburne Falls |
| March 3 | Zoning for Affordable Housing Public Workshop | 9:00 a.m. | Lexington |
| March 14 | Farmington River Watershed Advisory Committee | 6:00 p.m. | Otis Town Hall |
| March 17 | Full Commission Meeting | 7:30 p.m. | BRPC |
| March 18 | Citizen Plnr. Training Collaborative Annual Conference | 8:00 a.m. | Worcester |
| April 1 | Highland Community Initiative: Subdivision Seminar | 9:00 a.m. | Cummington |
| April 6 | Executive Committee | 3:30 p.m. | BRPC |
| April 7 | Zoning for Affordable Housing Public Workshop | 9:00 a.m. | Northampton |

Input Sought in Great Barrington

Great Barrington is preparing a Community Development Strategy as part of a CDBG grant application. Public input is encouraged. For info. call 413-528-1619 ext. 2, or visit <http://berkshireplanning.org/6/GreatBarrington/>

***Surplus State Property
Disposition Bill***

At its February meeting, the Regional Issues Committee reviewed House Bill 4491 which attempts to improve the process that governs the disposition of surplus state properties. The bill does not apply to state forests, parks or wildlife management areas which would still require a supermajority vote of both houses of the legislature to convert them to other uses. The bill was approved by the House and awaits Senate consideration. *Contact: Nat Karns.*

Highway Funding Slashed

Recent events have wiped out most of the increased transportation funding for the region. First, because the five-year transportation authorization was almost two years late, spending targets were based on overly optimistic assumptions. Now, the amount over-spent in 2005 must be subtracted from 2006. Secondly, cuts in 2006 appropriations, stemming from Defense and Gulf Coast needs, further reduced funding below the amount set in the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

Resultant changes to the TIP will soon be available for public comment. On the brighter side, a new distribution formula has doubled funding to the BRTA for urban area service and capital improvements. *Contact: Andrew Lenton*

***Reps. Needed for
Farmington River Watershed Plan***

Residents, leaders, environmentalists and others from the Massachusetts portion of the Farmington River Watershed are needed for an advisory/steering committee. This group will play a critical role in determining the future of the watershed by developing a Five-Year Action Plan. The plan will feature an inventory of goals and priorities taken from existing studies, plans, maps, and reports regarding environmental planning, water quality and quantity, conservation, open space, recreation, habitat and non-point source pollution. The recommendations of the Five-Year Action Plan will receive priority funding from state and other grant programs.

The Executive Office of Environmental Affairs granted funding for BRPC to assist communities in cooperatively setting a course for the future of this sensitive area. BRPC is partnering with the Farmington River Watershed Association, a nonprofit active in the area since 1953. **Volunteers are still needed to join the Committee.**

The next meeting is Tuesday, March 14^h at 6 p.m. in the Otis Town Hall. *Contact: Melissa Jette*

New Berkshire MPO Convenes

The first meeting of the restructured Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization was February 28th. A significant change is the addition of six local elected officials, giving local elected officials a majority & making officials from the region eight of ten members. Previously, the MPO had two state and two regional members.

The new members of the MPO are:

Mayor John Barrett, North Adams
Mayor James Ruberto, Pittsfield
Selectman Gordon Bailey, Lee
Selectman Ed Goddard, Hinsdale
Selectman Philip Guy, Williamstown
Selectman Cris Irsfeld, Stockbridge
Alternate Select Board representatives are:
Selectman Joe Dean (Adams)
Selectman Terry Field (Lenox)
Selectman Jim Lovejoy (Mount Washington)
Selectman Tom Szczepaniak (Dalton)

The Secretary of Transportation is designated as the Chair, and the local officials and regional representatives will select the Vice Chair. Other members continue to include the Commissioner of MassHighway, the Chair of the Berkshire Regional Transit Authority, and the Chair of the Regional Planning Commission.

Goodbye to Ethan

Transportation Planner Ethan Abeles is no longer working with BRPC. We wish him all the best in his future endeavors.