

COMMON GROUND

A NEWSLETTER FOR COMMUNITY PLANNING IN THE BERKSHIRE REGION

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Image (above): Prospect Lake in the Town of Egremont. Photo from the BRPC image library.

Aging in Place In the Berkshires

Aging is an critical issue in the Berkshires. The Donahue Institute at UMass Amherst predicts that by 2030, less than 15 years from now, the majority of municipalities in the Berkshires will have populations that are comprised of 60% or more residents aged 50 and over, and all but North Adams and Williamstown (probably due to college populations) will be over 40%. BRPC has been involved in important aging related planning in recent years, including work to designate the county as "Age Friendly" through the AARP and WHO, as well as the creation of "Age Friendly Berkshires", a coalition of local organizations working to plan for and address aging in the region.

These efforts also led to a successful survey identifying the needs and preferences of over 2,400 older adults last year. The age friendly survey revealed that 98% of survey respondents wished to remain in their own homes as they age—bringing the concept of "aging in place" in the region to the forefront. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) defines aging in place as "the ability to live in one's own home and community safely, independently, and comfortably, regardless of age, income, or ability level." This spring BRPC will continue to address aging in place in the Berkshires through two exciting projects.

Aging in Place Public Forums

Working with its partners in the Age Friendly Berkshires initiative, BRPC will host three Aging in Place public forums on March 31st and April 1st. These forums will discuss the barriers to aging in place, develop potential solutions, and help to draft a regional action plan for aging in the Berkshires. Additionally, regional efforts to support older adults will be discussed. Anyone interested in aging in place in the Berkshires is encouraged to attend.

Aging in Place Forum Dates:

Pittsfield: Thursday, March 31st,
9:30-11:30am
Froio Senior Center, 330 North St

Adams: Thursday, March 31st,
1:30-3:30pm
Visitor's Center, 3 Hoosac St

Great Barrington: Friday, April 1st,
10:00am-Noon
Berkshire South, 15 Crissey Rd

For more information, contact Planner Allison Hope (AHope@berkshireplanning.org or x36).

Residential Aging in Place Workbook and Training

Funded through a mini-grant from the Mass. Association of Health Boards (MAHB) and the Mass. Department of Health (DPH) and working with the City of Pittsfield Health Department, BRPC will develop a workbook focused on residential renovations to support aging in place. The workbook will include checklists to conduct home audits to help older adults determine their home renovation needs. Additionally, it will allow them to select from a range of possible renovation options to age safely in their own homes. The workbook will also include a list of area contractors and professionals who are Certified Aging in Place Specialists (CAPS) through the National Association of Homebuilders (NAHB). Finally, BRPC will develop a brief residential aging in place training (date TBD) and promote it through local Council on Aging groups. This training will help support the workbook and inform Berkshire residents about options they have to renovate their homes as they age.

For more information, contact Planner Eammon Coughlin (ECoughlin@berkshireplanning.org or x19).

FAST Act Outlines Federal Transportation Priorities

The first long-term federal transportation bill in over a decade was passed in December 2015. The Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act authorized \$305 billion over 5 years in federal funding for improving the nation's multimodal transportation infrastructure.

The FAST Act addresses all modes of transportation, from roads and bicycle infrastructure, to transit and freight. While the FAST Act maintains many priorities from the previous federal transportation legislation, MAP-21, there are a few changes that include:

- The existing Surface Transportation Program (STP) is restructured into a block grant program, called the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBGP). This is one of the most flexible funding categories, and can be used on a wide variety of projects from road construction to safety improvements, and bike facilities to sidewalks.
- New STBGP has a set-aside for what used to be called the Transportation Alternatives Program, which funds bicycle and pedestrian projects.
- Slightly increases the amount of funding to metropolitan areas over the life of the bill.
- New freight formula, and expansion of freight network.
- New discretionary program for nationally significant freight and highway projects.
- Expands the scope of the planning process to include resiliency and reliability, as well as enhancing travel and tourism of the transportation system.

The Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), which BRPC provides staff to, is responsible for conducting the regional transportation planning process. The MPO selects projects for several categories of federal transportation funds identified in the FAST Act for communities in Berkshire County. These funds are programmed in the MPO's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), which is designed to carry out the vision outlined in the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP).

To learn more about the FAST Act, please visit: <http://transportation.house.gov/fast-act/>.

For more information, contact Senior Transportation Planner Emily Lindsey (Elindsey@berkshireplanning.org or x12).

Comprehensive Planning in the Berkshires—2016 Update

During 2015, BRPC assisted several Berkshire communities with comprehensive planning efforts and will continue its ongoing work this year. Congratulations to all towns who have recently completed plans and those that continue to advance comprehensive planning in their communities.

Richmond and Lee Finalize Open Space and Recreation Plans

In late December, the Town of Richmond Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) was approved by the Mass. Department of Conservation Services (DCS). This final approved plan will make the town eligible to compete in state conservation and recreation grant programs until 2022. The Town of Lee has also completed major work on an updated OSRP in 2015. The plan has been reviewed by DCS and will be finalized this spring.

Otis Completes Master Plan and Open Space and Recreation Plan

In early January, the Otis Planning Board reviewed and approved the town's Master Plan, culminating nearly a year of hard work by the nine member Master Plan Steering Committee. While developing the Master Plan, the committee also worked to update the town's 2004 OSRP. This OSRP has been approved by town boards and now awaits final review and approval by DCS.

Sandisfield Completes Draft of Master Plan

In January, the Sandisfield Master Plan Steering Committee completed a crucial first draft of its Master Plan. The Master Plan is now available for public review, and was discussed at an All Boards Meeting in mid-February. On April 13th, a second public forum will review the plan and help to set priorities for implementation. Once all revisions have been incorporated, the Steering Committee will hand the plan off to the town's Planning Board for final approval.

Dalton, Cheshire, and Hinsdale advance Master Plans

BRPC assisted the Town of Dalton on its Master Plan development during 2015. Dalton is currently developing its goals and objectives and will have a draft plan within a few months. The Towns of Cheshire and Hinsdale were recently awarded DLTA funds to assist with the development of Master Plans. Both these towns are in the early phases of their planning work.

For more information, contact Planner Eammon Coughlin (ECoughlin@berkshireplanning.org or x19) or Assistant Director Thomas Matuszko (TMatuszko@berkshireplanning.org or x34).



1966-2016

Celebrating 50 Years

Berkshire County in 1966

In 2016, the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission will mark its 50th year providing technical assistance and planning services to the 32 municipalities of the Berkshire Region. To celebrate BRPC's 50th year, each issue of Common Ground in 2016 will reflect on the history of the Commission and highlight its accomplishments since its creation. Our last issue provided a look back at life and times in 1966. For this edition we will focus on life and events in Berkshire County in 1966.

The Berkshire County Regional Planning Commission (BCRPC) was approved by the Mass. Department of Commerce and Development on May 9, 1966. There were eight initial members: North Adams, Pittsfield, Cheshire, Dalton, Great Barrington, Lanesborough, Lee, Lenox, and New Marlborough. The May/June issue of Common Ground will provide a

concise history of the founding of BRPC and its early work.

The population of Berkshire county was about 147,000 in 1966, roughly 13% greater than it is today (approximately 129,500). Sixty percent of the population was found in the Berkshires three largest communities, Pittsfield, North Adams, and Adams. Today the value is closer to 50%. In 1966, 41% of Berkshire County workers were employed in manufacturing (24,000 out of 58,000 total jobs). In comparison, during 2014, average monthly employment in manufacturing for the county was around 4500 workers.

In Pittsfield, Remo Del Gallo was mayor and Francis Floriani was mayor of North Adams. Our region had seven state representatives: Roger Sala of North Adams, Edward Zelazo of Adams, William Kitterman, Joel Greenberg, and Tom Wojtkowski of Pittsfield, Warren Turner of Lee, and Sidney Curtiss of Sheffield. At the national level, Leverett Saltonstall and Edward Kennedy represented Massachusetts in the U.S. Senate. In Congress, Pittsfield native Silvio Conte was in his fourth term as congressman representing the Berkshires and the Mass. 1st Congressional district. Conte was one of 12 congressmen from Massachusetts at that time.

Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)—2016 Update

BRPC is pleased to announce that work has been completed on 13 projects under the FY14 Great Barrington-Sheffield Housing Rehabilitation Program, funded through a Community Development Block Grant from the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development.

Bid packages are being prepared for several more projects to be completed under this program by June 2016. New contractors are also being sought for pre-qualification in the program, and homeowner applications are still being accepted. Two additional housing rehab projects will be completed this year under a similar Great Barrington program, funded as part of a larger CDBG project that makes drainage improvements along Front Street in Housatonic.

A new grant application for FY16, submitted in February with the Town of Sheffield as the lead community, includes (1) a packet for a Sheffield-Great Barrington Housing Rehabilitation Program, (2) a construction packet to implement the Sheffield Town Hall Architectural Barrier Removal designs developed under the FY14 grant by Clark and Green Architecture Design of Great Barrington, and (3) a design packet for streetscape improvements around the Housatonic Community Center. Work on this application began six months prior to submission, and was generously supported by the efforts community volunteers. Municipalities across the state will be notified in August 2016 with a determination on the highly competitive application – wish us luck!

For more information, or if your community is interested in applying for CDBG funds in the future, please contact Community Development Program Manager Patricia Mullins (pmullins@berkshireplanning.org or x17).

Donate to Berkshires Tomorrow Through Amazon Smile



We all support local businesses, but let's face it, we still shop online at Amazon on occasion. Amazon has created a program called Amazon Smile, which allows a user to donate 0.5% of their purchases to a charity of their choice. You can choose any charity you want, but we ask that you consider supporting BRPC, and its charitable arm Berkshires Tomorrow, by designating Berkshires Tomorrow Inc. as your charitable organization. Your donation to Berkshires Tomorrow would allow us to continue to educate municipal officials on planning related topics.

To help you out, you can follow this link to specify Berkshires Tomorrow as your charity:
<https://smile.amazon.com/ch/03-0572303>.

For more information, contact GIS, Data, and IT Manager Mark Maloy (mmaloy@berkshireplanning.org or x29)

BRPC Work Anniversaries!

Melissa Provencher, Senior Planner, and Mark Maloy, GIS, Data and IT Manager, and both celebrated work anniversaries recently. On February 20, 2016, Mark celebrated 15 years at BRPC and Melissa celebrated 15 years on October 1st, 2015. Thanks for your hard work and dedication!

BRPC 5th Thursday Dinner - Designing for Complete Streets

You are invited to attend the next BRPC 5th Thursday Dinner to be held at Mazzeos Ristorante on Thursday, March 31, 2016 from 5:30 PM to 8:30 PM. The topic of the dinner will be designing for complete streets and the presenter will be Mr. Thomas Tavella from Alta Planning + Design. A flyer with event details, cost and how to register will be sent out soon.



Image (above): Melissa Provencher (left) and Mark Maloy (Right) at a recent staff meeting.

CALENDAR

Be sure to check out our online calendar for recently posted events and agendas.

berkshireplanning.org/events/calendar

Mar. 3 - BRPC Executive Committee

Mar. 7 - BRPC Regional Issues Committee

Mar. 10 - Berkshire Public Health Alliance Gov. Board

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Mar. 15 - TAC meeting

Mar. 17 - BRPC Commission Development Committee BRPC Commission Meeting

Mar. 19 - CPTC Spring Conference. Register Online @ www.masscptc.org/

Mar. 22 - MPO Meeting

Mar. 29 - Berkshire Con. Com. Coalition

Mar. 31 - 5th Thursday Dinner Aging In Place Forums—Pittsfield and Adams

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Apr. 1 - Aging in Place Forum—Great Barrington

Apr. 7 - BRPC Executive Committee

Apr. 19 - TAC Meeting

Apr. 26 - MPO Meeting

Please consider receiving an e-newsletter—saving trees and energy costs in our region and beyond. E-mail szaleski@berkshireplanning.org today to subscribe!