

COMMON GROUND

A NEWSLETTER FOR COMMUNITY PLANNING IN THE BERKSHIRE REGION

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2016 District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) Projects Selected from Record Number of Applications

BRPC received a record number of applications for technical assistance for the 2016 DLTA program. From the twenty-seven applications submitted, BRPC will be providing technical assistance to communities on twenty projects. Five of the twenty projects will help communities fulfill their commitments under the Community Compact Cabinet program. The selected projects cover a wide range of topics including housing, economic development, zoning, education, shared services and many others. Individual projects summaries are available on the BRPC website (www.berkshireplanning.org/projects/district-local-technical-assistance-2016). The DLTA program is funded through a line item on the annual state budget and is not guaranteed the following year. Please consider contacting your state representatives and encourage them to include expanded funding for the DLTA program in next year's state budget so BRPC can provide assistance on a greater number of projects.

For more information, contact Senior Planner Brian Domina (Bdomina@berkshireplanning.org or x14).

2016 National Rx Drug Abuse & Heroin Summit

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) declared opioid addiction a public health crisis in 2012. In 2013, the Berkshire Opioid Abuse Prevention Collaborative (BOAPC) was created, with funding from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH), to implement local policy, practice, systems, and/or environmental changes to prevent the misuse and abuse of opioids and to prevent and reduce unintentional deaths and non-fatal hospital events associated with opioid poisonings throughout the 32 municipalities in Berkshire County. BOAPC emphasizes the integration of SAMHSA's Strategic Prevention Framework (SPF) model into overall prevention systems, to ensure a consistent data-driven planning process focused on implementing effective and sustainable strategies and interventions.

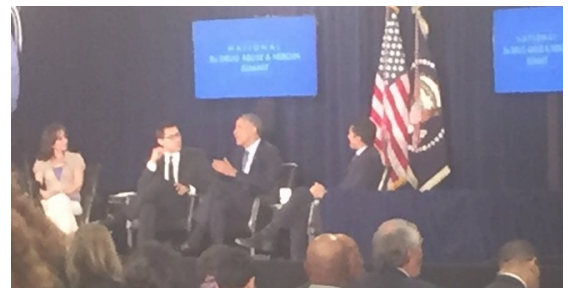


Image (above): President Obama speaks as part of a panel discussion at the National Rx Drug Abuse and Heroin Summit.

To further the knowledge in Berkshire County, this year, members of BOAPC, including Jennifer Kimball, Planner at BRPC, attended the National Rx Drug Abuse & Heroin Summit in Atlanta from March 28-30. The conference is the largest national collaboration of professionals from local, state and federal agencies, business, academia, clinicians, treatment providers, counselors, educators, state and national leaders, and advocates impacted by Rx drug abuse and heroin use. Nearly 2,000 people attended the conference this year, which featured not only an address from the President of the United States Barack Obama, but addresses from Vice Admiral Dr. Vivek H. Murthy (United States Surgeon General), Dr. Tom Frieden (Director of the Centers for Disease Control), Michael P. Botticelli (Director, Office of National Drug Control Policy), Dr. Robert M Califf (Commissioner, United States Food and Drug Administration), Francis S. Collins (Director of the National Institute of Health), and more.

BOAPC members were also able to attend a great number of sessions to hear about best practices and experiences of those working in the field of opioid abuse and overdose prevention. Through this type of collaboration, the work of BOAPC will be more innovative and impactful in bringing solutions to this Berkshire County.

If you are interested in listening to or watching any of the panels or sessions from the summit, all presentations have been archived here: www.nationalrxdrugabusesummit.org/2016-presentations/.

For more information, contact Planner Jennifer Kimball (Jkimball@berkshireplanning.org or x37).

Regional Aging in Place Forums a Success

The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission hosted three aging in place public forums at locations throughout Berkshire County between March 31st and April 1st. The forums, hosted by the Adams Visitor's Center, the Froio Senior Center in Pittsfield, and Berkshire South Community Center in Great Barrington each had approximately 50 community members in attendance. Community members were invited to share the barriers they face to staying in their homes as they age and discuss solutions in an open response format.

Last year's Age Friendly Survey of over 2400 older adults in the Berkshires found that 98% of older adults in the county thought it was important to age independently in their own homes. This nearly unanimous response prompted BRPC to host these forums to understand, from community members' perspectives, what may prevent aging people from staying in their own homes, and what solutions to these barriers may allow them to stay in their own homes for longer.

BRPC is developing a report to summarize the process and procedures of the forums, short and long term goals to address barriers, and the input from the audience. The report will be integrated into a regional action plan for aging to be developed by Age Friendly Berkshires.

Most notably expressed by the forum participants, the geographical distance from where people live to points of interest such as town centers, theaters, and medical establishments is a barrier to aging in place in the region. For example, if one lives rurally, getting health services, visiting family, and participating in social events may be very difficult when personal and public transportation is limited, leading also to potential social isolation and reduced civic participation. The barriers conveyed by the participants intersect a number of topics and require comprehensive and efficient solutions to be appropriately addressed.

For more information, contact Planner Allison Hope (Ahope@berkshireplanning.org or x12).



Image (above): Aging in Place forum participants at the Froio Senior Center in Pittsfield. In total, three forums were held across the county. Participants discussed the barriers they face to remaining in their own homes and communities as they age and identified potential solutions.

Age Friendly Berkshires Receives Award from Mass. DPH

Age Friendly Berkshires, a group composed of more than a dozen partners including COAs, BOHs, Chambers of Commerce, Berkshire Community College, Elder Services, and BRPC, was awarded the Peter R. Lee Healthy Communities Award by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) at the annual Ounce of Prevention Conference in Worcester, MA on April 12th. The Peter R. Lee award is awarded to coalitions which create healthier and more equitable communities through exemplary work using cross-sector collaboration. The award was accepted on behalf of Age Friendly Berkshires by Laura Kittross, the Manager of Berkshire Regional Planning Commission's Public Health Program, and Celeste Harp, the Age Friendly Berkshire Program manager.

For more information, contact Public Health Program Manager Laura Kittross (Lkittross@berkshireplanning.org or x32) or Celeste Harp (Celeste.Harp@homeinstead.com)



Image (above): Celeste Harp and Laura Kittross accept the Peter R. Lee Award from Mass. DPH recognizing the achievements and collaborative efforts of Age Friendly Berkshires.



1966-2016

Celebrating 50 Years

The Founding and Early Work of BRPC

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 focused on life and events in Berkshire County in 1966. This issue will provide highlights from the founding of BRPC and its early work.

On May 9th, 1966 the Massachusetts Department of Commerce and Development officially designated the Berkshire County Regional Planning Commission (BCRPC) as the official planning district for the Berkshire Region under Massachusetts General Law Chapter 40B. The word "county" would remain in the Commission's title until removed in the late 1990's.

The establishment of BCRPC was sponsored by the Berkshire County Industrial Development Commission and led by Philip C. Ahern, who may be considered BCRPC's father. The original member communities were the Cities of North Adams and Pittsfield, and the Towns of Adams, Cheshire, Dalton, Great Barrington, Lanesborough, Lee, Lenox, and New Marlborough. Expanding from these original member communities, the Commission would complete its membership in 1984, with Tyringham voting to join at its town meeting that year. Soon after its founding, the Commission hired its first professional staff member, Executive Director Karl Hekler. Mr. Hekler would go on to lead BRPC's efforts for many years until his retirement in 1993.

Early work by the Commission focused on a range of topics impacting the region. In 1967, the Commission expressed concern with planning and engineering work by the state on improvements to Route 7 from Connecticut to Pittsfield. A year later, the Commission was involved in the review of the now defunct Saddleball Mountain development proposal in Adams along the eastern slope of Mount Greylock.

In 1969, Charles Kusik of Richmond was hired as a consultant with the goal of getting all cities and towns in the county to adopt local zoning regulations. BRPC also completed a number of major studies, including a water supply and sewage plan for the county, solid waste management plans, and a county-wide Open Space and Recreation Plan. BRPC also weighed in on the planning of the Pittsfield Bypass, a proposed spur of Interstate 90 that would have spanned between Lee and Route 7 north of Pittsfield. The bypass was a recurring and controversial transportation project for many years. With these early projects, BRPC took the lead to provide guidance and assistance on regional issues. BRPC still continues in this role today with issues impacting life in the Berkshires; from our changing demographics, to the cleanup of the Housatonic River and proposed gas pipeline expansions. However, BRPC's mission and focus has expanded broadly from its initial work in transportation, land use, and economic development.

Berkshire Communities Support US Bicycle Route 7

The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials' (AASHTO) Special Committee on US Route Numbering is designating a United States Bicycle Routes System (USBRS). Today, the network is over 11,000 miles long and in 23 states. In the fall of 2015, the AASHTO Committee designated the Vermont section of the Western New England Greenway (WNEG), a bicycle touring route that connects the East Coast Greenway to Quebec's Route Verte, as USBR 7. This spring, the Committee will meet to decide whether or not to designate both the Connecticut and Massachusetts sections of the route. Over the last several months, Berkshire communities along the WNEG endorsed the designation of the route as USBR 7. The Massachusetts section of the route connects Connecticut to Vermont and utilizes low-volume roadways and off-road facilities whenever possible. At the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission's March 17, 2016 meeting, the Commission formally issued their support for the designation. MassDOT submitted the application to AASHTO this April and are excited to add a second USBR to the state. The meeting of the Special Committee will occur in Des Moines, Iowa on May 24, 2016. This is an exciting opportunity for Berkshire communities to play a part in the ever-growing sector of bicycle tourism.

To learn more about the Western New England Greenway and US Bicycle Route System, please visit: www.wnegenway.org/ and www.adventurecycling.org/routes-and-maps/us-bicycle-route-system/

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

New Grant Opportunity—Section 319 Nonpoint Source Competitive Grants Program

The Mass. Dept. of Environmental Protection's (DEP) annual nonpoint source grant program has been announced. Eligible projects are those that implement measures that address the prevention, control, and abatement of nonpoint source pollution. The deadline is June 1, 2016. To be eligible to receive funding, a 40% non-federal match is required from the grantee. For more information please visit www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/massdep/water/grants/watersheds-water-quality.html

For more information, contact Senior Planner Lauren Gaherty (Lgaherty@berkshireplanning.org or x35)



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Hepatitis C and the Opioid Crisis—A Berkshire County-Focused Public Health Seminar

Tuesday, May 24, 2016 8:30am – 12:15pm Crowne Plaza Hotel, Pittsfield, MA

This event is free, but registration is required.

To ensure you receive a registration notification, please contact Planner Jennifer Kimball (jkimball@berkshireplanning.org or x37)

Register Your Community or Organization for a Spontaneous Volunteer Management System Training!

Volunteers—particularly those who spontaneously show up to help during a disaster—are an important component of emergency response. Volunteer efforts can help communities recover more quickly and effectively from devastating incidents, but require pre-planning and effective management to avoid becoming a “disaster within a disaster.” BRPC has developed a management system and training series to help communities and organizations plan for and manage potential volunteers before the next disaster. Municipalities and community organizations are encouraged to register for a free training. BRPC staff will even come to your location to conduct them. Three training options of varying length (15 min., 1 hour, and 2.5 hour) are available.

For more information or to register your community or organization, please contact Planner Eammon Coughlin (Ecoughlin@berkshireplanning.org or x19)

CALENDAR

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

berkshireplanning.org/events/calendar

**May 5 - BRPC Executive Committee
BRPC Finance Committee**

May 5- MassDOT Draft Capital Investment Plan Public Meeting, Pittsfield City Hall - 6pm

May 17- Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC)

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May 17- Dr. Bill Thomas Age of Disruption Event in Pittsfield (www.drbillthomas.org/local/pittsfield-ma/)

**May 19 - BRPC Commission Development Committee
BRPC Commission Meeting**

May 24 - Hepatitis C and the Opioid Crisis—Public Health Seminar

May 24 - Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)

May 25 - Open House for Draft Transportation Public Participation Plan - 4-6pm

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May 31- Berkshire Con. Com. Coalition - 6:30pm

June 2 - Executive Committee

June 9 - Berkshire Public Health Alliance Governing Board

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