

COMMON GROUND

A NEWSLETTER FOR COMMUNITY PLANNING IN THE BERKSHIRE REGION

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Image (above): Complete Streets provide "safe and accessible options all travel modes—walking biking, transit and vehicles—for people of all ages and abilities". Complete Streets encompass a range of possible transportation projects from bike lanes, sidewalks, and bus stops, to simple roadway changes such as shoulder widening or road restriping to better accommodate all users.

MassDOT Announces Complete Streets Funding Program

MassDOT has announced plans to implement a new Complete Streets funding program. This program can provide up to \$50,000 in technical assistance and \$400,000 for construction and implementation funding for individual communities. BRPC is excited about this new funding opportunity that will bring Complete Streets policies, prioritization plans, and projects to the region, and would like to assist your community in any way possible. Encouraging safe and efficient multi-modal transportation in the Berkshires benefits our region's health, economy, and quality of life.

To be eligible for this funding, municipalities must meet three criteria.

- *Attend a Complete Streets – Benefits, Eligibility, and Funding training session.* A recent training was provided by Baystate Roads in Pittsfield in December and was attended by 14 Berkshire county municipalities as well as representatives from MassDOT, BRTA, Mass. in Motion, and other organizations. Given the popularity of the training, Baystate Roads is planning additional training sessions to ensure that interested municipalities will be able to participate in the program. BRPC will provide more information once these trainings have been scheduled.
- *Adopt a Complete Streets Policy.* Municipalities must adopt a local Complete Streets policy, such as a bylaw, ordinance, or administrative policy. The policy will need to be approved by a chief elected official and must include vetting through one public meeting. This policy should affirm the municipality's commitment to Complete Streets and provide a framework for how Complete Streets should be implemented in the town. Policies will be scored by MassDOT based on 10 key policy elements and must meet certain requirements to be accepted. BRPC has developed a model Complete Streets policy and is happy to work with any municipality to customize this policy to meet their needs. A schedule developed by MassDOT anticipates that municipalities will submit their policies to MassDOT for scoring by early February of 2016.
- *Create a Complete Streets Prioritization Plan.* Communities must develop a prioritization plan that identifies potential Complete Streets projects, goals, and estimated costs. Up to \$50,000 is available for the development of these plans, and BRPC can provide technical assistance to any community wishing to develop one. MassDOT currently anticipates that the deadline for approval of these plans will be in early June of 2016, with project review and approval by the end of the same month.

If your community is interested in participating in this funding program, please contact BRPC for additional information. MassDOT will issue final guidance on the funding program in late January and will also create an online portal to help with program enrollment and submittal of documents for review. This program is a unique opportunity to implement Complete Streets projects in our region and we encourage all interested municipalities to get involved.

For more information, contact Senior Transportation Planner Emily Lindsey (ELindsey@berkshireplanning.org or 413-442-1521 x12) or Planner Eammon Coughlin (ECoughlin@berkshireplanning.org or x19)

Thanksgiving Angel Donations

BRPC staff are pleased to say that through office fundraisers and individual donations we donated 10 turkey dinners to the Thanksgiving Angels program. Each dinner included a turkey, potatoes, stuffing, vegetables, cranberry, and gravy. Thanksgiving Angels is a collaboration of 16 Pittsfield area churches, civic and social organizations. The South Congregational Church acts as the single locale for program registration and food distribution to ensure there are enough Thanksgiving meals to go around. This year, volunteers handed out meals that were estimated to feed up to 6,000 people.

Tennessee Gas Northeast Energy Direct Pipeline—Project Update

Tennessee Gas's (TGP) Northeast Energy Direct (NED) Pipeline project continues in the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) permitting process. On November 20, 2015, TGP filed its application to FERC to construct, install, modify and operate a gas pipeline and compressor facilities that would cross Berkshire County. On December 7, 2015, FERC issued its Notice of Application (NOA). By issuing the NOA, FERC has accepted TGP's application as meeting minimum application standards. Also, the issuance of the NOA opens a 30 day period for interested parties to submit to FERC a Motion to Intervene. This is a longer period than the typical 21 day period. The deadline to submit a Motion to Intervene is January 6, 2016. A Motion to Intervene is necessary to obtain legal status by becoming a party to the proceedings. Only parties to the proceedings can ask for court review of any order that might be issued by FERC in the future. FERC's issuance of the NOA also closes the less formal pre-filing period. Now the application process will be more formal. Next in the formal FERC process will be the issuance of the Notice of Schedule (NOS) for Environmental Review which will indicate FERC's anticipated date for FERC staff to issue its Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). Provided FERC has not issued any data requests asking for clarifications or additional information, FERC will issue a NOS within 90 days from December 7, 2015. The NOS will be postponed until FERC has all the information it needs. As it is understood now, the FEIS will be issued in the latter part of 2016.

BRPC intends to submit a Motion to Intervene either jointly with some communities or referencing the common interests of the participants (municipalities, districts and County) in the pipeline working group.

Once it has been filed, BRPC's Motion to Intervene will be posted on the BRPC website at <http://www.berkshireplanning.org/major-initiatives/interstate-natural-gas-pipelines>

For more information, contact Executive Director Nat Karns (NKarns@berkshireplanning.org or x26), Assistant Director Tom Matuszko (TMatuszko@berkshireplanning.org or x34), or Senior Planner Melissa Provencher (MProvencher@berkshireplanning.org or x22).

District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA)—2015 Overview

BRPC staff along with their municipal partners completed a number of important projects over the past twelve months. Through the DLTA '15 program BRPC staff assisted eleven communities with local projects and worked on six regional projects that positively impacted multiple communities. Local projects included the development of master plans for Dalton, Otis and Sandisfield and the development of zoning amendments in Cheshire, New Marlborough and North Adams. BRPC staff also assisted the towns of Adams and Lee with pursuing the creation of 40R Smart Growth Zoning Overlay Districts. In terms of regional projects, BRPC staff developed and administered two important surveys, the young adult survey and the age friendly survey and reported on the findings. Additional regional projects included the coordination of the Northeast Gas Pipeline working group and the Rest of River (Housatonic River cleanup) working group. For a complete listing of the DLTA '15 projects please visit the BRPC website. BRPC staff members are looking forward to the next round of DLTA projects beginning in 2016.

For general information about the DLTA program or additional information about a specific project, contact Senior Planner Brian Domina (BDomina@berkshireplanning.org or x14).

Working Cities Challenge Planning Grant Awarded

A broad coalition of groups, with BRPC acting as the fiduciary agent, have been awarded a \$15,000 design grant from the Working Cities Challenge program at the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston. The Working Cities Challenge is intended to support community-based cross-sector collaborations to bring about systemic change to improve the lives of low-income people in smaller cities in Massachusetts. Pittsfield is the only Berkshire community eligible for the program. Over the next four months, the collaboration in Pittsfield will determine a focus and direction for a three year implementation grant request for \$475,000.

The work group is focusing on a proven program, Bridges Out of Poverty, as a model to engage the entire community in guiding the changes that are needed to move people from poverty to sustainability. There are considerable programs in place focused on aspects of this effort, but those programs can be uncoordinated and difficult for lower income people and families to find or access. The work group has also identified major issue areas, such as transportation, housing, and education, that all have an impact on people's ability to move out of persistent poverty.

During the planning phase, the Federal Reserve will provide several day-long workshop opportunities for groups from about a dozen communities in Massachusetts to help us in developing the strongest possible applications for funding. These applications will be due in early May.

For more information, contact Executive Director Nat Karns (NKarns@berkshireplanning.org or x26).

BRPC Celebrates its 50th Anniversary!

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. The Commission was first formed in 1966, authorized by enabling legislation that helped to create the thirteen Regional Planning Agencies, or RPAs, of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. This legislation, known as Chapter 40B, empowered towns and cities to collaborate and “promote with the greatest efficiency and economy the coordinated and orderly development of the areas within their jurisdictions and the general welfare and prosperity of their citizens.”

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. Additionally, BRPC invites you to join us for our 50th anniversary celebration to be held in late 2016. A final date and location are still being determined.

For the first installment in this six article series, Common Ground will set the stage with a look back at life and events in 1966, BRPC’s founding year. In that year, Lyndon Johnson was president, and the United States was embroiled in the Vietnam War. President Johnson had committed to significant troop increases, marking a period of escalation in the conflict. By the end of 1966, there were nearly 385,000 US troops stationed in Vietnam. The space race was also well underway, with the US launching its Gemini 8 mission and the Soviet Union’s Luna 9 mission making the first soft landing of any spacecraft on the Moon.

In planning related events, Johnson was moving forward with his “Great Society” programs, which aimed to end poverty and racial injustice. One element of this effort enacted in 1966 was the “Model Cities” program, which provided comprehensive funding to cities for a range of activities including comprehensive planning, urban building, and education. In the same year, the National Historic Preservation Act was passed. This law created the National Register of Historic Places and the National Historic Landmarks program we know today.

In popular culture, songs such as Simon and Garfunkel’s “The Sound of Silence”, and The Beatles’ “We Can Work it Out” reached the number one spot on the Billboard Hot 100. Top grossing films of the year included Clint Eastwood western “The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly”, Elizabeth Taylor in “Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?” and surfing classic “The Endless Summer”.

In sports, the Kansas City Chiefs won the AFL championship during 1966, and the Green Bay Packers took the NFL championship. Both teams went on to face each other in the first ever Super Bowl, held in January of 1967 (the Packers ended up prevailing 35-10). The Baltimore Orioles won the World Series, and the Boston Celtics defeated the Los Angeles Lakers in the NBA finals.

Needless to say, much has changed in the world, the nation, and our region since 1966. However, BRPC’s dedication to meeting the challenges facing the Berkshires and its commitment to its municipal members remains the same. Keep an eye out for the March and April issue of Common Ground where we will look at the Berkshire region and the issues it faced half a century ago in 1966.

BRPC Public Health Program Engages in another Successful Flu Vaccination Season

Beginning in September, the Berkshire Public Health Alliance Public Health Nursing Program, in partnership with Berkshire County Boards of Health Association (BCBOHA), Fairview Hospital, and the Berkshire Medical Reserve Corps (MRC), scheduled nearly 20 flu clinics in municipalities contracted with the Berkshire Public Health Alliance Public Health Nursing program and located throughout Berkshire County. Clinics were scheduled in all eight municipalities contracted with the Alliance for public health nursing (Cheshire, Clarksburg, Dalton, Egremont, Great Barrington (including Housatonic), Peru, North Adams and Washington) and in a variety of settings, including schools, town halls, community centers, senior centers, senior housing, churches, fire stations and others, and at a variety of times from early morning to evening, serving the specific needs of each community. Clinics were free and open to the public. Alliance clinics never require an appointment, and although insurance information is requested, identification and insurance are not required.

Each year, the Alliance staff, public health nurses, and partners work towards a goal of vaccinating over 1,000 people against influenza. The success of these clinics emphasizes what can be achieved when committed partners work together using a community-wide regional approach to ensure public health and wellness in our Berkshire cities and towns.

In addition to municipal contract fees for the public health nursing program, funding for these clinics was made possible through reimbursement from insurance billing and in-kind support through the partnership with Fairview Hospital. Vaccine is purchased privately, as well provided through the State Department of Public Health’s Immunization Bureau (for children and the uninsured).

For more information about the Berkshire Public Health Alliance Public Health Nursing Program, or to learn of upcoming clinics or Alliance events near you, please visit our webpage at: <http://www.berkshireplanning.org/major-initiatives/berkshire-public-health-alliance> or contact Jennifer Kimball (jkimball@berkshireplanning.org or x37). For more flu facts, visit www.cdc.gov/flu. And remember, if you haven’t had yours, it’s not too late to get your flu shot!



BRPC and the Berkshire Opioid Abuse Prevention Collaborative (BOAPC) are now on Facebook!

Visit and like these pages for updates on BRPC's continuing work and additional information on this important public health initiative.

BRPC Facebook page:

www.facebook.com/berkshireregionalplanning

BOAPC Facebook page:

www.facebook.com/Berkshire-Opioid-Abuse-Prevention-Collaborative-762089683896769

Active Shooter Awareness Symposium

On March 16th, 2016, Deerfield Academy in Deerfield, Ma will host an Active Shooter Awareness Symposium sponsored by the Western Region Homeland Security Advisory Council (WRHSAC) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Interested parties, including businesses and schools are encouraged to attend. For more information visit www.wrhsac.org or www.facebook.com/wrhsac. A registration and final agenda will be distributed in January 2016.

CALENDAR

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

berkshireplanning.org/events/calendar

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**Jan. 7 - BRPC Executive Committee
BRPC Finance Committee**

**Jan. 21 - BPRC Commission Development Committee
BRPC Commission Meeting**

Late Jan. - Final Complete Streets program guidance to be issued by MassDOT

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Feb. 4 - BRPC Executive Committee Meeting

Late Feb. - Municipalities to submit Complete Streets policies to MassDOT for scoring

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