

# COMMON GROUND

A NEWSLETTER FOR COMMUNITY PLANNING IN THE BERKSHIRE REGION

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Image (above): Guests listen to remarks by Lt. Governor Karyn Polito at the 2015 BRPC Annual Dinner.

## Tennessee Gas Northeast Energy Direct Pipeline Project Update

Tennessee Gas's Northeast Energy Direct (NED) Pipeline project continues in the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) pre-permitting process. On October 16, 2015, comments were due to FERC about items to be addressed in the Environmental Impact Report. BRPC submitted comments on behalf of the City of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, the Towns of Cheshire, Dalton, Hinsdale, Lanesborough, Lenox, Richmond, Washington and Windsor, Massachusetts, the Dalton Fire District, the Lanesborough Village Fire and Water District, Rensselaer County, New York and the Towns of Nassau, Stephentown, and Schodack, New York. Comments detailed concerns and requested mitigation measures should the project be constructed. They addressed the following topics: Public Safety and Health, Transportation and Local Infrastructure, Compressor Stations, Drinking Water, Rivers, Streams, Waterbodies, Wetlands, Invasive Plants, Special Species Status and Special Interest Areas, Socio-Economic and Fiscal Issues and Impacts, and Impacts to Property Owners.

Key concerns and considerations included the following:

- The pipeline should avoid drinking water supply areas;
- Compressor Stations should be located within industrial areas;
- The municipalities should not incur any cost as a consequence of the project for local review processes, repair of infrastructure, emergency response or any other cost associated with the permitting, construction, or operation of the pipeline.
- Directly impacted property owners should not incur any cost as a consequence of the project during acquisition, construction or operations and should be fully compensated for unavoidable costs and impacts.

BRPC's comments can be found at <http://www.berkshireplanning.org/major-initiatives/interstate-natural-gas-pipelines>

Tennessee Gas has pushed back the date for formally filing their permit request from October 23, 2015 to November 20, 2015. Once a permit application is formally filed, parties can request intervenor status, which provides certain legal rights as the application moves through the permitting process. In addition, once the permit application is filed, FERC will prepare the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). A draft and final EIS will be prepared. This will likely take several months.

For more information, contact Executive Director Nat Karns ([NKarns@berkshireplanning.org](mailto:NKarns@berkshireplanning.org) or 413-442-1521 x26), Assistant Director Tom Matuszko ([TMatuszko@berkshireplanning.org](mailto:TMatuszko@berkshireplanning.org) or x34), or Senior Planner Melissa Provencher ([MProvencher@berkshireplanning.org](mailto:MProvencher@berkshireplanning.org) or x22).

## FERC Issues Environmental Assessment for the Connecticut Expansion Project

FERC has prepared an environmental assessment (EA) for the Connecticut Expansion Project, proposed by Tennessee Gas Pipeline Company, L.L.C. The proposed project includes approximately 3.8 miles of new 36-inch-diameter natural gas pipeline loop in Sandisfield. The EA assesses the potential environmental effects of the construction and operation of the Connecticut Expansion Project in accordance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The EA is available for public viewing on the FERC's website ([www.ferc.gov](http://www.ferc.gov)) using the eLibrary link. Any person wishing to comment on the EA may do so. Comments to FERC are due on or before November 23, 2015. The EA will undergo review by BRPC's Environmental Review Committee.

For more information, contact Senior Planner Melissa Provencher ([mprovencher@berkshireplanning.org](mailto:mprovencher@berkshireplanning.org) or x22).

## Berkshire County Online Health Permitting

The Federal Drug Administration (FDA) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) have awarded the Berkshire Public Health Alliance, through BRPC, \$70,000 per year for five years to create public health infrastructure for Alliance Boards of Health that will help them work towards meeting the nine voluntary FDA Retail Food Program Standards. By implementing a coordinated, uniform online permitting and inspection system, this program will help local Boards of Health to meet State mandates and create many of the supporting infrastructure elements that are foundational to a Board of Health's retail food program including, accurate and accessible records, common forms, standard training, basic inspection equipment, uniform inspections, written policies and procedures, and annual assessment and improvement planning.

Only active Alliance communities are eligible to participate in Year 1 of the grant: Egremont, Dalton, Great Barrington, Lanesborough, Mt. Washington, New Marlborough, Sandisfield (inactive), Washington, and Williamstown. Alliance communities that become registered and assessed this year and next are eligible to participate in Years 2-5.

For more information, contact Mark Maloy ([MMaloy@berkshireplanning.org](mailto:MMaloy@berkshireplanning.org) or x29) or Laura Kittross, Public Health Program Manager ([LKittross@berkshireplanning.org](mailto:LKittross@berkshireplanning.org) or x37).

## BRPC Receives Brownfields Clean-up Funding from U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has awarded BRPC an additional \$500,000 to be added to the region's existing Brownfields Revolving Loan Fund (RLF). These funds can be used by for-profit or non-profit organizations or municipalities to clean-up contaminated sites in the region. Previously funds have been used to remove the contaminated building debris from the New England Log Homes site in Great Barrington and to clean-up sites on North Street in Dalton and School Street in Lee. Additional site clean-ups are under way for parcels to be used for additional public parkland along the Housatonic River in the Westside neighborhood in Pittsfield and for a portion of the Greylock/Cariddi Mill complex in North Adams. Initial new applications for funding from the RLF are due to BRPC by December 31, 2015.

For more information, contact Senior Planner Melissa Provencher ([MProvencher@berkshireplanning.org](mailto:MProvencher@berkshireplanning.org) or x22).

## 2016 District Local Technical Assistance Funds Available

The Commonwealth's 2016 fiscal year budget once again includes funding to support the District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) program. The DLTA program provides funding to the Commonwealth's regional planning agencies, such as BRPC. Through this program BRPC staff are able to provide direct technical assistance to communities on priority projects. The priority project criteria for fiscal year 2016 will be Planning Ahead for Housing, Planning Ahead for Growth (i.e. economic development) and Supporting the Community Compact (i.e. the adoption of best practices and regionalization). BRPC staff anticipates sending out the project solicitation in November 2015. It is never too early to speak with BRPC staff about potential projects, so please contact us today.

For more information about DLTA funding, please contact Brian Domina ([BDomina@berkshireplanning.org](mailto:BDomina@berkshireplanning.org) or x14).



*Image (above): Donna Cesan—2015 Kusik award winner and Town of Adams Community Development Director. Congratulations Donna!*

## Highlights from the 2015 BRPC Annual Dinner

On October 15, 2015, BRPC hosted its 2015 Annual Meeting at the Pittsfield Country Club. The event was co-hosted by the Berkshire County Selectmen's Association. The well-attended event was highlighted by a speech from Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito about the Baker Administration's commitment to strengthening local communities through the Community Compact program. The Community Compact program supports the implementation of best practices in all functions of municipal government and promotes the pursuit of regional solutions to shared problems. The Lieutenant Governor also listened to concerns from local officials on important issues such as the lack of broadband internet access and high infrastructure design costs.

The second highlight of the night was the awarding of the Charles Kusik award to Ms. Donna Cesan, Community Development Director for the Town of Adams. The Charles Kusik award is given to an individual who has made outstanding contributions to planning in Berkshire County and Ms. Cesan certainly fits that description. The successful evening wrapped up with BRPC Chairperson Sheila Irvin and BRPC Executive Director Nathaniel Karns speaking about the accomplishments of BRPC over the past year and identifying some of the challenges that lay ahead.

## New Grant Opportunities

### Massachusetts Recreational Trail Grant Program Open for Proposals

The Massachusetts Recreational Trails Grant Program is open to proposals, with grants due on Feb. 1, 2016. Grants are generally in the range of \$2,000 to \$50,000; however, proposals will be considered for larger amounts. A grant workshop will be held on Wednesday, December 2nd, 6:00 pm at Holyoke Heritage State Park, 22 Appleton St, Holyoke.

For more information, visit: <http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/dcr/services-and-assistance/grants-and-technical-assistance/recreational-trails-grants-program.html>

### 2016 Solarize Mass Program Now Open for Applications

The Commonwealth is seeking proposals from communities to participate in the 2016 Solarize Massachusetts program. Applications are accepted between September 1, 2015 and May 1, 2016, or when program funds have been fully allocated, whichever is earlier.

For more information, visit: <http://www.masscec.com/solicitations/2016-solarize-mass-community-request-proposals>

### Massachusetts Historical Commission Survey and Planning Grant Pre-Applications Now Available

The Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) Fiscal Year 2016 Survey and Planning Grant cycle is underway. This program helps to fund projects related the protection of historic properties and sites.

For more information, visit: <http://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc/mhchpp/Surveyandplanning.htm>

### 2016 Massachusetts Downtown Initiative Program Now Open

The Commonwealth announced recently that its 2016 Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (MDI) Grant Program is now open for applications. The grant provides funding for technical assistance related to Business Improvement Districts (BID), design, economics of downtowns, housing, and parking. Applications are due on December 4, 2015 at 5:00pm.

For more information, visit: <http://www.mass.gov/hed/economic/eohed/dhcd/> (under news and reports)

If your community or organization would like assistance in applying for any of these grant opportunities, please contact Executive Director Nat Karns ([NKarns@berkshireplanning.org](mailto:NKarns@berkshireplanning.org) or x26) or Assistant Director Tom Matuszko ([TMatuszko@berkshireplanning.org](mailto:TMatuszko@berkshireplanning.org) or x34).

## Housatonic Rest of River Cleanup Process Update

On September 30, 2015, the US EPA notified General Electric (GE) of its Intended Final Decision for the cleanup of the Housatonic River. Overall, the intent and levels of cleanup in the Final Decision seems consistent with the draft decision that was issued in June 2014. EPA has remained steadfast in their directive that GE dispose of contaminated sediments and soils off-site at existing disposal facilities permitted to accept PCB-related waste, none of which exist in Massachusetts. The permit also seems to increase the responsibilities that GE will have in containing PCBs within impoundments behind several dams along the river, requiring GE to monitor and maintain the integrity of the dams to reduce risk of PCB exposure should a dam fail.

Regarding future land use changes, the recently issued decision directs GE to conduct monitoring and possible response actions to contain PCBs if landowners along the river wish to conduct work where PCB contamination remains at concentrations > 1 mg/kg. GE would be required to conduct sampling, engineering controls and repair any aspect of previous remediation work that will be disturbed, as well as materials handling and off-site disposal. Work specifically listed are land use changes allowed by law and infrastructure projects, such as road repairs, water and sewer lines, or creation of boat launches.

On October 29th, GE sent a letter notifying EPA that it is invoking its right to a dispute resolution process. GE has listed several areas of dispute, and a few key areas important to local governments are:

- EPA's requirement for off-site disposal and permanent storage of PCB-contaminated soils and sediments;
- EPA's requirement to remove contaminated sediment in river channel, bank, backwaters and floodplain, which GE claims will cause greater environmental harm than benefit;
- EPA's requirement that GE control contaminated sediment behind dams, and monitor and maintain the integrity of the dams;
- EPA's open-ended requirements of having to propose and receive EPA approval to conduct response actions should PCB levels exceed Performance Standards; this includes conducting response actions to contain PCBs in the event that landowners propose projects that involve land disturbance of contaminated soils within designated Exposure Areas.

We encourage local officials and residents to review the Intended Final Decision and GE's response online at: <http://www2.epa.gov/ge-housatonic> .

For more information please contact Nat Karns ([NKarns@berkshireplanning.org](mailto:NKarns@berkshireplanning.org) or x26), or Lauren Gaherty ([LGaherty@berkshireplanning.org](mailto:LGaherty@berkshireplanning.org) or x35).



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# COMMON GROUND

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## Hellos and Goodbyes

In October, BRPC said goodbye to public health planner **Diane Persson**. Thanks for your hard work and dedication, Diane!

In mid-October BRPC welcomed new Associate Planner **Nancy Doucette**. Previously, Nancy worked in planning with the National Park Service as a visitor use management specialist, and at the Cape Cod National Seashore working with local towns and landowners within the seashore boundary.

Additionally, our organization is strengthened by new staff member **Allison Hope** who will be working as an Associate Planner and Worksite Tobacco Coordinator with the Public Health Program. Previously, Allison researched gambling addiction with UMass and the Massachusetts Gaming Commission, and has also held positions at community health organizations.

BRPC also welcomes Senior Transportation Planner **Emily Lindsey**. Emily joins us from Colorado, where she was a regional transportation planner. Emily is a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) and looks forward to her work on regional multi-modal transportation planning in the Berkshires.

## CALENDAR

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

[berkshireplanning.org/events/calendar](http://berkshireplanning.org/events/calendar)

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**Nov. 5 - BRPC Executive Committee Meeting**

**Nov. 12 - CPTC - Special Permits & Variances**

**Nov. 19 - BRPC Commission Development Committee**

**BRPC Commission Meeting**

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**Dec. 3 - BRPC Executive Committee Meeting**

**Dec. 10 - CPTC - Writing Reasonable & Defensible Decisions**

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E-mail [szaleski@berkshireplanning.org](mailto:szaleski@berkshireplanning.org) today to subscribe!