

COMMON GROUND

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A NEWSLETTER FOR COMMUNITY PLANNING IN THE BERKSHIRE REGION

BERKSHIRE PUBLIC HEALTH ALLIANCE CREATED

On November 10, 2011 the first meeting of the Berkshire Public Health Alliance (Alliance) was held. The Alliance is a shared services public health delivery model, formed through an Intermunicipal Agreement (IMA) under Chapter 40, Section 4A of the Massachusetts General Laws (MGL). The Alliance is a consortium of the following 21 Berkshire County municipalities (Members): Adams, Alford, Becket, Clarksburg, Dalton, Egremont, Great Barrington, Hancock, Lanesborough, Mt. Washington, New Marlborough, North Adams, Peru, Richmond, Sandisfield, Savoy, Sheffield, Washington, West Stockbridge, Williamstown and Windsor.

Regionalization of public health services has long been a goal for many Berkshire County communities. Berkshire County is geographically furthest from state public health resources, is far more rural than the state as a whole and has a pronounced split between high and low income households and communities. Small towns do not have resources to hire experienced, qualified public health staff, maintain necessary training and certification and meet environmental and public health nursing mandates, much less address non-required activities such as wellness and prevention. Working together will allow communities to pool resources and enhance public health for all residents. The effort was a collaboration between BRPC and the Berkshire County Boards of Health Association

STAFF CONTACT: Tom Matuszko at tmatuszko@berkshireplanning.org or ext. 34

NEW ENGLAND LOG HOMES SITE RECEIVES \$375,000 BERKSHIRE BROWNFIELDS LOAN

As part of a complex funding package to clean up the heavily contaminated New England Log Homes site in Great Barrington, the Community Development Corporation of Southern Berkshire has just closed on the first loan made by BRPC under the Berkshire Brownfields Revolving Loan program. The CDC was loaned \$375,000 by the Berkshire fund, and has a similar sized loan from the Massachusetts Community Economic Development Assistance Corporation, as well as grants from both the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in order to remove and dispose of properly the burned out contaminated buildings on the site. MassDevelopment is providing a loan for the actual site remediation. Demolition and disposal of the buildings is expected to take place over the winter.

STAFF CONTACT: Nat Karns at nkarns@berkshireplanning.org or ext. 26

STATE WIND ENERGY BILL UPDATE

As of Saturday December 17, 2011 the Wind Energy Siting Reform Act as written has been tabled in committee. According to Senator Ben Downing, co-chair of the Joint Committee on Telecom, Utilities and Energy, a new bill will be filed that will incorporate specific regulations for the siting, zoning and local decision making.

OFFICE RENOVATIONS FINISHED

Renovations are complete and the BRPC offices are now open Monday through Friday 9:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. Come visit the new office today!

DISTRICT LOCAL TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE 2011 COMES TO A CLOSE

After a busy year, BRPC is finishing up their District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) Projects. Eighteen projects were selected totaling \$158,461 in grant funds provided by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development.

MUNICIPAL PLANNING

Great Barrington Master Plan: BRPC assisted the Town of Great Barrington with their master planning effort. BRPC attended monthly Steering Committee meetings and organized an agriculture section grassroots planning process. BRPC also provided data and maps to the Town to support their existing conditions inventory work. This project work coincides with the regional plan rewrite (Sustainable Berkshires).

North Adams Comprehensive Plan: For the first time in 40 years, the city of North Adams is developing a comprehensive plan. BRPC prepared an existing conditions summary, prepared inventory maps and drafted a vision statement for the City. This project work also coincides with the regional plan rewrite (Sustainable Berkshires).

Tyringham Regional Housing: BRPC worked with the Tyringham Affordable Housing Subcommittee to develop a good, realistic strategy for affordable housing in the town.

MUNICIPAL BYLAWS

Adams Wind Bylaw: BRPC worked with the Town of Adams to develop a draft wind energy bylaw in anticipation of formal wind development proposals. BRPC drafted a bylaw that included regulations about proper siting, access and development of wind facilities. The Green Committee is reviewing the bylaw.

Becket Wind Energy: BRPC worked with the Town of Becket to develop an appropriate commercial wind bylaw to meet the needs of the community and to address the concerns of the town. The bylaw was successfully adopted at the spring town meeting.

Egremont Village Center Bylaw: After feeling the pressure of rural sprawl or rural-suburban development encroach and replace once productive agricultural fields, the town of Egremont sought assistance from BRPC to finalize draft village center boundaries and develop a tailored bylaw for the village center. BRPC completed an inventory of village buildings and infrastructure and drafted a bylaw for review by the Planning Board.

Lanesborough Zoning Rewrite: BRPC assisted the Town of Lanesborough with its zoning rewrite, specifically providing comments on the revised zoning bylaw as it moves through the local review and approval process.

Lee Zoning Revisions: BRPC assisted the Town of Lee to re-codify the existing zoning bylaws to make them internally consistent and easier to use. A new bylaw has been drafted and the town representatives will be asked to vote on the bylaw at the next annual town meeting.

New Marlborough Village Center Bylaw: BRPC provided technical assistance to the Town of New Marlborough to develop a new bylaw for Village Center District zoning. An inventory of village buildings and infrastructure was completed and a draft bylaw has been completed. Development of a Village Center zoning bylaw was recommended in a recently completed Master Plan.

Peru Bylaw: Similar to the towns of Becket and Adams, the Town of Peru is anticipating wind development proposals. Zoning language was prepared for the town to clarify and improve the bylaw.

Sheffield Accessory Apartment Bylaw: BRPC assisted the Sheffield Housing Committee to develop an accessory apartment bylaw as the town seeks to address affordable housing in the community. BRPC drafted the bylaw and it was successfully adopted at the spring town meeting.

Stockbridge Green Communities: BRPC provided technical assistance as the Town of Stockbridge sought to better understand the requirements to become a Green Community.

Washington Solar Bylaw: After working together previously to develop the Small Wind bylaw for the town, BRPC assisted the Town of Washington to add a solar bylaw to its zoning code. BRPC drafted the bylaw and continues to work with Planning Board to finalize it for adoption. Town residents will be asked to vote on the bylaw at the next annual town meeting.

REGIONAL/MUNICIPAL COORDINATION

GE Rest of River Cleanup: BRPC worked with the towns of Lee, Lenox, Great Barrington, Stockbridge and Sheffield to address the economic impacts of removal of PCBs from the Housatonic River. BRPC established a five-town working committee and goals for the project. BRPC also helped facilitate the hiring of a consultant to study the socio-economic impacts of the clean-up. That consultant work is ongoing.

Permitting Software: BRPC continues to work with a number of towns (including Richmond, Lenox, Lee, Dalton and Sheffield) to implement on-line municipal building permit software. Full Circle Technologies, Inc. was selected as the preferred vendor to provide this service. BRPC is finishing the draft contract between the interested municipality and the vendor. In this second year of use, BRPC also added more municipalities using on-line burn permits (see page 4 article).

Regional NPDES: Pittsfield, Lanesborough and Dalton are subject to new EPA rules for the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit coverage. BRPC developed a draft "model" permit and guidance the municipalities could use when the final permit is released.

Regional Wastewater: BRPC worked with the City of Pittsfield and the Town of Lenox to initiate a feasibility study to determine the impacts and consequences of improved regional collaboration related to municipal wastewater treatment.

Tri-town Shared Service Study: BRPC worked with the Tri-town Health Department to create draft bylaws for the collaborative effort between the towns of Lee, Lenox and Stockbridge.

NOTICE OF AVAILABLE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE (DLTA 2012)

The District Local Technical Assistance Fund (DLTA) is an annual grant established via Chapter 29 s2XXX of the Massachusetts General Laws. For fiscal year 2011, this fund received an annual appropriation of \$2.0 million to be distributed statewide to regional planning agencies to support local and regional planning and service provision projects. Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) received \$158,461 to provide staff support to projects in the Berkshires. BRPC has again been awarded a DLTA grant for 2012 to provide technical and staffing support to communities through a competitive application process.

Eligible Projects: There are two general categories of eligible projects: municipal partnerships and planning activities involving Priority Preservation or Priority Development Areas, as identified in local or regional plans.

Application Deadline: Applications must be received by 5:00 pm on January 18, 2012 to be considered for this grant cycle.

How to Apply: Complete and return a Request for Technical Assistance Form by the specified deadline. Applicants are encouraged to discuss potential projects with BRPC prior to submitting the completed Request for Technical Assistance Form. Applications must be signed by chief elected officials (Mayors or Board of Selectmen Chairs).

Evaluation and Award: Applications will be evaluated using the criteria listed in the Evaluation Criteria section, below. Decisions will be made in February 2012 and awardees will be notified by BRPC.

If your municipality would like to apply for DLTA assistance for a project that meets the specifications described in this letter, please contact Assistant Director Thomas Matuszko (413-442-1521 ext. 34, tmatuszko@berkshireplanning.org) or Planner Brian Domina (413-442-1521 ext. 14, bdomina@berkshireplanning.org).

ATTENTION BERKSHIRES: GET YOUR BURN PERMITS ON-LINE

Starting Saturday January 15, 2012 burn permits will be available on-line for a second year in a row. If you live in Richmond, Pittsfield, Peru, Lenox, Lanesborough, Great Barrington, Lee, Stockbridge or Becket you now can apply for your daily burn permits on-line at <http://www.bcburnpermits.com>. The State of Massachusetts allows for residents to burn brush from January 15 to May 1, but you must have a permit. This website allows you to review existing state burning regulations and gives you direction for obtaining a burn permit. You must obtain a permit for every day that you intend to burn. All other municipalities in Berkshire County still require you to register with the town.

STAFF CONTACT: Sara Lafayette at slafayette@berkshireplanning.org or x19

SUSTAINABLE BERKSHIRES UPDATE

The last two months have been busy ones as we help advance the Sustainable Berkshires Regional Plan effort through its first stages. A summary from the vision outreach activities (held Summer 2011) is available on the project website. In mid-fall open forums focusing on Historic Preservation were held and that plan element will be available for review in early 2012. Open forums for Conservation and Recreation were held in late fall; that draft plan element will be available soon. Maps and meeting materials for both sections are available by selecting the 'Plan Topic' on the project website.

Please continue to check this section in the next newsletter for announcements and updates. The best way to stay informed about public meetings and release of draft elements for comment is to visit the project website, www.sustainableberkshires.com to sign up for email alerts. You can also 'like' Sustainable Berkshires on Facebook.

STAFF CONTACT: Mackenzie Greer at mgreer@berkshireplanning.org or x32

WESTERN NEW ENGLAND GREENWAY CONFERENCE SUMMARY

On Saturday, November 19, 2011 a group of 24 bike and planning enthusiasts gathered at the Bennington Museum in Bennington, Vermont to discuss the merits and challenges of establishing a "multi-segment, multi-state" greenway that would link NYC and Montreal. The corridor being pursued largely follows Route 7 through the very western portions of CT, MA and VT. It would link with the East Coast Greenway at the Merritt Parkway near Norwalk, CT. at the Southern terminus, and with the Quebec's Route Verte at the Northern terminus. After a variety of speakers who honed in on their specific bike visions and trails, the group discussed the next steps for the initiative. In the end there was consensus that the Trails & Greenways Committee of the Upper Housatonic Valley National Heritage Area will continue to move forward to draft a mission statement and develop a "Ride-It-Now" map in the coming months. Visit www.youtube.com/watch?v=ogXLuyyKgbl to view a video summary of the conference.

STAFF CONTACT: Sara Lafayette at slafayette@berkshireplanning.org or x19

LET'S GO GREEN

Request to be part of our electronic newsletter mailing today by contacting Judy Wagner at jwagner@berkshireplanning.org or x10!



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UPCOMING EVENTS

BERKSHIRE REGIONAL EMERGENCY SHELTER PROJECT: KICK-OFF MEETING

In partnership with the Western Region Homeland Security Advisory Council, the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission invites you to become part of the discussion on REGIONAL EMERGENCY DISASTER SHELTERING. Help us answer the following questions: *Where should our regional shelters be located? How can we get the word out to the public? Where will the supplies come from? Who will run the regional shelter? How many people will the regional shelter serve?* This meeting will be held on Wednesday January 11, 2012 at 8:00AM at the BRPC offices. RSVP to Sara Lafayette (slafayette@berkshireplanning.org or x19) today to be part of the conversation.

COMPLETE STREETS TRAINING WORKSHOP IN JANUARY

On Tuesday January 24, 2012 from 4-7 p.m. at the BRPC offices, a Complete Streets Training Workshop will be held. Please RSVP to the Baystate Roads Program at <http://baystateroads.eot.state.ma.us> today.

STAFF WELCOMES A NEW BABY GIRL

Caydence Elizabeth Provencher was born at 5:20PM on Wednesday November 23, 2011 weighing in at 7lbs. 12oz and 19.5 inches long. She is the healthy, happy daughter of Senior Planner, Melissa Jette Provencher.

GRANT ANNOUNCEMENTS

WATER QUALITY MANAGEMENT GRANTS

Mass. DEP expects to issue a RFP for applications in early January 2012, with grant proposals due in March 2012. DEP will continue to focus grant funds towards watershed- or subwatershed-based nonpoint source assessment and planning projects, seeking proposals that will identify water quality problems and provide preliminary or final designs for BMPs to address these problems. Potential applicants are strongly encouraged to contact MassDEP before the RFR issue date to refine project ideas and obtain feedback. Contact Gary Gonyea (617-556-1152 or gary.gonyea@state.ma.us) for a discussion of ideas and program objectives.

CALENDAR

All meetings held in BRPC office unless otherwise noted.

JANUARY

- 2 **New Year's Day**, Offices Closed
- 5 **BRPC Executive Committee Meeting**, 4:00 p.m.
- 11 **Berkshire Emergency Shelter Meeting**, 8:00 a.m.
- 12 **Berkshire Public Health Alliance Meeting**, 5:30 p.m.
- 16 **Floating Holiday**, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
- 17 **TAC Meeting**, 4:00 p.m.
- 19 **Regional Issues Committee Meeting**, 4:00 p.m.
- BRPC Full Commission Meeting**, 7:00 p.m.
- 24 **Complete Streets Workshop**, 4:00 p.m.
- 26 **Sustainable Berkshires Regional Consortium Meeting**, 4:00 p.m.
- 31 **MPO Meeting**, 4:00 p.m.

FEBRUARY

- 2 **BRPC Executive Committee Meeting**, 4:00 p.m.
- 16 **Regional Issues Committee Meeting**, 4:00 p.m.
- 20 **Floating Holiday**, Presidents Day

In case of inclement weather, please call (413) 442-1521x15 to learn if your meeting is still scheduled.

CLEARINGHOUSE REVIEWS

None at this time.