

# COMMON GROUND

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## IN MEMORY OF AIMEE THAYER

Aimee Thayer, Delegate from Lanesborough and Chair of BRPC's Regional Issues Committee, passed away on April 11<sup>th</sup>. She suffered a heart attack at a Special Town Meeting on April 3<sup>rd</sup> and was unable to recover. The Special Town Meeting was held to consider comprehensive revisions to the Lanesborough Zoning Bylaw, which she had been heavily involved in drafting, working over the previous four years.

## LANESBOROUGH SPECIAL TOWN MEETING ADOPTS A COMPREHENSIVE RE-WRITE OF ITS ZONING BYLAWS

At a special town meeting on April 3, 2012, the residents of Lanesborough adopted a comprehensive re-write of its zoning bylaws. The newly enacted zoning bylaws replace zoning bylaws first adopted in 1965. The Lanesborough Planning Board had been working diligently on the zoning re-write for several years and BRPC staff conducted a comprehensive review of the proposed zoning revisions last year. Longtime Planning Board members John Friend and the late Aimee Thayer invested a tremendous amount of time in developing these revisions. A somber congratulations to all those involved.

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## ON-LINE MUNICIPAL BUILDING PERMITS BECOMES A REALITY

Originating out of a DLTA project, seven Berkshire municipalities (Becket, Dalton, Lee, Lenox, Monterey, Richmond and Sheffield) are moving forward with launching on-line municipal building permits. This effort will automate the creation, processing and management of building, plumbing, gas and electrical permits, and to provide secure on-line access for permit applicants and municipal officials for interested municipalities in the Berkshires. Over the last year a working group with the help of BRPC staff researched options, sought out price quotes and selected Full Circle Technologies, Inc. as the qualified vendor for this service.

The hard work paid off! The seven municipalities with the assistance of BRPC staff received \$110,835 to cover transitional costs through the Community Innovation Challenge Grant. Not only will this grant cover the costs for service implementation, but it will provide these towns with the training and field equipment for a seamless transition. The expected launch date for each participating municipality is this early summer.

Municipalities interested in this program should contact BRPC. If there is sufficient interest BRPC is willing to coordinate another application the next round of Community Innovation Challenge Grants. BRPC is interested in working with municipalities for other municipal permit services as well.

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## MAY FLOWERS



## MUNICIPAL ENERGY AGGREGATION: TOWN MEETING ACTION

BRPC recommends that all municipalities in the region consider municipal power purchase aggregation, which has so far proven to be beneficial to electricity customers residing in the communities that have already opted for this method of procuring electricity. BRPC has discovered that, with relative ease, a municipality can aggregate the electricity load of all customers within its borders, large and small, and on their behalf put the load out to a competitive bid. The Town of Lanesborough has done just that and is projected to save electricity users in the town approximately \$150,000 in the coming year.

We hope that each community in Berkshire County will consider competitive electricity purchase as an option to lowering electricity costs on behalf of their residents and businesses. As the Berkshire Chamber of Commerce has noted, electricity costs in the county are one of the major hurdles in attracting and keeping businesses to this region. Small businesses that do not have the capacity or leverage to purchase electricity on the open market often have the most to gain from lower electricity rates.

To begin the process of enabling the municipal aggregation option, BRPC recommends that Select Boards place an article on a Town Meeting Warrant to request the authority to act on behalf of the town to pursue the competitive purchase of electricity (in the cities, it takes a vote of City Council). This article does not in any way commit the Select Board (or Mayor) to the outside purchase of electricity – it simply empowers them to investigate the option and if electricity bids come in that are favorable, to accept the bid.

During the coming months BRPC will be investigating further regional energy topics, specifically identifying the costs and benefits of establishing a public regional energy entity to serve the towns and residents of Berkshire County. The models to be investigated include creating a regional electric cooperative and establishing a regional municipal aggregation with powers similar to that of the Cape Light Compact. We will keep you updated as we move along.

**STAFF CONTACTS:** Lauren Gaherty at [lgaherty@berkshireplanning.org](mailto:lgaherty@berkshireplanning.org) or x35

## REGIONAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLAN ELEMENT AVAILABLE FOR PUBLIC REVIEW

Sustainable Berkshires has just released its first element for public review. The draft Historic Preservation Element is available to view or download at the regional plan project website [www.sustainableberkshires.org](http://www.sustainableberkshires.org). This element establishes the first regional historic preservation plan for the Berkshires. Municipal historic commissions and historical societies, Massachusetts Historical Commission, Preservation Massachusetts, residents, and the plan's Regional Consortium all had a hand in developing this landmark document.

Please review the draft in preparation for a public workshop to be held in early summer 2012. At this workshop, attendees will be asked to review, revise and prioritize the goals established for three elements: historic preservation, conservation and recreation, and economic development. The Conservation and Recreation Element, as well as the Business and Economy Element will be finalized and released over the next few months so that all will have a chance to review before the workshop. Stay tuned!

Don't want to miss any updates on the regional plan? Visit our project website to sign up for e-mail updates or "like" us on Facebook!

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## ENHANCED REGIONAL COOPERATION

New England communities have a long tradition of working collaboratively to provide neighborly support. With the endorsement of the Berkshire County Selectman's Association BRPC is endeavoring to capture local examples of municipal cooperation. A DLTA grant has been awarded to the Town of Sheffield to research, document and share existing examples of municipal collaboration, as well as explore opportunities for enhanced regional cooperation between Berkshire County municipalities. If you receive a survey, please take a few moments to fill it out and stay tuned for the results!

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## SUCCESSFUL 5TH THURSDAY DINNER: LOCAL PERMITTING OF SOLAR PHOTOVOLTAIC SYSTEMS

On March 29<sup>th</sup> over 100 people attended BRPC's 5<sup>th</sup> Thursday Dinner held at Mazzeo's Ristorante in Pittsfield. Featured speaker Attorney Don Dubendorf provided excellent insight into the effect that Massachusetts General Law c. 40A § 3 has on a municipality's authority to regulate solar photovoltaic systems. The total number of attendees was the highest on record for a 5<sup>th</sup> Thursday Dinner event. Thanks to all those involved in making this a successful event! Please stay tuned for details on the next 5<sup>th</sup> Thursday event to be held on May 31, 2012 at the ITAM Lodge in Pittsfield.

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## BERKSHIRE TROPICAL STORM IRENE AFTER ACTION REPORT AND IMPROVEMENT PLAN WRAPS UP

The regionally focused Tropical Storm Irene After Action Report and Improvement Plan for Berkshire County is complete. Based on key stakeholder participation and data analysis, the report identified four core themes of the response from a regional perspective. County-wide municipal and community representation concurred that the response was excellent. Additionally, numerous volunteer and community based entities participated in the Berkshire County response. However, if Tropical Storm Irene's impact had been more significant, additional challenges would have been present requiring an enhanced regional response approach as well as additional public communication strategies. Along with Franklin, Hampshire and Hampden counties, this report will be aggregated for final review by the Western Massachusetts Homeland Security Advisory Council this summer.

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## DEVELOPMENT OF THE 2013 TIP

Work is underway to develop the 2013 Berkshire Transportation Improvement Project (TIP). The TIP is the financial programming document for federal transportation construction projects over the next four years. In March, all Berkshire County municipalities were contacted and asked to provide information on projects that they want to be considered. BRPC received information on 23 proposed projects having an estimated combined cost of over \$92 million. Staff from MassDOT and BPRC conducted a preliminary evaluation and ranking of these projects in mid April. The next step in the process is for the Transportation Advisory Committee to debate and rank the projects and provide a recommendation to the Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). Once the MPO finalizes the prioritizations of these projects, a draft TIP document will be prepared and released for public comment. The current schedule targets the start of the comment period on May 29<sup>th</sup> with final approval of the TIP by the MPO in early July.

**STAFF CONTACT:** Anuja Koirala at [akoirala@berkshireplanning.org](mailto:akoirala@berkshireplanning.org) or x18

## SCENIC BYWAYS PROJECT UPDATES

BRPC anticipates signing a contract with MassDOT to administer the grants for the Mohawk Trail Phase II (Williamstown and North Adams bike trail design) and the Jacob's Ladder Trail bike design (Lee) after July 1, 2012 (which is Massachusetts' beginning start of fiscal year). By October, BRPC will finalize advertising requests for proposals for both projects in order to start the trail design process. After the consultant(s) are selected, BRPC will disseminate public information and start outreach in the first quarter of calendar year 2013. The timeline for both projects' completion is three years.

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## THANK YOU SARAH HOECKER!

Sarah Hoecker has been working as a community planning intern with BRPC this spring. A student in the regional planning program at Westfield State University, Sarah has an interest in planning for healthy, mixed neighborhoods and housing options. During her time with us she has been a great help researching national and international frameworks for identifying and rating neighborhood sustainability. We'll take this work forward into the new regional plan as we begin work on the housing sections this summer. Thanks Sarah! Great work and best wishes.



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## UPCOMING EVENTS

### OPEN MEETING LAW TRAINING

Monday May 14, 2012 from 6-7:30 p.m. in the Drury High School Auditorium the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law will be discussed. The speaker will be Glenn Koocher, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Association of School Committees. The intended audience is school officials, municipal boards and commission members. RSVP to Ellen Sutherland at [esutherland@napsk12.org](mailto:esutherland@napsk12.org).

## GRANTS

### S.319 NONPOINT SOURCE POLLUTION COMPETITIVE GRANTS

This grant program funds projects that address prevention, control and abatement of nonpoint source (NPS) pollution. NPS is pollution defined as that which is "caused by diffuse sources that are not regulated as point sources and are normally associated with precipitation and runoff from the land or percolation." Projects must have a 40% non-federal match of the total project cost. The grant solicitation can be found at [www.comm-pass.com](http://www.comm-pass.com) – to search enter "BRP 2012-01" as the Document Number. Grant applications are due no later than 12 p.m, Friday, June 1, 2012.

### MASSACHUSETTS CONSERVATION TAX CREDIT AVAILABLE

A state income tax credit is available for landowners who voluntarily donate conservation land to a municipality, the state or a nonprofit conservation organization. Applications are accepted on a "rolling" basis during 2012. Landowners may be donating either land, a conservation restriction or entering into a bargain sale. The donation must occur during calendar year 2012 to be eligible (recorded at the registry). Massachusetts will provide 50% of the appraised donation value, up to \$50,000, to the donor in the form of a tax credit. Please note that tax credits are permitted for less than the \$50,000 cap, i.e. if the donated land is valued at \$20,000, the land owner would receive \$10,000 through a tax credit. Visit [www.mass.gov/eea/land-use-habitats/land-conservation/massachusetts-conservation-tax-credit-program.html](http://www.mass.gov/eea/land-use-habitats/land-conservation/massachusetts-conservation-tax-credit-program.html) for more information.

### MASSDEP SUSTAINABLE MATERIALS RECOVERY GRANTS OFFERED CONSERVATION TAX CREDIT AVAILABLE

MassDEP Sustainable Materials Recovery Program (SMRP) Municipal Grants offer funding to cities, towns and regional entities for recycling, composting, reuse and source reduction activities that will increase diversion of municipal solid waste and household hazardous waste from disposal. Grants are available for priority program implementation, pilot programs, regional initiatives and targeted small-scale initiatives. Visit [www.mass.gov/dep/recycle/recawgr.htm](http://www.mass.gov/dep/recycle/recawgr.htm) for more information.

## CALENDAR

All meetings held in BRPC office unless otherwise noted.

### MAY

- 3 **BRPC Executive Committee Meeting,**  
4:00 p.m.
- 10 **Berkshire Public Health Alliance,** 5:00 p.m.
- 15 **TAC Meeting,** 4:00 p.m.
- 17 **Regional Issues Committee Meeting,**  
4:00 p.m.  
**BRPC Full Commission Meeting,** 7:00 p.m.
- 28 **BRPC Offices Closed,** Memorial Day Holiday
- 29 **MPO Meeting,** 4:00 p.m.
- 31 **5th Thursday Dinner,** 5:30 p.m.

### JUNE

- 7 **BRPC Executive Committee Meeting,**  
4:00 p.m.
- 14 **Berkshire Public Health Alliance,** 5:00 p.m.
- 19 **TAC Meeting,** 4:00 p.m.
- 26 **MPO Meeting,** 4:00 p.m.

*In case of inclement weather, please call (413) 442-1521 ext. 15 to learn if your meeting is still scheduled.*

### CLEARINGHOUSE REVIEWS

None at this time.