

COMMON GROUND

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A NEWSLETTER FOR COMMUNITY PLANNING IN THE BERKSHIRE REGION

BECKET INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECT NEARS COMPLETION

The Becket FY11 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Infrastructure Improvements Project is nearing completion, with approximately 1700 linear feet of sidewalk reconstructed or newly created in the North Becket Village Historic District. The nearly \$.5 million construction project, part of a \$900,000 CDBG grant received by the Town in 2011, will also include new thermoplastic crosswalks on Main Street, High Street and State Route 8, and the replacement of asphalt paving with pervious brick in Bidwell Park at the dead end of Main Street, improving surface water quality flowing into Depot and Yokum Brooks, both tributaries of the Wild and Scenic Westfield River. This project was guided in part by the vision of the 11 member 2009 Becket CDBG Task Force, which produced an overall community development strategy, officially adopted by the Becket Select Board, prioritizing the needs of the community. This CDS became the driving force behind the CDBG grant application, which also included funds for housing rehabilitation and a feasibility study for the development of affordable senior housing within the Town. The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission is administering this CDBG grant for the Town of Becket. The engineering consultant for the construction project is White Engineering, of Pittsfield, MA, and the construction contractor is Gomes Construction Company of Ludlow, MA. The housing rehabilitation consultant is the Berkshire Housing Development Corporation of Pittsfield, and consultants for the affordable senior housing feasibility study include the Hilltown CDC and Foresight Land Planning of Pittsfield. The CDBG program is funded by HUD and the MA DHCD. Additional technical support and funding was received by the Town from the Westfield River Wild and Scenic Advisory Committee. For additional information on the MA Dept. of Housing and Community Development CDBG program, please contact BRPC Senior Planner and Project Manager Patricia Mullins at pmullins@berkshireplanning.org or x17.



NBCC'S MASS IN MOTION KICK-OFF EVENT: HEALTHY COMMUNITY DESIGNS WITH MARK FENTON

Interested in getting involved with healthy eating and active living initiatives? Think about attending the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition's Mass in Motion kick-off on Friday, November 16th, from 7:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. Enjoy breakfast and an inspiring presentation with residents, key community leaders, and others involved with all aspects of health and wellness. Mark Fenton, a national public health consultant, will be speaking about how make healthy choices easy choices. The event will be at the MCLA Church Street Center. Mass in Motion is an obesity prevention program focused on healthy eating and active living. Staff at BRPC have been assisting the nbCC Mass in Motion programs as they work with teams in Adams and North Adams to develop walking routes in their communities. The breakfast meeting costs \$10.

Please contact Amanda Chilson, nbCC's Mass in Motion Coordinator at achilson@nbccoalition.org, or 413-663-7588 x16 to sign up for the event. Attendees can also register online at: <http://conta.cc/PCr5aj>.



Photos, clockwise: Outgoing Chair Jamie Mullen, current Chair Sheila Irvin, Congressman Olver and Executive Director Nat Karns at BRPC's Annual Dinner, where Aimee Thayer of Lanesborough was posthumously awarded the Charles Kusik award (photo: M. Greer); a Dalton demo project, soon out to bid (photo: B. Domina); Brent White of White Construction, Craig Klemm, Becket Town Administrator, and Joe Fernandes of Gomes Construction stand in front of a near-completed North Becket Village infrastructure project (photo: P. Mullins); Planner Mackenzie Greer and nbCC's Amanda Chilson walk Williams Environmental Studies students through a site assessment in North Adams, pointing out the channelized Hoosac River (photo: S. Gardener); construction progress photos of the FY11 CDBG North Becket Village Infrastructure Project; volunteer Beth VanNess promotes emergency preparedness at Third Thursday (photo: L. Errichetto).

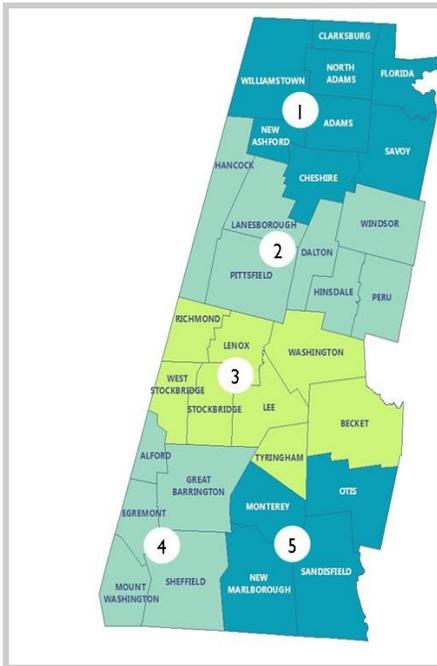
REGIONAL PARCEL DATA DIGITIZED

Digital parcel data for all 32 municipalities in the county has recently been completed. This will allow BRPC and partners to conduct GIS analysis that we have never before been able to do. This newly available data provides us a new tool to better understand the region. Included with the parcel boundaries are an extract of the assessors data, including building size, year built and valuation among many other characteristics. MassGIS provided funding to a number of contractors, of which BRPC was one, to complete this project. This is the first step by the state to move towards the next generation of 911, and will also facilitate community planning research and analysis.

For more information on the digital parcels, please contact Mark Maloy at mmaloy@berkshireplanning.org or x 29.

THE WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIES REPORT

Over the past several months BRPC has worked closely with both the Franklin County Planning Commission as well as the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission on the Western Massachusetts Communications Strategies report commissioned by the Western Region Homeland Security Advisory Council. The final report is complete and available for public dissemination. The report includes an emergency communications interagency communications analysis as well as an in depth assessment of emergency communications with the public. The report provides a comprehensive overview of all emergency responder communication strategies throughout the four Western Massachusetts counties and provides short and long term recommendations for future planning efforts. For more information please contact Lindsay Errichetto at lerrichetto@berkshireplanning.org or x28. The report itself can be accessed via the Western Region Homeland Security Advisory Council website.



KEEP BERKSHIRES FARMING EFFORT BEGINS IN TWO NEW SUB-REGIONS

Keep Berkshires Farming, a grassroots-driven effort working to research and implement strategies for supporting a vibrant local food system, has been up and running for the past year in the southwest (area 4) and north (area 1) portions of the county. This work will be folded into the regional plan as part of a Food and Agriculture Plan for the region; local communities will also receive action plans specific to their sub-region. The central Berkshires communities are now preparing to launch Keep Berkshires Farming in their regions this November (area 2) and December (area 3). Topics we'll be working on include getting more local produce in area schools, supporting value-added product creation in the region, enhanced distribution, addressing hunger and nutrition in our communities, linking new farmers with land, and working with retiring farmers on succession planning. Anyone interested in getting involved in any of the regions can contact Melissa Adams of the Glynwood Center at mladams@glynwood.org or BRPC Senior Planner Amy Kacala at akacala@berkshireplanning.org or x12.

NEW TRANSPORTATION PLANS ADOPTED

On July 12th the Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) adopted the 2013 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) and the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) following a 30 day comment period. The UPWP outlines the transportation planning studies to be undertaken in the upcoming federal fiscal year and the Transportation Improvement Program identifies the projects and programs to be implemented in 2013 through 2016. Visit BRPC's website at www.berkshireplanning.org for more information and to view these documents.

SUSTAINABLE BERKSHIRES HITS MAJOR MILESTONE

In December, the new regional plan will wrap up its work on historic preservation, conservation, recreation, and economic development and begin identifying priority implementation steps to start taking in 2013. Priorities will be driven by feedback received at public workshops to be held on December 11 and 12 (times and locations to be announced). Please mark this week in your calendar and prepare to attend. Visit www.sustainableberkshires.org for more information on the plan and sign up to receive e-mail alerts on this and other events.

HOUSATONIC RIVER SOCIOECONOMIC STUDY

During the past two years, BRPC has been participating in the public review process for the cleanup of the Housatonic River, specifically the area between the confluence of the East and West Branches of the river in Pittsfield and the Connecticut state border. This area is known as the Massachusetts stretch of the “Rest of River” and includes the six Berkshire municipalities of Pittsfield, Lenox, Lee, Stockbridge, Great Barrington and Sheffield. As proposed by GE, cleanup activities to remove PCBs would largely occur in the communities of Pittsfield, Lenox, Lee and Great Barrington, and could last from a few years to 50+ years in duration, depending on the level of cleanup that is finally decided upon.

The six Berkshire Rest of River communities have formed a working group of municipal officials to become more involved in the public review process and to understand the potential costs and benefits of the various cleanup scenarios that are being proposed by the GE and the regulatory agencies. At the request of the Rest of River communities, the U.S. EPA has funded the [Cleanup of the Housatonic “Rest of River” Socioeconomic Impact Study \(June 2012\)](#). The study begins to quantify the impacts that could be expected to occur during PCB cleanup activities. Despite a few shortcomings due to data gaps, the general conclusion is that the Rest of River communities will experience a series of negative economic impacts during cleanup activities, including losses of tax revenue, damages to road infrastructure and a diminished quality of life for residents near construction sites or along truck routes. Although not yet complete, the impacts that have been identified so far are quite significant, and they will need to be addressed. The *Cleanup of the Housatonic “Rest of River” Socioeconomic Impact Study, including comments about the study generated by the Rest of River communities*, is posted on [EPA’s Housatonic River website](#) under ‘General’, near the bottom of the page.

We at BRPC encourage Berkshire residents to become engaged in the public review process as it evolves over the next several months (and years) as the GE and the environmental agencies work to develop and approve a final cleanup strategy for the river. What we do today directly influences how and to what degree future generations will be able to utilize the river.

For more information, please contact Lauren Gaherty at lgaherty@berkshireplanning.org or x35, or Nat Karns at nkarns@berkshireplanning.org or x26.

SECOND ANNUAL WESTERN NEW ENGLAND GREENWAY CONFERENCE

The Upper Housatonic Valley National Heritage Area planned the second annual Western New England Greenway Conference from 9:30 am to 3:30 pm on November 10, 2012 at the Bennington Museum in Bennington, Vermont. The Western New England Greenway (WNEG) is a proposed contiguous network of bike routes connecting New York City with Montreal. The WNEG would run from the East Coast Greenway in Norwalk, CT, connecting with Quebec’s famed *Route Verte* at the Canada border. This year’s conference includes updates from Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Vermont, the impact of MAP 21 (the federal Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century funding program) on state programs for bicycles and pedestrians, the benefits of multi-state trails, and Revolutionary War history along the WNEG route. The conference concludes with a discussion on future goals for the WNEG. There is no charge to attend the conference. To register, please visit [2012 Western New England Conference](#).

FY13 FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Massachusetts Historical Commission Survey and Planning Grants: Under this funding round, local historical commissions, local historic district commissions, municipal planning offices and other public and non-profit historic preservation organizations are eligible for 50/50 match shares. Survey and Planning grants are intended to provide critical support to community projects preserving local character of place, including significant historical buildings, structures, archaeological sites and landscapes. Interested applicants are encouraged to complete a pre-application form. This, and additional information, are available on the MHC website: www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc/mhchpp/Surveyandplanning.htm.

Community Innovation Challenge Grant Program:

On October 17, BRPC hosted an informational meeting about FY13 CIC applications. Grant applications are due on November 30, 2012. More information concerning these grants can be found at www.mass.gov/anf/budget-taxes-and-procurement/working-for-you/community-innovation-challenge-grant. The state has made \$4 million available in funding for this funding round.

CREATE A DREAM

Each year, BRPC staff raises money for the Berkshire Health Systems **Create A Dream** program. This year, we are also donating to an area food pantry. If you are interested in donating to either initiative, please contact Doug at 413-442-1521 x16 or Lauren at x35. This is an excellent opportunity to make somebody’s holiday season a little brighter. Also keep your eyes out for opportunities when at BRPC for meetings or other business!

ANNUAL REPORT NOW ONLINE

Our FY 2012 annual report can now be accessed at our website, www.berkshireplanning.org. The annual report offers one-stop information on what BRPC has been up to for the past fiscal year.



THE STAFF AT BRPC WISHES
YOU AND YOURS A HEALTHY &
HAPPY HOLIDAY SEASON!

HAPPY RETIREMENT, CARRIE!

Whether a new or old staff member, one cannot but help but be impressed by Carrie LeBlanc, our kind, capable, and expert accountant. After thirty-five years with the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, Carrie is retiring at the end of December. Please join us in extending our heartfelt appreciation and best wishes to Carrie as she embarks on this next phase of her life. We will miss you, Carrie, and sincerely hope that you enjoy every moment of retirement!

PLEASE CONSIDER GOING PAPERLESS!

BRPC had hoped to have 100% digital distribution for its newsletter by December 2012—as of this issue, we’ve only gained 6 e-readers. Please consider, again, switching to a digital copy. It reduces paper use, and also reduces production costs. Save a tree, save BRPC some money, and reduce your clutter by signing up for an electronic copy of this newsletter. Please contact Judy Wagner (jwagner@berkshireplanning.org or x 10) to sign up today!

CALENDAR

All meetings held in BRPC office unless otherwise noted.

NOVEMBER

- 1: Executive Committee, 4:00 p.m.
- CPTC Workshop, 7:00 pm
- 8: MPO Meeting, 4:00 p.m.
- 15: Full Commission, 7:00 p.m.
- Consortium Meeting, 4:00 p.m.
- 20: TAC, 4:00 p.m.
- 22: THANKSGIVING, BRPC CLOSED
- 27: MPO Meeting, 4:00 p.m.
- 29: 5th Thursday Dinner @ Mazzeo's, Open Space Residential Design

DECEMBER

- 6: Executive Committee, 4:00 p.m.
- 18: TAC, 4:00 p.m.
- 25: CHRISTMAS, BRPC CLOSED

CLEARINGHOUSE REVIEWS

THERE ARE CURRENTLY NO CLEARINGHOUSE ITEMS.