

COMMON GROUND

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A NEWSLETTER FOR COMMUNITY PLANNING IN THE BERKSHIRE REGION

BERKSHIRE REGIONAL PLANNING AWARDED GRANT TO STUDY PASSENGER RAIL STATION LOCATIONS

BRPC has been awarded \$240,000 from the U.S. Department of Transportation to conduct a Passenger Rail Station Location and Design Analysis along the Housatonic Railroad line between Sheffield and Pittsfield. The Housatonic Railroad Company is working to re-introduce passenger rail service between the Berkshires and New York City. Berkshire County stops are planned for the communities of Sheffield, Great Barrington, Stockbridge, Lee, Lenox and Pittsfield. This project will provide for a comprehensive planning study focused on evaluating the most feasible locations for six passenger rail facilities, recommendations for facility upgrades at downtown Pittsfield's intermodal facility, to maximize opportunities for the directly affected communities and the entire Berkshires to benefit from station locations through increased economic, job and housing opportunities, as well as tax revenues. While BRPC will lead the study, it will involve considerable input and decision-making by the five towns and Pittsfield, as well as closely working with the Housatonic Railroad to determine operational, design and ancillary service needs at potential stations. This study is expected to begin next year and be concluded in approximately 18 months.

STAFF CONTACT: Clete Kus at ckus@berkshireplanning.org or x20

SEPTEMBER IS EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS MONTH!

A little more than a year ago, the New England region was rocked by Tropical Storm Irene—some of our regional communities are still dealing with its effects. BRPC is helping to promote September as National Preparedness Month, assisted by a Western Region Homeland Security Advisory Council grant. BRPC has worked with a variety of first responders, including representatives from the Regional Emergency Planning Committees, the American Red Cross, the Medical Reserve Corps, the Disaster Animal Recovery Team, the Community Emergency Response Team and the Faith Community Project—among others—in a variety of outreach efforts. Keep your eyes open for various municipal Preparedness Month proclamations, social media campaigns, and letters to the editor from key stakeholders encouraging (and reminding) us to be prepared. Please stop by our booth at the City of Pittsfield's Third Thursday on September 20th to say hi, ask questions and pick up useful hand outs and materials. In the meantime, additional information can be found at westernmassready.org, including a calendar of events.

STAFF CONTACT: Lindsay Errichetto at lerrichetto@berkshireplanning.org or x28

HAPPY FALL!



THANK YOU TO OUR MANY VOLUNTEERS!

BRPC is constantly asking a number of people across the region to serve on committees and working groups. While some do so as part of their "day jobs", the large majority make this commitment purely as volunteers interested in improving the Berkshires. We cannot thank you enough for your dedication of time, knowledge and perspective.

REGIONAL WIND SYMPOSIUM

The Western Massachusetts Wind Energy Landscape Symposium was held at MCLA on July 26th. The goal of this symposium was to better understand public attitudes towards various forms of wind energy development in their communities and to help them develop a set of regional best practices about local wind energy siting. This event was one of four held as part of a national study lead by Dr. Roopali Phadke of Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota, and funded by the National Science Foundation. BRPC co-sponsored the event, recognizing an opportunity to have a community conversation about wind project siting. Twenty-four residents out of a pool of more than seventy applicants were selected to participate in the day-long event. Participants were chosen to serve as a representative sample of the Berkshire – Franklin County region, based on a variety of demographic information including age, income, and education levels. Dr. Phadke and her team will provide BRPC with a copy of the report and findings from the day's event. We will post the report on our website and will announce the posting in our next newsletter.

STAFF CONTACT: Lauren Gaherty, lgaherty@berkshireplanning.org or x35

BERKSHIRE COUNTY HAZARD MITIGATION PLAN

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has approved the 2012 update to the Berkshire County Hazard Mitigation Plan pending adoption by the nineteen participating communities. BRPC is actively working with these communities to adopt the plan. Adopting the plan enables communities to apply for Hazard Mitigation grants directed toward reducing vulnerability to natural hazards, such as flooding, snow, ice, fire or landslides. Potential mitigation activities that communities will be able to apply for include culvert replacement, bank stabilization and many others. Communities included in this plan are Adams, Becket, Dalton, Egremont, Great Barrington, Hancock, Lee, Lenox, Monterey, New Marlborough, Otis, Pittsfield, Richmond, Sandisfield, Sheffield, Stockbridge, Tyringham, Washington and Williamstown. BRPC is aiming to have all nineteen community adoptions by the end of October 2012. In addition to the above work, BRPC is working with six additional communities to create an addendum to the plan, making them eligible for future funding. These six communities include Clarksburg, Cheshire, Hinsdale, Mount Washington, New Ashford and West Stockbridge. BRPC is aiming to have this addendum written and submitted to MEMA and FEMA for their review by the end of 2012.

STAFF CONTACT: Mark Maloy, mmaloy@berkshireplanning.org or x29

FY 2013 FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

MassWorks: Applications to MassWorks for public infrastructure projects are due no later than September 10th. MassWorks programs most typically used by Berkshire communities are STRAP (Small Town Roads Assistance Program) and several housing and economic development programs, including Public Works Economic Development (PWED). Projects typically need to be construction ready in the spring, so spring of 2013. Go to <http://mass.gov/hed/massworks> for application information. For the first time, BRPC staff has a role in reviewing applications from the region. It would be very helpful when reviewing if interested communities give us as much information as they can about their projects before applying.

STAFF CONTACT: Tom Matuszko at tmatuszko@berkshireplanning.org (x34) or Nat Karns at nkarns@berkshireplanning.org (x26).

2013 Community Innovation Challenge Grant Program

The Community Innovation Challenge Grant program, first initiated in 2012, is also level-funded in the final state budget. This program has provided funding for the On-line Building Permit Software program and the Berkshire Public Health Alliance Public Health Nursing program. We expect that the State will release information on this year's program in the near future.

2013 District Local Technical Assistance Program: We are pleased to report that the final 2013 state budget includes level-funding for the District Local Technical Assistance Program, an invaluable support tool for a large number of local projects and regional initiatives over the past five years. We thank the local officials who contacted their legislators and the Governor in support of DLTA and we especially want to thank the entire Berkshire County legislative delegation who has supported DLTA every year in the budget process. It will take a couple of months before this year's program is under contract but we will begin the process of soliciting projects from our municipalities as soon as we have state guidance regarding priorities.

ANNUAL DINNER MEETING, OCTOBER 18TH

BRPC's 2012 Annual Dinner will be on Thursday, October 18th at the Pittsfield Country Club. Our special guest that evening will be retiring Congressman John Olver. He will provide his observations after more than 20 years in Washington. This year's Charles Kusik award will also be presented. Invitations should be going out in the next couple of weeks but go ahead and put it on your calendar.

SUSTAINABLE BERKSHIRES UPDATE

We are halfway through the regional sustainability plan for the Berkshires! Please visit www.sustainableberksires.org to view the following products and announcements:

Vision Graphic: Two local artists have developed a vision graphic based on the input they heard at the three visioning workshops in July 2011. Meet the artists and see their graphic portrayal on our website.

Historic Preservation Element: The draft regional historic preservation plan (first of its kind for our region!) is available for public review on the website. This element will inform a more robust historic preservation practice in the region, forming and strengthening links between our historic resources and neighborhoods, vibrant Main Streets, energy efficiency, land conservation, and tourism. Also available:

Conservation and Recreation Element: This component delves into the region's rich mix of biodiversity and range of habitat, identifying conservation priorities to help address threats such as invasive species, climate change, and habitat fragmentation and highlights the many outdoor recreation options of the region to propose a regional strategy for promoting connection to and awareness of these nearby opportunities.

Economy Element: Four forums were held with small business owners this spring. Two public workshops (see posting below) this fall will delve into workforce development, quality of life, local and regional economic development-friendly practices and programs, business financing needs, and much more. Please plan to attend one of these **two** interactive workshops – we'll see you there!

STAFF CONTACT: Amy Kacala at akacala@berkshireplanning.org or x12

A Strong Berkshire Economy

JOIN A COMMUNITY CONVERSATION TO HELP IDENTIFY FUTURE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES IN THE BERKSHIRES

Quality of Life
Innovation
Workforce Development
Leadership
Brain Drain
Infrastructure
Broadband
Living Wage
Retaining Young People
Talent

TWO OPPORTUNITIES TO PARTICIPATE:

September 18, 6:30—8:30 pm
Lanesborough Town Hall
or
September 19, 6:30—8:30 pm
Stockbridge Town Hall (Gym)

Energy Costs
Permitting
Marketing Strategy
Health Care
Emerging Markets
Welcoming Community
Multicultural
Clusters
Metro-area Connections
Diversified Economy



SUSTAINABLE
BERKSHIRES

This is YOUR community—get involved today!



NORTH ADAMS SKATEBOARD/BMX PARK FEASIBILITY STUDY

The City of North Adams has engaged BRPC staff planners to conduct a feasibility study for a skateboard/BMX park in the City. Interest in this project was initially sparked by the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition's Youth Leadership Program, which took it on as a service project in the 2009-2010 school year. The project scope will include convening a task force, conducting general research about skate parks (design, site considerations, financial impacts, etc.), compiling potential sites, developing an assessment tool, and conducting the site assessments. The task force will serve in an advisory role for the study. Community members have noted two important design aspects: a true park-like setting to attract non-skaters and riders and families, and an actively used, accessible park location.

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

2012 PAVEMENT INVENTORY

BRPC started our annual road condition assessment in August. Doug Plachcinski, Senior Transportation Planner, and Eric Magazu, Transportation Planning Intern, hit the highways and rated hundreds of miles of the Berkshires' federal-aid eligible roads. They ranked the roads according to the PASER rating system, a 1-10 scale (failed to excellent), that considers the kinds of repairs each road needs. BRPC compares the data to past years' and estimates the region's funding required to keep our roads serviceable. BRPC is using a new computer program, RoadSoft, that analyzes data and predicts which roads are the most cost effective to fix. BRPC can help local communities assess their roads and plan for maintenance costs.

STAFF CONTACT: Doug Plachcinski at dplachcinski@berkshireplanning.org or x16

STAFF UPDATES

BRPC extends a warm welcome to newest Planner and Berkshire native Gwen Miller, who comes to us from the graduate program in Regional Planning at UMass Amherst, where she earned special recognition for her environmental and landscape planning research. In July, BRPC said farewell to Sara Lafayette as she moved on to a new endeavor in Albany. Congratulations are in order for Planner Mark Maloy and his wife, who celebrated their marriage this summer. Last, but not least, BRPC would like to recognize its hard working interns: Sarah Hoecker, Eric Magazu and Emily Johnson.

PLANNING AND ZONING BOARD TRAINING WELL ATTENDED

On August 9, 2012, BRPC held its annual training welcoming recently elected members of local planning boards and zoning boards of appeal. The seventeen attendees listened to Attorney Paul Bobrowski discuss both the substantive and procedural issues of the land use decision making process in Massachusetts. Please note that BRPC will be holding two additional land use trainings this fall at a date and time to be determined – so stay tuned.

STAFF CONTACT: Brian Domina at bdomina@berkshireplanning.org, or x14

2012 STATE REGIONALIZATION CONFERENCE

The annual Regionalization Conference is scheduled for Monday, September 10th at Holy Cross College in Worcester. Conference information has been distributed by the Department of Revenue to local officials or may be found on the Division of Local Services website. The registration deadline is August 31st.

WE *STILL* NEED YOUR HELP!

BRPC is trying to reduce paper use and reduce production costs. The simplest way to do so is to send out digital copies of this newsletter. In July/August, about 40% of our readers received a digital version. If you are receiving a paper copy, and would like to or are willing to receive it via e-mail, please contact Judy Wagner at jwagner@berkshireplanning.org with your e-mail address. Help us achieve our goal of 100% digital distribution by December 2012.

CALENDAR

All meetings held in BRPC office unless otherwise noted.

SEPTEMBER

- 3 **BRPC Offices Closed (Labor Day)**
- 6 **Executive Committee Meeting**, 4:00 p.m.
- 12 **MPO Meeting**, 4:00 p.m.
- 13 **Sustainable Berkshires Consortium Meeting**, 4:00 p.m.
- 20 **Full Commission Meeting**, 7:00 p.m.

OCTOBER

- 6 **Executive Committee Meeting**, 4:00 p.m.
- 16 **TAC Meeting**, 4:00 p.m.
- 18 **Sustainable Berkshires Consortium Meeting**, 4:00 p.m.
Annual Dinner Meeting
- 23 **MPO Meeting**, 4:00 p.m.

CLEARINGHOUSE REVIEWS

LEE LANDFILL PHOTOVOLTAIC ARRAY

Comments were due August 14, 2012, and BRPC did not submit formal comments to MEPA on this project.