

COMMON GROUND

A NEWSLETTER FOR COMMUNITY PLANNING IN THE BERKSHIRE REGION

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Image (above): Senator Benjamin Downing receives the Charles Kusik Award from Commission President Kyle Hanlon

BRPC's Mission and Vision—2016

At its November 17th meeting, the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission approved a new Mission Statement and Vision Statement for BRPC, replacing the 1993 Mission and Goals which have served us well over those 23 years.

BRPC's Mission is: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission provides leadership and assistance to the County's municipalities, organizations and citizens in achieving County-wide inter-relationships, prosperity, opportunities, quality of life, strength and vibrancy.

Our Vision is: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, as an indispensable source of support and leadership to municipalities, organizations and citizens, effects positive change through its collaborative efforts to achieve Sustainable Berkshire principles and a high quality of life for County residents, including greater economic growth, sustainable resource management, environmental, social and economic equity, and effective governmental and educational services. BRPC is recognized as the primary:

Source of trusted, reliable Berkshire County data and analysis.

Provider of technical assistance to Berkshire County municipalities and organizations.

Convener of interests seeking to seize opportunities for and confront challenges to the Berkshires.

Advocate on behalf of the collective interests of Berkshire County.

For more information contact Executive Director Nat Karns (NKarns@berkshireplanning.org, or x 26).

Economic Development Planning

Beginning in October 2016, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) created an economic development planner position to provide direct technical assistance to participating communities within Berkshire County. This effort was led by the Town of Lanesborough, and to date Lanesborough, Clarksburg, Great Barrington, and Hinsdale are participating. These towns are contracting for technical assistance at an approved hourly rate. The position also performs regional economic development planning tasks funded by state and federal grants.

In Lanesborough, we are reviewing the town's web site and business directory, facilitating an Economic Development Plan, and researching redevelopment options for the Berkshire Mall.

In Great Barrington, we are assisting the town on the development of a Request for Proposals for the redevelopment of the Housatonic School site, and related marketing activities.

In Clarksburg, we are researching options for the local water district, including acquisition of land to better protect the water source and development of a plan to upgrade and replace infrastructure. Infrastructure work will include finding experts to provide design and construction cost estimates and securing necessary funds in the form of grants and loans to make the project a reality.

In Hinsdale, we will be preparing the Economic Development section for the Hinsdale Vision Plan.

For more information, please contact William D. Compton, AICP at 413-442-1521, ext. 14, or wcompton@berkshireplanning.org

Ageism

What is ageism? It is discrimination on the basis of age, and it is one of the last “accepted” types of discrimination. Older adults face ageism in employment, popular culture, from medical providers and possibly worst of all, in their own minds. Your own perception of age doesn’t just harm your self-esteem – it may actually shorten your life. Yale researcher Becca Levy and her colleagues found that older individuals with a positive self-perception of aging lived 7.5 years longer than those who are less positive, while Patricia Boyle of Rush University Medical Center found that participants with a high level of purpose were 2.4 times more likely to remain free of Alzheimer’s disease.

Age discrimination is particularly rampant in employment. Older adults – sometimes starting as early as in their 40’s – are increasingly passed over for promotion and have difficulty finding new employment. Age discrimination in employment is illegal, but two-thirds of older job seekers report encountering it. Meanwhile, not one negative stereotype about older workers holds up under scrutiny. Abundant data show that they’re reliable, handle stress well, master new skills and are the most engaged of all workers when offered the chance to grow and advance on the job. Older people might take longer to accomplish a given task, but they make fewer mistakes. They take longer to recover from injury but hurt themselves less often. Motivation and effort affect output far more than age does.

Ageism doesn’t just affect older adults either. Age prejudice — assuming that someone is too old or too young to handle a task or take on a responsibility — cramps prospects for everyone, old or young. Millennials, who are criticized for having “no work ethic” and “needing to have their hands held,” have trouble getting a foothold in the job market. Instead, the best workplaces have a mix of ages: A 2012 Pew Charitable Trusts study of employment rates over the last 40 years found that as more older workers stayed on the job, the employment rate and number of hours worked also improved for younger people. Perhaps age belongs alongside race, gender, ability and sexual orientation as a criterion for diversity — not only because it’s the ethical path but also because age discrimination hurts productivity and profits.

Ashton Applewhite, the Next Avenue 2016 Influencer in Aging of the Year and author of “This Chair Rocks: A Manifesto Against Ageism,” wants to “catalyze a social movement to raise awareness of ageism that would transform the experience of aging in America and make discrimination on the basis of age as unacceptable as racism and sexism. We would no longer see aging as a problem to be ‘fixed’ or a disease to be ‘cured,’ but for what it is: a powerful, natural, lifelong process that connects us all.” She advocates for a mass movement making people aware that their own experiences being perceived of as incompetent or being passed over for promotion are actually widely shared political problems that require collective action. In Applewhite’s opinion, “The critical starting point is to acknowledge our own prejudice: internalized bias like “I’m too old for that job,” and that directed at others, like “It’s going to take me forever to bring that old guy up to speed.” Confronting ageism means making friends of all ages. It means pointing out bias when you encounter it (when everyone at a meeting is the same age, for example).

Confronting ageism means joining forces. It means seeing older people not as alien and “other,” but as us — future us, that is.”

For more information, contact Public Health Program Manager Laura Kittross (LKittross@berkshireplanning.org, or x32).

Rural Policy Advisory Committee

In 2015, the General Court passed legislation creating a 15-member Rural Policy Advisory Commission (RPAC). The Commission is charged with making recommendations to enhance the economic vitality of the Commonwealth’s 167 rural towns (defined as any town with a population density of less than 500 people per square mile) and to advance the health and well-being of the State’s rural residents. Each regional planning agency with rural communities could appoint a representative; BRPC’s Executive Director, Nat Karns, serves as the BRPC representative on the RPAC. The rural towns vary greatly between those dealing with suburban growth in the extended Boston region, to heavily tourist impacted towns on the Cape and in the Berkshires, to weak-market towns suffering losses of employment, population, income and education.

The RPAC has met twice, in June and September 2016, with its next meeting scheduled for Friday, January 6th at Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission in the Union Station in Worcester. It has created four subcommittees:

- Workforce and Demographics
- Economic Development
- Housing
- Infrastructure

These have all been meeting in between the full RPAC meetings to collect information and begin to set directions and determine actionable items to be addressed.

For more information contact Executive Director Nat Karns (NKarns@berkshireplanning.org, or x 26).

Complete Streets Construction Funding Awarded to Egremont, Dalton, and Hinsdale

In late 2016, the Towns of Egremont, Dalton and Hinsdale were notified that they were awarded construction funding for several Complete Streets projects in their communities. Both Hinsdale and Dalton received \$400,000 in construction funding - the maximum amount available through MassDOT's Complete Streets funding incentive program. Egremont applied for and received nearly \$60,000 in construction funds. These generous construction awards arrived after several months of technical assistance preparation with BRPC, which ensured their eligibility for potential funding.

Hinsdale received funding for several sidewalk projects along Goodrich St., Church St., Commonwealth Ave., and Longview Ave. Construction will replace most existing sidewalk as well as add or extend it in several locations to create an interconnected sidewalk network for a neighborhood west of Route 8 and the village center. The town will also use funding to install two radar speed feedback or "your speed" signs along Longview Ave. to discourage speeding and slow vehicle traffic along this roadway.

Likewise, Dalton will use its funding to replace and extend the sidewalk along the entire length of High St. as much of the existing sidewalk is in poor condition. New sidewalk will also be installed along Field St. Extension. These new and repaired sidewalks will provide improved pedestrian access for residential areas as well as the Dalton Senior Center and senior housing in the area.

Finally, Egremont received construction funding to install several radar speed feedback signs and install bike racks at locations throughout the community. Speed feedback signs will help to slow traffic entering the town's two village centers. Bike racks installed at municipal facilities, parks, and other open space areas will help to encourage use by cyclists.

Congratulations to each community on their funding awards and their efforts to address Complete Streets in the Berkshires.

For more information, contact Senior Planner Eammon Coughlin (ecoughlin@berkshireplanning.org or x19) or Senior Transportation Planner Emily Lindsey (elindsey@berkshireplanning.org or x12).

For more information on the MassDOT Complete Streets funding program, please visit <https://masscompletestreets.com/>.

Recreational Marijuana

On November 8th, Massachusetts voters approved Question 4 which legalizes possession, use, distribution and cultivation of marijuana for recreational use. There are various issues local governments will confront with Question 4's passage and significant unanswered questions about exactly what should and can be done, and when, at the local level. On November 30th, the Massachusetts Municipal Association sent a letter to Governor Baker, House Speaker DeLeo, and Senate President Rosenberg asking for various changes through legislation to help make the new law more workable for the cities and towns.

BRPC is planning a workshop on Thursday, January 26th, for municipal officials (mayors, city councilors, select board members, administrators/managers, and planning and health board members) who have key roles in various aspects of the law. Details will follow as soon as possible. Topics we expect to cover include moratoria, the process to prohibit, the parameters for using zoning bylaws and health regulations in a manner that conforms with the law, taxation authority, and other issues or questions which arise in the coming month.

For more information contact Executive Director Nat Karns (NKarns@berkshireplanning.org, or x 26).

Economic Development District Designation

The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) is seeking Economic Development District (EDD) designation from the Economic Development Administration (EDA). An EDD is a county, or ideally a region, designated by EDA to receive economic and workforce development related technical assistance and grant funding. The Berkshire Regional EDD would support economic and workforce development through grants, technical assistance and partnerships with the EDA and other public and private entities. With this designation, EDA will provide annual economic development funds to BRPC and additional areas in Berkshire County will be eligible for EDA grant funds.

At this point in time, BRPC has submitted an initial draft of the EDD application packet to EDA for review and feedback. We anticipate that we will finalize these efforts in the first quarter of 2017. We will be seeking letters from the communities in Berkshire County to support this effort; and we must receive approval from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Additionally, we must have an EDA approved Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) in place at the time of EDD approval. BRPC has also submitted a draft of its new CEDS to EDA. Like the EDD application, we hope to have final approval of the CEDS by EDA in the first quarter of 2017.

For more information, please contact William D. Compton, AICP at 413-442-1521, ext. 14, or wcompton@berkshireplanning.org.



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FFY 2018-2022 TIP Schedule

- January 3**—TIP project solicitation letter and data forms to Cities, Towns, MassDOT and BRTA via e-mail (forms due February 3)
- February 21**—TAC discussion on project evaluation scores
- February 28**—MPO discussion on project evaluation scores
- March 21**—TAC preliminary draft TIP listing
- March 28**—MPO preliminary TIP listing
- April 18**—TAC endorsement/recommendation
- April 25**—MPO release draft for public comments
- May 16**—TAC endorsement/recommendation
- May 23**—MPO approval

Housing Development Training

With grant funding provided by the Berkshire Taconic Foundation, the BRPC Community Development Program is getting set to partner with the Towns of Lenox and Great Barrington, the CDC of Southern Berkshire, Construct, and Age Friendly Berkshires in order to bring a day-long housing development training event to the county in late May or June 2017. Conceived as an opportunity to help build local capacity and readiness for housing, the event will provide local officials and housing advocates an opportunity to network with and learn from housing advocates, professional consultants and representatives from funding agencies. Learning sessions will focus on such topics as building community support, inclusive zoning, site selection, procurement and construction management, and financial and long term management strategies. Additional Information will be provided as plans are finalized.

For more information, contact Community Development Program Manager Patricia Mullins (PMullins@berkshireplanning.org, or x17).

CALENDAR

Be sure to check out our online calendar for updates, cancellations, recently posted events and agendas. berkshireplanning.org/events/calendar

- January 12 - BRPC Executive Committee Meeting - 4:00pm**
- January 12 - BRPC Finance Committee Meeting - 5:00pm**
- January 17 - Berkshire TAC Meeting - 4:00pm**

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- January 19 - BRPC Commission Development Committee Meeting - 5:45pm**
- January 19 - BRPC Commission Meeting - 7:00pm**
- January 124- HIV/AIDS 101 Training—8:30am**
- January 31 - Berkshire MPO Meeting - 4:00pm**
- February 2- BRPC Executive Committee Meeting - 4:00pm**

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- February 21 - Berkshire TAC Meeting - 4:00pm**
- February 28 - Berkshire MPO Meeting - 4:00pm**

Remember to check our inclement weather hotline to learn the status of a meeting at (413) 442-1521 X 15



Please consider receiving an e-newsletter—saving trees and energy costs in our region and beyond. E-mail SZaleski@berkshireplanning.org today to subscribe!