

# COMMON GROUND

A NEWSLETTER FOR COMMUNITY PLANNING IN THE BERKSHIRE REGION

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## BRPC Celebrates 50th Anniversary at May Commission Meeting

At the Commission meeting on Thursday, May 19th, commissioners and staff celebrated BRPC's 50th anniversary.

To read the article in the Berkshire Eagle, please visit: [http://www.berkshireeagle.com/local/ci\\_29922493/berkshire-regional-planning-commission-marks-50th-approves-new](http://www.berkshireeagle.com/local/ci_29922493/berkshire-regional-planning-commission-marks-50th-approves-new).

For more information, contact Executive Director Nat Karns (NKarns@berkshireplanning.org or x26).

*Image (right): BRPC Commission Chairwoman Sheila Irvin and Executive Director Nat Karns with the 50th anniversary cake*



## Land Use Reform Law Passes the Senate

On the evening of June 9<sup>th</sup>, the Massachusetts Senate approved, by a vote of 23-15, the first substantial overhaul of Massachusetts land use laws in over forty years in the form of Senate Bill 2311. The bill must still be considered by the House of Representatives, so final approval is uncertain with only a few weeks left in the formal legislative session. BRPC commented extensively on the Senate bill and has considerable concerns which we hope can be dealt with before the House takes up this important and needed legislation. An updated version of the bill to include the various amendments made to the bill during final Senate action has not yet appeared on the General Court's website as of the printing of this newsletter.

For more information, contact Executive Director Nat Karns (NKarns@berkshireplanning.org or x26).

## Sandisfield Adopts Master Plan

In May 2016, the Sandisfield Planning Board adopted a comprehensive Master Plan. BRPC staff assisted a Master Plan Steering Committee who prepared the plan for the consideration of the Planning Board. BRPC staff wants to recognize the efforts of the Committee members who spent many evenings over the last year in thoughtful discussion about the plan. BRPC staff looks forward to assisting the town in Plan implementation.

For more information, contact Planner Eammon Coughlin (ECoughlin@berkshireplanning.org, or x 19) or Assistant Director Tom Matuszko (TMatuszko@berkshireplanning.org, or x 34).

## Berkshire County Burn Permits

During the 2016 Fire Season (January 15 – May 1), 8,529 burn permits were issued in the communities of Becket, Cheshire, Dalton, Great Barrington, Hancock, Lanesborough, Lee, Lenox, Monterey, Peru, Pittsfield, Richmond, Sheffield, Stockbridge and Windsor. Just over 82% (7,013) of these permits were issued using the online permit program found at [bcburnpermits.com](http://bcburnpermits.com). All of these permits were previously handled manually through the local fire station or dispatch center. For a low annual cost, these communities are now better able to track permits issued, issue citations as needed, and devote more of their time and resources to other issues they face.

For more information, contact Assistant Director Tom Matuszko (TMatuszko@berkshireplanning.org, or x 34).

## Tennessee Gas Withdraws Application for Proposed NED

On May 23, 2016, Tennessee Gas Pipeline Company formally withdrew its application filed with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) for the Northeast Energy Direct Project, citing inadequate commitments from prospective customers. This withdrawal effectively ends the application process as it has been presented to date. Tennessee Gas can file this or a modified version of this project in the future, but if they did so they would have to start the FERC process anew.

For more information contact Executive Director Nat Karns (NKarns@berkshireplanning.org, or x 26) or Assistant Director Tom Matuszko (TMatuszko@berkshireplanning.org, or x 34).

## Health Impact Assessment for Egremont *Complete Streets* Project

BRPC conducted a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) as part of its work to develop a Complete Streets Prioritization Plan for the Town of Egremont. A Health Impact Assessment is a process that evaluates the potential effects of a plan, project, or policy on human health before it is implemented. The HIA process engages stakeholders to systematically examine existing data and develop a set of recommendations that will increase positive health outcomes. To help complete the HIA, BRPC received generous assistance and funding from the Metropolitan Area Planning Commission (MAPC), BRPC's equivalent organization in the Boston area, and the Mass. Department of Public Health (MDPH). Traditionally, HIAs can take many months to complete and address a range of possible health determinants.

For its HIA work in Egremont, BRPC helped to test a new rapid HIA model, or HIA Sprint, which completed major work through a short scoping session meeting and day long workshop. The scoping meeting engaged stakeholders to identify the three health determinants they felt were most relevant to the town's Complete Streets planning work. Participants chose access to green space, safety from traffic, and social cohesion. The workshop looked at existing data and research related to how these determinants impact health and then generated a set of recommendations to the town's Complete Streets Committee. Through the HIA's objective and data driven process, stakeholders helped to inform the town's Complete Streets planning work by identifying performance measures, creating insightful recommendations, and making health a part of the town's transportation planning efforts. Thanks to the Town of Egremont, all HIA participants, MAPC, and MDPH for assistance with this project!

For more information on HIAs please visit: <http://www.mapc.org/hia>

For more information on Complete Streets, contact Planner Eammon Coughlin (ECoughlin@berkshireplanning.org, or x19).

## Berkshires Awarded \$900,000 in EPA Brownfields Grants

Three separate grants have been awarded to recipients within Berkshire County to conduct community-wide environmental assessments and to clean up a North County Brownfield site. The three Berkshire County grants are among ten grants recently awarded by the EPA across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts through the Brownfields Assessment, Revolving Loan Fund, and Cleanup grant program. BRPC is partnering with the grant recipients to implement these projects.

The Town of Lee has received a \$300,000 grant award to target the former Schweitzer-Mauduit mills that closed in 2008 for assessment and site reuse and cleanup planning. The Eagle Mill previously received a \$115,000 federal grant through the EPA's Targeted Brownfields Assessment Program. These new funds will continue where that work left off and determine the full extent of asbestos abatement and whether any additional cleanup is needed. Redevelopment plans are already in place for the Eagle Mill and include a boutique hotel, housing, commercial space, and a restaurant. These funds will also be directed toward the Columbia, Greylock, and Niagara Mills, which have not previously been assessed.

The Town of Adams has received a \$400,000 grant award for the assessment of properties along the Route 8 corridor. Funding will be targeted toward downtown properties that may include Curtis Fine Paper plant, the former Hoosac Coal & Grain property, former Adams Memorial Middle School, 7 Hoosac St., and 50 Commercial St. It is anticipated that these environmental assessments will help fight against blight and make properties more development-ready.

Greylock Flume Inc. has received a \$200,000 grant award to remediate contamination at the Greylock Mill in North Adams. The funding will help to continue progress toward the redevelopment of the 230,000-square-foot mill complex, formerly known as the Cariddi Mill. The tailrace, which at one time provided power to the historic mill, is contaminated with a sludge that is made up of petroleum products comingled with semi-volatile organic carbons (SVOCs), metals, and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). Grant funds will be utilized toward remediating the contamination within the tailrace.

For more information, contact Senior Planner Melissa Provencher (MProvencher@berkshireplanning.org or x 22).



## Highlighting the Accomplishments of BRPC's First Fifty Years

On May 9th, the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission celebrated its 50th year providing technical assistance and planning services to the 32 municipalities of the Berkshire region. To celebrate BRPC's 50th year, each issue of Common Ground in 2016 will reflect on the history of the Commission and highlight its accomplishments since its creation. Our last issue focused on highlights from the founding of BRPC and its early work. This issue will provide a look at some of BRPC's major accomplishments (and a few failures).

In reviewing our files, checking in with one remaining founding Commission delegate, retired long-time Transportation Program Manager Charlie Cook, and racking our own brains, the following top five accomplishments rise to the top:

1. Forming the Commission in the first place and getting every city and town to join!
2. Getting zoning adopted in every city and town in Berkshire County, in large part thanks to the missionary work of Charlie Kusik.
3. Creating a Regional Data Bank, which has evolved into both our GIS system and Berkshire Benchmarks, to provide accurate information on the county and its communities, and to be used in making properly informed decisions on a wide variety of issues.
4. Acting as an instrument to study, and then act on, a wide variety of regional issues collectively. The following regional issues were examined by BRPC, and as a result new entities were formed to spearhead the respective initiatives:
  - Public transportation – Berkshire Regional Transit Authority
  - Housing – Berkshire Housing Development Corporation
  - Broadband – Berkshire Connect/Western Mass Connect/Wired West
  - Housatonic River clean-up – Rest of River Municipal Committee
5. Increasing role as a cooperative service delivery mechanism for Berkshire municipalities
  - Berkshire Brownfields Program –one of the most successful in New England
  - Regional approaches to utilizing technology to provide better customer experiences, such as online burn permits, building permits and inspections, and increasingly a wide range of local permits and inspections
  - Berkshire Public Health Alliance – public health nursing, immunization clinics, inspections, disaster preparedness, etc.

On the flip side, the three most notable failures over the fifty years are:

1. Thirty five years spent on the Pittsfield bypass planning and debate (1966-2001). The Berkshires remains the only county in Massachusetts, outside the Cape and Islands, served by only one limited access highway (some would say that is good; others, bad).
2. The inability of the region to develop a reasonably growing, sustainable economy that provides adequate jobs which support families to replace the former reliance on large manufacturing firms.
3. The continued decline of our core cities and towns, and the rural sprawl across most of our rural towns, which impacts the landscape and our environment.

## Announcing the Designation of U.S. Bicycle Route 7

We are excited to announce the designation of U.S. Bicycle Route (USBR) 7 in Massachusetts by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO). The USBR 7 connects Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Vermont and runs over 380-miles using both on and off-road infrastructure. In March, before the application was filed by MassDOT and approved by AASHTO, BRPC endorsed the designation along with many Berkshire communities, without whose support the designation may not have been possible.

The designation of the Berkshire section of the Western New England Greenway as USBR 7 highlights the importance of bicycle travel and active tourism in our region. The interstate bicycle network, comprehensively mapped by the Adventure Cycling Association, already covers over 11,000 miles. The Massachusetts section of USBR 7 begins at the border in Sheffield and continues through Great Barrington, Stockbridge, Lenox, Pittsfield, Lanesborough (via the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail), Cheshire (via the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail), Adams (via the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail), North Adams, and Williamstown where it connects to the Vermont section at the border.

To learn more about the Western New England Greenway and US Bicycle Route System, please visit: [www.wnegenway.org/](http://www.wnegenway.org/) and [www.adventurecycling.org/routes-and-maps/us-bicycle-route-system/](http://www.adventurecycling.org/routes-and-maps/us-bicycle-route-system/)

For more information, contact Senior Transportation Planner Emily Lindsey (ELindsey@berkshireplanning.org or x12).



Image (above): The official logo of the United States Bicycle Route System



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# COMMON GROUND

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## BRPC Office Changes

Don't be surprised when you come into the BRPC offices and find the location of the office door has changed. We are doing some internal construction to add more office space.

This additional space is needed to accommodate the public health staff. Starting July 1st, the public health staff will no longer be located on the 3rd floor.

For more information, contact Marianne Sniezek (MSniezek@berkshireplanning.org, or x 13.)

## Several Towns Approve Zoning Changes

Several towns approved zoning changes this spring. Great Barrington approved a new Mixed Use Transitional zone to replace a highway commercial zone, which embraces and encourages the current context and has numerous benefits for the community. Lenox adopted a new and improved, recodified Zoning Bylaw with a number of new provisions, such as a new category of custom manufacturing and non-profit education to encourage the adaptive reuse of old buildings throughout Town. Hinsdale and Windsor both passed bylaws to govern solar photovoltaic installations.

## Farewell to Brian Domina

Senior Land Use Planner Brian Domina resigned from BRPC at the end of June to become the Town Administrator for the Town of Whately, MA. Brian has been our resident land use and bylaw expert, in addition to his many other duties. We thank you for your years of service and wish you the best of luck in your new position, Brian!

## CALENDAR

Be sure to check out our online calendar for recently posted events and agendas.

[berkshireplanning.org/events/calendar](http://berkshireplanning.org/events/calendar)

**July 1** - BRPC Environmental Review Committee Meeting for the Tel-Electric Dam Removal - 3:00pm

**July 6** - Berkshire Bike Path Council Meeting - 6:00pm

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**July 7** - There will be no BRPC Executive Committee Meeting

**July 14** - BRPC Commission Meeting - 5:30 - 7:30pm

**July 19** - Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) - 4:00pm

**July 20** - BRPC Regional Issues Committee July - 4:00pm

**July 21** - New Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals Members Training - 6:00-8:00pm

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**August 2** - Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) - 4:00pm

**August 4** - BRPC Executive Committee Meeting - 4:00-5:00pm

**August 16** - Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) - 4:00pm

**August 29** - New Health Board Member Training - 5:50 - 8:30

**August 30** - Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) - 4:00pm

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