

COMMON GROUND

A NEWSLETTER FOR COMMUNITY PLANNING IN THE BERKSHIRE REGION

IN THIS ISSUE

PAGE 1

- *Egremont, Dalton, and Hinsdale Finalize Complete Streets Prioritization Plans*

PAGE 2

- *Community Justice Workshop Brings Berkshire County Partners Together*
- *Municipal Small Bridge Funding Program*

PAGE 3

- *BRPC's 50th Anniversary – Tribute to Staff and Looking Forward*
- *Age Friendly Berkshires Action Plan*

PAGE 4

- *Green Community Funding*
- *Welcome to Our New Senior Planner, Bill Compton*
- *Water Quality Assessment Award*
- *Calendar*

Egremont, Dalton, and Hinsdale Finalize Complete Streets Prioritization Plans

This summer BRPC worked with the towns of Egremont, Dalton, and Hinsdale to draft Tier 2 Complete Streets Project Prioritization Plans that will allow them to compete for up to \$400,000 in annual construction funding from MassDOT beginning in FY2017.

These plans were the culmination of several months of effort in which communities were required to attend a training, adopt a municipal Complete Streets policy, and create a plan and prioritize projects for potential funding through the new MassDOT complete streets incentive program. Up to \$50,000 in technical assistance funding was available to help prepare their Prioritization Plans. Plans generated a list of potential projects in each community designed to address walking and biking, public transportation, and/or general roadway safety.

These three communities, in addition to Northampton, were the only municipalities east of I-495 to finalize plans in preparation for the FY 2017 funding round. Dalton and Hinsdale both applied for \$400,000 in funding for several potential sidewalk construction and traffic calming projects. Egremont applied for around \$60,000 for the installation of bicycle parking and traffic calming speed feedback signs at various locations in the community. The towns are still waiting to hear back from MassDOT on funding approvals.

Congratulations to each community for developing these plans and their efforts to address Complete Streets in the Berkshires. This fall, BRPC will assist North Adams, Lenox, Clarksburg, and Sandisfield to prepare similar plans in preparation for the next round of funding opening in the late spring of 2017.

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/>.



View from BRPC's conference room on October 27th!

The Sheffield—Great Barrington Housing Rehabilitation Program

IS NOW ACCEPTING

HOMEOWNER APPLICATIONS

The 2016 Sheffield-Great Barrington Community Development Block Grant Housing Rehabilitation Program provides 0% interest, deferred payment loans to low and moderate income homeowners needing housing rehabilitation related to code violations and other types of home repair.

You may qualify for CDBG assistance for:

- Code Violation Repairs
- Heating, Electrical or Plumbing Repairs
- Water, Sewer, Septic Repairs / Replacement
- Lead Paint Remediation
- Insulation
- Accessibility Improvements
- Roof Replacement or Repairs
- Windows Replacement or Repairs
- Other Repairs as Necessary



Program Income Limits FY 2016	
Household Size	Household Income Less Than:
1	\$46,000
2	\$52,600
3	\$59,150
4	\$65,700
5	\$71,000
6	\$76,250
7	\$81,500
8	\$86,750

Funding for this program is provided by a Massachusetts Community Development Block Grant, administered by the MA Department of Housing and Community Development, the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, and the Towns of Sheffield and Great Barrington.

For more information on the program, please contact:

- Patricia Mullins, Housing Rehab Program Manager
Phone: 413-442-1521 ext. 17
Email: pmullins@berkshireplanning.org

Community Justice Workshop Brings Berkshire County Partners Together

Mental health, substance use disorder and criminal justice systems often collide, creating significant barriers to treatment and support services. On October 25th and 26th, over 50 representatives from Berkshire County's Pittsfield region came together to identify cross-system gaps in services, identify and set community priorities, and to develop a local action plan.

The Massachusetts Community Justice Project is an initiative of the Massachusetts Trial Court, in collaboration with the Department of Mental Health and the Department of Public Health/Bureau of Substance Abuse Services. The project facilitates collaborations between the courts, criminal justice, mental health and substance use disorder professionals, appropriate regional representatives of agencies which fund the already listed services, people with lived experience with mental health/substance use challenges and/or criminal justice exposure and their families, as well as state agency representatives, veterans' services, social service agencies, community coalition representatives and more. Utilizing Sequential Intercept Mapping (SIM), participants in the workshop were able to visualize how these different systems intersect within the community, develop a local "map," based on the Sequential Intercept Model, developed by the SAMHSA Gains Center, then identify opportunities and resources for diverting people with mental illness and/or substance abuse disorders out of the justice system, and connecting them with appropriate treatment and support services. The workshop participants will also determine area where immediate steps can be taken, and will develop a local set of priorities for change. The product of the Community Justice Workshop will be a local action plan that addresses mutually identified local problems impeding criminal justice diversion and service delivery, best practices to address the identified problems, as well as action steps and a list of identified staff and agencies who will pursue these action steps.

Jennifer Kimball, a Planner in the Public Health Program at BRPC and the project coordinator of the Berkshire Opioid Abuse Prevention Collaborative (BOAPC), attended the workshop. She stated that the BOAPC funding enables her to work not only on use prevention, but also overdose prevention. A recent Department of Public Health overdose study (Chapter 55 report, September 2016) identified that individuals who have recently been released from Massachusetts prisons are 56 times as likely to die from an opioid-related overdose. The report recommended that to reduce opioid-related death rates, additional focus be paid to those released from Massachusetts prisons, and that treatment opportunities be standardized, regardless of setting. BOAPC strives to work in concert with community partners such as those present at this 2-day workshop to support, among other things, access to medication assisted treatment and other substance abuse disorder treatments, to also actively support naloxone access for persons at risk (such as those being released from jail), their family members and those who serve people at risk.

In the bigger public health picture, the social determinants of health, defined by the World Health Organization as "the circumstances in which people are born, grow up, live, work, and age, as well as systems designed to deal with illness," are major contributors to health disparities. "The large-scale expansion of incarceration has become one such factor in the constellation of determinants of health," states a November 2014 report from the Vera Institute. HIV/AIDS, is 2 to 7 times more prevalent, Hepatitis C is 8 to 21 times more prevalent, and Tuberculosis is 4 times more prevalent among people who are incarcerated than in the general population. At least 68% of all jail inmates have a diagnosable substance use disorder, and in state prisons, prevalence of serious mental illness is 2 to 4 times higher than the general population. Aside from diagnosable illnesses, incarceration has "crippling, intergenerational effects on the social determinants of health, including, but not limited to "altering the demographic composition of communities in ways that fracture family structure and trap young children in poverty, diminishing the educational opportunities of youth, stagnating economic mobility and widening income inequality, exacerbating homelessness, restricting access to social benefits," and more. The Public Health Program at Berkshire Regional Planning Commission understands that effective and evidence-based public health practice must take into account the social determinants of health, as they affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks, in Berkshire County and beyond. It is through participation in workshops like this that more comprehensive and sustainable public health policy will be developed. For more information contact Planner Jennifer Kimball (JKimball@berkshireplanning.org or X 37).

Municipal Small Bridge Funding Program

The Governor recently signed legislation that created a funding program for small municipally owned bridges. This legislation provides \$500 million dollars (over five years) to reimburse cities and towns up to \$500K per year to aid in the replacement and preservation of municipally owned bridges with spans between 10' and 20'. These bridges are not eligible for federal aid under existing bridge replacement or rehabilitation programs and an increasing number of these bridges are at high risk for full or partial closure in the near future due to their present condition.

The Municipal Small Bridge Program is a need and merit based program that will seek to fund those applications that demonstrate a critical need (i.e. emergency closure, detrimental detour routes for first responders) or will substantially extend the life of an existing bridge.

To participate in the program, towns and cities must complete an application and submit it to the local MassDOT district highway office. From there, projects will be screened for eligibility and forwarded to MassDOT's Bridge Section in Boston with a recommendation. Projects will again be evaluated and scored, with final recommendations being made to the Chief Engineer, who will issue to each municipality a final decision.

Applications will accepted three (3) times per year - Oct. 31st, Feb. 28th, and June 30th. A number of Berkshire County communities have been working to finalize their application submittals for the first round which were due to on October 31, 2016.

More information on the municipal small bridge program including a copy of the funding application can be found at <http://www.massdot.state.ma.us/highway/DoingBusinessWithUs/LocalAidPrograms/MunicipalSmallBridgeProgram.aspx>

For more information contact Transportation Program Manager Clete Kus (CKus@berkshireplanning.org or X 20).



BRPC's 50th Anniversary – Tribute to Staff and Looking Forward

As we close out our anniversary year, the contributions of the many dedicated public servants who have worked at BRPC have to be acknowledged. Without their dedication over these five decades, the Berkshires and our communities would be a poorer place. Looking back to the early decades, Karl Hekler, Charlie Kusik, Bernie Drew, Bob Spencer and Charlie Cook all made lasting contributions to BRPC and the Berkshires (and I am sure that I am leaving out any number of individuals who also contributed mightily – my apologies to them). Our long-time Bookkeeper, Carrie LeBlanc, kept us out of trouble with the auditors for over two decades.

Today, we continue to have an incredibly dedicated staff. Assistant Director Tom Matuszko, Senior Planners Melissa Provencher and Lauren Gaherty, and GIS, Data & IT Manager Mark Maloy have all been here, and continue to be highly valued and productive members of the team, for over fifteen years. Our 20 staff members work independently, providing high quality services and products, with a lot of evening meetings, and are the best group of professionals that I have been associated with in my 38-year career.

The Mission of the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission is to guide and support the Berkshire Community in meeting the needs of our citizens and promoting prosperity and quality of life, making the Berkshires stronger and more vibrant. Our Vision is that in 2025, BRPC is an indispensable source of support and technical leadership for communities effecting change in the areas of economic growth, population stability, environmental quality, public health, governmental and educational services, and society cohesion, all of which support quality of life and a Sustainable Berkshires. We are, in 2025:

- The primary source of reliable, official data for the Berkshires and trusted for our analysis of that data.
- The primary provider of technical assistance to Berkshire municipalities in order to provide the highest quality public services effectively and efficiently.
- A primary convener of interests to seize opportunities and confront challenges for the Berkshires.
- A primary voice to advocate on behalf of the collective interests of the Berkshire community.

Age Friendly Berkshires Action Plan

Age Friendly Berkshires has begun its Strategic Action Planning in earnest! A complete, three-year Action Plan / Implementation Plan is expected by March 2017. Eight leaders chosen as experts in their areas and corresponding to the eight domains of livability as envisioned by the Age Friendly Communities program will conduct research with community leaders and stakeholders, identify gaps, needs, resources and strategies, and draft the various sections of the plan under the oversight of Laura Kittross, Manager of the Public Health Program at BRPC. Once the plan has been drafted and reviewed by the Age Friendly Berkshires Task Force and the Active Agers Advisory Council, a public comment process will allow others an opportunity to weigh in on the plan. The plan is expected to consist of small, actionable steps and strategies that can be taken to close the identified gaps and needs and make Berkshire County more livable for all ages.

Age Friendly Communities, a movement begun by the World Health Organization (WHO) and administered in the United States by AARP, is designed to create communities that are livable, provide opportunities and are inclusive for all ages. Berkshire County was accepted into the program in June 2015. The eight domains of livability are Outdoor Space and Buildings, Housing, Transportation, Social Participation, Civic Engagement and Employment, Respect and Social Inclusion, Community and Health Services, and Communication and Information. The plan will consider the full continuum, from those older adults who are actively aging, to those in need of supportive care. If you have expertise in any of the domain areas or would like to be involved in the Age Friendly Berkshires Action Plan, please contact Laura Kittross at LKittross@berkshireplanning.org.

Licensed Contractors

NEEDED FOR THE

SHEFFIELD—GREAT BARRINGTON HOUSING REHABILITATION PROGRAM

THIS PROGRAM ASSISTS LOW AND MODERATE INCOME HOMEOWNER-
OCCUPANTS WITH HOUSING REPAIRS / REHABILITATION.

Work may include:

- Asbestos Removal
- Chimney Building & Repair
- Electrical Service & Repair
- Gas & Oil Burner Service
- General Carpentry
- Foundation Repair
- Lead Paint Inspection / Removal
- Insulation
- Painting
- Plumbing
- Roofing
- Siding



Contractors **must** be licensed in the state of Massachusetts, and submit an application to the Housing Rehabilitation Program.

Prequalification applications are available at the website below.

Qualified contractors will be notified of their status on the Prequalified Contractor list.

For more information or to access an application, please visit our website at:

www.berkshireplanning.org/projects/regional-community-development-block-grant-project/
or call Patricia Mullins, Program Manager, at 413-442-1521 ex.117

Funding for this program is provided by a FY16 Massachusetts Community Development Block Grant and administered by the Department of Housing and Community Development, the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, and the Towns of Sheffield and Great Barrington.



1 Fenn Street, Suite 201
Pittsfield, MA 01201

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Green Communities

BRPC received funding from the Dept. of Energy Resources to provide assistance to four communities. BRPC will assist North Adams and Hinsdale to become Green Communities, a state designation that affords them access to a grant program that funds energy reduction, energy efficiency and renewable energy projects.

Lanesborough and Richmond are already Green Communities, and BRPC will help them with annual energy reporting and identifying new energy reduction opportunities. For more information, contact Senior Planner Lauren Gaherty (LGaherty@berkshireplanning.org or X 35).

Welcome to Our New Senior Planner, Bill Compton!

BRPC is proud to welcome Senior Planner Bill Compton. Bill joins us from Georgia, where he split his time between Economic Development and the Planning and Government Services Department. Bill has been a practicing planner since 1995 and during that time has worked for regional planning agencies, as well as city and county governments and in the private nonprofit sector. Bill is a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners and looks forward to working in Berkshire County to advance the economic development of the region.

Water Quality Assessment Award

BRPC received federal funding from DEP to document current bacterial levels in select river segments of the Housatonic and Hoosic River Watersheds. It is our expectation that bacteria levels have decreased in those river segments due to known land use changes and/or infrastructure improvements conducted by municipal public works departments. Our partners in this project are Housatonic Valley Association and Hoosic River Watershed Association. For more information, contact Senior Planner Lauren Gaherty (LGaherty@berkshireplanning.org or X 35).

CALENDAR

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

November 3 - BRPC Executive Committee Meeting - 4:00pm

November 3 - BRPC Annual Dinner - 5:30pm (rescheduled from October 20)

November 8 - Election Day

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November 10 - Berkshire County Boards of Health Association Fall Dinner - 5:00-8:00pm

November 15 - CPTC Training: Zoning Exemptions - 6:00-8:00pm

November 17 - BRPC Commission Development Committee Meeting - 5:45pm

November 17 - Berkshire Public Health Alliance Governing Board Meeting - 6:00-8:00pm

November 17 - BRPC Commission Meeting - 7:00pm

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December 1 - BRPC Executive Committee Meeting - 4:00pm

December 1 - CPTC Training: How to Hold a Perfect Public Hearing - 6:00-8:00pm

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!