

COMMON GROUND

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Photo: Mark Maloy

A NEWSLETTER FOR COMMUNITY PLANNING IN THE BERKSHIRE REGION

PAVEMENT MANAGEMENT SERVICES AVAILABLE

BRPC's transportation program staff works with regional partners and local communities to improve our transportation system's safety, flow, accessibility, and function. Road surface conditions are an important measure of our transportation system's health. In 2010, BRPC recommenced collecting condition data on roads of the Berkshire region eligible for federal aid. This data, when processed through a Road Management System (BRPC uses a computer program called RoadSoft), helps to determine where and how to fix our roads. Preventing roads from falling apart is important, especially in an economic climate where money to fix them is so scarce. Pavement management is cited as a best practice in terms of municipal performance, and was discussed at a December New England StatNet meeting of DPW heads hosted by the UMass-Boston Collins Center for Public Management. In 2012, BRPC partnered with the Towns of Otis and Sandisfield to collect and analyze data of their locally maintained roads. Due to the limited and unpredictable nature of Chapter 90, Massachusetts' state aid for roads, both communities are planning how to spend their road funds over several years. An additional regional challenge is that many local roads are also unpaved, meaning that they are deteriorate more rapidly and sometimes unpredictably. For more information about managing roads, please contact Douglas Plachcinski at dplachcinski@berkshireplanning.org

BERKSHIRE BROWNFIELDS DIRECTORY

There are many opportunities available to identify, assess and clean-up brownfield sites, but the various agencies and organizations do not make it easy to navigate these opportunities. The Berkshire Brownfields Directory offers a solution to the sometimes dizzying array of resources and related information. BRPC has prepared and made available to the public a directory to assist the municipalities, property owners, and prospective purchasers in Berkshire County who are committed to the cleanup and redevelopment of brownfield sites. The directory is organized by category: assessment, cleanup/remediation, grant, loan, tax incentive, liability protection, and technical assistance. Each program description also includes eligible parties. The electronic format allows users to directly access organization and agency websites to learn more about the program and their respective eligibility. Another feature of this report which makes it very easy to use is the linking of the page numbers in the table of contents to the program descriptions, enabling users to navigate to the programs that meet their needs and eligibility. This directory consolidates a wealth of resources from federal, state and local agencies, and will hopefully encourage municipalities, property owners and prospective purchasers in the Berkshires to explore their financial options when faced with potential or identified brownfield sites. The directory can be accessed via the BRPC [website](http://www.berkshireplanning.org), under the Berkshire Brownfields Program.

For more information about the directory, or about the programs and past local examples of the various programs, please contact Melissa Provencher at mprovencher@berkshireplanning.org.

PRESERVATION PROJECT FUNDS AVAILABLE

The Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) has announced its next round of the Preservation Projects Fund grant program, offering approximately \$780,000 in grant funds. This grant program can fund pre-development work or "bricks and mortar" preservation construction projects. A local match of 50% required. Applications are due March 8, 2013. More information about the program is available at <http://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc/mhcmppf/mppfidx.htm> or by calling MHC at 617-727-8470.

SLAUGHTER AND MEAT PROCESSING IN MASSACHUSETTS: OPPORTUNITIES, CHALLENGES AND NEEDS

Join the Berkshire County Farm Bureau, Berkshire Grown and Keep Berkshires Farming on January 19th for a lunch-time (lunch provided) discussion with Brad Mitchell of the Massachusetts Farm Bureau Federation. Berkshire County is home to farms, farmers, livestock and a demand for more meat, but faces challenges to maximizing access and availability of locally raised meat. The panel will be held at the **First Baptist Church of Pittsfield, at 88 South Street, 12:00-1:30, January 19th**. This will be the first of several food and agriculture panels, so please stay tuned for more! Contact Amy Kacala at akacala@berkshireplanning.org or X 12 with questions.

BERKSHIRE REGION COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (CEDS) STRATEGY: 2012 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT

The BRPC Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Committee finalized its 2012 Annual Performance Report, which discusses the economic progress made in the County over the past year. The submittal of an annual report is a requirement of the Economic Development Administration (EDA) for all regions that maintain an EDA approved CEDS. The report includes information on existing regional trends and conditions, a report on the region's progress towards meeting the goals and objectives set forth in the 2011 Berkshire CEDS and a progress report on the thirty-six projects listed on the Priority Project list in the 2011 Berkshire CEDS. Two regional trends are worth noting here: First, the rate of inflation (29%) exceeded the rise in median household incomes (25%) between 1999 and 2009 in the region. Second, the unemployment rate decreased by 0.9% from 2010 (8.2%) to 2011 (7.3%); however, the 2011 level (7.3%) is still well above the unemployment levels of 2007 (4.4%) prior to the Great Recession. The region continued to lose jobs in the manufacturing, construction and real estate sectors and gained jobs in the retail, wholesale and arts, entertainment and recreation sectors. Despite the lackluster statistics, a fair amount of development is occurring across the region. The MassBroadband123 project that will bring high-speed fiber optic capabilities to every municipality in the region is nearing completion. Safety improvements at the Pittsfield Municipal Airport have laid the groundwork for expansion in and around the airport. Williams College and the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts have both completed significant building projects to provide an even greater level of education to their students. The annual report contains a number of other projects, too numerous to list here, that have been completed or are nearing completion. Despite the slow recovery and including only the representative projects listed in the Annual Report, over \$500 million dollars have been invested in the region over the past several years. If you would like additional details please go to www.berkshireplanning.org to view the 2012 Annual Report.. For questions or more information, please contact Brian Domina at bdomina@berkshireplanning.org or X 14.

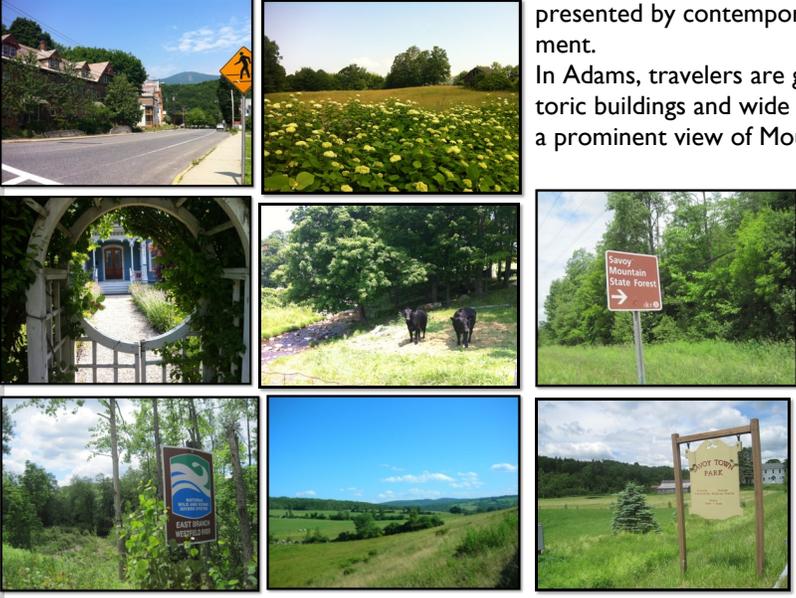
ROUTE 116 SCENIC BYWAY UPDATE

The Scenic Byway program, as part of the federal Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, seeks to identify and protect the unique characteristics along America's scenic roads. The plans formulated aim to promote and protect historic, cultural, economic, natural and infrastructure resources along specific routes. Designation as a scenic byway facilitates marketing, and can also make communities eligible for specific funding opportunities. In the past year, BRPC staff have worked in partnership with the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG) and Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) to inventory the diverse resources along Route 116, which stretches from the Town of Sunderland in Franklin County to the Town of Adams. The Berkshire leg begins in the highlands of Savoy, and journeys into bustling downtown Adams, with stunning views of Mount Greylock along the way and unique glimpses of the regions agricultural past seen in hedgerows and pastures. In December, staff from PVPC, FRCOG and BRPC, along with advisory committee members, met to review the scenic resource and transportation chapters. Both chapters yielded some findings of note. For example: the scenic resources inventory emphasized a lack of wayfinding information along the Byway, and highlighted some of the distinguished scenic views accessible from Route 116 but not well marked for the traveler new to the region. The transportation chapter found that the road's capacity is challenged for oversized items such as wind turbine components, and highlighted some of the great pedestrian infrastructure in Adams. Other chapters issued for review in the last year include a chapter inventorying natural resources along the Byway and tourist and traveler resources. An artist has designed several logos for participants to vote on. The next chapter drafts to be completed and issued for public comment will include economy, historic resource, and community planning along the Byway. If you are an interested resident along the Byway who would like to participate in the ongoing advisory meetings, would like to see the chapters to date, or would like to vote on a preferred logo for the scenic byway, please contact Pat Mullins at pmullins@berkshireplanning.org for more information.

VIEWS FROM THE BYWAY

The Berkshire leg of the Scenic 116 Byway is notable for its diverse landscape—it begins heavily forested, with limited peripheral views but long views of a hilly road in either direction. Notable in Savoy: glimpses of the Wild and Scenic Westfield River, which is also a critical habitat area. In Cheshire, the landscape begins to open up, highlighting pastures but also highlighting challenges presented by contemporary development.

In Adams, travelers are greeted by historic buildings and wide sidewalks and a prominent view of Mount Greylock.



WELCOME, LINDA!

We are very pleased to welcome Linda Ludwig to BRPC as our financial Administrator, replacing Carrie LeBlanc who retired on December 31st. Linda previously worked as the Director of Finance for the Berkshire Theater Company/Colonial Theater since 2004. She brings over twenty-five years of financial experience to the agency, and we look forward to working with her!

HOLIDAY GIVING UPDATE

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission staff celebrated the holidays by giving back to our community. In October and November, staff from BRPC and Camp Danbee in Peru combined to purchase 10 full turkey dinners. These dinners were given to those in need through area church food banks. Each dinner included a turkey, stuffing, potatoes, vegetables, and cranberry sauce. Special thanks to BRPC's Lauren Gaherty for organizing the turkey dinner donations.

In December, BRPC staff continued their tradition of adopting a family for Christmas through Berkshire Health System's Create-A-Dream program. This program matches donors with families. Staff held potluck meals and bought presents for a local family to make sure they have a great Christmas. Thanks to everyone at BRPC for a great job helping those less fortunate. Happy Holidays!

BE GREEN IN 2013

Please consider switching your paper newsletter to a digital newsletter. One benefit of the digital newsletter is that you can link directly to reports and websites discussed, and you can link directly to staff contacts. A digital newsletter also saves natural important resources while reducing agency consumption of energy and ink. Think about e-mailing Judy Wagner at jwagner@berkshireplanning.org to request a digital newsletter today!

CALENDAR

All meetings held in BRPC office unless otherwise noted.

JANUARY

- 3rd: Executive Committee
- 3rd: Finance Committee Meeting
- 15th: MPO Meeting
- 17th: Full Commission Meeting
- 31st: 5th Thursday Dinner, Sign Bylaws (ITAM, 5:30-9:00)

FEBRUARY

- 7th: Executive Meeting

**CLEARINGHOUSE REVIEWS
CLEVELAND RESERVOIR
DIVERSION MAINTENANCE
PROJECT
BY CITY OF PITTSFIELD
LOCATED IN HINSDALE**