

COMMON GROUND

A NEWSLETTER FOR COMMUNITY PLANNING IN THE BERKSHIRE REGION

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Guilder Pond



Bash Bish Falls

Sustainable Berkshires - the final push!

The next three months will be filled with activities to wrap up the development of *Sustainable Berkshires*, with final Berkshire Regional Planning Commission adoption scheduled for the March 20th Commission meeting. The Commission will be holding work sessions on the plan on **January 9th** and **February 6th**, with other possible work sessions to be scheduled if necessary. These work sessions are open to the public. Tentatively, the required public hearing will be held on **Thursday, March 6th**. Meetings will be held at the BRPC office at 1 Fenn Street in Pittsfield, and posted on the Commission (www.berkshireplanning.org) and Sustainable Berkshires (www.sustainableberkshires.org) websites.

For more information regarding **Sustainable Berkshires**, please contact Project Manager Amy Kacala at akacala@berkshireplanning.org or (413) 332-1523 x12.

Road Safety Audits in the Berkshires

Through the Berkshire MPO, BRPC annually analyzes high crash locations in Berkshire county. The crash analysis contributes to project selection in the region's Transportation Improvement Program, especially projects that include Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) funds. In order to unlock HSIP funds, the project planning must include a Road Safety Audit (RSA).

This audit process includes representatives from BRPC, MassDOT, the Federal Highway Administration, and the community's road crews and first responders. On November 25, 2013, BRPC participated in two Berkshire RSAs. The first RSA was the intersection of Walker Street and Veteran's Memorial Highway in Lenox. The group convened and reviewed crash records to figure out what kind of crashes were happening and the causes. Recommendations to reduce those crashes include :

- Signage upgrades,
- Elongating the left bound turn lanes, and
- Refining traffic signal placement.

The second RSA of the day was at the Route 8 and Friend Street intersection in Adams. This intersection is already planned for a roundabout. The project designer discussed the roundabout design process and the group reviewed crash data, even though a roundabout will completely reconfigure the currently stop-controlled intersection and alter future crash types. As complementary crash prevention measures, the group discussed:

- Signage upgrades
- Shifting driveways
- Shifting crosswalks

The project in Lenox will use "The Way Forward" funding to construct improvements in 2014 although there are no initial cost estimates. The Adams RSA process will add about \$400,000 additional Federal and State funds to a project that the Town already estimates at over \$1,000,000 for construction.

For more information, please contact Douglas Plachcinski at dplachcinski@berkshireplanning.org or (413) 442-1521 x 19.

Berkshire CEDS 2013 Annual Performance Report

As part of its Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) planning effort, BRPC submitted its 2013 Annual Performance Report to the Economic Development Administration (EDA) in late November. The Report identifies the regional economic trends and documents the economic progress made in the region for the prior year. The Report also contains a list of the economically significant projects in the region known as CEDS Priority Projects. The CEDS Committee added seventeen (17) new projects to the Priority Project list for 2013. In addition, the Report highlights the significant investments made or proposed in the region, such as the proposed construction of the \$30 million dollar Berkshire Medical Cancer Center. A few noteworthy items from the Report include:

- The report documents \$161.7 million dollars of public investment and \$422.7 million dollars of private investment in the region since 2011.
- The median income for Berkshire County households decreased by -0.4% between 2009 and 2011.
- The average unemployment rate in the region for 2012 equaled the average unemployment rate for the entire Commonwealth at 6.7%; however, the labor force in Berkshire County continues to shrink.
- The industry sectors with the largest increases in employment in the region are (1) educational services, (2) accommodations and food services, and (3) health care and social assistance.

A full version of the 2013 Annual Performance Report is available on the BRPC website at www.berkshireplanning.org.

Staff Contact: Brian Domina @ bdomina@berkshireplanning.org or (414) 442-1521 x19.

DLTA 2014 Project List

BRPC received \$203,588 in DLTA funds from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to provide technical assistance to its member communities in 2014. BRPC issued a solicitation for eligible projects in early November and received twenty-one (21) applications for assistance. The categories of eligible projects included Planning Ahead for Housing (5 applications received), Planning Ahead for Growth (9 applications received) and Supporting Regional Efforts (7 applications received). Final funding decisions will be announced in January 2014. A listing of the selected projects will be available on the BRPC website shortly after the announcement at www.berkshireplanning.org.

Staff Contact: Brian Domina @ bdomina@berkshireplanning.org or (414) 442-1521 x19.

Save the Date: January 5th Thursday Dinner on the Community Preservation Act

Please save the date for the next BRPC 5th Thursday Dinner on January 30, 2013 at the ITAM Lodge in Pittsfield. The social hour will begin at 5:30 PM followed by a buffet dinner and presentation beginning at 6:30 PM. The topic for the evening will be the Community Preservation Act (CPA). An event flyer will be sent out in the near future. We hope you can attend and learn about the benefits of adopting the CPA.

Staff Contact: Brian Domina @ bdomina@berkshireplanning.org or (414) 442-1521 x19.

2014 Grant Opportunities

604(b) Water Quality Management Planning Grant. The Mass. Dept. of Environmental Protection (DEP) has issued the scheduling for this program, which focuses on assessing and planning the mitigation of nonpoint source pollution. A pre-RFP meeting will be held on Jan. 28th in Worcester and grant applications will be due to DEP on March 28th. Towns are encouraged to propose water quality assessment/planning projects that will lead to direct actions to implement water quality improvements. For more information contact Gary Gonyea (617-556-1152 or gary.gonyea@state.ma.us) for a discussion of ideas and program objectives. BRPC contact: [Lauren Gaherty](#), ext 35 or [Melissa Provencher](#), ext. 22.

Energy Managers Grant. The Dept. of Energy Resources is offering funds for towns or regional school districts to hire Energy Managers on either a full-time or part-time basis, or to increase the hours of an existing Energy Manager. Two or three communities may join together to hire a shared Energy Manager. Applications are due Feb. 14th. For more information visit www.mass.gov/eel/docs/doer/.../grant.../energy-managers-grant-app.doc. Staff contact: Tom Matuszko at tmatuszko@berkshireplanning.org or (413) 442-1521 x19.

Housing Needs Assessments

BRPC recently completed Housing Needs Assessments for three Berkshire County communities, including one for the Town of Dalton and a joint study for the neighboring communities of Great Barrington and Sheffield. The reports were compiled using a new model provided by Massachusetts Housing Partnership and Citizens' Housing and Planning Association in partnership with the Center for Housing Policy. Data largely came from the US census, American Community Survey, various state agencies and the Town's past planning documents.

The Housing Needs Assessment includes:

- Analysis of community demographic and economic data / trends
- Assessment of the quantity, quality and affordability of existing housing and the community's ability to meet current and future housing demand
- Quantification of the current and future need for elderly, handicap and affordable housing units
- Recommendations for meeting identified housing needs

In recent years, shifts in population and job opportunities have impacted Berkshire communities. Increasing housing costs continue to present a burden to many county residents.

The Housing Needs Assessment is an important planning tool that can inform other municipal documents, and, along with the community input process, support the housing elements of Master Plans and Community Development Strategies, etc. The Housing Needs Assessment is a significant first step in creating a Housing Production Plan that is uniquely designed to meet each community's future needs. It can also be used to support the need and demand for housing when seeking public funds through a number of grants and programs, such as the Community Development Block Grant, prioritizing housing development and preservation of existing housing through rehabilitation.

As a result of their Housing Needs Assessment, the Town of Sheffield completed a Community Development Strategy, approved by the Board of Selectmen on December 16, and will undertake a Community Development Block Grant application for FY 2014.

For more information, please contact Patricia Mullins at pmullins@berkshireplanning.org or (413) 442-1521 x17 or Jaclyn Pacejo at jpacejo@berkshireplanning.org or (413) 442-1521 x32.

Thank you, Sarah Hoecker!

BRPC intern Sarah Hoecker will be focusing her energy and efforts on the Westfield University's planning program in the spring, and the staff at BRPC wish her the best. Sarah has worked as an intern at BRPC since 2012. Thank you for all your hard work, Sarah!

Annual Giving Update

BRPC staff gathered food and cash donations to again provide turkey dinner baskets to our neighbor, the First United Methodist Church. We were honored to deliver a total of 12 frozen turkeys with all the fixings (potatoes, stuffing, cranberry, etc) to the church, which they in turn forwarded to a regional pool. In all, area churches that joined together were expecting to offer 1,000 turkey dinner baskets to local families in need. One of our turkeys was funded by Laura Kitross' daughter, who donated a portion of her Halloween candy as a fundraiser for the effort (BRPC staff can't resist candy).

BRPC staff and members also celebrated the 2013 holiday season by adopting a family for Christmas. BRPC's partner service agency for this year is the Family Life Support Center, Inc. Louison House. BRPC held FUNdraisers in November through December and wrapped gifts at the staff's holiday luncheon for the fifth year in a row. The Family Life Support Center (FLSC) is a 501 © *3) non-profit organization established in 1990 to address increased homelessness in Berkshire County resulting from industrial decline in the 1980s. Over the past twenty years, FLSC has provided homelessness prevention and housing services to over 3,500 individuals and families throughout Berkshire County. Today, FLSC is the only comprehensive homelessness provider in Northern Berkshire County. FLSC offers both housing services (transitional and permanent) and supportive services to the homeless.

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

Berkshire Opioid Abuse Prevention Collaborative Continues Work With Community Partners

The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, through the Berkshire Public Health Alliance, is coordinating the Berkshire Opioid Abuse Prevention Collaborative (BOAPC). The Berkshire Opioid Abuse Prevention Collaborative will develop and implement local policies, practices, systems and environmental changes to prevent the misuse or abuse of opioids, prevent or reduce unintentional deaths and non-fatal hospital events associated with opioid poisonings and increase the capacity of municipalities to deal with this growing problem.

Prescription drug and heroin abuse in Berkshire County is a problem that is growing in magnitude and severity. The total number of opioid pills prescribed in Berkshire County in 2008 was 13,943,380 – or 107.2 tablets for each resident (OxyFree ED, 8/31/11, BHS). Statewide, the Schedule II opioid doses fill rate is 24.2 doses per person. In Berkshire County, the rate is much higher – 31.7 per person. It is understood that there is a linear relationship between opioids dispensed and deaths, overdoses, hospitalizations, impaired lifestyle, and higher rates of long-term disability. Because of the high cost of buying prescription drugs on the street, many users are turning to heroin, which is far cheaper. Since 2000, 169 Berkshire County residents have died from opioid overdose.

As part of the assessment phase of the BOAPC grant, community forums on prescription drug and heroin use and abuse were held in Pittsfield on October 30 and in Great Barrington on November 6. The forums were very well received, with over 120 people attending. The forums gave an opportunity for those in the medical, mental health, addiction/recovery, and law enforcement fields to speak, as well as parents of/people in recovery, and community members at large. The community forums were an excellent opportunity to gauge community thoughts and feelings about the opioid problem in the Berkshires, ideas on addressing these issues, and also to identify the gaps in services in Berkshire County to help deal with opioid use and abuse.

The next step in the BOAPC grant process is to mobilize existing resources and build capacity to address the gaps identified, to continue the development and implementation of strategies to prevent the misuse or abuse of opioids, as well as prevent or reduce unintentional deaths and non-fatal events associated with opioid poisonings.

Winter 2014 will launch an expanded, county-wide prescription take back program, partnered with educational programs designed not just only for those who receive opioid prescriptions, but physicians and pharmacists as well.

This effort builds upon the ongoing work being done in the communities by our key partners in this grant: Berkshire Youth Development Project (Northern Berkshire Community Coalition, the Pittsfield Prevention Partnership and the South Berkshire Community Coalition / Railroad Street Youth Project). In addition to the 21 Alliance municipalities, the City of Pittsfield and the Tri-Town Health Department (Lee, Lenox and Stockbridge) were co-applicants on the grant and remain strong partners in this effort. Other organizations supporting and participating in this effort include Berkshire Health Systems, Berkshire Sheriff's Department, Berkshire United Way, Brien Center, Berkshire County DA Office and the Berkshire County Drug Task Force, and North Adams Regional Hospital.

If you have any questions about this program, please contact the Public Health Program Manager, Laura Kittross, at lkittross@berkshireplanning.org

CALENDAR

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

All meetings are held at BRPC unless noted otherwise.

JANUARY

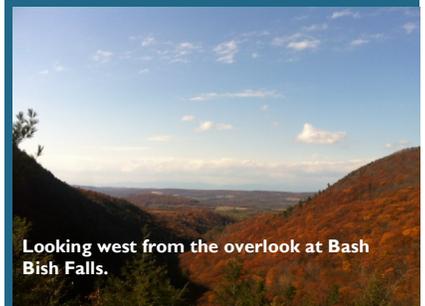
- 1: New Year's Day 2014
- 9: Executive Committee, Finance Committee
- Sustainable Berkshires WorkSession
- 16: Commission Meeting
- 30: 5th Thursday Dinner

FEBRUARY

- 6: Executive Committee
- Sustainable Berkshires Work Session

MARCH

- 6: Sustainable Berkshires Public Hearing (tentative)
- 20: Full Commission, Sustainable Berkshires Adoption



Looking west from the overlook at Bash Bish Falls.