

COMMON GROUND

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A NEWSLETTER FOR COMMUNITY PLANNING IN THE BERKSHIRE REGION

North Adams Adopts First Comprehensive Plan in Nearly Forty Years

On May 12th, the North Adams Planning Board voted unanimously to adopt North Adams Vision 2030, it's first comprehensive plan in nearly forty years. The Office of Community Development will also seek the City Council's endorsement. To take a look at the plan's nine chapters, public outreach summaries and implementation process, please visit the North Adams Vision 2030 website: <http://vision2030.wp.northadams-ma.gov/> or contact City Planner Mackenzie Greer at mgreer@northadams-ma.gov.

Rest of River Remedy Update

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has released its proposed plan (Remedy) for the clean-up of PCB's from the Housatonic River from southern Pittsfield to Long Island Sound for public comment. The Remedy can be found at www.epa.gov/region1/ge. The current deadline for submittal of public comments is August 8th and there will be at least one public hearing prior to the deadline. Both the six community Rest of River Committee and BRPC will request that the formal comment period be extended to a full 120 days, to October 24th. In order to maintain legal standing in the process moving forward, organizations, agencies, and individuals must provide formal comments during this public comment period.

The proposed Remedy includes a requirement that all hazardous material be transported to a licensed hazardous waste landfill (there are none in Massachusetts), with a preference that it be moved out by rail. Waste will either be removed or capped, except in areas with a high degree of environmental sensitivity and waste behind each of the dams will have to be removed or capped. Over the coming weeks, there will be ongoing, in depth consideration by BRPC, the six individual municipalities and the Rest of River Committee regarding both joint and individual comments.

Please contact Lauren Gaherty (x 35) or Nat Karns (x 26) for more information, at lgaherty@berkshireplanning.org or nkarns@berkshireplanning.org respectively.

New Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals Member Training

Land Use Attorney Paul Bobrowski will review the duties of Board members, the required procedures and the relevant laws (Zoning Act, Subdivision Control Law) on July 31st, 2014 at the BRPC office on Fenn Street. This free training will last from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. Light dinner and refreshments will be provided. Please R.S.V.P to Brian Domina (x 14) or bdomina@berkshireplanning.org.

BRPC Annual Dinner: Save the Date!

BRPC has set the date for its annual dinner. Join staff and the commission on October 16th at the Country Club of Pittsfield for cocktails, dinner and a speaker. The event will start at 5:30 p.m. Stay tuned for more details.

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 Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Approves FFY 2015–2018 Transportation Improvement Program

On June 24th, 2014 the Berkshire MPO approved the 2015-2018 TIP (Transportation Improvement Program). The TIP implements the region's long-range transportation plan by programming 80.4 million dollars of bridge, highway, transit, and bike paths projects in Berkshire County over the next four years. The following list details the projects that are included in the TIP and the federal fiscal (FFY) year in which funding will be available for these projects.

FFY 2015

Lee – Reconstruction of Tyringham Road (completion of funding started in FFY 2013)
Dalton – Reconstruction of Housatonic Street (first year of funding)
Pittsfield – Intersection & Signal improvements at Center Street and West Housatonic Street
Sandisfield – Bridge maintenance, S. Main Street over W. Branch Farmington River (Phase II)
Great Barrington – Bridge replacement, Park Street over Housatonic River
Savoy – Bridge replacement, River Road over Westfield River
Sheffield/Great Barrington – Route 7 resurfacing and related work
Lenox/Pittsfield – Route 7 resurfacing and related work

FFY 2016

Dalton – Reconstruction of Housatonic Street (second year of funding)
Lenox – Intersection & Signal improvements at US7/20 & Walker Street
Dalton – Bridge maintenance, Main Street over E. Branch Housatonic River
New Marlborough – Bridge replacement, Hadsell Street over Umpachene River
Florida – Bridge replacement, South County Road over Cold River
Lanesborough – Bridge replacement, Narragansett Avenue over Pontoosuc Lake
Pittsfield – Ashuwillticook Rail Trail extension to Crane Avenue
North Adams/Williamstown – Mohawk Bike Trail

FFY 2017

Dalton – Reconstruction of Housatonic Street (completion of funding started in FFY 2015)
Pittsfield – Intersections & Signal improvements near Berkshire Medical Center (first year of funding)
North Adams – Bridge maintenance, Hodges Cross Road over S. Branch Hoosic River
Pittsfield – Bridge rehabilitation, US 7/20/ South Street over W. Branch Housatonic River
Lee – Bridge replacement, Chapel Street over Greenwater Brook
Lee – Bridge replacement, Valley Street over Housatonic River
Adams/North Adams – Ashuwillticook Rail Trail extension (Lime St to Hodges Cross Road)
Lee – Bikeway construction

FFY 2018

Pittsfield – Intersections & Signal improvements near Berkshire Medical Center (completion of funding started in FFY 2017)
North Adams – Intersection & Signal improvements at Route 2 & Phelps Avenue
Washington – Reconstruction of Washington Mountain Road (first year of funding)

Please contact Anuja Koirala (x 18) at akoirala@berkshireplanning.org for more information.

Passenger Rail Station Location and Design Study Update

BRPC has been working to wrap up the Passenger Rail Station Location and Design Analysis which kicked off in the spring of 2013. Having met with all six corridor communities during the winter and conducting further study of potential station areas, four potential locations have been identified. A draft report will be issued in July for public comment, and there will be public meetings through the fall to receive public comments and let community members learn more about the project. The next two meetings will be on:

1. JULY 23, starting at 6:00 p.m.—Great Barrington Fire House, State Road
2. AUGUST 6, starting at 6:00 p.m.—The Intermodal Center, 1 Columbus Avenue, Pittsfield

Be sure to check the website for project updates and draft material as they become available:
<http://berkshireplanning.org/projects/passenger-rail-station-location-and-design-project/>

If you have further questions or comments regarding the passenger rail station location and design analysis, please contact Brian Domina (x 14) at bdomina@berkshireplanning.org.

GIS Services

BRPC provides a wide range of GIS and data services to our communities. These services range from the creation of basic maps to advanced analysis. Examples of some of the maps that can be made for our communities include zoning maps, official maps/status of road maps, assessor maps, open space maps, buildout maps and infrastructure maps. Custom maps and analysis can also be done using data from MassGIS, the local community and data the Commission has created itself. Some of the data BRPC has available for the region include parcels, buildings, roads, hydrology, water and sewer systems, endangered species habitat, water supplies, floodplain, zoning districts, elevation and land use. BRPC can also provide assistance in planning, setup, organization and management of a GIS.

BRPC has the ability to collect data in the field through the use of advanced tools such as GPS and tablet based data collection. BRPC can use this technology to collect information such as property conditions, sign locations, street trees, street lights, hydrants, trail mapping and storm water features.

BRPC provides GIS and data in several ways. Communities can utilize BRPC's Local Technical Assistance policy, which allows a community to obtain up to seven hours' worth of GIS and data services at no charge. Projects that require more than seven hours are handled on a fee for service basis through a contract between BRPC and the requesting entity. In addition, municipalities can take advantage of the Outsource GIS program where BRPC staff are available to work in town/city halls under contracts with the local governments between a half day and three days a week, acting as staff for the town. Communities can utilize this program to get in-house GIS support in running their own GIS. The Outsource GIS rate is a reduced rate from our normal rate as the community, not BRPC, is responsible for providing workspace, computers and software. In addition, as BRPC is a government entity, local municipalities do not need to go through procurement to hire BRPC to provide services to them.

For more information, please contact Mark Maloy (x 29) at mmaloy@berkshireplanning.org.

Land Use Reform Legislation Update

Legislation intended to modernize Massachusetts' land use legislation governing zoning, subdivision, and comprehensive planning has been proposed for at least two decades. This year, for the first time, it has made it out of the Joint Committee on Municipalities and Regional Government and is being considered by the House Ways and Means Committee. The new bill number is H.4065. There is considerable pressure being applied to get this long-needed legislation passed.

At its meeting on June 2nd, the BRPC Regional Issues Committee recommended that BRPC endorse the bill, even with reservations regarding its comprehensive planning related provisions. The Committee feels that the improvements in Chapter 40A (the Zoning Enabling Act) and the provision to allow communities to substitute a minor subdivision process for the existing Approval Not Required process in Chapter 43 (the Subdivision Control Law) are both major improvements which overcome the issues they see in the comprehensive planning sections of the bill.

Please contact Brian Domina (x 14) or Nat Karns (x 26) for more information at bdomina@berkshireplanning.org or nkarns@berkshireplanning.org respectively.

Natural Gas Pipelines Update

For the first time in over two decades, communities in the Berkshires are dealing with proposed natural gas transmission pipelines. Kinder Morgan, a major pipeline operator, is proposing the expansion of existing pipeline from New York state to serve Connecticut. This impacts Sandisfield particularly, but also Tyringham and corners of Monterey and Otis. That project is currently undergoing an initial MEPA (Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act) review. A new, major pipeline is proposed from New York state to the Town of Dracut on the Massachusetts border, just north of Lowell. This second proposed line effects the Berkshire communities of Richmond, Lenox, Washington, Pittsfield, Dalton, Peru, Hinsdale and Windsor. Interstate natural gas transmission lines are permitted at the federal level by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and thus the review and permitting process is different from most other types of projects.

BRPC has taken on the role of helping local officials understand what the permitting process is and what their involvement can be. We also have reached out to the Undersecretary of Energy at the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs to learn what multiple roles the state energy and environmental agencies have in this process. We have applied for a technical assistance grant, and received an initial favorable indication on its status from the U.S. Department of Transportation's Hazardous Materials & Pipeline Safety Administration. This grant will help provide education to local officials on the permitting process and to provide training to local first responders regarding natural gas pipelines.

Please contact Melissa Provencher (x 22) or Nat Karns (x 26) for more information at mprovencher@berkshireplanning.org or nkarns@berkshireplanning.org.

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BRPC Staff Present at MHP Housing Institute

BRPC Senior Planner Patricia Mullins presented ‘Housing Needs Assessments, Housing Production Plans’, and ‘Housing Action Plans - The Rural Perspective’ at the Massachusetts Housing Partnership’s Housing Institute in Devens, MA on June 11th, 2014. The annual two day conference focuses on housing planning and advocacy, and features presentations by planners, consultants and a number of state and local experts on all aspects of housing development. This year’s program also included sessions on zoning to promote affordable housing, fair housing law, site assessments, and developing RFP’s and financial pro-forma. Approximately 150 people attended the conference, including representatives from several Berkshire County municipalities, Central Berkshire Habitat for Humanity, and BRPC Planner Jaclyn Pacejo. The MHP Housing Institute provides an exceptional opportunity for the exchange of information, ideas and technical advice on furthering the goals of municipalities in meeting their current and future housing needs. Contact Patricia Mullins (x 17) at pmullins@berkshireplanning.org for more information.

DHCD Priority Development Funds Awarded to Four Berkshire Communities

Four Berkshire County municipalities have recently been awarded \$42,500 in Priority Development Funding (PDF) from the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and MassHousing, in support of their efforts to further housing planning in their respective communities. BRPC assisted Dalton, Adams, Great Barrington and Richmond with the application and will serve as planning consultant to the towns. The work will focus on developing Housing Production Plans or Housing Action Plans to address the current and future housing needs specific to each town, while striving to achieve balanced housing options at the regional level. Lack of affordable housing is a development concern in Berkshire County: impacting the ability of the region to retain and attract new residents and to provide professional and skilled employees to existing and potential businesses and industry. Dalton, Adams, Great Barrington and Richmond are all currently engaged in various types of housing planning. If you would like more information about housing planning grants and assistance, please contact Patricia Mullins, (x 17) at pmullins@berkshirplanning.org.

Clearinghouse Review Items

The Clearinghouse Committee has reviewed two items:

1. EENF for Connecticut Expansion Project (Kinder Morgan)
2. ENF for Rte. 8/Friend Street Round-About (Adams)

CALENDAR

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

JULY

- 4: Independence Day, BRPC Closed
- 10: BRPC Executive Committee, *Commission Meeting*
- 15: TAC
- 16: Western Massachusetts Historical Commission Coalition (Berkshire Athenaeum, 10 a.m.)
- 19: Brownfields Committee
- 23: Passenger Rail Meeting
- 29: MPO
- 31: New Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals Member Training

AUGUST

- 6: Passenger Rail Meeting
- 7: BRPC Executive Committee
- 16: *BCBOHA Executive Committee**
- 19: TAC
- 20: *BCBOHA Executive Committee**
- 26: MPO

**Tentative*

