

COMMON GROUND

A NEWSLETTER FOR COMMUNITY PLANNING IN THE BERKSHIRE REGION

IN THIS ISSUE

PAGE 1

- *Northeast Energy Direct Gas Pipeline FERC Scoping Period and Public Hearing*
- *Tufts Age-Friendly Grant Received*

PAGE 2

- *Healthy Community Design in the Berkshires*

PAGE 3

- *Comprehensive Planning "Renaissance"?*
- *Draft Transportation Plans Available for Review*
- *Seeking Licensed Contractors for the Gt. Barrington-Sheffield Housing Rehabilitation Program*

PAGE 4

- *Farewell to Transportation Planner Douglas Plachcinski*
- *Jennifer Kimball Nominated for Neighborly Award*

Northeast Energy Direct Gas Pipeline FERC Scoping Period and Public Hearing

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) has issued a Notice of Intent (NOI) which will kick off the formal process to develop the scope of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the new proposed natural gas pipeline running across the Berkshires. Now that the Notice of Intent is issued, all interests have until August 31, 2015, to submit comments to FERC regarding concerns they have which should be included in the scope of the EIS. There will be a formal FERC public hearing in Berkshire County at Taconic High School, Pittsfield, on Tuesday, July 28th, starting at 7 p.m. Registration to sign up to speak will begin at 6 p.m. A copy of the NOI can be found on [BRPC's website](#) as a link under Announcements and on our Major Initiatives page.

In bi-weekly agency conference calls, in which BRPC participates, FERC has made it clear that they expect to conduct a thorough alternatives analysis of three potential routes, all of which affect the Berkshires, but in different places. The three routes are: 1) the now "preferred" route affecting Hancock, Lanesborough, Cheshire, Dalton, Hinsdale, Peru and Windsor; 2) further enlargement of the existing "200" line which would affect Richmond, Stockbridge, Lee, Tyringham, Monterey, Otis and Sandisfield; and 3) a Mass Turnpike alternative which would affect Richmond, Stockbridge, Lee, Becket and Otis.

BRPC continues to coordinate discussions by a working group of communities affected by either the now or formerly preferred routes and includes Rensselaer County, NY, and the three affected towns there. We are working on developing issues which we feel will need to be addressed in the EIS and reviewing the Tennessee Gas Pipeline resource reports which were filed in March, with significant updates and additional information expected towards the end of July.

For further information, contact Executive Director Nat Karns (nkarns@berkshireplanning.org or 413-442-1521, ext. 26), Assistant Director Tom Matuszko (tmatuszko@berkshireplanning.org or ext. 34) or Senior Planner Melissa Provencher (mprovencher@berkshireplanning.org or ext. 22).

Tufts Age-Friendly Grant Received

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, through Berkshires Tomorrow, has been awarded a \$197,770 two year grant from the Tufts Foundation. The grant application was conceived in partnership with the Berkshire Age-Friendly Vision 2020 Task Force, and will allow the hire of a full time project manager for a countywide Age-Friendly project. The Age-Friendly Communities Project is coordinated internationally by the World Health Organization (WHO) and by AARP here in the United States. Berkshire County was formally accepted into the program with a certificate presentation at the June 1 Senior Summit held at the ITAM in Pittsfield and attended by approximately 150 participants. The Berkshire Age-Friendly Vision 2020 Task Force has representation from numerous agencies, including BRPC, Berkshire County Boards of Health Association, Home Instead Senior Care, Tri Town Health Department, the City of Pittsfield, Elder Services of the Berkshires, Berkshire Health Systems, Councils on Aging from Adams, Williamstown, Pittsfield, Great Barrington and North Adams, Berkshire AHEC, Berkshire Music School, Berkshire Regional Housing Association and many others. In addition to the successful Summit and the Tufts grant, a survey of almost 2,500 older adults in Berkshire County has been completed and is in the process of being analyzed. A growing list of interested community seniors is also being compiled. If you are interested in participating in the age friendly work or would like to receive notifications of important milestones, please send your contact information to Laura Kittross, Public Health Program Manager, lkittross@berkshireplanning.org.



Healthy Community Design in the Berkshires

BRPC is wrapping up work on two public health related projects funded by the Metropolitan Area Planning Commission (MAPC), the regional planning agency for the Boston area, and Mass. in Motion (MIM) to develop strategies for healthy community design in the Berkshires. These projects have been working to integrate aspects of public health into comprehensive planning efforts and identify on the ground solutions that communities could implement to increase and support the health and safety of their residents. Work for these projects included a focus on “Complete Streets”, a transportation design concept that attempts to integrate all modes of transportation (pedestrian, bicycle, automobile) into our roadways. While Complete Streets concepts help to address the safety of roadway users, they can also address health by promoting active living and encouraging exercise by biking or walking. BRPC has developed a simple checklist and worksheet to help municipalities with planning for possible Complete Streets projects. Additionally, BRPC been working with the Town of Egremont to apply Complete Streets principles to examine possible walking and biking improvements in the town’s two village centers. BRPC also helped to develop a conceptual plan for an outdoor fitness area located in Egremont’s French Park. Outdoor fitness areas are an increasingly popular recreation amenity that provide a space for exercise within existing park areas and can include much of the same equipment that would be found in an indoor gym or fitness center. Outdoor fitness areas are also popular with senior citizens, as they can be located close to neighborhoods, can be combined with other forms of exercise walking or bicycling, and are free.



WHAT ARE COMPLETE STREETS?

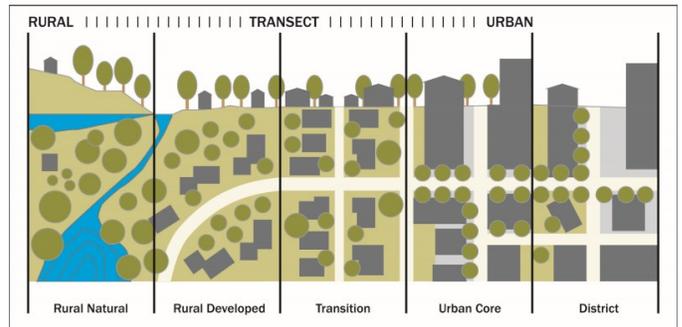
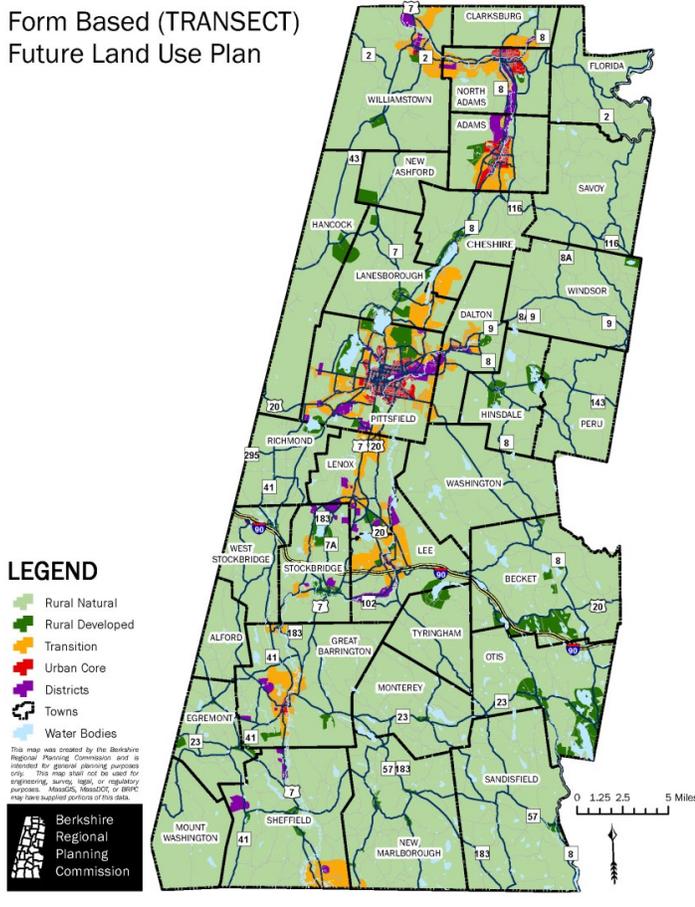
Complete streets is a transportation concept that examines the design of roadways to enable safe access for all users, regardless of age, ability, or mode of transportation, be it by automobile, bicycle or foot. Complete streets is not a “one size fits all” solution, but rather a kit of parts and possible solutions that can be applied to any street or roadway.

Complete streets help to improve access for all ages and abilities by making the roadway safer for non-motorized use. By encouraging non-motorized uses, complete streets help to increase walkability and bicycling, thus promoting active living and exercise.

Additionally, BRPC has been working to integrate healthy design aspects into its ongoing Open Space and Recreation Plan project for the Town of Richmond and its municipal Master Planning project with the town of Otis. BRPC will work to identify public health and healthy community design related goals and objectives for possible inclusion in these plans. Moreover, BRPC worked to map out potential rural “walking loops”, or marked walking paths on quiet roads or existing sidewalks, for the towns of Otis and Richmond that could provide residents with a safe and easily accessible area for walking and exercise.

Please contact Eammon Coughlin (ext. 19) or Tom Matuszko (ext. 34) for more information at ecoughlin@berkshireplanning.org or tmatuszko@berkshireplanning.org.

Form Based (TRANSECT)
Future Land Use Plan



At left, Future Land Use Plan for Berkshire County
Above, Rural Urban Transect

The future land use plan and the rural urban transect are important components of planning for complete streets.

Comprehensive Planning “Renaissance”?

Could there be a Comprehensive Planning Renaissance in the Berkshires? Since 2009, Pittsfield (2009), New Marlborough (2010), Great Barrington (2013) and North Adams (2014) have prepared Master Plans. Currently Dalton and Otis are updating previous Master Plans and Sandisfield is preparing its first plan. Additionally Otis and Lee are updating Open Space and Recreation Plans and Richmond is developing its first Open Space and Recreation Plan. Williamstown is actively working to create an Economic Development Plan. Several other communities are currently or have recently conducted housing needs assessments, which are precursors to Housing Plans. The efforts by those involved are recognized and applauded, as preparation of these plans can involve a significant time commitment. Comprehensive plans are good tools municipalities can use to focus attention and efforts of municipal employees and board members. Additionally comprehensive plans can help secure increasingly competitive grant funds. Let us know if your municipality is actively working on a comprehensive plan or would like more information. Contact, Tom Matuszko at tmatuszko@berkshireplanning.org.

Draft Transportation Plans Available for Review

The Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) has initiated a 30 day public comment period on three transportation plans. The 2016 Long Range Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) is a comprehensive document that provides the basis for future transportation investment and planning in the region and is updated every four years. The MPO’s annual documents, the Unified Planning Work Program which outlines the transportation planning studies to be undertaken in the upcoming federal fiscal year and the Transportation Improvement Program that lays out the projects and programs to be implemented in 2016 through 2019.

Copies of these draft documents are available on the BRPCs website, www.berkshireplanning.org and at the following local public libraries: Berkshire Athenaeum, Pittsfield; Stockbridge Public Library; Mason Public Library, Gt. Barrington; North Adams Public Library; Lenox Library; Lanesborough Library; Williamstown Public Library; Dalton Public Library and Adams Free Library.

The public comment period for these three plans will close on July 31st. Any comments should be sent to the BRPC office or via email to info@berkshireplanning.org.

Three public workshops have been scheduled to provide more information on these plans. The workshops will be held at the locations and dates identified below beginning at 5:30 PM:

Thursday, July 9th
Adams Free Library, 92 Park Street

Wednesday, July 15th
BRPC Offices, 1 Fenn St. Pittsfield

Tuesday, July 28th
Lee Library, 100 Main Street

For more information, please contact Clete Kus at ckus@berkshireplanning.org or (413) 442-1521 ext. 20.

SEEKING LICENSED CONTRACTORS

For the Great Barrington-Sheffield Housing Rehabilitation Program

MA Licensed Contractors are needed immediately for the **Great Barrington-Sheffield CDBG Housing Rehabilitation Program**, for roofing, asbestos removal, chimney building and repair, electrical service and repair, gas and oil burner service, general carpentry, foundation repair, insulation, lead paint removal, painting, plumbing, roofing, siding, and more.



Minority- and women-owned firms are encouraged to apply.

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

<http://tinyurl.com/CDBG-Contractor>

or call (413) 442-1521 ext. 17 or 32.

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

**Farewell to Transportation Planner
Doug Plachcinski**

BRPC says goodbye to Doug Plachcinski, Senior Transportation Planner, who has been with the organization since 2010. Doug has been involved with a variety of transportation planning activities, including corridor planning, bike and pedestrian planning, pavement management, and highway safety. Best of luck in your new position in Michigan, Doug!

Jennifer Kimball Nominated for Neighborly Award

In May, Planner Jennifer Kimball received a Community Recognition Award, sponsored by the Northern Berkshire Neighbors. Jennifer was nominated for her tenacious advocacy for public health of the citizens of Northern Berkshire and Berkshire County. Congrats Jennifer!

Photo: Al Bashevkin, Jennifer Kimball, North Adams Mayor Dick Alcombright. *Photo from Northern Berkshire Community Coalition.*



CALENDAR

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

berkshireplanning.org/events/calendar

J
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Jul. 9th
Lee Northern Mills Reuse Strategies Event

Jul. 16th
Full Commission

Jul. 21st
Transportation Advisory Committee

Jul. 28th
MPO

Jul. 30th
5th Thursday Dinner

A
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Aug. 4th
MPO Special Meeting

Aug. 18th
Transportation Advisory Committee

Aug. 25th
MPO

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