

COMMON GROUND

A NEWSLETTER FOR COMMUNITY PLANNING IN THE BERKSHIRE REGION

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[Maybe] leaving winter behind...what do you think happened here?



As we look forward to spring, can you identify the plants and flowers below?



Sustainable Berkshires Plan Public Hearing and Adoption. March 6 and March 20

Pursuant to M.G.L. Chapter 40B "The Regional Planning Law", Section 5, the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission will hold a Public Hearing on the proposed sustainable Berkshires plan, a new regional plan for Berkshire County, on Thursday, March 6 at 5:30 p.m. in the Berkshire Athenaeum Auditorium, 1 Wendell Ave, Pittsfield. Staff will be available starting at 4:30 p.m. to provide information and answer questions regarding the plan. A copy of the draft plan is available online at www.berkshireplanning.org, and available at the BRPC office or by calling (413) 442-1521 x 10,. Plan elements are: Historic Preservation, Food and Agriculture, Conservation and Recreation, Climate and Energy, Housing and Neighborhoods, Economy, Infrastructure and Public Services, and Land Use.

Thursday, March 20th: BRPC Plan Adoption

Scheduled in conjunction with a full Commission meeting, the commission will formally vote to adopt the Sustainable Berkshires plan at this time.

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Save these Dates! Free MACC Fundamental Units for Berkshire Conservation Commissioners to be Held in Pittsfield



Saturday, March 29th

Unit 3: The Wetlands Protection Act: Fundamentals, Process and Procedures (9:00 am – 11:30 am)

Unit 4: Plan Review and Site Visit Procedures (includes field session) (12:30 pm – 3:30 pm)

Saturday, April 5th

Unit 5: Wetlands Functions and Values (9:00 am – 11:30 am)

Unit 6: Writing an Effective Order of Conditions (12:30 pm – 3:00 pm)

The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) and the Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissioners (MACC) are teaming up to offer four units of MACC's Certificate Training Program, Fundamentals for Conservation Commissioners. The trainings are offered free of charge for Conservation Commissioners from Berkshire County communities and will be held at the BRPC office in Pittsfield. Registration will be available in early March. For more information about this training series, visit http://www.maccweb.org/edu_ct_fundamentals.html.

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Water Quality Grants

Two DEP grant programs are offering funding to protect water quality. The **604(b) Water Quality Planning Grants** will fund nonpoint source assessment and planning projects to identify pollution sources and implementation plans. Applications are due March 28, 2014. The **s319 Nonpoint Source Pollution Grant Program** funds projects that address prevention, control, and abatement of nonpoint source pollution. This is the “shovel in the ground” grant program that will fund final engineering and construction projects. This grant program requires a 40% non-federal match, and applications will likely be due in late May 2014. **Staff Contact: Lauren Gaherty (ext. 35) or Melissa Provencher (ext. 22).**

Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) begins developing the 2015–2018 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

The Transportation Improvement Program, referred to as the **TIP**, is Berkshire County’s four year transportation capital improvement program. It is the document that identifies the funding for, and scheduling of, transportation projects and programs. The TIP implements the region’s long-range transportation plan by programming federal-aid funds for transit, highway, bridge, transportation enhancement, bike paths, safety, and air quality improvements. Federal regulations require Berkshire MPO to develop a TIP document each year through a continuous, cooperative and comprehensive (3C) metropolitan transportation planning process in conformance with various applicable federal laws and regulations. The development of the TIP follows a process whereby new transportation projects consistent with the Regional Transportation Plan are solicited from local communities. The projects are then evaluated by BRPC and MassDOT staff and are assigned a priority score based on transportation and regional planning criteria. This evaluation and scoring establishes a preliminary prioritization for the project. A project’s readiness (i.e. engineering design status) and its fit within the funds anticipated to be available for Berkshire County also figure into the final ranking of projects. This ranking of candidate projects is then presented to members of the Transportation Advisory Committee and the MPO. This project list is further refined in response to comments from MPO and TAC members and then released for public comment in a draft TIP document. Implementation and/or construction of a particular project requires many steps and in all likelihood it will take several years from when a project is first programmed in the TIP until construction actually begins. Therefore, it is important that communities maintain an awareness of their long-term transportation needs so that projects can be initiated at an appropriate time to avoid unnecessary delays in keeping their

road network up-to-date. Limited funding also impacts the ability of the MPO to program projects in a timely manner to meet the region’s needs.

The following table highlights the milestones in developing the FFY 2015-2018 TIP.

March 3, 2014	Project submittal deadline
March	Project evaluation/planning, initiate TAC + MPO discussions
April	TAC/MPO meets to discuss project prioritization listing
May	TAC/MPO recommend TIP project listing
May 20, 2014	MPO releases Draft TIP for 30 day public comment period
June 24, 2014	MPO approval of TIP
July/ August	Federal agency approval

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Farmland Access Symposium

On Saturday, April 12, Berkshire Grown and the Community Land Trust in the Southern Berkshires will host a conversation among people and organizations working in the Berkshires to put more farmers on the land and more land into farming. Established, new and retired farmers, land owners, members of the land conversation community, agricultural commissions, community food security planners, sustainability community organizers, financial advisors, accountants, assessors and attorneys are welcome. The event will include lunch and requires advance registration at CommunityLandTrust.org. The event is a collaboration between a number of community and regional partners, and is also an item from the Sustainable Berkshires Food and Agriculture element and Keep Berkshires Farming Initiative. Other partners include Berkshire Coop Market, Land for Good, The Carrot Project, Berkshire Natural Resources Council, and the Schumacher Center for a New Economics.

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

Bike Planning Update

BRPC has begun working with North Adams citizens and city staff to advance the design of a bicycle/pedestrian path that will link the city to downtown Williamstown. The goal of the project is to finalize the route as it winds its way through busy North Adams. One objective in determining the route is to locate the bike/ped path along fairly level terrain, similar to that of the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail, so that people of all abilities will be able to enjoy it. As residents of North County know, finding level, undeveloped land in North Adams is a challenge. This work follows a preliminary study that was conducted in 2010. The Town of Williamstown will soon begin work of its own to design a bike/ped path that will link up with the North Adams route. Funding for the work in both communities is being provided by the National Scenic Byways Grant Program.

The City of North Adams, Town of Adams and MassDOT continue to work together to bring the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail northward. It is hoped that construction of the Ashuwillticook extension will be done in 2014, bringing the trail northward to Lime Street in Adams. Concurrently, the two communities are partnering to further design of the trail from Lime Street up to Hodges Cross Road in North Adams.

BRPC will soon be working with the Town of Lee to aid in studying and locating a bike/ped path that will stretch from the Stockbridge town line along Route 102 and northward through the downtown area. This project will advance the work that has been done by the Lee Bike Committee and Foresight Land Services in 2010. The focus of this new work will be to locate a path along the Housatonic River so that the Town can begin the design process for this section. The funding for this work is also from the National Scenic Byways Program. **Staff Contact: Lauren Gaherty, x 35 or lgaherty@berkshireplanning.org**

Public Health Update

The Berkshire Public Health Alliance was recently awarded a third year of Community Innovation Challenge grant (CIC) funding from the State Office of Administration and Finance to expand its successful public health nursing program. The CIC grant will allow the Alliance to continue to expand the public health nursing program to additional communities, while building up revenue to sustainable levels. The grant will also allow the Alliance to implement two related programs: an Integrated Tick Management Program (ITMP) for recreational summer camps and an indoor air quality education program designed to help residents reduce indoor contaminants that can cause asthma and other respiratory disease.

The Alliance Public Health Nursing program began almost three years ago and currently provides comprehensive public health nursing services to seven municipalities: the City of North Adams and the Towns of Great Barrington, Egremont, Windsor, Peru, Washington and Clarksburg. These services include all mandated disease reporting, surveillance and investigation, as well as wellness and education programs, assistance with well checks for vulnerable residents, flu clinics and other services. The Alliance public health nurses also provide back-up services to the City of Pittsfield. Any interested Berkshire County community – whether or not they are a member of the Alliance – is welcome to contact the Alliance for further information on the public health nursing program. The Alliance/BRPC was also a partner on the recent successful Prevention and Wellness Trust Fund grant led by Berkshire Health Systems. The Prevention and Wellness Trust Fund was implemented by the legislature to create clinical/community partnerships and linkages around chronic conditions that can be improved with a return on investment within four years. The Berkshire Health Improvement Plan (Be-HIP) funded under the grant will concentrate on four conditions: diabetes, hypertension, falls in older adults and tobacco use. The Alliance/BRPC will be represented on the Steering Committee during the planning phase (through FY 14) and expects to be part of the community programming for the implementation phase starting in January 2015 in three of the four areas.

Staff Contact: Laura Kitross, x 37 or lkitross@berkshireplanning.org

Save the Date! Think Regionally, Act Locally: Addressing Housing Needs in Western Massachusetts Communities

April 25, 2014 9:00 am-3:30 p.m. at the Kitteredge Center of Holyoke Community College

MHP, with the support of PVPC, BRPC, and FRCOG will host a workshop focused on the basics of housing development for suburban and rural municipalities in central and western Massachusetts. This event is targeted to local public officials, planning and zoning board members, municipal staff, affordable housing developers and advocates. Topics to be covered include: conducting a housing needs analysis, site and project feasibility, accessing financial and community resources, and fair housing laws and regulations, as well as a presentation from the western Massachusetts regional planning agencies on regional housing trends and opportunities.

No cost for attendance, but registration required. Please contact Carsten Snow at Massachusetts Housing Partnership, at (617) 330-9944 x 252 or csnow@mhp.net.

DLTA'14 Projects Announced

BRPC has selected the following sixteen (16) projects to receive direct technical assistance from BRPC staff through the 2014 District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) program:

1. ADAMS HOUSING (40R)
2. BECKET HOUSING PLANNING
3. CHESHIRE ZONING FOR GROWTH
4. DALTON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANNING
5. GREAT BARRINGTON HOUSING PLANNING
6. HOUSATONIC RIVER RESTORATION
7. NORTH ADAMS ZONING FOR GROWTH
8. OTIS VILLAGE PLANNING
9. PITTSFIELD WEST SIDE ZONING FOR GROWTH
10. RICHMOND LONG RANGE FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY
11. RICHMOND HOUSING PLANNING
12. REGIONAL SHARED ENERGY MANAGER
13. REGIONAL INDUSTRIAL SITES REPORT
14. REGIONAL INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SERVICES
15. REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT
16. WASHINGTON ZONING FOR GROWTH

Please visit <http://berkshireplanning.org/projects/district-local-technical-assistance-2014/> for project descriptions and additional information.

Staff Contact: Brian Domina, ext. 14, or bdomina@berkshireplanning.org

BRPC Seeks Technical Assistance Funds for Pipeline Safety Information

BRPC will be seeking \$50,000 through a Pipeline Safety Information Grant to Communities Technical Assistance Grant. The grant program, administered by the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA), provides funding for the analysis of pipeline safety issues affecting local communities and to help promote public participation in official proceedings pertaining to pipeline safety issues. BRPC's application is in response to the recent Northeast Expansion Project proposal by Tennessee Gas Pipeline Company, L.L.C. to upgrade its existing pipeline system within New York, Massachusetts, Connecticut and New Hampshire. As proposed, the project will result in the construction of 250 miles of new pipeline running through Richmond, Lenox, Pittsfield, Dalton, Hinsdale Peru and Windsor. Pending receipt of all necessary regulatory approvals, the proposed project is estimated to be placed in-service by November 2018. Tennessee Gas plans to explore this effort with interested stake-

holders, including landowners, elected officials, local governments and their residents, and as well as state and federal regulatory agencies.

The PHMSA Technical Assistance Grant Program provides money to local governments and communities for hiring independent experts to help them obtain information so they can be informed and active participants in decision-making activities about pipelines running through—or proposed for siting in—their communities. Funding through the PHMSA Technical Assistance Grant will allow BRPC to provide such technical assistance to the affected communities to better understand their role with regard to the proposed project including how to safeguard against pipeline failure and minimize risk to both people and unusually sensitive environmental areas.

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CALENDAR

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

MARCH

- 6: Executive Committee, Sustainable Berkshires Public Hearing
- 18: MPO
- 20: Full Commission, Sustainable Berkshires Adoption
- 29: Free MACC Certificate Training

APRIL

- 1: Executive Committee, Finance Committee
- 5: Free MACC Certificate Training
- 12: Farm Land Access Symposium
- 25: Mass Housing Partnership Workshop

MAY

- 1: Executive Committee, Finance Committee
- 15: Full Commission