

COMMON GROUND

A NEWSLETTER FOR COMMUNITY PLANNING IN THE BERKSHIRE REGION

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Twenty-Four Year (almost) Retrospective



I am very proud as I reflect on how much BRPC has evolved since starting as Executive Director on August 22, 1994. At that time, BRPC was primarily involved in regional transportation planning, with much of the energy focused on the ongoing effort to get the Pittsfield Bypass built. Three staff focused on transportation planning and one planner focused on local land use and limited environmental planning. There was the Executive Director and a bookkeeper and a secretary. At that time the program support consisted of transportation and transit planning contracts and two or three contracts from other state agencies or a municipality for a handful of land use or environmental planning projects and the budget was about \$425,000 annually.

In 2018, BRPC still has transportation planning as one program area but that is equaled by other robust programs, specifically Community & Economic Development, Community Services and Planning, Environment & Energy Planning, Public Health, and GIS and Data. We have sixteen planners, an Executive Director and Assistant Director, and three administrative staff, plus some part-time, off-site staff who primarily focused on public health inspection and nursing services. At any given time, we have between 60 and 80 projects and programs underway and the budget is approximately \$2.6 million annually.

Beyond the breadth of services provided expanding considerably, the level of support to and interaction with Berkshire municipalities and non-local government organizations has also greatly expanded. We provide some service to every city and town in Berkshire County, although the exact amount and nature of the service varies widely across them, based on their needs and desires. We participate with a significant number of non-governmental organizations across a spectrum of interest areas including arts and culture, Age Friendly Berkshires, the Berkshire Opioid Abuse Prevention Task Force, regional economic development, historic preservation, water quality and land conservation, regional bicycle organizations, and public education. Berkshire Benchmarks is the “go-to” place to obtain data on the region and we are increasing the amount of analysis produced from that effort.

BRPC has gained increased respect at the state level with key staff representing the Berkshires or BRPC on key state commissions and task forces. These have included the State Climate Change Adaptation Task Force, the Massachusetts Housing Partnership Rural Initiative, the Massachusetts Rural Policy Advisory Commission, and Special Commission on Local and Regional Public Health. Within the Berkshires, we are now often requested to either convene or facilitate various working groups or initiatives, sometimes due to our expertise, such as the Rest of River Municipal Committee working on the local response to the clean-up of the PCBs from the Housatonic River, and sometimes because we can act as an impartial convener as has happened with a collaboration involving many of the arts and cultural organizations.

None of these things would have occurred if we had not been able to build a very capable and dedicated staff and if we had not had strong support from the Commission members and built strong support from our communities and our state legislative delegation. We have also built a culture within BRPC of being adaptable to the changing opportunities and environment in which we work.

I think I am proudest that from 1994 to 2018 we transitioned from being an organization that was not relied upon and often was not invited to be at a table to one that is often at the table and increasingly is asked to set that table. The transition from irrelevancy to relevancy has been profound.

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Adams EMS Takes Part in Post-Overdose Engagement and Harm Reduction Training

Since 2000, opioid-related deaths have increased in Massachusetts more than 350%. With the emergence of the overdose-reversal drug naloxone, many lives have been saved. The BOAPC Post-Overdose Engagement Program creates greater interaction and follow-up with those who have experienced an opioid overdose reversal, as well as their families/significant others/ bystanders, leading to a reduction in the risk of overdose and associated deaths, increased continuum of care for clients and their families who are interested in treatment, and services resulting in better health outcomes, and less opioid-related deaths.

Many first responders in northern Berkshire County have expressed concern with the number of persons who have had an opioid overdose reversed with naloxone who then overdose again, refuse admission to the emergency room, or refuse transport entirely. Adams EMS (which also serves Cheshire and Savoy) wanted to do something more to serve this high-risk population. Through the Berkshire Opioid Addiction Prevention Collaborative (BOAPC), and with additional funding from the Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation, about 12 first responders took part in a training on how to further engage post-overdose clients in the Adams EMS service area. Trained by North Adams Ambulance Services veterans, Amalio Jusino and John Meaney, Jr., the first responders were educated about opioids, the stigma of drug addiction, and harm reduction, as well as how to provide overdose clients, loved ones, and bystanders with information about a variety of social and health services, and connect them to care (if they choose).



To prevent additional high-risk behaviors and future overdoses, Adams EMS were trained to engage with their clients about the risk of re-overdosing. (The risk of re-overdosing after receiving the naloxone is high, as Naloxone (Narcan) is active for only about 30–90 minutes in the body. If the naloxone wears off before the opioids are out of the body, that person can go back into an overdose. Additionally, because naloxone blocks opioids from acting in the brain, it can cause withdrawal symptoms, prompting an opioid user to use again right away, again putting the individual at high risk for overdose.) The first responders were also provided with a script/form that can be loaded in to the computer on-board the ambulance, which includes a (HIPAA-compliant) release that allows the Brien Center to follow up with the client by phone or in person within 24-48 hours. The client can also request information regarding Tapestry and Healthy Steps, the comprehensive drug-user services providers for Berkshire County.

If your community's first responders are interested in a similar training, or to learn more about BOAPC, please contact project manager Jennifer Kimball at jkimball@berkshireplanning.org.

Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Grants

The MVP program is offering two grant opportunities: one for planning and the other for action. Planning grant funding is being offered to municipalities to develop a comprehensive, baseline climate change vulnerability assessment and develop prioritized action strategies for dealing with priority climate change-related and other natural hazards. The vulnerability assessment will include a full range of climate change impacts, including temperature changes, extreme weather, inland flooding, changes in precipitation, and other impacts. As part of the assessment communities will conduct an intensive public participation process to develop and prioritize actions for the municipality and broader stakeholder networks.

Towns successfully completing the MVP planning process will be designated as "MVP Communities," which makes them eligible for MVP Action Grants and could lead to increased standing in other state funding opportunities. The Planning grant program complements the work towns may have already done in developing Hazard Mitigation Plans, and those with such plans are encouraged to become MVP-designated to increase standing with other state grant programs. Four Berkshire towns received MVP Planning Grants in 2017, and two of them are likely submitting grants to the MVP Action Grant Program in May 2018.

There is not a cash match requirement, but municipalities must commit sufficient staff and volunteer board member time (estimated at 120-200 hours) to assure completion of a public participation process and broad community engagement. The application deadline for the MVP Planning Grant is May 11, 2018.

The application form can be found at <https://www.mass.gov/alerts/mvp-planning-and-designation-program#719636>.

Staff contact: Lauren Gaherty at lgaherty@berkshireplanning.org

Age Friendly Launch Event

On April 17th Age Friendly Berkshire held a launch event at Berkshire Hills Country Club to celebrate the Age Friendly Berkshire Action plan.



Age Friendly Berkshires Action Plan Launch Event, Berkshire Hills Country Club, April 17, 2018



Alice Bonner, Secretary of the Executive Office of Elder Affairs, gives the keynote address



Mike Festa, State Director, AARP/MA, with Peg McDonough, Laura Kitross and Bobbi Orsi, awards a certificate of recognition to Age Friendly Berkshires



Participants in break out session

Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Public Review and Comment

The Berkshire MPO released the following documents for a 21-day public comment period on April 24th.

2019-2023 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) – The TIP is a prioritized, multi-year program for the implementation of federally funded transportation projects in Berkshire County. 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.

2018 Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Transportation (HST) Plan – This plan focuses on the transportation needs of persons with disabilities, older adults, and persons with low income; it identifies strategies to improve the quality and availability of transportation services for these demographic groups. The Coordinated HST Plan is updated to retain the region's eligibility to receive federal funding and to address the growing needs of human services transportation users.

You can review the draft documents on BRPC's website or in office, and provide comments to staff during the comment period, which ends May 17.

For more information, contact Senior Transportation Planner Anuja Koirala (akoirala@berkshireplanning.org or x18)

Public Meeting set for MassDOT's 2019 -2023 Capital Investment Plan

MassDOT is nearing completion of the 2019–2023 Capital Investment Plan (CIP). The CIP is a multi-billion dollar program that makes long-term, multi-modal investments across the Commonwealth. It covers all MassDOT highway and municipal projects, regional airports, rail and transit, including projects for MBTA and Regional Transit Authorities as well as the Registry of Motor Vehicles. The CIP is expected to be available for public review by May 14th. A copy of the document will be available at the link below.

In anticipation of the upcoming release of the 2019–2023 Capital Investment Plan (CIP), public meetings have been scheduled across the Commonwealth to present and discuss the Draft Capital Investment Plan Update. Members of the public are invited to attend these sessions which includes a presentation by MassDOT and staff will be available to answer questions. Participation by the public is critical to its success!

The public meeting for Berkshire County will be held at BRPC Offices, Fenn Street, Pittsfield on May 22nd beginning at 5:30 PM.

If you are unable to attend this meeting, a copy of the presentation will be available at www.mass.gov/massdot/cip

For additional information on MassDOT's 2019–2023 Capital Investment Plan, contact Clete Kus, Transportation Program Manager, at ckus@berkshireplanning.org or X 20.



EOEEA Municipal Planning Assistance Grant Program



The Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) is again offering Massachusetts municipalities technical assistance to improve their land use practices. Through the procurement issued on April 13th, available at the link below, EEA is making grant funding available to the Commonwealth's municipalities and Regional Planning Agencies in support of their efforts to plan, regulate (zone), and act to conserve and develop land consistent with the Massachusetts Sustainable Development Principles. Grants are available for diverse land use planning related work with a preference given to zoning for sustainable housing production, zoning that results in permanent land conservation, and mitigation of climate change through zoning and other regulations that reduce energy use and greenhouse gas emissions. Optional bidders conferences are being held in Boston on April 25th and in Springfield on May 1st.

Proposals are due on May 11th. Full details can be found in the procurement available on the CommBuys [page](https://www.commbuys.com/bs0/external/bidDetail.sdo?docId=BD-18-1042-ENV-ENV01-25982&external=true&parentUrl=bid) at <https://www.commbuys.com/bs0/external/bidDetail.sdo?docId=BD-18-1042-ENV-ENV01-25982&external=true&parentUrl=bid>

For more information, contact Assistant Director Tom Matuszko (tmatuszko@berkshireplanning.org or x34)

CALENDAR

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

If you prefer not to receive this newsletter, please send an email to: info@berkshireplanning.org and we will remove your name from the mailing list.

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May 3 - BRPC Finance Committee Meeting, 3:30 pm

May 3 - BRPC Executive Meeting, 4:00 pm

May 17 - BRPC Commission Meeting, 4:00 pm

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2**

June 7 - BRPC Executive Meeting, 4:00 pm

Remember to check our inclement weather hotline to learn the status of a meeting at (413) 442-1521 X 15



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