

COMMON GROUND

A NEWSLETTER FOR COMMUNITY PLANNING IN THE BERKSHIRE REGION

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Regional Transportation Plan Update – Progress Report

For the past few months, BRPC's transportation planning staff have been working to update Berkshire County's long-range Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). As the guiding document that sets the direction for transportation priorities and investments in the region, BRPC has been asking you, the public, to help identify segments of the transportation network that need improvement.

Through our 'Transportation Needs' survey, we are pleased to have received input from close to 700 county residents. Preliminary survey results indicate consensus around expanding BRTA's service routes and hours of operation; improving the condition of sidewalks and bike paths to enable more walking and bicycling; and increasing the presence of Taxis, or Uber and Lyft rideshare vehicles. The survey will remain open until mid-November and is available at www.surveymonkey.com/r/berkshireplan and in Spanish at www.surveymonkey.com/r/planespanol. Don't miss your chance to weigh in on how best to strengthen our transportation system. If you haven't already, please take 10 minutes to fill-out our survey or tell a friend and help BRPC get to 1,000 transportation surveys collected.

Additionally, BRPC would like to thank all those that attended the RTP public information session at the Berkshire Athenaeum Auditorium. Your participation is essential as we work to enhance regional connections and provide transportation options that meet the present and future needs of Berkshire residents.



RTP Public Information Session – Berkshire Athenaeum Auditorium – October 17th, 2018

For more information, contact Senior Transportation Planner Eammon Coughlin (ECoughlin@berkshireplanning.org, or x19).

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

Berkshire Flyer 2.0

The Berkshire Flyer feasibility study identified a preferred route for a seasonal rail service between New York City and Pittsfield using the same tracks as the existing Empire Corridor service and Lake Shore Limited service, connecting in Albany/Rensselaer. This Friday/Sunday seasonal service would not require capital improvements and could be operated by Amtrak utilizing their existing equipment. The Berkshire Flyer 2.0 study is the continuation of efforts to implement a Pilot for Seasonal Rail Service between New York City and Pittsfield in 2020.

State Senator Adam Hinds secured funding in the FY19 state budget to continue moving forward the Berkshire Flyer planning process. The Berkshire Flyer 2.0 subcommittee was established for the purposes of further study to identify and evaluate the issues, benefits, and challenges to creating a seasonal rail service between New York City and Berkshire County. The study will specifically focus upon:

- Identifying and evaluating last mile/ local transportation options in Berkshire County
- Evaluating ridership data
- Developing a marketing strategy
- Identifying and developing private partnership

The subcommittee's first meeting was on August 27th with work to be wrapped up by March 1, 2019. Meeting materials can be found at <http://berkshireplanning.org/projects/berkshire-flyer-2.0>.

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

Downtown Great Barrington receives Cultural District designation



Image (above): Steering Committee co-chair Karin Watkins

Downtown Great Barrington joined 44 other communities around the Commonwealth as a "Cultural District", designated officially by Mass Cultural Council on October 22nd. Mahaiwe Performing Arts Center hosted a public announcement featuring MCC Executive Director Anita Walker along with Senator Adam Hinds and Representative Smitty Pignatelli to mark the launch of the new district. The Mass Cultural Council is a state agency that promotes excellence, inclusion, education, and diversity in the arts through a wide range of grants, initiatives and advocacy.



Image (above): Announcement at Mahaiwe

The application process for Great Barrington's downtown district began in early 2018, supported by BRPC Senior Planner Laura Brennan through the Shared Economic Development Planner program. Laura will continue to work with Town staff and the volunteer Steering Committee on district promotion and programming. The Downtown Great Barrington Cultural District includes over 30 cultural venues and supporting destinations within its borders and is the bullseye of a much larger cultural target for visitors and residents. The district is home to a diverse combination of social, architectural, and cultural resources that reflect the history of the southern Berkshires and play an important role in the success of Great Barrington's economy.



Image (above): Announcement at Mahaiwe

More information and regular updates on activity in the district can be found on their

Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/CulturalGB/>



Image (above): Anita Walker

BRPC's 5th Thursday Dinner–Census 2020

The 2020 US Census is rapidly approaching and work to ensure a complete count in Berkshire County is beginning. As we face a declining population, ensuring our congressional and state representation does not further decline as well as making sure the county receives its appropriate share of federal and state financial resources, is essential. With concern about a citizenship question and general government mistrust, as well as reliance on internet-based submittals, there is concern in the region about making sure every person is counted.



Please join Georgia Lowe from the US Census Bureau as well as representatives from the Massachusetts Secretary of State's office for a presentation on the 2020 Census, its impacts on you, and how to get involved.

Dinner and the presentation will be at the County Club of Pittsfield, 639 South Street in Pittsfield starting at 5:30pm. Registration can be found online at: <https://brpc-fifth-thursday-dinner.eventbrite.com>

2018 Charles Kusik Award winner



The Kusik Award recognizes outstanding contributions to Berkshire County. Barbara Zheutlin, the retiring Director of Berkshire Grown, is the 2018 Charles Kusik Award winner. Barbara has been instrumental in building Berkshire Grown as a strong resource and support agency to “keep farmers farming” in Berkshire County. Barbara has been the executive director since 2007. She initiated major growth in the organization through seeking new collaborators, strategic planning and development training. With increased funding she has expanded the size and effectiveness of the office. The organization now provides direct support for farmers in the form of winter markets, workshops on the business aspects of farming, mentoring for new farmers and networking opportunities among farmers. She has also originated and maintained a Share the Bounty program, and

helps administer the Healthy Incentives Program, both of which insure that our low-income citizens are not left out. She has made the mission of “Keeping farmers farming” her personal crusade, and is very deserving of this recognition for all she has done for this county.

The Massachusetts Rural Policy Advisory Commission

The Rural Policy Advisory Commission (RPAC) was created by the legislature in 2015 as established by **M.G.L. Chapter 23A: Section 66.**

The commission serves as a research body for issues critical to the welfare and vitality of rural communities and studies, review and reports on the status of rural communities and residents in the commonwealth. It advises the general court and the executive branch of the impact of existing and proposed state laws, policies and regulations on rural communities and advances legislative and policy solutions that address rural needs. It also advocates to ensure that rural communities receive a fair share of state investment, promotes collaboration among rural communities to improve efficiency in delivery of services and develops and supports new leadership in rural communities.

To inform its work the RPAC is developing Massachusetts Rural Plan. The RPAC is scheduling public outreach sessions across the state to discuss the creation and components of this plan and solicit input on a broad range of topics including infrastructure, economic activity, municipal government, housing, public health and education.

The Berkshire session is scheduled for 6:00 pm, Thursday, December 6, 2018 at the BRPC offices, 1 Fenn Street, Suite 201, Pittsfield.



Congratulations

Doing our part for Berkshire Population Growth!

Best of luck to Senior Planner Laura
Brennan who is expecting twins early next
year.



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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**November 1 - BRPC
Executive Meeting,
4:00 pm**

**November 8 - CPTC
Intro to Subdivision
Control Law, 6:00 pm**

**November 15 - BRPC
Commission Meeting,
7:00 pm**

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**December 6 - BRPC
Executive Meeting,
4:00 pm**

**December 13 - CPTC
Zoning Exemptions
Training, 6:00 pm**

Please consider receiving an e-newsletter—saving trees and energy costs in our region and beyond.
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