

COMMON GROUND

A NEWSLETTER FOR COMMUNITY PLANNING IN THE BERKSHIRE REGION

IN THIS ISSUE

PAGE 1

- *Carrying On*
- *Food and Transportation access during Covid-19*

PAGE 2

- *MVP Planning Grant*
- *FEMA Reimbursement for COVID-19 Emergency Protective Measures*
- *MVP Action Grant*

PAGE 3

- *Helping Those Who Are Helping Others*
- *Isolation & Loneliness in Berkshire County-Community Conversation*
- *Konkapot River Plant Species and Resilience*

PAGE 4

- *CDC Face Mask Guidance*
- *Calendar*

Carrying On

The COVID-19 crisis has disrupted all aspects of life—health and safety, work, entertainment, family events, commerce, travel, etc. While the BRPC office is still officially closed, the BRPC staff is still working remotely and conducting virtual meetings. We will begin the slow process of re-opening soon. We have, however, re-directed some of our resources and staff time towards responding to the initial health risk and immediate disruption caused by the virus. More recently we have focused on recovery activities; trying to secure resources to overcome the economic impact the business, school, and daycare closures and the stay at home order have created. If work we were doing for your community was disrupted we appreciate your understanding. We are trying to get to it as best we can. We, like I'm sure all of you, are eager for returning back to a more normal time.

Food and Transportation access during Covid-19

The Covid-19 shutdown has created challenges for everyone, but especially those living in poverty, the disabled and chronically ill, recent immigrants, older adults and now, those suddenly jobless. We are requesting that municipal leaders make a concerted effort to identify and contact vulnerable residents directly, if possible, to make sure they are able to access **local food resources, transportation providers** that are still operating and get assistance from **volunteers**, if they are unable to get to one of the food outlets themselves.

Current **food pantry, meal sites, school meal programs and diaper programs** spreadsheet is here: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1a3XZx8MlmW8GSILKXBizUpM_NwY6V2bcVm4ApD5Mw3k/edit?usp=sharing. Please share this info widely via email and post in your municipal publications/websites. Please be aware that this list is updated WEEKLY as resource sites shift to meet the needs of the community.

Donate Food or Funds to Pantries: All food pantries and the nonprofits that run them, are confirming double and even triple-digit increases in visitors.

Donations of fresh veggies, plus canned tuna, fruits, vegetables, soups, nuts and nut butters, healthy cereals, sandwich bread, etc. can be made at any food access site. Cash donations at pantries are best made via purchased gift cards (Visa, MC) to allow the pantry to make specific purchases, or donate gift cards to local grocery outlets (StopandShop, Big Y, etc.). Bulk quantity items from Costco or BJ's are also welcome. When in doubt, call your local pantry before you shop, to inquire about what they need most.

100% of donations made to the **Covid-19 Fund** at Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation and Berkshire United Way will be redistributed to area nonprofits: <https://www.berkshireunitedway.org/berkshirecountycovid19fund>.

Transportation has been curtailed region-wide. Public providers now limit rides to food or medical appointments only. Private taxi and ambulance services are operating. Face masks must be worn, in order to use these services. The list of Berkshire County Transportation providers, COVID EDITION, is here: http://berkshireplanning.org/images/uploads/documents/Berkshire_County_Transportation_Guide_-_COVID_EDITION_Apr_2020.pdf

Volunteers Needed: There is a need for volunteers to perform food-access related services, as well as other tasks. Berkshire United Way is recruiting volunteers to help nonprofits to continue to provide services to their constituents, all across the county. Sign up here: <https://www.berkshireunitedway.org/volunteer-advocate>

Many area **restaurants** are open, with **curbside pickup** or **delivery options**. Here's a list that is constantly being updated: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/e/2PACX-1vSkylGb2vxBfgNhH94mrkVZwbbKcAqRKMjnPtjVrDvwnTVRjIOWURQIA3yC5XnhmAQ6NFEeq2XiKT/pubhtml?gid=0&single=true>

Doorstep Deliverers is a new all-volunteer service, that is recruiting to provide curbside pickup and delivery for phoned-in grocery or pharmacy orders: <https://www.doorstepdeliverers.org/sign-up-to-volunteer>.

MVP Planning Grant

MVP Planning Grants are currently OPEN on a rolling basis until August 7, 2020 at 4pm (or until all funding has been allocated). Early application is encouraged.

The MVP Planning Grant offers funding to municipalities that wish to assess their vulnerability to and prepare for climate change impacts, build community resilience, and receive designation from the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) as a Climate Change Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) program municipality.

As an MVP Certified Provider, BRPC has worked with communities in Berkshire County to complete the MVP planning process including research on local climate change impacts, facilitating stakeholder workshops, organizing public listening sessions, and creating the final planning document. BRPC can also assist municipalities in the application process. Applicant municipalities can request additional funding to complete their FEMA-approved Local Hazard Mitigation Plans with MVP Planning Grants. Contact BRPC Senior Planner Caroline Massa at cmassa@berkshireplanning.org.

MVP program questions can be directed to the Berkshire and Hilltowns MVP Regional Coordinator Carrieanne Petrik at carrieanne.petrik@mass.gov.

FEMA Reimbursement for COVID-19 Emergency Protective Measures

Visit the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) website for resources on how to apply for reimbursement from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for "Category B" Emergency Protective Measures in response to COVID-19. Be sure to track costs and set up your FEMA Public Assistance Grants Portal account to submit a Request for Public Assistance (RPA). All municipalities and some public nonprofits are eligible for reimbursement.

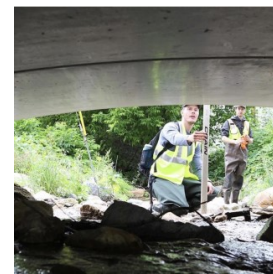
Go to <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-federal-disaster-declaration> to access templates and training. Municipalities should coordinate with their Emergency Management Directors before requesting new Grants Portal accounts.

MVP Action Grant



The MVP Action Grant Request for Responses (RFR) is OPEN until June 11, 2020 at 2pm.

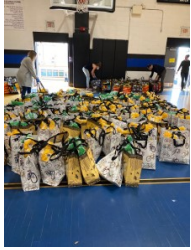
The MVP Action Grant offers financial resources to municipalities that are seeking to advance priority climate adaptation actions to address climate change impacts resulting from extreme weather, inland flooding, severe heat, and other climate impacts. Responses to the RFR may be submitted by municipalities who have received designation from the EEA as a MVP Community.



- Planning, Assessments, and Regulatory Updates- This project type provides municipalities with the opportunity to employ MVP core principles to:
 - * Identify, inventory, assess, and prioritize people, places, resources, and/or critical facilities or infrastructure that may be impacted by climate change in order to propose strategies for improving resiliency.
 - * Develop and formally adopt planning documents and regulations that encourage climate change adaptation.
 - * Develop and implement plans that will increase social resiliency and public health
- Nature-based Solutions for Ecological and Public Health- This project type uses MVP core principles to protect, restore, or manage an ecological system to safeguard public health and clean water, increase natural hazard resilience, and/or sequester carbon.
- Resilient Redesigns and Retrofits for Critical Facilities and Infrastructure- This project type utilizes MVP core principles to address vulnerable, critical community facilities or infrastructure that provide broad community benefit. Projects must be designed with explicit consideration of the criticality of the asset, the anticipated lifespan and maintenance needs of the asset, and climate change data.

BRPC has worked with communities in Berkshire County to develop, apply to, and administer MVP Action Grants. Contact BRPC Senior Planner Caroline Massa at cmassa@berkshireplanning.org with ideas and questions.

Helping Those Who Are Helping Others



Berkshire Regional Planning Commission is proud to be supporting regional emergency response efforts, providing fiscal agent services through our non-profit entity, Berkshires Tomorrow, Inc. Our partnership with the Berkshire United Way has allowed for specific food access projects funded by their COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund for Berkshire County to operate on an ongoing basis since March 21st.

One such project supports local restaurants impacted by COVID restrictions by purchasing youth meals for distribution in multiple communities on weekends. Another provided 500 households with grocery “care packages” during April Vacation week while school district food services were temporarily suspended.



Berkshire Regional Planning Commission is also providing administrative support for a “Fridge Filler” program which provides weekly bundles of prepared food to frontline workers including hospital personnel and staff at nursing homes and authorized childcare provider facilities. This program is supported with funding from the Mill Town and Gilson Family Foundations.

Isolation & Loneliness in Berkshire County-Community Conversation

Age Friendly Berkshires (AFB) cordially invites you to a virtual *Community Conversation* on **Isolation & Loneliness in Berkshire County**, on **Thursday, May 28, 2020 from 10:00-12:00 via Zoom**.

Your participation in this special event, co-sponsored by AFB and AARP Massachusetts, is an opportunity to inform and collaborate with a statewide working group, convened to find a set of workable solutions to the separate-but-related problems of loneliness and social isolation, that affects people of all ages.

The current Covid-19 shutdown has brought these issues into sharper focus -- so now is the time to capture what we're learning and turn insights and suggestions into *Actions* we can take here at home, both immediately and in the longer-term, to strengthen the Berkshire community web of connection, safety, friendship and support for our people.

Please join us on the 28th. If you cannot attend, feel free to send a surrogate from your organization or community. Thank you very much -- we look forward to seeing you (in person!) soon. Meanwhile, please follow this link to the **Berkshire Community Conversation Registration and Agenda**: <https://aarp.cvent.com/CCBerkshires>.

For more information contact Peg McDonough, Planner and AFB Regional Coordinator, mmcdonough@berkshireplanning.org (413) 442-1521 x16.

Konkapot River Plant Species and Resilience

The Town of Monterey received an MVP Action Grant award this past round to complete the preliminary engineering necessary to replace the culvert conveying the Konkapot River under Route 23. During the wetland delineation this past March, the ecologists from the contracted engineer firm identified several dominant species of plants, both native and nonnative invasive species. Native species included silky dogwood, tall goldenrod ostrich fern, and various aster species. Nonnative, invasive species of plants included Japanese knotweed, Asiatic bittersweet, and multiflora rose.

As we plan for replacing the culvert on the Konkapot River in the heart of Monterey, special attention must be given to these native and invasive plants. The vegetation along our waterways plays a major role in the overall resiliency of the area. Vegetation can either improve resiliency through ecosystem services, such as by stabilizing riverbanks with their root systems and filtering stormwater that runs off our roads. Nonnative, invasive species however, can be a hazard. Japanese knotweed is prime example of a hazard and is discussed as such in Monterey's Hazard Mitigation and Climate Adaptation Plan. This invasive plant species is often found along waterways in Berkshire County because it can easily colonize disturbed areas. Japanese knotweed can travel downstream during high water or flood events, and it can travel in soil used as fill during bridge or culvert construction for example. Japanese Knotweed is nearly impossible to get rid of, which anyone with the plant invading their gardens will know. However, Japanese knotweed has a shallow root system, and therefore is not a plant you want along waterways that may erode and cause infrastructure damage during heavy precipitation.

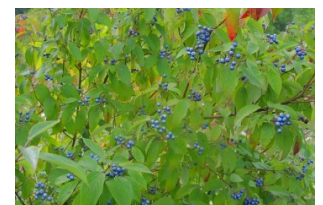


Photo credit: Dan Mullan

Silky dogwood is a recommended species for stream stabilization and habitat by the USDA. It takes 2 to 3 years for the silky dogwood to provide effective stream stabilization, making a case for ensuring existing plants are not disturbed during culvert construction where feasible. The USDA recommends planting the silky dogwood alongside willows and other riparian species.

What other plants would you like to see planted along your local waterways to provide needed ecosystem services in developed landscapes?



1 Fenn Street, Suite 201
Pittsfield, MA 01201

COMMON GROUND

Presorted
Standard
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 121
Pittsfield, MA

CDC Face Mask Guidance

Your cloth face covering should:

- ✓ Reach above the nose, below the chin, and completely cover the mouth and nostrils
- ✓ Fit snugly against the sides of the face
- ✓ Be made of multiple layers of fabric that you can still breathe through
- ✓ Be able to be laundered and machine dried without damaging the material or shape

Do not buy surgical masks to use as a face covering. Those are intended for healthcare workers and first responders. Many items you may already have in your home can be used to create face coverings.

Try creating a cloth face covering using bandanas, ski masks, washable napkins, or dish towels.

Learn more at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover.html>

CALENDAR

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

M
O
N
T
H

1

May 27 - CEDS (Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy) Committee meeting, 1:00 pm

M
O
N
T
H

2

June 4 - Executive Committee Meeting (Virtual), 4:00 pm

Remember to check our inclement weather hotline to learn the status of a meeting at (413) 442-1521 X 5

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