

COMMON GROUND

A NEWSLETTER FOR COMMUNITY PLANNING IN THE BERKSHIRE REGION

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“Don’t Just Stand There—Volunteer!” Volunteer Fair Planned for November 15th

Age Friendly Berkshires is teaming up with three area nonprofits and the region’s municipalities, to host a **VOLUNTEER FAIR** on Friday, November 15th, 2019 from 1:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. at Saint James Place, 352 Main Street, Great Barrington. The event is being underwritten by AARP Massachusetts.

“Don’t Just Stand There—Volunteer!” is the co-creation of Age Friendly Berkshires, Nonprofit Center of the Berkshires, Berkshire United Way and the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI). The event is open to all, but people age 50+ are especially encouraged to attend. Age Friendly Berkshires’ coordinator Peg McDonough, explained, “One of Age Friendly Berkshires’ goals is to boost the overall health and well-being of our adult population and combat social isolation and loneliness. An easy way to do that is to volunteer for local causes, close to home and heart.”

The Volunteer Fair will highlight the good work of over 30 nonprofits and include a 1-stop Civic Station, to learn about openings on municipal Committees, Commissions and Boards, county-wide. Attendees will be given a Volunteer Passport and Skills Checklist—for matching personal talents, interests and values with local volunteer opportunities. There is no fee to attend. Attendees will be encouraged to visit four or more volunteer stations, for the chance to win door prizes.

Registration is required via Eventbrite: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/dont-just-stand-there-volunteer-berkshire-county-volunteer-fair-tickets-69461105035>

Visit agefriendlyberkshires.com for more information about the movement to create a more ‘livable’ Berkshire County for residents of any age.



Two Upcoming Seminars

Hepatitis C and the Opioid Crisis: A Berkshire County-Focused Public Health Seminar
Tuesday, October 22nd, 2019 8:00 am—2:15 pm; Berkshire Hills Country Club; 500 Benedict Road, Pittsfield, MA 01201 Register here: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/hepatitis-c-the-opioid-crisis-a-berkshire-county-public-health-seminar-tickets-66469374689>

All You Will (Ever) Need to Know About Hepatitis C
Tuesday, October 22nd, 2019 5:30pm—8:00pm; Country Club of Pittsfield; 639 South St., Pittsfield, MA 01201 Register here: <https://www.neaetc.org/events/view/13953>

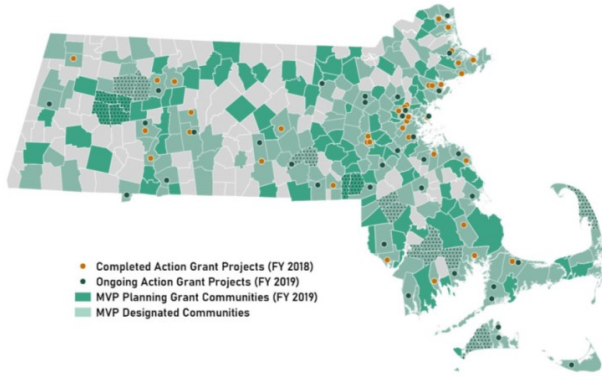
Cyber Security

There has been a lot of news lately about cyber security attacks and it serves as a good reminder for individuals and municipalities to review their cyber security plans. Many people may discount the risk and not take any precautions, but one of the municipalities in the Berkshires was just hit with ransomware and has lost almost all of their files.

Some things you should do to help reduce your risk of attack include ensuring you have the latest operating system and patches in place, making sure you have an up-to-date virus protection software monitoring your computer, and are actively backing up your files, preferably to an off-site location. But the single biggest thing you can do to prevent cyber-attacks is to practice caution when viewing emails and browsing the internet and to not open attachments or follow links that you are not sure about.

If you are a municipality, you may want to explore getting cyber security insurance, having an assessment of your computer network performed, and training your employees on best practices to avoid cyber-attacks.

Are You A MVP Community?



In September 2019 the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) will announce available grant funding for municipalities under the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) grant program. The MVP Program provides support for cities and towns to begin the process of planning for climate change resiliency and implementing priority projects. Please see the map on the left to see your municipality's MVP Status.

If your town is not an MVP Planning Grant Community or Designated Community, your town is eligible to apply for an MVP Planning Grant to complete vulnerability assessments and develop an action-oriented resiliency plan. Towns have no financial commitment under the MVP Planning Grants, but are required to dedicate 120 hours for municipal staff time.

If your town or city is an MVP Designated Community, you are eligible for an MVP Action Grant. Culvert assessments and replacements are eligible for MVP Action grant funding, as well as much larger scale projects such as streambank stabilization or

microgrids (max. award \$2M per project). A 25% match is required under the MVP Action Grants.

BRPC is an "MVP Certified Provider" and our team can potentially help you with applications, project development, and identifying diversified funding sources for the MVP Action grant match. Contact BRPC Senior Planner Caroline Massa, cmassa@berkshireplanning.org, with questions and interest.

September is Preparedness Month!

Preparing yourself and your family for disasters is an important thing to do. The Department of Public Health (DPH) and the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) have partnered for National Preparedness Month to help residents prepare for and respond to natural, technological, and man-made disasters. There are four steps you can take to become more prepared:

Be informed. Pay attention to severe weather watches and warnings. Tune into local news, National Weather Service announcements, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) weather radio for current information. **Sign up for emergency alerts or reverse 911 to get up to date information from emergency authorities in your community.** If you don't know how to sign up, or want more information, contact your local Emergency Management Director (EMD). You can find your local EMD here: <https://www.mass.gov/find-your-local-emergency-management-director-emd>.

Make a plan. Work with your family to prepare a communications plan in your home. You can create a shelter-in-place plan, as well as an evacuation plan, to keep yourself and your family safe whether you "stay" or "go". A great place to start is here: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/make-a-family-emergency-plan>.

Build an emergency kit. Every home and business should have a basic emergency supply kit for any emergency, at any time of the year. You'll want to include necessities such as bottled water, food, flashlights, a battery-powered radio, and a first aid kit. More information can be found here: <https://www.ready.gov/build-a-kit>.

Get involved. Disaster preparedness, response, and recovery takes the whole community to be effective. You can support the cause by volunteering for the Berkshire Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) unit, with the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT), or another affiliated program. To Volunteer with the MRC, you do not have to be medically trained! For more information on volunteering, go to the MRC's website here: <http://wmmrc.org/> or contact Coordinator Carmela Lanza-Weil at carmela@wmmrc.org.

For more information on public health and disaster preparedness, contact Allison Egan, Senior Planner, at aeagan@berkshireplanning.org.

Berkshire Mall Future Use Study

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission recently completed an 18-month reuse study of the Berkshire Mall on behalf of the Town of Lanesborough. Elements of this plan include evaluation of current site, building, utility, and market conditions, research on reuse of mall properties and active developers in other markets, assessment of current zoning and regulations, solicitation of public input, and development of five potential redevelopment scenarios. Engineering and reuse concept development were conducted through Milone & MacBroom, Inc., of Springfield, MA and EDM Architecture, Engineering & Management of Pittsfield, MA. Funding for this project was provided by the MA Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, and supported with a partial match by the Baker Hill Road District in Lanesborough. The full report is available on the Town of Lanesborough website at: <https://www.lanesborough-ma.gov/economic-development-committee/files/berkshire-mall-reuse-report>



Image (above): Aerial shot of Berkshire Mall

With questions, please contact Senior Planner Laura Brennan at lbrennan@berkshireplanning.org or 413.442.1521 x14.

Berkshire Bikesharing on the Horizon?

Transportation planning staff at BRPC would like to thank all those that attended Pittsfield's 3rd Thursday event this past July—and specifically to those that were willing to hop-on and try out one of Bewegen's electric pedal-assist bicycles. It was a pleasure to see such warm reactions by those that test rode the e-bikes—as I'm sure anyone who has ridden one for the first time knows—they are an instant smile-generator.



Image (above): BRPC Transportation Staff oversee 3rd Thursday attendees hoping to get their chance to test ride an e-bike.

As mentioned in last month's issue, Bewegen is the equipment supplier for the ValleyBike Share program operating in Hampden and Hampshire Counties, just east of Berkshire County—in Amherst (including UMass campus), Holyoke, Northampton, South Hadley, Springfield and Easthampton. ValleyBike Share continues to see high ridership into its second year of operation. Transportation staff at BRPC are eager to study the potential of a Berkshire bikeshare program operating at the municipal level and gradually assess its potential at the county-level. The City of Pittsfield has expressed interest in studying the feasibility of a municipal bikeshare program. Pending final decision-making, the City may apply for technical assistance funding through the Workforce Transportation Program and, if awarded, would provide financial assistance for the City to assess the viability of a Pittsfield-based bikeshare program. This program represents an excellent opportunity for the city and surrounding municipalities to move one step closer to creating the multimodal transportation network Berkshire residents deserve!

For more information, contact transportation planner Justin Gilmore at JGilmore@berkshireplanning.org.

Hazard and Flood Mitigation Grants Announcement

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has announced new Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM) and Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA) grants. The Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) will be calling for applications from municipalities that need funding for new or updated Hazard Mitigation Plans, project scoping, and flood or other hazard mitigation projects for towns/cities with current Hazard Mitigation Plans. Applications to be submitted by January 31st, 2020.

PDM Factsheet: <https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/1566838030892-2ce88be44262b32999aecba3e383aa05/PDMFactSheetFY19Aug2019.pdf>

FMA Factsheet: <https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/1566838228911-f228284e94d43af0d6b16214dcf07f63/FMAFactSheetFY19Aug2019.pdf>

Contact BRPC Senior Planner Caroline Massa, cmassa@berkshireplanning.org, with questions and interest.

Lenox Cultural District Established

The Massachusetts Cultural Council (MCC) recently designated downtown Lenox as a Cultural District, after a year-long application process assisted by Berkshire Regional Planning Commission. Lenox is the 46th Cultural District in Massachusetts, and the 5th to be established in Berkshire County, joining Downtown Great Barrington, North Adams, Upstreet (Pittsfield), and Williamstown Cultural Districts. Cultural Districts are walkable, compact areas with a density of cultural, artistic, and economic activity. Launched in 2011 by an act of the state legislature, the Cultural District program “drives economic growth, strengthens our distinctive local character, and improves the quality of life for families across Massachusetts.” Districts are established with the goals of attracting artists and cultural enterprises, encouraging business and job development, positioning the district as a tourist destination, preserving and reusing historic buildings, enhancing property values, and fostering local cultural development. Districts are established and renewed on a five-year cycle, and are overseen by steering committees populated with municipal, higher education, and for- and non-profit representatives from the host community.



Image (above): Lenox Library

MassDOT East-West Passenger Rail Study

The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) is conducting a study to examine the costs, benefits, and investments necessary to implement passenger rail service from Boston to Springfield and Pittsfield, with the speed, frequency, and reliability necessary to be a competitive option for travel along this corridor. The study will assess up to six alternatives, which will feature a range of approaches including high speed rail and potential infill stations. BRPC has developed a survey to assess potential ridership demand, preferred travel times and costs, and to understand how Berkshire County residents might utilize such a connection. Please follow this link <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/East-WestRail> to give your input on MassDOT's East-West Rail study.



For more information, please contact Transportation Planner Justin Gilmore at JGilmore@berkshireplanning.org.

2017-2022 CEDS Annual Performance Report Underway

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission and the regional CEDS (Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy) Committee is in the process of completing the 2019 performance report for submission to the Economic Development Administration (EDA). This process involves review of all CEDS Priority Projects, including those initiatives affecting the entire region, as well as physical development projects within the northern, central, and southern subregions of Berkshire County. Municipal and project leaders are encouraged to review the current project descriptions and provide updated information as soon as possible. The 2017-2022 CEDS as well as the 2018 Performance Report are available at: <http://berkshireplanning.org/>. Submission of new projects for consideration as CEDS Priority Projects is also invited. An online application form is available at: <https://form.jotform.com/91404002332136>.

Please contact Senior Planner Laura Brennan with any questions: 413.442.1521 x14 or lbrennan@berkshireplanning.org.



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BRPC's and Berkshire County Selectmen's Association's Joint Annual Meeting

We would be honored by your presence at our joint Annual Dinner Meeting on Thursday September 19th. This year's guest speaker is Housing and Economic Development Secretary Mike Kennealy, co-chair of Governor Baker's Economic Development Planning Council. This year's dinner is at the Stationery Factory: 63 Flansburg Ave, Dalton, MA 01226.

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/brpcs-and-bcsa-annual-dinner-meeting-91919-registration-67059892945>

Announcing A Western Massachusetts Town Hall Forum

Brining regional stakeholders together for a forum designed to promote collaborative working relationship between the Western Mass counties. This forum will address the issues and challenges our region faces, including: declining population, transportation, housing, expansive infrastructure needs, and more. Please join us for this ground-breaking forum as we work to create sustainable cross-governmental partnerships across Western Massachusetts!

When: Saturday, October 5th—8:30am—3:00pm; Where: UMass Amherst; Cost: \$35 (Light Lunch Included) https://members.mma.org/MMA/Event_Display.aspx?EventKey=MSA1019

New Staff!

BRPC welcomes Phillip Arnold as our new Community Planner!



A 5G 5th Thursday

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission hosted one of their 5th Thursday dinners on August 29, 2019. This dinner was on the topic of 5G infrastructure. If interested the presentation can be found here: <http://berkshireplanning.org/events/announcements/5g-wireless-infrastructure-presentation-august-29-2019>

CALENDAR

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

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**September 19 - BRPC
Commission Meeting
and Annual Dinner,
5:00 pm**

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**October 3 - BRPC
Executive Committee,
4:00 pm**



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