

COMMON GROUND

A NEWSLETTER FOR COMMUNITY PLANNING IN THE BERKSHIRE REGION

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JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2010

NEWS FROM BOSTON



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WIND SITING REFORM ACT LEGISLATION

Just before Thanksgiving, the Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities & Energy reported out a revised Wind Energy Facility Reform Act under a new bill number (Senate Bill 2206). The bill next will be considered in the Senate Ways & Means Committee. Senator Downing indicates that he expects the Senate will take the bill up after its holiday recess, sometime in January or early February. No House action has been scheduled.

BRPC submitted a second comment letter to the Committee on October 28th which is available on our website. Staff has also suggested a number of changes to the bill to at least improve it so that it can be workable, if it ultimately is passed. An annotated version of the bill with the suggested changes, is also available on our website.

BRPC Contact: Executive Director Nat Karns (x26)



MASSDOT GETS A NEW NAME, NEW LOOK

Earlier this year, Governor Deval Patrick signed legislation aimed at reforming the Commonwealth's transportation management and administration. MassHighways, the Executive Office of Transportation, and the Mass Turnpike Authority are now all operating under the unified umbrella of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, or MassDOT for short.

"This reform is nothing short of historic. It will modernize the state's transportation agencies, as well as create operational efficiencies and cost savings," said Joseph F. Wagner, House Chairman of the Joint Committee on Transportation. "This legislation will benefit every citizen of the Commonwealth."

The Commonwealth's transportation system faces an estimated \$15 to \$19 billion funding gap in the next 20 years to maintain the current network of roads, bridges and transit for safe, reliable service. A 2007 report issued by the Transportation Finance Commission stated: "The cost of this neglect will be felt in our regional economy and in our way of life. ... Business as usual will not suffice."

Crushing debt and substandard management from the Big Dig has siphoned much-needed dollars away from maintenance and operations, and fed a culture of out-of-scale benefits, inefficiencies and a lack of accountability. The reform legislation is viewed as a ground-breaking redirection for the Commonwealth's transportation future.

In Berkshire County, it is hoped the new emphasis on reinvesting in the Commonwealth's transportation infrastructure and achieving improved cost efficiencies may mean the potential for more funding for the region's \$100 Million backlog of unfunded projects currently included in the Berkshire Transportation Improvement Program.



2009 DISTRICT LOCAL TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROJECTS

December marked the close of 2009 District Local Technical Assistance projects. DLTA provided Berkshire Regional Planning Commission staff support to eight projects through a competitive application process. These projects are described below.

Land Use/Sustainable Development Selected Projects: Four projects fell under the funding category of pursuing one or more of the states 10 Sustainable Development Principles.

- ➔ **Mill Redevelopment in the Town of Adams:** BRPC assisted the Town to develop a funding strategy to assist several downtown reuse projects get off the ground.
- ➔ **Open Space Residential Development Bylaw (OSRD), Town of Great Barrington:** BRPC assisted the Town of Great Barrington to complete and successfully adopt an OSRD bylaw at their 2009 spring town meeting.
- ➔ **Future Land Use Scenario for Comprehensive Plan, Town of New Marlborough:** BRPC created three future land use scenarios and presented them at a public workshop held in summer 2009. Feedback received on the scenarios helped define the growth and land use tools recommended in the plan and displayed on the town's Future Land Use Plan of their Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan is anticipated to move forward for adoption in January 2010.
- ➔ **Wind Energy Bylaw, Town of Peru:** BRPC worked with the Town of Peru to draft and adopt a wind energy bylaw for community wind and get the bylaw submitted to the Attorney General's office.

Regional/Municipal Coordination: Four projects assisted collaborations of two or more Berkshire communities working towards a common purpose.

- ➔ **Green Communities Act Implementation Assistance, Berkshire County:** BRPC assisted communities to submit applications to receive free energy audits through the state Energy Audit Program, worked closely with green committees on efficiency and renewable energy projects, and provided expertise to communities on a variety of energy-related items. This work included education and outreach on the Green Communities Act. Fourteen Berkshire communities have since signed up to develop an action plan for becoming a Green Community.
- ➔ **Group Purchasing, Berkshire County Towns:** BRPC created a comprehensive summary of the Berkshire County Group Purchasing Program and made recommendations for how that program could
- ➔ **Broadband Planning for Southern Berkshire Region, Southern Berkshire Technology Collaborative (SBTC):** The SBTC, a coalition of 11 south county communities, is working to promote improved broadband service. BRPC assisted this effort by mapping broadband infrastructure for each town and reviewing regulations to identify any barriers that would need to be addressed or avoided to successfully facilitate broadband service in the area.
- ➔ **Shared Service Arrangements, Towns of Lee, Lenox, and Stockbridge:** Municipal shared service arrangements are an excellent way to reduce costs while still providing the same level of service to the community. BRPC looked at all town services and departments to explore shared service opportunities and potential savings for the three towns.

BRPC Staff Contact: Amy Kacala x12



2010 DLT A APPLICATION DEADLINE IS JANUARY 15!

BRPC is accepting applications for 2010 District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA). The finding priorities have remained the same as in 2009:

- Municipal projects that advance one or more the the states Sustainable Development Principles
- Regional projects that involve the collaboration of two or more municipalities.

Applications have been sent to each Berkshire municipality. Please contact BRPC for additional information or a copy of the grant application.

Amy Kacala 442-1521 x12

604(B) AND 319 GRANTS—MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

The schedule for **604(b)** is as follows:

Pre-RFR Informational Meetings CERO & Boston	January 19 & 20, 2010
RFR release on Comm-PASS	January 29, 2010
Responses due to MassDEP	March 27, 2010
Evaluation of Responses	April 2010
Award Announcement	May 2010

The **319** is not out, yet. The anticipated schedule is as follows:

Pre-RFR Informational Meetings CERO & Boston	March 2010
RFR released	April 2010
Responses due to the Department	June 2010
Evaluation of responses and response selection by the Dept.	Summer 2010
Applicants notified of response selection results by the Dept.	November 2010

BERKSHIRE REGION HAS STRONG SHOWING IN EECBG APPLICATIONS

Berkshire communities has a strong showing in the stimulus-funded Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grants (EECBG) applications due to the state on December 4th. These grants were limited to municipalities with populations under 35,000 and were therefore a more competitive option for Berkshire communities. The grants award up to \$150,000 per community to help fund a variety of energy projects including making energy efficiency improvements to oil-heated municipal buildings or installing a solar photovoltaic system. Sixteen applications were submitted from the Berkshires. Award decisions are expected to be announced by the state in early 2010.

BRPC Contact: Lauren Gaherty (x34) or Amy Kacala (x12)



SECOND ROUND OF ARRA FUNDING ANNOUNCED

Just in time for the gift giving season, a second set of Federal Stimulus transportation projects have been announced for the Berkshire Region. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, better known as ARRA (say it like you're a pirate), was signed into law in February 2009. Earlier this year, the Region received ARRA funding for several repaving, roadway reconstruction, and transit projects.

Two additional ARRA funded projects for the Berkshires have been authorized by the Governor's Office. These projects are:

- Reconstruction of the Route 7/8 Connector in Lanesborough, better known to locals as the 'Mall Road'. This long deferred project should significantly improve the ride quality for the more than 6,000 vehicles that use the route every day.
- Resurfacing of Barker Road and Valentine Road in the City of Pittsfield

The availability of ARRA funds has proved to be very beneficial to both the Berkshire economy and the region's transportation infrastructure. However, the influx of these federal funds came about due to unprecedented circumstances. Historically, state and federal funding for transportation has been less than adequate, and the region will continue to face funding shortfalls for many of its most basic roadway and transit system needs.

For more information on the Ashuwillticook Trail Count Program, including data from the 2008 counts, please visit www.berkshireplanning.org/3/bike



ROUTE 7/20 CORRIDOR STUDY MOVES FORWARD

As the days have grown shorter and colder, BRPC staff has been working to cast new light on one of the area's long standing planning priorities. The stretch of Route 7 and Route 20 that spans the commercial district shared by Lenox and Pittsfield may be getting a makeover.

Using grant funds provided by MassDOT, BRPC is finalizing a consultant contract for the Route 7/20 Corridor Study. The Study has as its main objectives an examination of land use redevelopment opportunities in the Corridor, along with identification of transportation improvements that will help to preserve roadway capacity.

The work of the consultant will be directed by a Study Management Committee, made of up representatives from BRPC, MassDOT, the Town of Lenox, and the City of Pittsfield. The consultant's work on the corridor analysis is expected to get underway in early January, with a Public Information Meeting to be scheduled shortly thereafter. One product of the analysis is expected to be a Corridor Access Management Plan, which is intended to guide local planning boards in their decision making processes, as well as prioritize corridor transportation improvements

STAFFING CHANGES

Christine Neumann, a Transportation Planner with BRPC since 2007, has left the organization to pursue educational objectives. BRPC wishes Christine all success in her future endeavors. At the time of this writing, BRPC is actively recruiting to fill this staff vacancy. Details on the job opportunity are available on BRPC's website; www.berkshireplanning.org.

Sarah LaValley, a planner with BRPC since 2006, has accepted a planner position with the City of Northampton where she will assist with development review, historic preservation, and wetlands review and permitting.

RECOVERY ZONE PROGRAM

In an effort to assist private and public projects experiencing difficulties attaining competitive funding, Governor Patrick signed an Executive order enabling the Massachusetts Recovery Zone Bond Program, authorized through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). This lending program is intended to propel private and public development efforts forward through favorable borrowing rates and terms.

Eligible projects must be located within a “Recovery Zone”, (primarily the existing state Economic Target Areas), demonstrate readiness (bonds must be issued prior to January 1, 2011), be fiscally sound investments, and will create or retain jobs. The Recovery Zone Bond Program supports two categories of projects – Economic Development (RZEDB) through public infrastructure improvements, site remediation, or site acquisition by a municipality, and privately funded facility investments (RZFB). Berkshire County has been allocated \$3,817,000 for RZEDB through taxable bonds with the benefit of 45% interest forgiveness. The RZFB, with \$5,725,000 directed to the County, is awarded in the form of tax-exempt bonds for improvements to privately held facilities which will create new jobs.

Priority will be given to projects having a significant regional or statewide economic benefit, support of the municipality, and which further smart growth principles. Applications are being received by the state on a rolling basis and some funding has been made available through UMass’s Collins Center for BRPC to help communities prepare applications. If you are interested in learning more, visit www.mass.gov, and search for Recovery Zone Bond Programs, or contact Nat Karns at BRPC, by phone at 413-442-1521, ext. 26 or email nkarns@berkshireplanning.org.

CALENDAR

JANUARY

- 1 **BRPC Executive Committee Meeting**
BRPC Office, 4:00 p.m.
- 21 **BRPC Meeting**
BRPC Office, 7:00 p.m.

FEBRUARY

No Meetings Scheduled at This Time.



CLEARINGHOUSE REVIEWS

Upper Hathaway Dam Removal ENF – Dalton.
Comments submitted Dec. 11.

Berkshire Biodiesel ENF – Lenox.
Comments submitted Dec. 11.

Hoosac Wind NPC – Florida & Monroe.
Comments submitted Dec. 14.

Minuteman Savoy Wind – Savoy.
Comments submitted Dec. 17.