

COMMON GROUND

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CALENDAR

HAPPY SPRING!



A NEWSLETTER FOR COMMUNITY PLANNING IN THE BERKSHIRE REGION

RELEASE OF 2010 CENSUS DATA

The US Census Bureau has begun to release information related to the 2010 Census. So far, the Bureau has released Total Population, Race of Population, Total Housing Units, Occupied Housing Units and Vacant Housing Units. Over the coming year, additional data will be released.

POPULATION: Berkshire County reported a population of 131,219 in 2010. This was a decline in population totaling 3,734, or 2.8% of our population. Overall, over half of our communities saw a decline in population since 2000. One item of note is that every community that had more than 3,000 people in 2000, lost population in 2010, while two thirds of the communities below 3,000 people saw an increase in population. Pittsfield saw the largest numerical loss at -1,060, but Stockbridge saw the largest percentage decline of -14.3%. The larger communities have seen a decline in population for several decades which has most likely been due to the loss of manufacturing jobs within these communities. The communities who have a population less than 3,000 and lost population may have lost population for a number of reasons; however it is believed that the conversion of primary homes into secondary homes is the major reason. Otis saw the largest numerical increase in population at 248 while Mount Washington saw the largest percentage increase at 28.5%. It is believed that many of the communities in southern Berkshire County grew due to the conversion of seasonal homes into permanent homes as well as immigration from New York City after 9/11. Several of the hill towns in central and northern Berkshire County also grew, most likely due to people moving out of the urban core and into the more rural hill towns and commuting to work in the urban areas.

RACE: The population of Berkshire County, while declining, is becoming more diverse. The white population saw a decline of 6,851 people to 128,235, while the Hispanic population doubled from 2,286 to 4,530. Increases were also seen in the Black or African American population, American Indian and Alaska Native population, Asian population, some other race and two or more races. Overall, the non-white population increased from 5.51% to 10.95% of the county population.

HOUSING: Berkshire County's total housing units have increased by 2,207 (3.33%) from 66,301 to 68,508 between 2000 and 2010. This number is misleading though, as the number is comprised of both occupied and vacant housing units. If just occupied housing units are examined, the county increased its housing by 85 units to 56,091, or 0.15%. The vacant housing units amount to 12,417, which is an increase of 2,122 units, or 20.61%. Overall, the vacant housing units rose from 15.53% to 18.12% of the total housing units. Further census releases will provide more information on the makeup of the vacant housing; however the increase is believed to be due to an increase in second homes as well as due to the foreclosures occurring throughout the county.

For more information visit the:

- American Fact Finder (<http://factfinder2.census.gov/>)
- Berkshire Benchmarks (<http://www.berkshirebenchmarks.org/data/>)

BRPC Contact: Mark Maloy (ext. 29)

CONSTRUCTION NOTICE

The next phase of Pittsfield's streetscape project began on April 4, 2011. The project removes the North St. center island between Park Square and Columbus Ave., adds five (5') foot bike lanes, improves the traffic signals, and widens the sidewalks. The project should finish in Spring of 2012, however, the road will remain open to traffic and parking during construction. BRPC visitors may want to avoid North St. or add a few extra minutes to their trip. To sign up for bi-weekly e-mail updates on the project, write to mnilan@rnetworx.com.

CURRENT PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

BRPC AWARDS FIRST BROWNFIELDS CLEANUP REVOLVING LOAN

The Berkshire Brownfields Committee has voted to award a \$375,000 loan to the Community Development Corporation of South Berkshire for the New England Log Home site in Great Barrington. The 8.2 acre site in downtown Great Barrington is located just 1½ blocks from Main Street. The site was first developed in 1894 and was occupied by New England Log Homes of Massachusetts for the manufacturing of log home components from 1971 until it ceased operations and vacated the site in 1993. Since that time the property has remained vacant. On March 15, 2001, a fire occurred at the site, which further complicated the site's environmental condition. The fire significantly damaged the main building, burning greater than fifty percent (50%) of it to the ground. Due to the fire, none of the structures are suitable for reuse. Charred debris, including building remnants containing asbestos and possibly other contaminants related to the previous industrial use of the buildings, persist at the site as a result.

Contaminates on the site include dioxins, pentachlorophenol (PCP) metals, and petroleum hydrocarbons found in the soil and ground water. The contamination of the soil and ground water is the result of the process of preserving wood using dip tanks, bulk preservation storage, as well as machine and vehicle maintenance. The contamination is widely dispersed, yet remains localized to the site and has not migrated to the Housatonic River or beyond the parcel boundaries. The Cleanup Plan calls for demolition and capping 100% of the site with earth, parking lots and building foundations.

The redevelopment of the site includes one 15,000 square foot commercial/retail building, one 26-unit continuing care facility, a separate 40-unit Low Income Housing Tax Credit project (LIHTC) consisting of three buildings, and approximately 2.5 acres of public open space. The estimated cost of environmental cleanup (including demolition and remediation) is \$3.6 million. Other sources of funding include a HUD earmark, EPA Cleanup grant, CEDAC loan, and MassDevelopment loan/grant combo.

The Berkshire Brownfields Committee has also approved the first part application from Pittsfield Silk, LLC for the Rice Silk Mill in Pittsfield. The Silk Mill is located on Spring Street in Pittsfield's Morningside Neighborhood. The project would consist of a \$250,000 loan to remove 1,400 cubic yards of petroleum contaminated soil from under the boiler room. The redevelopment will involve the development of 45 units of affordable and workforce family rental housing. Pittsfield Silk, LLC has received historic tax credits and low income housing tax credits for this project.

The Berkshire Brownfields Committee continues to receive applications for Brownfields Cleanup. For more information please contact Senior Planner/Brownfields Program Coordinator Melissa Provencher at mprovencher@berkshireplanning.org or by phone ext. 22.

BRPC ISSUES MODEL LARGE SCALE WIND ENERGY BYLAW TO ASSIST COMMUNITIES

BRPC has released its model large wind energy system zoning bylaw to assist willing communities with the development of zoning bylaws to regulate large scale wind turbines. In its professional opinion, BRPC recommends that all large scale wind turbines be allowed only through the special permitting process. Projects subject to a special permit may be denied by a community and this aspect of local control should not be readily relinquished. The model wind bylaw suggests that communities adopt reasonable design standards to limit the scope and size of projects. The design standards are intended to proactively protect the community from the potential impacts of inappropriate projects. The model wind bylaw also suggests that communities require developers to submit in-depth studies of the proposed site so that the permitting board fully understands the potential impacts of the large wind energy system prior to making its decision. The model large wind energy system zoning bylaw will be posted on BRPC's website in early May (www.berkshireplanning.org).

BRPC Contact: Planner Brian Domina (ext. 14)

2011 BERKSHIRE COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (CEDS) UPDATE

The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission and CEDS Strategy Committee are seeking public comments on the draft 2011 Berkshire Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. The draft plan can be downloaded at: http://www.berkshireplanning.org/economic/2011_berkshire_ceds.html.

Comments are due no later than noon Monday May 16, 2011. To submit comments or for questions, please contact Planner Daniel J. Sexton by phone at ext. 28 or e-mail at dsexton@berkshireplanning.org.

This draft document has not been endorsed by the CEDS Strategy Committee, BRPC Full Commission or the communities of Berkshire County.

BRPC STAFF ANNOUNCEMENTS

MACKENZIE GREER

We welcome Vincent Michael Greer to the BRPC family. Born Thursday April 14th at 3:55 am weighing in at 7lbs. 11oz. he is a very healthy, happy little guy. The mother and family are doing well. We can't wait to meet the new addition!

CURRENT PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

COMPREHENSIVE LAND USE REFORM & PARTNERSHIP ACT (CLURPA)

BRPC's Regional Issues Committee has been focusing activities on reviewing this long and complex legislation, which represents over a decade's work to modernize Massachusetts's arcane and poorly written land use statutes. The Committee is hoping to complete its review by the end of April, after spending six meetings going over various parts of the act, with a recommended statement to be considered at the BRPC meeting on May 19th. It is expected that the Joint Committee on Municipalities and Regional Government will hold a public hearing on the bill in May or June and we expect to offer testimony on this very important planning bill.

The bill, as drafted, totally re-writes the Zoning Enabling Act (Chapter 40A), with the primary aim of making it more understandable, rather than offering dramatic new concepts in zoning. There are revisions to the Subdivision Control Law (Chapter 41) which give municipalities the option of adopting minor subdivision provisions in place of "Approval Not Required" subdivisions. The bill also modifies the Master Planning provisions in Chapter 41 to make comprehensive plans more meaningful in the land use decision—making and regulatory process, much more similar to what is in place in a large majority of states. Finally, the bill creates a new section in state law, Chapter 40U, for communities who wish to do enhanced levels of planning and who will receive enhanced planning tools and funding preferences to do so (the "Partnership" aspect of the bill).

BRPC Contact: Planner Brian Domina (ext. 14)

SOUTH STREET SAFETY AUDIT

BRPC transportation staff coordinated a road safety audit for three intersections on South St. on March 24, 2011. The intersections of South @ Crofut, Gamwell, and Berkshire Life have all been in the County's top five (5%) percent of crash frequency and severity. Representatives from MassDOT, the City of Pittsfield, and BRPC examined the crash reports since 2006, visited the sites, and decided how to incorporate safety measures into the 2012 South St. reconstruct project. The 2012 project, funded through the Berkshire MPO's transportation improvement program, rebuilds the road from Berkshire Life to Reed Street. The project will upgrade the traffic lights, improve the road alignment, replace the crosswalks and make turning onto South St. from side streets much safer. The traffic light timing and visibility will improve dramatically. This \$4 million dollar investment will make



BRPC Contact: Sr. Planner Doug Plachcinski (x16)

NEW RULES FOR OTHER POWER-DRIVEN MOBILITY DEVICES

The U.S. Department of Justice has ruled to make public trails more accessible to people with mobility disabilities. The March 15, 2011 ruling requires public and private land managers to permit individuals with mobility disabilities to use wheelchairs and manually-powered mobility aids in areas open to pedestrian use. It also requires that land managers shall make reasonable modifications in policies, practices, or procedures to permit the use of other power-driven mobility devices by individuals with mobility disabilities on trails that allow pedestrian use.

Power-driven mobility devices include any mobility device powered by batteries, fuel or other engines that is used by individuals with mobility disabilities for locomotion. It includes golf carts, ATVs, the Segway® PT and Jeeps.

The American Trails website provides a detailed description on this ruling along with a variety of resources, questions and answers. Visit <http://www.americantrails.org/resources/accessible/index.html> for more information.

GRANT ANNOUNCEMENTS

FUNDS TO REDUCE FLOODING FROM BEAVERS

The MSPCA has funding to assist with installation of water flow devices to humanely, non-lethally, and ecologically mitigate beaver-related flooding in the Berkshires. More information can be found at www.mspsca.org/beaverfunding.

OPEN SPACE GRANTS

The MA Division of Conservation Services (DCS) announces a new grant round for open space acquisition and improvements. Information for the PARC Program (formerly the Urban Self-Help Program) and the LAND Program (formally the Self-Help Program) can be found at the DCS website.

S.319 NONPOINT SOURCE POLLUTION GRANT PROGRAM

Grants are available to support water quality improvement projects. The program requires a 40% match from applicants. The RFR is posted at the Commonwealth's procurement site, www.compass.com under Solicitations, Open Solicitations, Department of Environmental Protection, Professional Services. Grant deadline is June 1st.



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UPCOMING EVENTS

REST OF RIVER WORKSHOPS—MAY 7TH FINAL CHARRETTE

Over three evenings (April 5-7) the EPA held workshops to inform the public about the status of the research that is being used to help the agency determine the most appropriate way to conduct cleanup activities on the Housatonic River. For those who were unable to attend the workshops, the EPA has created a website to view and download videos of each of the workshops, the presentations given each evening and other informational materials. We encourage everyone interested in learning more about the Rest of River Cleanup to visit the website at www.housatonicworkshops.org and attend the upcoming public charrette on **May 7th at 8:30 p.m. at the Shakespeare & Co. in Lenox**. BRPC sends our thanks to the EPA for holding these informative workshops!

LAND BASED WIND SITING MEETING MAY 12TH

In partnership with the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center, CLF Ventures is convening a meeting on **Thursday May 12th at 6:30 p.m. at the Conte Community School** (200 West Union Street Pittsfield, MA) to offer members of town energy committees, Boards of Health, Planning Boards, Zoning Boards of Appeal, Boards of Selectmen, City Councilors and Conservation Commissions an opportunity to talk about land-based wind siting.

RSVP to Walker Larsen at (617) 850-1709 or wlarson@clf.org by May 2nd.

LAPA-WEST LAKE MANAGEMENT TRAINING

The Lake & Ponds Association of Western MA has invited Kenneth Wagner of WRS, Inc. to provide training to Conservation Commissions on lake management on **Tuesday May 24th at 7pm in the Cafeteria of the Lee High & Middle School** (300 Grellock Street Lee, MA). The training will include reasons for lake management, the techniques used, how it relates to the Wetlands Protection Act, and the evaluation of lake projects. The discussion will also include case-specific examples. Dr. Wagner has over 25 years of experience working on a variety of water resources assessment and management projects.

For more information, contact Jack Hickey at jhickey@jhrcs.com or (413) 442-6713.

GRANT ANNOUNCEMENTS (CONTINUED)

MASSACHUSETTS CULTURAL COUNCIL: CULTURAL DISTRICTS INITIATIVE

In July 2010, Massachusetts passed legislation to establish state-designated cultural districts in cities and towns throughout the Commonwealth. The Massachusetts Cultural Council is pleased to announce that this new initiative is available. Application instructions and guidelines are now available. For more information contact Meri Jenkins at 617-727-3668 (ext. 251) or Meri.Jenkins@art.state.ma.us.

CALENDAR

All meetings held in BRPC office unless otherwise noted.

MAY

- 5 **Executive Committee Meeting** 4:00 p.m.
- 17 **CEDS Meeting** 12:30 p.m.
TAC Meeting 4:00 p.m.
- 19 **Full Commission Meeting** 7:00 p.m.
- 31 **MPO Meeting** 4:00 p.m.

JUNE

- 2 **Executive Committee Meeting** 4:00 p.m.
- 9 **Special Committee Meeting** *Tentative*
Full Commission Meeting 7:00 p.m.
- 21 **TAC Meeting** 4:00 p.m.
- 28 **MPO Meeting** 4:00 p.m.
- 30 **5th Thursday Dinner** TBD

CLEARINGHOUSE REVIEWS

None at this time.