

COMMON GROUND

A NEWSLETTER FOR COMMUNITY PLANNING IN THE BERKSHIRE REGION

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BRPC AWARDED HUD SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES PLANNING GRANT!

Berkshire Regional Planning will hit the ground running in 2011 with a three-year planning process which will develop a regional sustainability plan for the Berkshires. The Berkshire plan was one of 45 projects selected from over 1,000 applications nationwide for the new HUD Sustainable Communities Planning Grant program. This new program is a joint effort between three federal departments: Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Department of Transportation (DOT), and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and focuses on aligning the projects and funding of the three agencies around core sustainability principles.

The \$590,700 grant will support the creation of a comprehensive plan for the region that will devote special attention to topics such as energy, economic development, housing quality and affordability, ramifications of land use pattern decisions, historic preservation, local agriculture, and social equity—among others.

A regional consortium of public, private, and non-profit entities will help guide the process—but we'll be looking to involve as many people from across the region as possible. That is why we're planning a rigorous public involvement process that will include a newsletter, workshops, forums, and web. Want to be informed about upcoming events and web updates? Please visit our website www.berkshireplanning.org to sign up to receive updates.

BRPC Contact: Amy Kacala (x12)



ATTENTION FARMERS!

HELP SUPPORT RESEARCH TO BOOST BERKSHIRE FARMING!

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission is working with students and Williams College to conduct a foodshed analysis of the county. The foodshed study measures what is currently being produced by farmers in Berkshire County against the amount that would be needed to support our population—to what degree are we able to support our nutrition needs locally? A second project also underway at Williams is measuring farmers' interest in a community kitchen/value-added facility that farmers could use to produce value-added products for sale.

The 5-minute surveys are on line at the website below. We would greatly appreciate your input and suggestions to help boost the farm economy in the Berkshires.

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/GJZ9Z2X>
<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/GOVC8X9>

For a hard copy of the survey contact Amy Kacala (x12)

Please submit your response no later than Dec 10th!

CURRENT PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

2011-2014 TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

The Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) approved the FFY2011-2014 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) at its meeting on August 24th, following a 30 day public comment period. The complete 2011-2014 TIP document is available for download from the BRPC website.

The TIP is a prioritized listing of highway, bridge and transit projects to be implemented in the region over the next four years. Federal funds programmed in the TIP include a mix of formula allocations to the region (called the regional 'target'), discretionary allocations of funds from MassDOT administered transportation programs, and one-time legislative authorizations (also known as Earmarks).

Projects in the 2011-2014 TIP include:

- Road and signalization improvements to South Street in Pittsfield
- Road and path/walkway improvements to Route 183 in Lenox
- Road/streetscape and signalization improvements to Main Street in Great Barrington
- Resurfacing and partial reconstruction of Housatonic Street in Dalton
- Continuation of the design/construction of a 1.2 mile segment of the Ashuwillticook Trail in Adams
- Installation of a new signal at Friend Street and Route 8 in Adams

Bridge improvements funded in the TIP include continuation of the multi-year Hadley Overpass project in North Adams, and improvements to the Route 2 (Cold River) bridge in Florida and Miner Road bridge in Lanesborough. Transit projects include continuation of operating assistance to the BRTA, as well as capital assistance for vehicle replacements and improvements to maintenance facilities.

While the funding levels in this year's TIP are comparable to those of prior years, the adequacy of regional transportation funds is continually challenged. Competition among local projects for inclusion in the TIP was especially intense this year. Next year the MPO will again be faced with difficult choices in trying to choose among many worthy regional transportation projects.

BRPC Contact: Anuja Koirala (x18)

2011 BERKSHIRE COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY UPDATE

BRPC is undertaking the task of developing a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for Berkshire County.

The CEDS process is defined by the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) as a participatory planning process that will "help create jobs, foster more stable and diversified economies and improve living conditions." It is a dynamic and evolving process that is meant to guide the economic future of the region, while still preserving the natural and cultural character of that region. The CEDS serves two primary purposes: 1) it is an ongoing process of establishing regional priorities primarily for physical projects that serve economic development purposes; and 2) it maintains the ability for eligible areas within the Berkshires to compete for funds from the EDA for priority economic development projects.

Although you may be thinking, "Why do we need another economic planning document?" In these hard economic times, this is an opportunity for the Berkshire Region and its communities to re-evaluate and set economic priorities for the future. The already existing economic planning documents, such as the: *2001 CEDS*, *2006 Rural Clusters of Innovation: Berkshires Strategy Project*, local community development strategies and others will be used as building blocks from which this CEDS will be developed. So those previous planning efforts will not be forgotten. Needless to say, opening the door for additional funding and grant opportunities doesn't hurt either.

The CEDS process is just ramping up, so if you would like more information regarding the 2011 Berkshire CEDS process, monthly updates or to get a Project Solicitation form, please visit the project page on the BRPC website at: http://www.berkshireplanning.org/economic/2011_berkshire_ceds.html.

*BRPC Contacts: Tom Matuszko (x. 34)
Daniel Sexton (x. 28)*

CURRENT PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

BRPC LAUNCHES NEW PERFORMANCE CONTRACTING PROGRAM FOR MUNICIPAL ENERGY PROJECTS

Energy costs continue to escalate, placing an increasing burden on municipal budgets. BRPC has secured funding to provide technical assistance to those municipalities and school districts that would like to investigate innovative financing mechanisms to reduce fossil fuel use. BRPC will be hosting informational meetings that describe energy performance contracting and power purchase agreements. But, we can only pursue these financing mechanisms if Berkshire communities show a serious interest.

Performance Contracting is a mechanism that can help cash-strapped municipalities and regional school districts make energy savings upgrades to their buildings now — with little or no upfront capital — and pay for them later through the energy savings that result. Energy savings are guaranteed. The municipality or school district enters into an agreement with a private energy service company (ESCO), who will be a partner throughout the design, construction and monitoring process. The ESCO will identify energy saving opportunities and recommend a series of improvements. Equipment is generally purchased through the energy cost savings generated by the greater efficiency of the equipment upgrades. The ESCO guarantees that the energy savings resulting from the upgrades will be equal to or greater than the project costs — usually over a contract term of 7 - 12 years. If the savings do not materialize, the ESCO pays the difference, not the community.

Power purchase agreements (PPAs) are contracts between electricity producers and consumers. The solar power industry has developed creative financing mechanisms to allow them to install solar arrays on private and public facilities. Many solar power companies take on the cost of installing solar panels on customers' roofs or land, and in return the customers receive financial benefits of some kind. The customers can purchase the electricity generated at a lower rate or receive lease payments for use of the site, or a combination of the two. Many municipalities are investigating this option, considering using closed landfills or other open areas to host solar panel arrays.

Please contact BRPC if your municipality or school district is interested in investigating performance contracting or PPAs. If there is sufficient interest, we will provide the services of an Owner's Agent to help communities negotiate beneficial contracts. We cannot pursue the hiring of an Owner's Agent unless Berkshire communities show an interest. Please contact Lauren Gaherty at 442-1521, ext. 35 or Amy Kacala at 442-1521, ext. 12 for more information.

GREEN COMMUNITIES TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE: REGIONAL STRATEGIES DISCUSSION

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission and the Center for Ecological Technology (CET) have partnered over the past year to offer Green Communities Technical Assistance to fourteen Berkshire municipalities. Since then, three communities have successfully achieved "Green Community" designation and grant awards: Becket, Pittsfield and Lenox. The remaining eleven communities each have an action plan detailing their strategy for moving forward with one or more of the Green Communities criteria.

Twelve of the fourteen communities in the Berkshires were part of a regional application. BRPC and CET will host a final workshop as part of the technical assistance to brainstorm ideas for regional green initiatives to be undertaken. We will also use this opportunity for communities to share challenges and strategies to meeting the five criteria. The final workshop will be held at BRPC offices on December 9 from 6:30-8 pm. We hope to see representatives from all fourteen communities; other communities interested in learning more about Green Communities are also welcome to attend. Please contact Lauren Gaherty (ext. 35) or Amy Kacala (ext. 12) for more information. All those planning to attend are asked to RSVP to Lauren Gaherty so we can plan the meeting space appropriately. Lauren Gaherty: lgaherty@berkshireplanning.org or 413-442-1521 x 35

2011 DISTRICT LOCAL TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

BRPC is now accepting applications from municipalities or collaborations of municipalities for District Local Technical Assistance projects. This flexible technical assistance program which provides BRPC staff assistance to advance municipal projects that align with one or more of the state's 10 Sustainable Development Principles. The solicitation for projects was sent to all communities in November. Applications are due December 15, 2010. To receive a copy of the application or discuss a project idea, please contact Amy Kacala (x 12).

ANNOUNCEMENTS IN MEMORIAM

Carl Nordstrom of Peru, BRPC Chair from 1985-1988, passed away on October 5, 2010.

WELCOME TO NEW STAFF

As BRPC's workload has increased substantially in these tough economic times, we are pleased to have two new planning staff. Planner Dan Sexton has worked for a couple of months as an Intern, before being hired as a Planner. Dan has four years of local planning experience, primarily in Juneau, Alaska, and a Bachelor of Arts in Geography and Community Development from St. Cloud State University in St. Cloud, Minnesota. Dan is focusing on developing our new regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy.

Our newest addition is Sara Lafayette, a fairly recent graduate of the State University at Albany's Master's program in Regional Planning. Sara has experience working in two New York state agencies with labor market research activities. She will immediately begin work on our Regional Planning Framework project.

GRANT OPPORTUNITIES

DEP WATER QUALITY MANAGEMENT PLANNING GRANTS

Water quality assessment and planning grants for activities that identify water quality problems and provide mitigation strategies. Regional planning agencies and municipalities are eligible to apply. Deadline for grant submission is Dec. 20, 2010.

PUBLIC WIND PROJECT SITE ASSESSMENT

Mass. Clean Energy Center – The goal of the Public Wind Project Site Assessment is to help public entities identify sites that might be appropriate for a wind project, to assess the advantages, disadvantages and potential fatal flaws of each site. The Public Wind Project Site Assessment also provides recommendations as to which sites could be worthy of further analysis. MassCEC accepts applications on a rolling basis and provides site assessments as funding is available. For more information visit www.masscec.com

CALENDAR

DECEMBER

- 2 Executive Committee Meeting**
BRPC Office, 4:00 p.m.
- 9 Green Communities Regional Strategies Discussion**
BRPC Office, 6:30 p.m.
- 15 Brownfields Committee Meeting**
BRPC Office, 11:00 a.m.
- CEDS Public Meeting**
BRPC Office, 6:00 p.m.
- Berkshire County Foodshed Analysis Presentation**
BRPC Office, 3rd Floor Board Room, 7:00 p.m.



CLEARINGHOUSE REVIEWS
None at this time.