

COMMON GROUND

A NEWSLETTER FOR COMMUNITY PLANNING IN THE BERKSHIRE REGION

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THANK YOU KIM, TANG AND AARON!

BRPC was fortunate to have three interns join us this summer, focusing on environmental, community and demographic projects. We thank the hard work of Kim Klosterman, who worked on water quality projects, Aaron Wasserman, who worked primarily on Crane Stationery Mill Re-Use Study for the Town of Dalton, and Yue Tang, who worked primarily on Berkshire Benchmarks. BRPC gives a warm

Thank you to all of our interns for their hard and valuable work, and we hope them the best in future endeavors!



GREAT BARRINGTON FY08 CDBG GRANT PROJECT COMPLETED

Infrastructure improvements in Housatonic Village will be completed by September 30, 2010. The 2-year project, which implemented over \$400,000 worth of infrastructure improvements in Housatonic Village and devoted \$75,000 for architectural designs for the removal of accessibility barriers to the Ramsdell Library, was funded by a FY08 CDBG CDF I Grant awarded to Great Barrington.

BRPC Planner Patricia Mullins worked closely with the town's project supervisor, DPW Sureintendent Joe Sokul, to procure the engineering services of White Engineering, Inc. of Pittsfield and construction services of A. Pereira Construction Co., Inc., of Ludlow, MA. Engineering work was completed in the summer of 2009 and construction work will be completed during the 2010 construction season. With daily supervision conducted by Great Barrington's Highway and Facilities Supervisor Pete Soules, over 2,000 linear feet of sidewalks were reconstructed on Main, Pleasant, Front and Depots Streets, including ramps and crosswalks, improving the pedestrian circulation in and around the vicinity of the post office, two stores and the Ramsdell Library. Abandoned trolley tracks that had formerly scored Depot Street were removed, and full depth reconstruction of the entire length of Depot Street, as well as approximately 1,000 feet of Main Street, was accomplished. Over 20 new drainage structures were installed.

After an intensive selection process spearheaded by Mr. Sokul, Great Barrington Library Director Anne Just, and Ms. Mullins and others, the architecture firm DRA (Drumme, Rosane, Anderson, Inc.) was contracted to develop and present schematic designs to a design review committee appointed by the town, and to assist in the final evaluation of those options. A final design option was selected, including an addition to the library housing an elevator and accessible bathrooms, as well as new stack arrangements and access to the building's second floor. Under the supervision of DRA architect Ken Best, schematic designs were advanced to the 100% design level.

This project to improve pedestrian circulation and vehicular safety, remediate drainage problems, and design accessibility improvements to the Ramsdell Library would have never been undertaken and funded by DHCD without the energetic and committed involvement of the Housatonic Village community. Members of the community worked hard and helped to identify the need, and shape the solutions, in a process that began several years ago, and has culminated in a project that the people of Housatonic, the Town of Great Barrington, BRPC and the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development can be very proud of.

CURRENT PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

CRANE STATIONERY MILL RE-USE STUDY

The BRPC is collaborating with the Town of Dalton and Crane & Co. on the redevelopment of Crane's downtown stationery mill, which the company will vacate in 2011. BRPC staff wrote a re-use report that analyzes redevelopment options and the local real estate market and recommends a mixed-use future for the property. It also recommends several planning actions town officials can undertake to facilitate the redevelopment. Crane intends to sell the stationery mill to a new community development corporation created by departing state Rep. Denis Guyer, who intends to convert the mill to commercial, residential and food-production uses.

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 RTP UPDATE

The 2011 RTP passed several milestones and is on target for completion of the first draft by the end of September – Please check the project page on BRPC's website www.berkshireplanning.org/transportation/transportation_plan.html to learn more and access draft project summaries. Stay tuned for the final round of public involvement on draft plan components. A final open-house style presentation will be held once the MPO releases the draft document (January 2011) for the official comment period prior to adoption.

BRPC Contact: Doug Plachcinski (x16)

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) and the Berkshire Bike Path Council (BBPC) are looking for volunteers to count trail users on the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail. The dates are: Tuesday, September 21st (7AM to 9AM and 4PM to 6PM) and Saturday September 25th (7AM to 7 PM). Shifts are 2 hours. Contact Ellen Downes at: edownes@berkshireplanning.org. Telephone: (413) 442-1521, extension 23.

GRANT OPPORTUNITIES

MASSACHUSETTS ENVIRONMENTAL TRUST FY12 GENERAL GRANTS

The Massachusetts Environmental Trust General Grants Program supports nonprofit organizations and municipalities in efforts to restore, protect, and improve water and water-related resources of the Commonwealth. The general grants program accepts proposals for programs and initiatives that address threats to the health of the state's water bodies and watersheds. The goal of this MET program is to encourage development of new approaches and ideas and to spur innovation among grantees or partnering organizations. The Trust seeks proposals that would: improve water quality or quantity, conserve aquatic or marine habitat and species, reduce runoff pollution, mitigate the effects of climate change on water resources, and/or promote human health as it relates to water resources. This grant program is open to any public or §501(c)(3) certified non-profit organizations, including, but not limited to municipalities, public or nonprofit educational institutions, including school districts, and nonprofit organizations (§501(c)(3) or fiscal partnerships with §501(c)(3) organizations).

Deadline for Letters of Inquiry: 15 October 2010
Deadline for Full Proposals (Invited Only): 11 March 2011

GREEN COMMUNITIES TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE: ROUND TWO

The state Department of Energy Resources (DOER) has released an application for Green Communities Technical Assistance. Municipalities across the Commonwealth are invited to apply to receive assistance in understanding and charting out the steps necessary to become designated a "Green Community" as defined in the state's landmark Green Communities Act legislation. DOER will be accepting applications from September 3 - October 1 for this first-come, first-served opportunity. Space is limited. Please visit the Green Communities page on www.Mass.gov and follow the link for Green Communities Grants to download the application for planning assistance. Please contact Amy Kacala (x12) or Lauren Gaherty (x35) with any questions.

LEGISLATIVE TRACKER

PERMIT EXTENSION ACT

The Massachusetts Legislature has enacted legislation that temporarily changes the law regarding the expiration of environmental and land use permits in an effort to assist landowners whose projects are "shovel ready," but unable to obtain financing in the current state of the economy. For all practical purposes, any permit that is or was in effect for any part of the time period from August 15, 2008 through August 15, 2010 has been, as a matter of law, extended for two years beyond its original expiration date. For example, a permit with an original expiration date of October 15, 2012 now has an expiration date of October 15, 2014. The new law applies to almost every type of permit both state and local, except for air and solid waste permits under M.G.L. c. 111 and permits issued under M.G.L. c. 40B. This legislation supersedes any requirement in a local ordinance that sets forth a timetable for the expiration of a permit, such as a special permit expiring in two years if a substantial use or construction has not begun.

LEGISLATURE PASSES NEW CULTURAL DISTRICT LEGISLATION

Recently enacted legislation allows communities across the Commonwealth to create state-sponsored cultural districts to stimulate cultural activity and attract creative businesses. The legislation instructs the Massachusetts Cultural Council ("MCC") to develop a new program that will create state-sponsored cultural districts in local communities. Participation in this program is voluntary. The goal of this new program is to "attract artists and cultural enterprises to a community, encourage business and job development, establish tourist destinations, preserve and reuse historic buildings, enhance property values and foster local cultural development." The MCC will be working over the next several months to develop guidelines for this program.

Further information about this program when available can be found at <http://www.massculturalcouncil.org/>



COMMONWEALTH WIND: COMMUNITY SCALE WIND INITIATIVE

OPENED ON JULY 28, 2010—CLOSES SEPTEMBER 14, 2010

The Commonwealth Wind Community Scale Initiative provides grants through a competitive application process for the installation of Wind Projects by professional, licensed contractors at commercial, industrial, institutional, residential, and Public Entity facilities. The Applicant and project site must both be served by distribution utilities that pay into the Massachusetts Renewable Energy Trust Fund, administered by the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center (MassCEC). The grants are based on the size and other characteristics of the Wind Project. MassCEC is offering grant funding for the in-depth study of the feasibility and the design and construction of eligible wind projects.

- Applications due at MassCEC – September 14, 2010 4:00 p.m. (applications received after 4 p.m. will not be accepted)
- Interviews for Design and Construction Applicants – September 21-22, 2010
- Awards Announced - October 2010

BRPC ANNUAL DINNER

Please join us for the BRPC Annual Dinner!
Speaker: John Hanlon, President
Housatonic Railroad

When: Thursday, September 30, 2010
Where: Pittsfield Country Club
RSVP by: September 10, 2010

Cost: Local Government Officials: \$15
All others: \$30
Time: Cash bar opens: 5:30 pm
Dinner and Presentation: 6:30 pm

CALENDAR

SEPTEMBER

- 2 Executive Committee Meeting**
BRPC Office, 6:00 p.m.
- 8 Brownfields Committee**
BRPC Office, 10:00 a.m.
- 16 Commission Meeting**
BRPC Office, 7:00 p.m.
- 30 BRPC Annual Dinner**
Pittsfield Country Club, 6:00 p.m.

OCTOBER

- 7 Executive Committee Meeting**
BRPC Office, 6:00 p.m.
- 12 MPO Meeting**
BRPC Office, 4:00 p.m.

CLEARINGHOUSE REVIEWS

Proposed Retail Store Draft EIR/NPC
(Proposed North Adams Super Walmart)
Comments due September 24