



# Common Ground

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Berkshire  
Regional  
Planning  
Commission

## Regional Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan Now Under Way at BRPC

**B**RPC is moving forward with the development of a Regional Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan for Berkshire County, which will include an overall plan for the region and an individual plan for each of the 32 municipalities in the county. Historically, natural hazard planning has focused on responding to disasters (floods, tornados, hurricanes, severe winter storms) while they hit or in their aftermath. In contrast, hazard mitigation planning focuses on mitigating the effects of natural disasters *before* they hit. Mitigation planning includes identifying risks and developing strategies and activities to minimize the effects of those risks should they become hazardous realities. Mitigation techniques may include infrastructure enhancements such as replacement of undersized culverts, berm construction or high-risk building relocation. They may also include non-infrastructure activities, such as creating or enforcing flood-plain protection bylaws and dedicating flood-prone properties to recreational use, thereby preventing disaster-prone development. Communities require local mitigation plans to qualify for federal grant programs providing funding to support such mitigation activities.

BRPC has collected data on critical facilities throughout the county and entered it into the Commission's Geographical Information Systems (GIS). This data has been taken from state-mandated local Comprehensive Emergency Management Plans. BRPC intern Brooke Medley will be contacting Emergency Management Directors throughout the county to verify the data and to ensure that the data is as comprehensive as possible. In addition, she will be collecting information on known community hazards in hopes of identifying mitigation activities that may save Berkshire towns and property owners untold aggravation and heartache in the wake of a natural disaster.

The Regional Hazard Mitigation Advisory Team will have its 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting on Thursday, July 29<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m. at the BRPC offices. All interested citizens are welcome to attend. *Contact: Mark Maloy*

## Also Inside this Issue:

The Berkshire Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy wrap-up. (See *CEDS, page 2*)

BRPC Working on Stormwater Improvements to Pittsfield's Drinking Water Supply. (See *Pittsfield Stormwater, page 2*)

Several amendments posted to the Berkshires Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). (See *Transportation, page 3*)

## BRPC Helps Prepare \$3.7 Million Regional Homeland Security Plan

**I**n May, Secretary Edward Flynn of the Executive Office of Public Safety appointed a Western Massachusetts Regional Advisory Council under the State's Homeland Security Strategy. There are fifteen members on the Council, which represents Berkshire, Franklin, Hampden and Hampshire Counties. Representatives from the Berkshires are Tri-Town Health Department Director Pete Kolodziej, Sheffield Police Chief James McGarry, and BRTA Administrator Chuck MacNeil. The Council is charged with developing a regional homeland security plan for Western Massachusetts by July 28<sup>th</sup>, including setting a budget for spending \$3.7 million in funds for the current fiscal year to meet priority regional homeland security needs.

Since the Council actually got organized in early June, there have been a number of Council and subcommittee meetings to develop the regional plan and to deal with issues of "interoperability"—that is, assuring that communities and agencies within communities have the ability to communicate with each other and to work together in preventing, responding to or recovering from a terrorist incident. The Western Massachusetts Council has made significant progress in moving towards the July 28<sup>th</sup> deadline.

The three regional planning agencies that cover the four counties are collaborating in assisting the Western Massachusetts Regional Advisory Council in developing the plan. There is a relative lack of membership from Berkshire County on the Council. Thus one of our tasks is to work with the Central Berkshire Local Emergency Planning Committee and specific local emergency officials from elsewhere in the region to better understand the current nature of risk and ability to respond to events in this part of the greater western Massachusetts region. Some other parts of the greater region have well-established local committees that work across municipal boundaries in a multi-disciplinary manner and this puts them at a com-

*(Continued on page 2)*

## Programs, Projects and Grants

### Grant Opportunities

#### MassHousing Priority Development Fund: Planning Assistance for Housing Production

On June 14, 2004, MassHousing and the Department of Housing and Commonwealth Development (DHCD) announced the availability of \$3 million from the MassHousing Priority Development Fund (PDF) to assist communities in the early stages of housing development. The goal of PDF Planning Assistance for Housing Production is to increase the supply of housing in the Commonwealth by encouraging community-based planning that will lead directly to housing production. The application and guidelines for PDF Planning Assistance are available at [www.mass.gov/dhcd/temp/04/pdf.doc](http://www.mass.gov/dhcd/temp/04/pdf.doc) and must be submitted to Miryam. Bobadilla@state.ma.us. MassHousing will consider the applications on a rolling basis. *Contact: Bryan Boeskin*

#### Highlands Communities Initiative Small-Grants Program

The Highlands Communities Initiative (HCI) is approaching the final months of its small-grants program, which awards eligible eastern Berkshire Hill Towns with up to \$5,000 for projects and programs designed to preserve the natural and cultural landscapes of the Highlands region through land conservation or community preservation. Applications will be accepted and grants awarded each month until the HCI small-grants funding runs out. The Grants Program page on HCI's website ([hci.thetrustees.org/pages/1597\\_grants\\_program.cfm](http://hci.thetrustees.org/pages/1597_grants_program.cfm)) details the project eligibility guidelines, review criteria and application procedures. Proposals should be submitted by mail, fax or e-mail to:

Jocelyn Forbush  
HCI Program Director  
The Trustees of Reservations  
5 Strong Avenue, Suite 4  
Northampton, MA 01060  
Tel: 413/587-0716, Fax: 413/587-3947  
e-mail: [highlands@ttor.org](mailto:highlands@ttor.org)

Applications must be received by 5:00 PM on the last business day of the month to be considered in that month's round.

#### EOEA DCS Self-Help Grant Program

The Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA) Division of Conservation Services (DCS) awards Self-Help Grants to assist municipal conservation commissions in acquiring land for natural resource and passive outdoor recreation purposes. Lands acquired may include wildlife, habitat, trails, unique natural, historic or cultural resources, water resources, forest, and farm land. Compatible passive outdoor recreational uses such as hiking, fishing, hunting, cross-country skiing, bird observation and the like are encouraged. Access by the general public is required. This state program pays for the acquisition of land, or a partial interest (such as a conservation restriction), and associated acquisition costs such as appraisal reports and closing costs. Applications for FY2005 are due August 29, 2004. Proponents can contact DCS Self-Help Grant coordinator Jennifer Soper at (617) 626-1015 or at [jennifer.soper@state.ma.us](mailto:jennifer.soper@state.ma.us). Application packages and details on Program Regulations 301 CMR 5.00, Step Procedures, Appraisal Guidelines, and the Selection System are available at [www.mass.gov/envir/dcs/selfhelp/default.htm](http://www.mass.gov/envir/dcs/selfhelp/default.htm)

#### 2004 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committee *ReVisions Future Berkshire Economy* Project Review Underway

The Berkshire Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Committee, meeting biweekly since early May, recently completed a major review and revision of the region's economic development Vision, Goals and Objectives. The 6 regional goals formulated in 2001 were trimmed down to 3 new statements designed to move the region's economy forward, driven by the revised **Vision for the Berkshires**:

*A diverse and robust economy, capitalizing on the region's unique combination of industrial and intellectual vigor, and natural and cultural resources, that creates a sustainable prosperity.*

Where do Berkshire economic development strategists want to see the regional economy headed over the next 10 to 20 years? Towards a sustainable prosperity rooted in the resources of the people and natural landscape that characterize this special region.

*(Continued on page 3)*

#### Stormwater Improvements to Pittsfield's Drinking Water Supply

With BRPC's grant writing assistance, the City of Pittsfield received a section 319 Nonpoint Source Pollution Competitive Grant from the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (with funds from EPA) to improve the water quality of stormwater runoff from roads before it enters its drinking water supply reservoirs. Measures to improve stormwater quality, so-called Best Management Practices (BMPs) will be installed adjacent to Cleveland Reservoir, the main supply source and Sackett Reservoir. These BMPs will treat and filter the sediment that transports roadway pollutants, such as oil and gas residuals.

This is a good example of a planning project leading to on-the-ground results. In 2001, the City of Pittsfield worked with BRPC to prepare a Watershed Management Plan for its series of reservoirs. The Plan was prepared to meet DEP guidelines for "Developing a Local Surface Water Supply Protection Plan," and it addresses the recommendations of the DEP "Source Water Assessment and Protection (SWAP) Report". In 2002, using the material in the Management Plan and again with BRPC's assistance, the City received a DEP Source Water Protection Grant to prepare the designs for the BMPs. Now those BMPs will be constructed according to the designs. BRPC will assist the City on the project and provide administrative services as well as conduct outreach and education tasks that are also part of the project. *Contact: Tom Matuszko*

#### Homeland Security Plan *(Continued from page 1)*

petitive advantage. The central Berkshire area does have such a committee, but one of the gaps here is that it does not include the entire region nor are there similar committees in southern and northern Berkshire County.

The immediate deadline is to get the regional homeland security plan developed; however, we expect that there will be significant work in the year ahead to fill in information gaps and to develop a more comprehensive plan aimed at this vital issue. This entire effort fits in well with the Natural Hazard planning project which is discussed elsewhere in this issue. *Contact: Executive Director Nat Karns*

## TRANSPORTATION UPDATE

- A proposed amendment to the 2004-2008 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) was posted on June 29 for public comments. The amendment consists of delaying three bridges from 2004 to 2005, delaying three other bridges from 2005 to the outer years, delaying an intersection improvement project from 2004 to the outer years, increasing the cost of six projects in 2004 and 2005, and adding a highway project and a project for new fareboxes on BRTA buses in 2004. Details of the proposed amendment may be viewed by contacting BRPC at 413-442-1521. Additional changes are still possible. The Berkshire Metropolitan Organization (MPO) will vote on the amendment at a meeting some time in early August.
- The annual process of preparing a TIP for the next five years (2005-2009) is well underway. BRPC staff worked closely with the Transportation Committee, member communities and Mass. Highway staff to gather information and apply a new set of evaluation criteria to projects. Funding levels have been set slightly higher than in the previous TIP, but those will be subject to change when the federal transportation bill is finally passed. A preliminary draft TIP is in the works, and will be released for public comment by the MPO some time in early August. Final approval must occur in September.
- Summer interns have been collecting regional traffic counts and assessing pavement condition for TIP projects. There is still time, but not much, for communities to request free traffic counts. Pavement condition surveys can also be performed, by community request, at cost, any time before August 15. *Contact: Andrew Lenton*

## CEDS Update *(Continued from page 2)*

As the Committee heads into the final stretch of its work on the region's Strategy, members have discussed a series of economic development activities—for a regional **Action Plan**—of ideas, projects, and plans of varying duration to be undertaken over the next five years. Among these are:

- Workforce development initiatives geared to making strong connections with the region's youth;
- Plans to centralize information sources for people and businesses interested in relocating or expanding in the region;
- Seeking capitalization for a Revolving Loan Fund focused on downtown improvement projects; and
- Targeting infrastructure improvements to key economic development areas.

The **Action Plan** is intended to provide a means to accomplish the region's goals—to turn the potential for improving the regional economy into reality.

The region's communities, Community Development Corporations (CDC's), and other non-profit and private economic development organizations have submitted 38 economic development projects for inclusion in the CEDS Strategy. At the Committee's meeting on July 8<sup>th</sup>, members grappled with establishing a set of criteria to review and prioritize projects aligned with the region's goals—putting real, ongoing economic development projects on a timeline for further feasibility, funding, or other implementation support.

Once this phase of project review is completed and the **Action Plan** finalized, the document outlining the Berkshire Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy and the regional process which spawned it will be submitted to the U.S. Economic Development Administration, as well as to the state and other public and private organizations, for review and approval. Following the Strategy's approval by EDA, the Committee will continue to meet quarterly, moving the Plan into ACTION, and the Berkshire economy forward—into a sustainable and prosperous future. *Contact: Kate McNulty-Vaughan or Peter Falcier*

## Term of the Month

### ***Transportation Enhancements***

This unique federal funding program was established with the passage of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Assistance Act (ISTEA) in 1991. Ten percent of the federal funding category used for most highway projects in the Berkshires is set aside for transportation-related projects that were not traditionally eligible for highway dollars. Typically, these have included bike trails, footbridges, streetscape improvements, and restoration of historic transportation facilities. Berkshire projects have included the Berkshire Scenic Railway Museum and a footbridge, both in Lenoxdale, City Hall Plaza in Pittsfield, the Mahican-Mohawk Trail of Peace in Williamstown, and others. Other eligible project types, all of which must be transportation-related, include acquisition of scenic easements, abandoned rail rights-of-way and other property, mitigation of environmental impacts of transportation projects, billboard removal, archaeological documentation, and educational programs or facilities.

**Clearinghouse Reviews**

The following comments were submitted under the direction of the Clearinghouse Review Committee between April 30, 2004 and June 25, 2004.

- Wahconah Park Rehabilitation (Pittsfield). Comments on the Environmental Notification Form submitted June 3, 2004.
- Wetland Protection Act Regulation Amendments (statewide). Comments on the amendments submitted June 17, 2004.
- Oak 'n' Spruce (Lee). Comments on the Notice of Project Change submitted June 23, 2004.
- Modification to State Revolving Fund selection criteria (state-wide). Comments submitted June 25, 2004.

**BRPCConnections**

- Web Site
- Electronic Mail
- Chair
- Executive Director
- Assistant Director
- Transportation Manager
- Senior Planners
- Planner
- Traffic Planner
- GIS Coordinator
- Associate Planner
- Planning Associate
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- Secretary
- Office Administrator
- Planning Interns

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- Lauren Gaherty
- Anuja Koirala
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- Mark Maloy
- Pete Falcier
- Kate McNulty-Vaughan
- Carolyn LeBlanc
- Debbie Polito
- Joyce McGuire
- Vishu Lingala
- Brooke Medley
- Sharif Ullah

**Date CALENDAR OF EVENTS**

- Thurs—July 15—Transportation Committee Meeting—BRPC offices— 3:30 PM**
- Wed—August 4—Executive Committee Meeting—BRPC offices— 3:30 PM**
- Wed—August 11 (proposed)—Regional Issues Committee Meeting—BRPC Offices—3:30 PM**
- Thurs—August 26 (proposed)—Full Commission Meeting (TIP & UWP Approval)—BRPC Offices— 5:30 PM**

**FAREWELL TO THREE TERRIFIC BRPC STAFFERS**

**Leigh Anne Adams, Sari Calame, and Douglas Holmes**

At the close of FY 2004 on June 30th, BRPC bid a truly fond farewell to three exemplary staff members. Sari Calame came to BRPC as an intern after finishing her Master of Arts in Landscape Design at the Conway School of Landscape Design. She worked on many projects, ranging from appropriate outdoor lighting (on which she presented a training session to the full Commission), the culvert rehabilitation project in Hinsdale, the Becket Village Plan, the buffer planting project in Otis and various others. Douglas Holmes joined BRPC in April for what had to be one of the most rigorous intern assignments in recent memory: organizing, assembling, packaging and managing the distribution of nearly all of the Community Development Plans completed for June 30, 2004. He handled the responsibilities and the inevitable misadventures with genuinely impressive aplomb and ample good humor. Lastly, BRPC will most certainly miss Associate Planner Leigh Anne Adams, who began as an intern in January 2003 and came on full-time in September 2004. She contributed excellent work on the CDPs, particularly the West Stockbridge truck plaza project, the Route 102 corridor study, the Adams Stormwater project, and the Pittsfield CDP. In addition, she was a valued website coordinator, minute-taker, and, last but not least, a skilled, respected and good-humored workmate.

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