

COMMON GROUND

A NEWSLETTER FOR COMMUNITY PLANNING IN THE BERKSHIRE REGION

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BRPC SELECTED FOR GREEN COMMUNITIES TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR MASSACHUSETTS MUNICIPALITIES PROGRAM

BRPC, partnering with the Center for Ecological Technology (CET), has been selected as one of six consultants across the state to provide technical assistance to communities seeking Green Communities designation. With support from the Green Communities Technical Assistance for Mass. Municipalities program, BRPC and CET will work directly with communities to help them understand and meet the five criteria of the Green Communities Grant Program. Those communities that meet the criteria are eligible for energy efficiency and renewable energy grant funding overseen by the Mass. Dept. of Energy Resources (DOER).

The five criteria required to become a designated Green Community are:

1. Adopt by-right siting for renewable/alternative energy generating, manufacturing or R&D facilities in designated locations;
2. Establish an expedited permitting process for approving such facilities within one year of the filing of an application;
3. Establish a municipal energy use baseline and a program to reduce that energy use by 20% within 5 years;
4. Develop a policy to purchase fuel-efficient vehicles where feasible; and
5. Require all new commercial/industrial and large residential real estate construction to minimize, to the extent feasible, the life-cycle cost of the facility through incorporation of energy efficiency, water conservation and other renewable or alternative energy technologies.

BRPC and CET will assist Berkshire communities to develop action plans that include specific tasks and assigned responsibilities for meeting the Green Community criteria. Although the contract has not been drafted, we expect our technical assistance role to include visiting communities interested in attaining Green Community status to assess the steps needed and chart out a course of action for the town to pursue to achieve that designation. The assessment work will likely include an analysis of existing town and zoning bylaws, calculating current energy use, identifying strategies for how to reduce that use, and assisting local building inspectors to understanding and implement stricter energy efficiency and renewable energy standards. The final action plan will be a clear roadmap of steps and activities the individual community will need to do in order to achieve the Green Community designation.

The exact timeline for this project is not yet formalized, but we expect to be under contract with the DOER within the next few months. We will keep our communities apprised of this exciting new project as it progresses.

BRPC Contact: Lauren Gaherty x35 or Amy Kacala x12

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'MASS IN MOTION' WELLNESS STUDY UNDERWAY

BRPC, along with the Tri-Town Health Department and Berkshire Health Systems, has initiated work under a Mass in Motion grant for the towns of Lee, Lenox and Stockbridge. The grant provides funding to assess how these communities, particularly through municipal policies, regulations, and actions, are affecting their residents' ability to stay healthy through regular exercise opportunities, such as walkability and access to nutritious food. BRPC will survey residents of their personal and community-wide barriers to maintaining a healthy lifestyle, and will also conduct field research to locate specific examples of how the built environment influences wellness. An action plan which addresses gaps and weaknesses of those municipally-driven actions will be the primary product. To learn more about the statewide wellness efforts, please visit the Mass in Motion website: www.mass.gov/massinmotion

BRPC Contact: Tom Matuszko x34 or Sarah LaValley x28

BRPC AWARDED \$895,000 FOR REGIONAL BROWNFIELDS

BRPC has received a \$895,000 grant award from the U.S. EPA Brownfields Assessment Grant Program. Funding will continue and expand the Berkshire Brownfields Program. The new grant will continue to fund Phase I and Phase II assessments throughout Berkshire County. These assessments are the first step to cleaning up contaminated sites and are often needed to protect potential buyers from liability. In addition, the new grant will expand the Program by including funding for Phase III assessments, which include the preparation of a remedial action plan. The remedial action plan is an important first step in cleaning up a site. This new funding coupled with the Berkshire Brownfields Revolving Loan Fund positions BRPC to help sites move from assessment through clean-up. BRPC currently has 13 active sites in the brownfields program, and will continue to accept applications for potential sites. Please contact Melissa Provencher (x22) for more information, or visit berkshireplanning.org for a site enrollment form.



The Brownfields program helps take contaminated sites, as well as those where a potential developer is unsure of the property's status, and bring them back into productive use for the community.

ENERGY GRANTS FOR COMMUNITIES UNDER 35,000

The Dept. of Energy Resources (DOER) will soon offer Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grants (EECBG) for communities with less than 35,000 residents (all of Berkshire County except Pittsfield). Funding will be available to support energy projects that include Solar PV and other clean energy technologies, thermal energy efficiency measures in oil heated buildings, and performance contract buy-downs.



Mass DEP and DOER recently hosted a Renewable Energy on Closed Landfills workshop. Presentations from the workshop are available online at: www.mass.gov/dep/energy/landfill.htm

The total program budget for this grant is \$12,252,000 with individual awards capped at \$150,000 per community. These funds are being provided to the DOER under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, also known as the stimulus package. The program is competitive, and those projects that are "shovel ready," provide jobs, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and leverage other funds will be most competitive. Regional school districts are eligible for funding, but a municipal government must serve as the applicant on their behalf.

The DOER expects to formally announce the application process in late summer or early fall. BRPC strongly encourages communities with "shovel ready" energy projects to do their homework now to be ready to apply in late summer. As with all stimulus funding, the project must be completed within a relatively short time span. We will keep you apprised of the grant opportunity once it is formally announced. For more information on this program, visit www.mass.gov/doer and click onto the Energy Funding Opportunity web page.

BRPC Contact: Lauren Gaherty x35

LEE BIKE PLANNING

BRPC has been working with communities to develop a border to border multi-use trail that will traverse Berkshire County from Vermont to Connecticut. The development of a countywide north-south trail has been an objective of BRPC's Regional Transportation Plan since 2003. This multi-use trail will serve as a "spine" to which future local trails, or spurs, can attach. A multi-use trail accommodates a variety of uses, including walking, running, bicycling, in-line skating and cross country skiing.

BRPC has been working with Lenox, Pittsfield, Adams, North Adams and Williamstown to advance consideration of bike path projects. Milone and MacBroom, Inc. of Cheshire, Connecticut was recently awarded the contract for conceptual design and engineering work for a trail between Williamstown and North Adams. A 1.2 mile extension of the Ashuwillticook Trail north to Lime Street in Adams is slated for construction in 2010. A 1.2 mile trail segment is also slated for construction in 2010 in Lenox. This segment will run parallel to Housatonic Street between Woods Pond and East Street.

The Towns of Lee, Stockbridge and Great Barrington have recently developed local bike trail committees. These town committees are working on determining in-town trails and routes as well as working collaboratively with their neighbors to determine routes for the north-south trail spine. BRPC has assisted in the development of cross-community connections through joint meetings with representatives from Lenox, Lee, Stockbridge, Great Barrington and Sheffield to determine the direction of the trail through South County.

The Lee Bike Path Committee is preparing a preliminary feasibility analysis for its portion of the north-south trail spine. Assistance is being provided by BRPC. The Lee Bike Path Committee envisions a trail that roughly follows the Housatonic River and is separated from existing roadways wherever possible. The idea for a trail along the river concurs with recommendations from the Lee Community Development Plan and the objectives of the Lee Community Development Corporation. At the Lee Town Meeting in May, the Town of Lee approved \$50,000 to retain a consultant to provide conceptual design and engineering services for the preferred alternative identified through the feasibility analysis and public input sessions.

In Lee, the routes under consideration begin at the Lenox town line and head south along the Housatonic River, providing access to downtown business and recreational areas. South of the downtown area, the trail would continue to follow the Housatonic River westward to the Lee-Stockbridge town line. Maps of the routes under consideration are available at the Lee Town Hall and on the BRPC website.

Stockbridge and Great Barrington have received assistance from the National Parks Service for trail planning services and mapping. The Great Barrington "Vision Map" is available online at: <http://gbtrails.org/vision-map/>. The Stockbridge "Vision Map" is available on the BRPC website at: <http://berkshireplanning.org/3/bike/>

The Berkshire Bike Path Council is currently completing its Berkshire Bike Path Regional Implementation Plan. The volunteer advocacy organization plans to present a draft of the plan to Congressman Olver on July 1st. This plan includes signed Memorandums of Understanding from eleven Berkshire communities along the envisioned trail "spine." These communities have agreed to participate in ongoing discussions with their neighbors to develop the trail spine and to request assistance from BRPC in support of a comprehensive regional strategy to develop the trail spine. The Implementation Plan will be used to support trail projects and grant applications. The draft Implementation Plan will soon be available on the BRPC website.

BRPC Contact: *Christine Neumann x16*

2009 SUMMER TRAFFIC COUNTING PROGRAM

BRPC has begun its annual ritual of collecting traffic count data from around the County. Accurate traffic counts are necessary for many local and regional projects, such as traffic mitigation studies, corridor plans, and construction proposals. Interns Justin Daigle and Matthew Martin will be placing many counters over the coming months. Please be kind both to the traffic counters and the interns - their data and hard work is a vital part of BRPC's transportation planning program.

BRPC Contact: *Christine Neumann x16*



Sign up to receive Common Ground by e-mail! Go to www.berkshireplanning.org and follow the "Newsletter" link.

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JULY 5TH THURSDAY

BRPC typically offers a dinner/training workshop at an area restaurant each time a fifth Thursday occurs in a month. Traditional 5th Thursday dinners are on vacation for the summer, but the Citizen Planner Training Collaborative (CPTC) workshop, the “Introduction to the Roles and Responsibilities of Planning and Appeals Boards” will be offered on July 30th at 6:00 pm at the BRPC Offices. The workshop is a great introduction to what being on a planning board or ZBA is all about. Recently elected or appointed board ‘newbies’ are encouraged to attend this overview session, which is also a great refresher course for more seasoned board members. The workshop is part of CPTC’s core curriculum, and will be led by BRPC planner Sarah LaValley, who was once a new planning board member herself. Pizza and cookies will be provided. To ensure enough food and handouts are available, please email slavalley@berkshireplanning.org to RSVP. There is no cost to attend the workshop.

PLANNING TRAINING RECOGNITION

Being a volunteer board member is a big commitment. Going to meetings, reviewing plans and applications, conducting research, and making land use decisions can sometimes feel like a full-time job. Board members that have learned about planning are better equipped to make good decisions, which benefits everyone in the community. However, attending trainings and workshops requires an additional commitment. BRPC sponsors and offers a variety of different training events over the course of the year to help board members learn about topics of interest, and we would like to recognize those board members and municipal employees who made the effort to attend these workshops. A total of 119 local board members, building inspectors, town administrators, municipal staff and other interested citizens from 24 different Berkshire communities took the initiative to attend at least one training event, and 35 dedicated people attended three or more. Attendees will be receiving recognition letters, and selectboards will also be notified of the commitment made by board members.

BRPC’s training program is intended to provide information that will make the job of board members easier. If there is a topic you would like to know more about, please let us know!

BRPC Contact: Sarah LaValley x28

CALENDAR

JULY

- 2 Executive Committee Meeting**
BRPC Office 4:00 pm
- 14 Brownfields Environmental Consultant (LSP) Interviews**
BRPC Office 12:30pm
- 15 MPO Meeting**
BRPC Office 4:00—6:00 pm
- 22 Brownfields Committee Meeting**
BRPC Office 4:00 pm
- 30 5th Thursday**
BRPC Office 6:00 pm

AUGUST

- 6 Executive Committee Meeting**
BRPC Office 4:00 pm

GRANT WATCH

The Mass. Environmental Trust is soon expected to reissue their solicitation for projects that promote the responsible stewardship of the Commonwealth’s water resources. Eligible projects include those that improve water quality or quantity, conserve aquatic habitat and species, reduce runoff pollution, mitigate the effects of climate change on water resources, or promote human health as it relates to water resources. The Trust utilizes a two-stage application process. The first stage is a Letter of Inquiry, typically due in October. Successful applicants are then invited to prepare a full proposal, the deadline for which is typically in March.