

COMMON GROUND

A NEWSLETTER FOR COMMUNITY PLANNING IN THE BERKSHIRE REGION

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DHCD WORKSHOP AT BRPC: DEVELOPING / REDEVELOPING SMALL SITES

The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission will host a free Department of Housing and Community Development workshop on how communities can overcome the challenges of small site infill development or redevelopment. The workshop will highlight case studies, suggestions, and best practices in an interactive format. Participants are encouraged to bring questions regarding development opportunities in their own communities for brainstorming.

Speakers: Jacquelyn Burgin, Community Facilities Director, Hilltown CDC; Joseph Kellogg, Town Administrator, Town of Sheffield; and Connie Kruger, Senior Program Manager for Massachusetts Housing Partnership.

When: Friday, May 15, 2009
8:45 am—noon

Where: BRPC offices, 1 Fenn Street, Suite 201, Pittsfield

How do I register? Register online at www.mass.gov/dhcd in the News and Updates section. Click the link Developing / Redeveloping Small Sites Workshop. Please register by May 8, 2009.

BRPC UNVEILS RESOURCE DIRECTORY SERIES

BRPC has begun a new series of topic-specific directories to serve as a one-stop-shop resource for communities seeking to learn about available grant, loan, and technical assistance resources. The first three resource directories, described below, will be unveiled at the May 15 DHCD workshop. After that point, up-to-date resource directories will be maintained on the BRPC website (www.berkshireplanning.org).

1 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Guide to State Economic Development Resources includes information on a variety of state programs to support economic development projects. The directory is organized by five project types: downtown/commercial center development, historic preservation, industrial/business development, infrastructure and public improvements, and mixed-use development and includes grant, loan, and technical assistance program summaries. This resource will eventually be broadened beyond state resources into a complete economic development directory for the series.
BRPC staff contact: Amy Kacala x12

2 BERKSHIRE BROWNFIELDS

The Berkshire Brownfields Resource Directory includes information on a variety of programs for Brownfields assessment, clean-up, and redevelopment. The directory is arranged by the following categories: grants, loans, liability protection and technical assistance.
BRPC staff contact: Melissa Provencher x22

3 ENERGY

The Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Resource Directory highlights grants and other assistance available to support energy efficiency and renewable energy options for municipalities. This relatively new and very active topic area is expected to change more rapidly than others. Directory users should check back periodically to ensure they have the most current and complete directory.
BRPC staff contact: Amy Kacala x12

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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PRIORITY DEVELOPMENT SITES

An economic development “cornerstone” of the Patrick administration has been the Priority Development Site (PDS) Program, as authorized by MGL Ch. 43D. This program seeks to expedite permitting and provide additional state marketing and promotion of sites that communities have specifically identified. Technical Assistance grants were also provided by the Massachusetts Permit Regulatory Office to advance development of these sites. Pittsfield, Dalton, Adams and Lee have designated PDSs.

WILLIAM STANLEY BUSINESS PARK, PITTSFIELD

The Site: A 52-acre segment of the former GE site.

Project Status:

- Many state and local permits have already been issued for the site, making it easier for new tenants to move into the Park.
- The City is in the process of implementing site improvements to enhance the Park’s appearance, as well as construction of stormwater management, electric lines, and sewer infrastructure.
- Pittsfield has also used their grant funds to improve the permitting process in the City beyond the boundaries of the PDS site. Applicants can now work with the Permitting Coordinator during all stages of project applications, have access to forms and applications on the City’s website, and can benefit from computerized permit tracking.

ASHUELOT PARK, DALTON

The Site: Ashuelot Park in Dalton includes the former Beloit building, located on South Street in Dalton at the Pittsfield-Dalton line. The site is owned by Crane & Co.

Project Status:

- A traffic study is underway for the Hubbard Ave, South St, Dalton Ave/ Main St triangle to evaluate the projected impact from potential new development. An infrastructure analysis will also be conducted.

GREYLOCK GLEN, ADAMS

The Site: The 1,060-acre Greylock Glen site at the base of Mount Greylock in Adams.

Project Status:

- The planned project would serve as a model of green building and site design in the region and beyond.
- The town has contracted with the Boston office of VHB, a consultant firm, to develop a detailed master plan for the planned environmental education center, campground, amphitheater, and conference and retreat lodge.
- As part of that effort, VHB is developing a set of sustainable design and renewable energy standards that will be used to guide development on the site.
- A regional traffic analysis is being conducted to evaluate potential regional impacts.

EAGLE AND LAUREL MILLS, LEE

The Site: The Eagle Mill, at the northern edge of downtown on West Center Street, and the Laurel Mill on Route 102.

Project Status:

- A re-development plan for the Eagle Mill that is integrated into other downtown planning efforts is currently being prepared. A presentation on March 17 allowed citizens and the Selectboard to provide input on potential future uses of the mill site as well. A review of current zoning requirements has also been completed
- The technical assistance awards will substantially move these sites to “development-ready” status.

RPC contact: Tom Matuszko x34

\$ 647,000 CDBG PROJECT GETS UNDERWAY IN HOUSATONIC

The Town of Great Barrington, with the assistance of Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, successfully applied for and received a Community Development Block Grant totaling \$647,000 for two projects in the village of Housatonic. The first phase will bring long-needed street and sidewalk repairs and resolve drainage problems. The second phase will advance handicap accessibility of Ramsdell Library and crosswalks to enhance pedestrian safety.

This project is part of a larger vision of the Housatonic Village Task Force, and shared by the Town Administration, who were instrumental in the public participation process required in order to receive funding from the Massachusetts CDBG program. Construction is scheduled to begin late summer 2009.

NOW IS THE TIME TO START PLANNING FOR YOUR FY 2011 CDBG APPLICATION

The CDBG program is one of the strongest grant resources available to communities address a wide range of activities related to housing, economic development, and infrastructure projects. Minimum funding for CDBG grants is currently \$100,000, with maximum funding set at \$750,000 for individual communities. For several years now BRPC has been involved in writing and administering CDBG grants on behalf of various communities in the region. Given the intensive nature of the application process, BRPC encourages its communities to plan ahead to identify and develop a strategy for potential CDBG projects well in advance to make for a more competitive application. We are here to assist with questions, the application, and administration of CDBG projects. Call us today!

BRPC Staff Contact: Patricia Mullins x17

CLEARINGHOUSE REVIEWS

Great Barrington Green River Bank Stabilization
ENF

STATE ENERGY AUDIT PROGRAM APPLICATIONS ARE IN!

As of April 15th, 86% of eligible municipal entities (towns, school districts, fire & water districts) in Berkshire County have submitted applications to the Mass. Dept. of Energy Resources (DOER) to receive free energy audits for their facilities. This high application rate is due to the hard work of municipal staff, with support from BRPC and the Center for Ecological Technology. We are pleased to announce that BRPC was able to help seven towns and one fire and water district submit applications, while CET helped submit an additional four towns and one fire and water district applications. We do not know when the next application window opens, but when it does, we'll work to get the county to a 100%!

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO GET A STATE AUDIT?

The Energy Audit Program is one of the first steps by the state to implement the Green Communities Act adopted into law in 2007. The audit provides towns with a list of energy conservation projects, their costs and estimated energy savings. It will also offer renewable energy options where feasible. As stated by the DOER, only projects identified or confirmed on a DOER-approved audit are eligible for future state energy funding. Thus, we recommended getting an audit through the state program. The reasons are twofold: first, it is more complete than a utility audit in that it assesses renewable options in addition to conservation measures; and second, having a state audit eliminates any doubt or concern that the audit not be accepted to meet the state grant criteria.

WHEN CAN I EXPECT MY AUDIT?

The demand for audits is high, and the state is just wrapping up round-one audits. This second round of audits is expected to be done in a first-come first-served basis, and they will probably be commencing this summer and going through at least the end of the year. If your community or district has not yet applied for a state energy audit – stay tuned! We'll notify you if the state issues third round application. If your community has an energy project that it would like to pursue but it has not yet received an audit, we suggest that you contact DOER staff to inquire about the possibility of receiving an interim audit by your electric or natural gas company.

WHAT WILL YOUR AUDIT REPORT TELL YOU?

After the audit, a report summarizing the findings and recommendations will be sent to you. This report will detail three types of recommendations to help improve the efficiency and energy savings of the facilities examined: energy conserving improvements and upgrades, operational practices to reduce energy use, and renewable energy potential. The report will indicate the “low-hanging fruit” where savings can be gleaned through little or no investment, prioritize equipment upgrades based on performance and pay-back, and identify the renewable options that have the greatest potential given the building and its location.

WHAT ELSE CAN I DO WHILE I WAIT?

While getting your state energy audit is an important first step in implementing the Green Communities Act, communities should also begin to strategize on how they might meet new requirements to achieve Green Communities designation and become eligible for additional energy program funding. To achieve Green Communities designation, communities will be required to: 1) allow by-right siting of renewable energy generating facilities, 2) create an expedited permitting process for development of those renewable energy generating facilities, 3) establish a baseline inventory of municipal energy use (the energy audit is part of this process), 4) create a plan to purchase fuel-efficient vehicles, and 5) require new development to meet stricter energy usage codes.

BRPC Staff Contact: *Lauren Gaherty x35*

ARRA UPDATE DOER HOSTS WEBINAR SERIES

The Department of Energy Resources hosted a webinar on April 22 to provide guidance to communities over 35,000 on the submittal process for federal applications to receive the money allocated to them for energy purposes through the American Recovery and Revitalization Act (ARRA). The PowerPoint is available at the DOER page of www.mass.gov.

A second webinar will be held on **May 6 at 10 am for communities under 35,000** people as to the state's priorities and process for competitive applications for the remaining \$14 million for competitive awards to small communities. All are encouraged to register, tune-in and learn more!

GO GREEN! SIGN UP TO RECEIVE COMMON GROUND ON YOUR E-MAIL

If you sign up to receive Common Ground electronically you'll help save paper and energy.

It's easy! Simply go to our website and click the “Common Ground” link to enter your name and e-mail. You can also send an e-mail to Amy Kacala at akacala@berkshireplanning.org subject “Common Ground.”

2009 5TH ANNUAL
**Sustainable
ENERGY SUMMIT**
THIS IS THE YEAR. NOW IS THE HOUR.

May 1-2
UMass Amherst
Campus Center



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**LOCAL ACQUISITION FOR NATURAL DIVERSITY:
LAND GRANT PROGRAM**

The LAND Program provides funds to municipal conservation commissions for the purchase of conservation land. The priority for this year's LAND grant round will be for the protection of sensitive water resources, landscape and working lands conservation, and biodiversity protection. Projects that fall under lands mapped in the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species BioMap and Living Waters, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, and those that augment or connect to existing conservation lands, will receive greater consideration for funding.

Contact: Celia Riechel
(617) 626-1187
celia.riechel@state.ma.us

**PARKLAND ACQUISITION AND RENOVATION FOR
COMMUNITIES: PARC GRANT PROGRAM**

The PARC Program assists communities with the acquisition of parkland, as well as construction of new parks and renovation of existing parks. The priorities for this year's PARC grants include new park development, especially on parkland recovered from brownfield site clean-up and those in environmental justice neighborhoods. Projects that are near urban centers close to public transportation will be given special consideration as will those that provide for park equity in a community. Towns with a population less than 35,000 qualify for a grant if proposals are designed to provide statewide or regional recreational facilities or a maximum grant of \$50,000 for smaller recreational projects.

Contact: Melissa Cryan
(617) 626-1171
melissa.cryan@state.ma.us

LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND GRANT RFR

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) grant RFR has been posted on www.comm-pass.com. Please contact Melissa Cryan at melissa.cryan@state.ma.us or 617-626-1171 if there are any questions.

BEAVER MITIGATION FUNDING AVAILABLE

The MSPCA has received grant funding from the Nion Robert Thieriot Foundation to assist with installation of water flow devices to humanely mitigate beaver-related flooding in the Berkshires. For more information visit www.msps.org/BeaverFunding or contact Lisa Huebner at 617-541-5104 or Lhuebner@mspca.org.

CALENDAR

MAY

- 6** Berkshire Conservation Commission Group
BRPC Office 7:00 pm
- 6** ARRA Webinar: Communities Less Than 35,000 Residents
On-line at Mass. DOER, 10:00 am
- 7** Executive Committee Meeting
BRPC Office 4:00 pm
- 11** LUPA Breakfast Discussion
Berkshire Hills Country Club 8:00 am
- 13** APA Audio/Web Conference: Inclusionary Housing
BRPC Office 4:00—5:30 pm
- 15** Workshop: Developing/Redeveloping Small Sites
BRPC Office 8:45 am—noon
- 20** Transportation Advisory Committee
BRPC Office 4:00 pm
- 21** Commission Meeting
BRPC Office 7:00 pm

JUNE

- 27** APA Audio/Web Conference: Great Plans, Great Communities
BRPC Office 4:00—5:00 pm
- 4** Executive Committee Meeting
BRPC Office 4:00 pm
- 24** APA Audio/Web Conference: 2009 Planning Law Review
BRPC Office 4:00—5:30 pm