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## **PVPC NEWS**

### **Regional Data Sharing Project Wins National Award**

The National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) has awarded a 2014 Innovation Award to the Regional Organizations Advanced Data Sharing Partnership (ROADS). This collaborative initiative of PVPC, the Economic Development Council of Western MA (EDC), the Regional Employment Board of Hampden County (REB), and the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG) was created to provide key regional economic, planning, and workforce data through a publicly accessible portal. PVPC submitted the award application to NADO on behalf of the ROADS partnership.

The Pioneer Valley Data Portal ([www.pioneervalleydata.org](http://www.pioneervalleydata.org)) offers hundreds of data sets, such as statistics on poverty, health, crime, education, employment, transportation, and housing, all covering geographical regions from Franklin County, Massachusetts to the Central Region in Connecticut. Rather than duplicating existing sources of easily accessible data (such as Census Bureau or Bureau of Labor Statistics information), the portal offers a collective resource of information that may be difficult to locate for the inexperienced user, capturing these data sets in a database and keeping them updated.

NADO is a Washington, DC-based association that promotes programs and policies that strengthen local

governments, communities, and economies through regional cooperation, program delivery, and comprehensive strategies. The association's Innovation Awards program recognizes regional development organizations and partnering organizations for improving the economic and community competitiveness of our nation's regions and local communities. Award winners were showcased during NADO's 2014 Annual Training Conference held in August in Denver, Colorado.

Contact: [Timothy W. Brennan](#), PVPC Executive Director; Molly Goren-Watts, Principal Planner and Manager, PVPC Regional Information and Policy Center

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### **Site Cleared for Northampton Community Garden**

A site with the potential to become a new community garden has been created along the Connecticut River in Northampton. During late August, tractors wrestled with thick vegetation to clear a half-acre site along the Connecticut River just upstream of the Route 9 Coolidge Bridge and Elwell Island.

Many residents of River Run are already interested in community gardening; during recent years, they have cleared and established a small community garden near the condominium complex with about 12 plots now filled with vegetable and flowers during the growing season.



*Community gardening is already popular with residents of the River Run condominiums in Northampton.*

The recently cleared site is closer to the river and could accommodate up to 90 additional plots, based on an initial assessment by PVPC, which is working with the City of Northampton and Sarah Bankert of Healthy Hampshire/Mass in Motion.



*The recently cleared half-acre site along the Connecticut River near River Run where a new community garden is now being studied.*

Residents of River Run condos have begun meeting to envision how a larger community garden could be run and managed on the new site. The new plots would be part of an existing city-owned parcel of fertile farmland that is currently cultivated by Enterprise Farms of Whately. The site is also adjacent to the future Connecticut River Community Boat House and recreation area, with connecting trails and beachfront access.

Improving access to the Connecticut River is a key recommendation of the [Pioneer Valley Environment Plan](#) and expanding community gardens in member municipalities is a key recommendation of the [Pioneer Valley Food Security Plan](#).

Contact: [David Elvin](#), Senior Planner

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### **CPTC Training Scheduled in October**

We are pleased to announce that PVPC will host the first Fall Citizen Planner Training Collaborative Workshop on Site Plan Review on Wednesday, October 8, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. in our 2nd floor large conference room. Wayne

Feiden, FAICP, City of Northampton, will be the trainer.

For more information about this workshop, as well as the entire Fall 2014 CPTC course schedule, including registration instructions and costs, visit <http://www.umass.edu/masscptc/>.

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## **Medical Marijuana Update**

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) is well on its way to giving final approval to the state's first registered marijuana dispensaries (RMD). In the first round, 77 applications were submitted for RMDs statewide, including seven in the PVPC region (two each in Northampton, Holyoke, and Chicopee, and one in Easthampton). While initially 20 of these applications received provisional certification from MDPH, including one each in Northampton and Holyoke, after additional scrutiny that number was reduced to 11 statewide, leaving only the one in Northampton in PVPC's region. In addition, one applicant receiving provisional certification for an RMD facility in Lowell is proposing to locate its growing facility in South Hadley, and has already received local approval. All 11 proposed RMDs have moved on to the MDPH inspection stage, the last stage before RMDs can open for business. When all are up and running, 97 percent of the state's population will be located within 30 miles of at least one of these proposed 11 facilities.

Because the state legislation and regulations require that at least one registered marijuana dispensary must be located in each county, seven of the state's counties, including Hampden, Franklin, and Berkshire, are without a proposed facility. To address this, MDPH has implemented an expedited open county process, in which it has approved five additional applicants from the initial round to submit applications to provide facilities in these so-called "open counties." While applicants can apply for up to two RMD facilities, each facility must be in a different open county. All applications were required to include a letter of support or non-opposition from the community's chief executive/administrative officer, city council/board of aldermen/board of selectmen, or board of health. Applications for seven locations were submitted under this open county process, with one in Greenfield and none in Hampden or Berkshire counties. Two of these



applications identified South Hadley as their proposed cultivation location (but with no dispensary). MDPH announcements on the open county submissions are scheduled to be made in October.

With a recent personnel change of the proposed Northampton RMD, that facility is awaiting a clarification of the status of their provisional certification from MDPH. Should that certification be revoked, that would leave Hampshire, Hampden, and Berkshire counties waiting for the next application round for RMDs, anticipated to begin next summer.

PVPC's model medical marijuana bylaw has now been utilized by more than half of its member communities in developing their own zoning bylaws to regulate RMDs in their communities. In addition, many other communities from the Cape to the Berkshires have also used it as their model. If your community needs to develop an RMD bylaw, please contact PVPC Senior Planner Larry Smith at (413) 781-6045 or [lsmith@pvpc.com](mailto:lsmith@pvpc.com) for assistance.

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### **Regional Bike Share Survey Results Announced**

PVPC, in collaboration with the City of Holyoke, the City of Northampton, the City of Springfield, and the Town of Amherst, is currently assessing the feasibility of a regional bike share program. The proposed program would allow local residents to access bicycles at self-serve rental stations and return the bicycles to any other station in the system.

As part of the study, Pioneer Valley residents were recently asked to complete a survey about the potential program. The survey was available on PVPC's website for six weeks during June and early July, and was completed primarily by residents of Holyoke, Northampton, Springfield, and Amherst. Of the over 500 survey respondents, 80 percent answered that they would be interested in using a bike share system. Respondents also stated that they would like to see stations located in downtown centers, near bus stops, and on college campuses, and that they would use the proposed system mostly for recreation, commuting to work, or exercise. Eighty percent of residents indicated they would be willing to walk a half mile to use the system. Over 60 percent of residents who do not currently own a

bicycle said that they would be willing to try using the bike share system. Many respondents also commented upon the importance of improving bicycle infrastructure, such as bike lanes and bike racks, to make bicycling easier and safer in the region, in collaboration with the bike share program.

The bike share feasibility study will be completed in December 2014 and will make recommendations about the size of the system, where stations should be located, and how to connect the service with the region's rail and bus lines. The public survey results will be incorporated into these recommendations. The study will also estimate the cost of the proposed system and identify potential funding sources, such as grants and sponsorships.

The study is being directed by an advisory committee composed of representatives from the City of Holyoke, the City of Northampton, the City of Springfield, the Town of Amherst, and several local colleges and universities. The committee's monthly meetings have included guest presentations from leading professionals in the bike share field, such as Scott Kubly, the President of Alta Bike Share, and Nicole Freedman, the Director of Bicycle Programs for the City of Boston.

*Contact: [Josiah Neiderbach](#), Land Use and Environmental Planner*

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### **Hampden County Community Health Survey Now Available**

PVPC, on behalf of the Oversight Committee of the Hampden County Shared Public Health Nurse Assistance program, has announced an online Hampden County community health survey and invites the public to participate.

This survey is conducted by Ready EDI, a local research and consulting company hired to conduct a community public health assessment for 12 Hampden County municipalities: West Springfield, East Longmeadow, Ludlow, Palmer, Monson, Hampden, Brimfield, Southwick, Granville, Tolland, Blandford, and Montgomery. The basis of this project is funded by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Administration and Finance's Community

Innovation Challenge Grant program.

This community health assessment will aid in identifying unmet health needs that can be addressed by local public health boards and other health initiatives occurring within the region. The assessment focuses on community health conditions, as well as health care access issues, and is organized around five prevalent health sectors:

- Chronic Diseases-cancer, diabetes, asthma/COPD, hypertension, heart disease, etc.
- Infectious Diseases-Lyme disease, STDs, influenza, food-borne pathogens, etc.
- Environmental and Occupational Health-asthma, workplace accidents, etc.
- Health Related Behaviors-opiate use, mental health, obesity rates, teen pregnancy, etc.
- Injury and Violence-adolescent suicide, domestic violence reports, elder abuse, etc.

To take the survey, follow this link:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/Hampdencountycommunityhealthsurvey>. Or, click the survey button on the PVPC website at: <http://www.pvpc.org/healthassessment>.

The survey is available through December 31, 2014.

Contact: *Joshua Garcia*, Senior Economic Development/Policy Analyst

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## **Walking in the Middle of the Street**

**by *Dillion Sussman*, PVPC Planner**

One of the joys of being a land planner is that what I learn at work helps me understand how communities function and why people act the way they do. Here's an example. A year ago I moved from one neighborhood to another in the same city. One of the first things that struck me was the difference in pedestrian behavior. In my old neighborhood, we walked on the sidewalk. In the new one, people usually walk in the street.

Over time, I noticed some patterns. Single, middle-aged people usually walk on the sidewalk. Parents with strollers walk on the edge of the street. Unaccompanied kids stick

to the sidewalk. At 2:45 p.m., the street is overtaken by a loud, cussing, snowball-throwing, wrestling, running, biking horde of middle schoolers. They occupy the whole street, often causing cars to slow down or stop. Out of all of this, one older gentleman stuck out. Gene often wears a bright yellow coat, uses a cane, and walks slowly, but assuredly, in the middle of the street. He passes my house heading to the village center in the morning, and returns in the afternoon. Why, I wondered, does he walk in the middle of the road? Isn't he afraid of the cars?



*Eugene Barry, aka "Gene," takes a walk in the middle of the street. (Photo: Dillon Sussman)*

So, back to my work as a senior planner for PVPC. I recently completed updating the [Massachusetts Healthy Design Toolkit](#) to incorporate the needs of older adults. In our work we found that:

- The built environment of many communities does not meet the needs of older adults, and is likely contributing to negative health outcomes.
- Older adults are diverse and people age differently. Our communities need to be more diverse in order to accommodate the varying needs of older adults. This includes more diverse housing opportunities, more diverse access to goods and services, and more diverse transportation options.
- The needs of older adults are extremely personal and specific. They range from the macro scale, like a land use pattern that requires excessive driving or a lack of affordable housing, to the micro scale, like a difficult intersection.
- Older adults are a key leverage point for influencing change in our built environment. As active voters and citizens with a growing population, the opinions



and actions of older adults will shape the public policies which in turn determine how our communities are designed and built.

- Meeting the healthy community design needs of older adults will improve the built environment for all.

After reading a lot of literature on the topic, I developed a working theory about Gene's walking behavior, which I later confirmed by talking with him. Gene, like many older people, wants to walk because he enjoys it and knows staying active is good for his health. In his late 80s, Gene walks two and a half hours a day. It turns out the design of my neighborhood provides a pretty good environment for him to get out and walk.



*The author's son with his red wagon. (Photo: Dillon Sussman)*

First, there is a village center near his house, where he can visit the library and a café. Second, the streets in the neighborhood are laid out in a grid pattern (as opposed to a series of cul-de-sacs off arterial roads). That means that Gene can take a relatively direct route from point A to point B without having to cross any excessively fast streets. Third, traffic volumes are relatively low in my neighborhood in part because of the grid pattern, which disperses traffic. All of this encourages Gene to walk. But still, why does he walk in the middle of the street?

The answer is simple: cracked sidewalks. Gene has weighed the risk of getting hit by a car versus the risk of tripping and falling on our cracked sidewalks. For him, cracks are a danger with every footstep, whereas cars provide only an occasional risk. Gene mitigates the risk of cars by wearing his yellow coat and walking in the middle of the road.

For him, it is common sense. For me, as a planner, it is a good lesson. On the one hand, I wish Gene didn't have to make this kind of difficult calculation about risk to take a walk. I wish he had safe sidewalks, and I will work to make them available. I hope you will join me in that work in your community. On the other hand, I'm impressed with his spirit and I'm inspired by his commitment to maintaining his health by getting out and staying active.

To support the Genes in your neighborhood, please check out our recent update to the Massachusetts Community Design Toolkit. The Toolkit identifies the key steps we need to take to promote healthy community design for older people and everyone else. It introduces the basics of zoning, subdivision regulations, street and sidewalk design, storm water, etc. It delves into specific community planning priorities for older adults, including unique housing types and road, sidewalk, and parking lot design criteria. Checklists provide a snapshot of key reforms to advocate for at the local level. In short, the Toolkit is a crash course in land planning for people who want to know how to implement change on a local level.

Walking in the middle of the street was not one of our Toolkit recommendations. But maybe it should have been! The built environment matters, but so does the culture of a place. In my new neighborhood people walk in the street, and drivers have come to expect that. The horde of middle schoolers has taught us that pedestrians rule the street! And once you have seen that vision, you know you need drive slower. That helps everyone, from Gene with his yellow coat, to my two-year-old who sometimes pulls his red wagon down the middle of the road.

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### **Register for Hampden County Public Health Improvement Forum**

PVPC, along with a planning committee made up of public health practitioners and elected officials, invites you to participate in the Hampden County Public Health Improvement Forum on Thursday, November 13, 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at the Kittredge Center, Holyoke Community College. This forum brings together public, private, local, regional, and state officials to shed light on the issues that contribute to Hampden County's poor

health ranking. It will provide an opportunity for key decision makers and stakeholders to understand the economic costs incurred as a result of our county's poor health, while also allowing us to launch the process of strategizing a plan to improve our health outcomes.

According to the [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation County Health Rankings Annual Report](#), Hampden County consistently ranks the lowest in the Commonwealth with respect to health. This includes having the highest rates of tobacco smoking, adult obesity, excessive drinking, motor vehicle crash fatalities, sexually transmitted infections, and teen pregnancy, all of which are identified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as "winnable battles."

Register at <http://www.pvpc.org/publichealthforum>.

Contact: [Joshua Garcia](#), Municipal Services Coordinator

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### **Joint Transportation Committee Meetings**

October 8, November 12, December 10  
10:15 a.m. at PVPC office

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### **Plan for Progress Coordinating Council Meetings**

November 19  
8:15 a.m. at PVPC office

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### **PVPC Commission Meetings**

#### **Executive Committee:**

October 30, November 20  
4 p.m. at PVPC office

#### **Commission:**

October 9, 5:30p.m. at PVPC office; December 11, 5:30 p.m. at Northampton Clarion Hotel

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Pioneer Valley Planning Commission | 60 Congress Street | Floor 1 | Springfield | MA | 01104