



A Newsletter for Community Planning in the Berkshire Region

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Congratulations to **Clete Kus**, BRPC's Transportation Program Manager, on his 10th anniversary with BRPC! Clete was hired as the program manager and grew the program from 2 to 4 planners. In addition to leading the team to assist BRPC's 32 communities on transportation matters, Clete manages the federal transportation process and the Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) including preparation of the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) and the Transportation

Improvement Program each year. Every four years, the Regional Transportation Plan is also updated.

A favorite project was the *Passenger Rail Station Location and Design Study* in 2014. After securing a \$240,000 federal grant for this study, Clete said "it was exciting to be able to assemble a multi-disciplinary team to conduct this study." It was the start of many rail studies for Berkshire County. Clete appreciates the opportunity to work for all Berkshire County communities.

BRPC's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program is delighted to announce the addition of two new staff members: CDBG Housing Rehabilitation Specialist William F. Thornton and ADA Project Specialist James R. Woods.

Bill Thornton, Jr. is a former Building Inspector for Lenox and Pittsfield, and his addition to the CDBG Housing Rehab team provides a wealth of knowledge with regard to Massachusetts building and sanitary codes, as well as home improvement and construction methods.

James Woods comes to BRPC after serving as the ADA Coordinator and Planner in Charlottesville, VA and a planner with the Binghamton, NY, Metropolitan Transportation Study. He is working with multiple communities on ADA Self-evaluation & Transition Plans.

Welcome to **Lynne Lemanski**, CPA who is joining the Administration Program team as a part-time temporary Finance Project Specialist.

#HereForGood Volunteer Month

Northern Berkshire United Way & Berkshire United Way have declared **April 2021 #HereForGood** Volunteer Month. Throughout the month there will be many signature events as well as highlights of other non-profits and their volunteer needs. Projects include: Packing Pantry Packs of Food, Trail Clean up, Neighborhood clean-ups, live StoryWalks and fun events to bring joy to children during school vacation week April 17-25th. Events will be both week days and weekends, mostly daytime hours. Sign up to receive updates as new dates are added. Details:

<https://www.volunteerberkshireuw.org/need/index/>

Grant Opportunities

Due April 29 - [U.S. Department of Commerce Build to Scale Program](#)

Efficiency & Regionalization FY21 Grant Program for one-time or transition costs for municipalities, regional planning agencies, and school districts to implement regionalization and other efficiency initiatives for long-term sustainability. Application **closes April 15, 2021**. For more information contact Executive Director Tom Matuszko, tmatuszko@berkshireplanning.org or go to [Efficiency & Regionalization grant program | Mass.gov](#).

FFY 2022 Section 319 Nonpoint Source Pollution Competitive Grants Program

Request for Responses will be issued about April 14, 2021 with proposals due about **June 30, 2021**. Please contact Melissa Provencher at mprovencher@berkshireplanning.org for more information or assistance with a proposal. Description [here](#) and [RFP link here](#).

Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) **Community Planning** grants are available through One Stop for technical assistance on planning and zoning projects. The maximum award is \$75,000. Applications due **June 2021**. Details at: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/planning-fy-22-guidelines/download>

Microenterprise Grant Programs Available in Northern & Southern Berkshires

CDBG-CV Grant Programs for income-qualifying small business owners in northern and southern Berkshire County. Up to \$10,000 for costs such as rent, staffing and utilities. Applications rolling: [Community Development Block Grant Microenterprise Assistance](#)

Community One Stop for Growth

On January 21, 2021, the Baker-Polito Administration announced the launch of the Community One Stop for Growth, a single application portal and collaborative review process for grant programs. This will allow applicants—including municipalities, public entities, community non-profits, and private companies—to use a single portal to access ten different grant programs. For more information, please visit www.mass.gov/onestop.

Community Planning



Lenox - Master Plan update

In 2018, a Steering Committee comprised of engaged residents and members of local authorities formed to update Lenox's 1999 Master Plan. Their continued efforts, along with guidance from town staff and Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, have led to a nearly complete Master Plan update. The plan provides a comprehensive analysis of Lenox's land, economy, culture, and infrastructure and serves to guide the growth of the Town over the next ten to twenty years.

Recently, the Steering Committee concluded a five-part series of public meetings to solicit feedback from the community. The meetings included general information on creating Master Plans, topic specific presentations on all of the plan's chapters, review of the proposed projects, and open discussions with attendees to see if the plan draft had overlooked anything. The final meeting focused on implementation strategies for the proposed projects. Due to the limitations caused by COVID-19, all five meetings were held virtually via Zoom.

Feedback from the public meetings has been compiled and will be reviewed by the Steering Committee to assess how it will be integrated into the plan draft. After the responses are incorporated and the timeline for implementation has been finished, the plan draft will be reposted to the Town's website. Typically, a Planning Board is the authority to formally adopt Master Plans; however, the Steering Committee is seeking the adoption of the plan by both the Planning Board and Select Board. The intent is to accomplish this through a joint public hearing.

The next Steering Committee meeting is scheduled for April 5 at 4pm via Zoom. The dates for subsequent meetings are to be determined but all will be accessible to the public and posted on Lenox's website. The updated Lenox Master Plan is anticipated to be completed by June 2021. Stay tuned!

Data & Information Services

2021 Municipal Taxes

The FY 2021 municipal tax information has been released by the state and shows an increase in the average single-family tax bill in Berkshire County of \$104, increasing from \$4,001 to \$4,105 last year. When looking over the previous ten years, the county has seen an increase of \$974, or 31%. Williamstown has the highest single-family tax bill in 2021, at \$6,611, while Hancock has the lowest at \$764.

The latest release of data also includes the average value of single-family homes. In Berkshire County, the average rose from \$272,841 to \$280,043, an increase of \$7,202 or 2.6%. The last ten years have seen a rise of 9% in the average value of a single-family home. Averages in 2021 ranged from \$728,775 in Alford to \$149,474 in Adams.

Due to the increase in the average single-family home, the average tax rate has fallen from \$13.15 to \$12.96. Adams has the highest tax rate at \$22.62, while Hancock has the lowest at \$2.98.

More information can be found online at <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/municipal-finance-trend-dashboard>.

Economic Development

Agility and Resilience in Berkshire County: Public and Private Sector Preparedness

BRPC has recently been awarded a two-year grant from the Economic Development Administration (EDA) focused on economic recovery efforts following the COVID-19 pandemic. In partnership with [1Berkshire](#), BRPC will respond to economic injury to the region as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, through regional resiliency planning, recovery project support, economic indicator tracking, technical assistance and capacity building for businesses and municipalities, and workforce and industry support. Learn more [HERE](#). For more information, contact Laura Brennan lbrennan@berkshireplanning.org.

Emergency Preparedness

The Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency is offering a new course on **Basic Sheltering Operations** via their Virtual Classroom on **April 14, 2021**, plus a **Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) Train-the-Trainer** course, also via their Virtual Classroom on **April 29, 2021**.

Visit MEMA's training web site at <http://mematraining.chs.state.ma.us/TRS/?ogToken=MEMA> for more details.

Environmental & Energy

Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Program FY22 Funding

Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Program Planning Grants

The Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) is seeking proposals for Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Planning Grants, which provide support for Massachusetts cities and towns to complete climate vulnerability assessments and develop action-oriented climate resiliency plans. The program helps communities define extreme weather and natural and climate related hazards; understand how their community may be impacted by climate change; identify existing and future vulnerabilities and strengths; and develop, prioritize, and implement key actions. State-trained MVP providers offer technical assistance to communities in completing the assessment and resiliency plans. Communities that complete the MVP planning grant program become certified as an MVP community and are eligible for MVP Action Grant funding. The link to the RFR and required forms can be accessed through the new [MVP program website](#) or directly on [COMMBUYS](#). Planning Grant applications are due on **June 4, 2021 by 4:00 p.m.** (via email, see RFR for details) for MVP planning processes that must be complete by June 30, 2022.

BRPC is a certified MVP Provider and staff are available to answer questions or provide direct assistance. Please contact Courteny Morehouse, Senior Planner at cmorehouse@berkshireplanning.org.

Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Program Action Grants

EEA is also seeking proposals for MVP Action Grants, which provide designated MVP Communities funding to implement priority climate adaptation actions identified through the MVP planning process or similar climate change vulnerability assessment and action planning that has led to MVP designation after EEA review. Projects are required to use climate data and projections. Projects that propose nature-based solutions or strategies that rely on green infrastructure or conservation and enhancement of natural systems and that have robust community engagement plans are preferred. Applicants can request up to \$2 million in funding (regional proposals may request up to \$5 million), and a 25 percent match of the total project cost is required. EEA recommends reading the RFR in full as there have been several updates to the Action Grant RFR from the last round; significant changes are outlined on page 1. The link to the RFR and required forms can be accessed through the new [MVP program website](#) or directly on [COMMBUYS](#). Action Grant proposals are due by 2:00 p.m. on May 7, 2021 (via online form, see RFR for details) for project proposals that must be completed by June 30, 2022, or June 30, 2023.

The MVP team also hosted a recent webinar about this FY22 funding round. The recording can be accessed [here](#). The slides can be accessed [here](#). BRPC has also worked with communities and partnering organizations in Berkshire County to develop, apply to, and administer MVP Action Grants. Please contact Courtney Morehouse, Senior Planner at cmorehouse@berkshireplanning.org with ideas and questions.

Public Health



Senator Warren Visits Vaccination Clinic

The Public Health clinic staff, volunteers and vaccine recipients were pleased to meet with Senator Warren and her staff on Saturday, March 27 at Berkshire Community College. Senator Warren was there for nearly two hours and spoke with everyone. BRPC staff were assured the Senator understood their concerns about fair distribution of vaccines within Massachusetts. The supply of vaccines is not something our Senators can control.

As quoted in the Berkshire Eagle: “This is all done publicly,” Warren said. “It’s not a big private contractor dragging in millions of dollars to run this operation. ... This is the best possible use of public money. It’s effective, and it’s local. That’s what we need more of.”

Regional Initiatives

Outdoor Recreation Forum Scheduled for April 15

A discussion of outdoor recreation news and developments will be held via Zoom on April 15 at noon. The focus of the session will be on hiking trails, with presentations from Berkshire Camino, BNRC, Williamstown Rural Land Foundation and others. To register for the webinar, click [here](#).

BRPC is also requesting feedback on the Berkshire County Outdoor Recreation Plan, published in June of 2020. To take a brief survey regarding aspects of the plan, please click [here](#). Input provided will help in our development of this year’s annual update to the Outdoor Recreation Plan.

Regional Services, Housing & Community Development

The BRPC Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Team continues to actively solicit applications for a number of CDBG programs in Berkshire County.

The **CDBG CV Program** provides assistance to low and moderate-income business owners adversely impacted by the 2020 pandemic. This program can be helpful to home-based businesses as well as traditional, store-front establishments. If you would like more information, please look at the information provided on the BRPC website at the following link:

<https://berkshireplanning.org/initiatives/cdbg-cv-assistance-to-lmi-microenterprise-business-owners/>.

Several **CDBG Housing Rehabilitation Programs** are also available to assist low to moderate income homeowners in the following communities: Becket, Cheshire, Dalton, New Marlborough, Sheffield

and Stockbridge. This program can assist homeowners with deferred maintenance on roofs, windows, electrical upgrades, plumbing issues and septic systems, and will also address lead paint hazards within individual projects. The Housing Rehabilitation Program is also actively seeking licensed, qualified general contractors for this program.

For additional information contact Gwen Cariddi, 413-442-1521 x 35, gcariddi@berkshireplanning.org or Christie Lewis, 413-442-1521 x 23, clewis@berkshireplanning.org.

Transportation

Complete Streets Coming to Otis and West Stockbridge

Since 2016, BRPC has assisted 12 communities in applying for funding through the MassDOT Complete Streets program, which provides both technical assistance and construction funding through a competitive grant process. Municipalities may apply for up to \$400,000 in construction funding for projects that improve biking, walking, traffic safety, and transit in their communities. The Towns of Otis and West Stockbridge are the newest communities in the Berkshires to look at this program. Otis recently held a kickoff meeting and has begun to identify potential projects across town. Planning work in the Town of West Stockbridge has not yet begun, as the project is awaiting final approval from MassDOT. The project is expected to begin in the next few months. BRPC encourages all communities interested in Complete Streets to apply for construction funding or begin the process of becoming eligible. To date, Berkshire County communities participating in the Complete Streets program have received nearly 3 million dollars from the State.

For additional information, contact Senior Transportation Planner Eammon Coughlin at ecoughlin@berkshireplanning.org or 413-442-1521 X19.

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission
www.berkshireplanning.org

