



A Newsletter for Community Planning in the Berkshire Region

Invite others to read Common Ground! Share [this link](#) with your colleagues.

Grant Opportunities

June 25, 2021 [MassDOT Community Transit Grant Program- Applications being Accepted](#) for State FY22. The State Mobility Assistance Program funds transportation services for seniors and people with disabilities.

June 30, 2021 [FFY 2022 Section 319 Nonpoint Source Pollution Competitive Grants Program](#)
Contact Melissa Provencher mprovencher@berkshireplanning.org for more information or assistance with a proposal. Description [here](#).

July 2, 2021 Collaborative Workspace Program Fit-out grants up to \$100,000 for new equipment or building improvements, or seed grants up to \$15,000 for planning and feasibility work related to the establishment of new coworking spaces. Details massdevelopment.com/cowork or email cowork@massdevelopment.com.

July 12, 2021 MassDEP announces funding opportunity for private, public, and non-profit entities to **replace eligible diesel vehicles and equipment** with more efficient technologies. This is an early replacement program to accelerate retirement of older less efficient diesel vehicles and equipment. <https://www.mass.gov/how-to/apply-for-a-diesel-emissions-reduction-act-dera-open-solicitation-grant>. Questions cayla.paulding@mass.gov.

July 26, 2021 USDA [Rural Placemaking Innovation Challenge \(RPIC\)](#)
Up to \$3 million in USDA grants to help rural communities create plans to enhance capacity for broadband access; preserve cultural and historic structures; and support development in transportation, housing, and recreational spaces.
More information: RD.RPIC@usda.gov or page 28526 of the May 27 [Federal Register](#). Virtual workshop to learn more: Thursday, June 24, 2021, at 2:30 p.m. Eastern Time. Register at: <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/6167023696195529742>.

Rolling applications: [Community Development Block Grant Microenterprise Assistance](#) for income-qualifying small businesses. More information at above link or via Christie Lewis, 413-442-1521 x 23, clewis@berkshireplanning.org.

SBA Community Navigators A new grant funding opportunity will soon be open to states, tribes, units of local government and other non-profit organizations to conduct outreach to underserved businesses. Read more [here](#).

Community Development, Housing & Regional Services

CDBG Housing Rehabilitation Program

We are happy to announce BRPC will be implementing the FY20 CDBG Housing Rehabilitation Program this summer. This grant covers residents the following communities: Dalton, Cheshire, Sheffield, and Stockbridge. To date we have received 44 applications.

CDBG Housing Rehabilitation Program assists low to moderate income homeowners. This program can assist 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 please contact Gwen Cariddi at 413-442-1521 x 35, gcariddi@berkshireplanning.org or Christie Lewis at 413-442-1521 x 23, clewis@berkshireplanning.org.

Community Planning

Outdoor Dining Post-COVID



Berkshire Regional Planning Commission uses the firm of Miyares and Harrington, LLP as its legal counsel. In Miyares Harrington’s recent newsletter, there was an excellent article about outdoor dining for restaurants when the COVID-19 crisis has ended. In the midst of the pandemic, Governor Baker issued COVID-19 Order No. 35, § 4, on June 1, 2020 which “gave municipalities authority to approve restaurants’ requests for expansion of outdoor table service, including expansion of the licensed premises, without going through the usual statutory permitting process.”^[1] A subsequent order extended this until 60 days past the end of the state of emergency, at which time restaurants must return to their pre-COVID seating policies. On May 25, 2021 Governor Baker filed legislation to extend the provisions through November 29, 2021.

Increased outdoor seating has created new opportunities for both restaurants and their patrons alike. Many restaurants will seek ways to continue the extended outdoor seating options in the wake of the pandemic, but would have to do so under the normal permitting process. This will likely lead to questions and concerns over the existing policy. If outdoor seating during the pandemic has been largely successful, why return to normal? Municipalities should be prepared for these discussions and may seek to review and amend local regulations. Additionally, towns and cities should continue to pursue new, creative seating arrangements to bolster local business and provide more options for businesses and their customers.

Please see the link below for the original article:

^[1] Miyares and Harrington, LLP (April 27, 2021) [‘Help Your Restaurants Prepare for the End of the COVID-19 State of Emergency’](#) Accessed 5/17/21.

Data & Information Services

Berkshire County Open Burn Permits

Berkshire County completed another successful year of the Berkshire County Open Burning Permits program. The participating communities issued 11,367 permits for burning from January 15, 2021, through May 1, 2021. The program added six communities this year, which brings the total to 23 Berkshire communities and two from other counties. The communities that participated for the last two years saw a decline of almost 14% in the number of permits, likely due to the drought and high fire risk, which resulted in numerous days of fires not being allowed. For more information, contact Mark Maloy, mmaloy@berkshireplanning.org.

	Self-Issued	Town-Issued	Sheriff-Issued	Total
Adams	84	0	0	84
Becket	249	17	31	297
Blandford	147	0	0	147
Cheshire	284	2	0	286
Dalton	323	15	0	338
Egremont	440	0	0	440
Great Barrington	732	538	14	1284
Hancock	159	0	0	159
Lanesborough	388	25	1	414
Lee	930	4	75	1009
Lenox	912	26	62	1000
Monterey	209	0	13	222
New Ashford	11	0	0	11
New Marlborough	547	0	0	547
Otis	241	20	6	267
Peru	131	0	11	142
Pittsfield	1625	0	0	1625
Richmond	596	20	0	616
Sheffield	781	13	7	801
Stockbridge	620	5	151	776
Tolland	32	2	0	34
Tyringham	90	44	0	134
Washington	14	51	3	68
West Stockbridge	518	12	1	531
Windsor	125	10	0	135
Total	10188	804	375	11367

Economic Development

Berkshire Economic Recovery Project - Recovery Project Support & Technical Assistance

As part of the [recently-awarded EDA investment](#) in economic recovery and resilience in Berkshire County, BRPC is seeking to identify and support economic recovery projects throughout the region. BRPC staff is available to assist municipal leaders, project managers, and investors bring beneficial and sustainable projects to fruition. If you are aware of pending projects in your community that could benefit from this type of assistance, please contact us or share our contact information with project leads.

The recent EDA award also allows BRPC to arrange for technical assistance to municipal staff in a range of topics, including (but not limited to): increased access to online payments and services for your residents and businesses, improved and expanded tools to communicate with your residents and businesses, information about available funding sources for municipalities, and review and revision of policies which affect economic recovery in your community.

For more information about either of these opportunities, or to suggest a technical assistance topic you believe would be helpful for municipal leaders in Berkshire County, please contact Economic Development Program Manager Laura Brennan at lbrennan@berkshireplanning.org.

Environmental & Energy

Green Communities Regional Energy Planning Assistance Funding Opportunity

BRPC is applying for funding under the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources (DOER) Green Communities program for Regional Energy Planning Assistance (REPA) to provide technical assistance to municipalities. BRPC will be submitting applications for funding on behalf of communities that have received Green Community designations and want to engage in clean energy planning activities and those that want to become designated. To be eligible BRPC must receive a signed MOU from the community **no later than June 11, 2021**. Contract duration is 2 years long and begins September 10, 2021.

The Regional Energy Planning Assistance (REPA) program seeks to: 1) augment municipal resources necessary to effectively participate in the Green Communities Designation and Grant Program; and 2) build local capacity to advance local or regional municipal and clean energy projects and programs.

Municipalities have been sent a formal request for information and a MOU. Please contact Emily

Reduce Nonpoint Pollution through Sustainable Landscaping

Summer is here! With gardens in bloom and lawns growing, it is a good time to remind residents to practice sustainable landscaping. Fertilizers, pesticides, pet waste, grass clippings, and other yard waste can wash off into public storm sewer systems that lead to our waterways. This nonpoint source pollutant of nutrients, bacteria, and chemicals can lead to poor water quality, disrupted aquatic life and fish populations, harmful algal blooms, and public health risks in our county's streams, lakes, rivers, and ponds. Getting soil tested to determine proper fertilizer needs, encouraging residents to reduce chemical use, and properly dispose of pet and yard waste goes a long way to maintaining clean water. *If your town is renewing pet licenses this month, consider providing a flyer about proper pet waste disposal along with renewals.*

Residents and town officials can find more information on the [Think Blue Massachusetts](https://www.thinkbluemassachusetts.com) website. **Outreach is a requirement for municipalities with MS4 areas, but good practice for all.** For more information and support in reducing nonpoint source pollution or addressing water quality issues contact Courteny Morehouse, Senior Planner, 413-442-1521 x26, cmorehouse@berkshireplanning.org.

Public Health

HIV/Bloodborne Pathogen Outbreak Table Top Exercise and Emergency Response Plan

BRPC Public Health Program staff held a Workshop and Table Top Exercise (TTX) May 21st to test the draft Berkshire County HIV/Bloodborne Pathogen Emergency Response Plan. The workshop received funding from the Health Resources Service Administration (HRSA) Ryan White HIV/AIDS program.

Staff have been working with community partners since 2019 to develop a comprehensive community response plan to address possible outbreaks of HIV and other bloodborne pathogens. The primary partners on this planning and exercise effort were Sarah DeJesus from Healthy Steps, Katrina Mattson from Tapestry Health, Lieutenant Stephen Murray from Northern Berkshire EMS, and Jess Tilley from H4H 413.

The planning effort was led by BRPC Senior Planner Sandra Martin, community and harm reduction engagement by Principal Planner Jennifer Kimball. The Table Top Exercise was facilitated by Senior Planner Allison Egan.

The purpose of the plan is to address gaps in public health emergency planning in Berkshire County. There are robust plans for sheltering, Emergency Dispensing Site (EDS), pandemic response and vaccination programs (bolstered by the lived experience of the COVID-19 pandemic). But there are no plans that address an HIV or other bloodborne pathogen outbreak among People Who Use Drugs (PWUD). There have been outbreaks of HIV in rural counties and communities that have very similar statistics to Berkshire County. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) have classified Berkshire County as "high risk" for an HIV outbreak.

Table Top Exercises are used in traditional emergency response planning to test specific capabilities of response plans. Facilitators create an immersive, simulated and realistic scenario that community partners work through together in a "workshopping" format. The exercise scenario reflected a realistic circumstance in which HIV is spreading across Berkshire County, primarily among PWUD. Through this realistic scenario, community partners and people with lived experience worked together to troubleshoot techniques to reduce the spread of HIV and conduct a widespread testing and treatment program for the community. Partners included: Harm Reductionists, Direct Service Providers, the Berkshire County Sheriff's Office, EMS, Public Health Nurses and BRPC Planners.

The Public Health Program staff will develop an "improvement plan" to address gaps in the draft response plan. For more information, contact Allison Egan, Senior Public Health Planner, aegan@berkshireplanning.org.

Partnership to Expand Hepatitis C Care Continuum

In Massachusetts, roughly 9,000 new Hepatitis C (HCV) cases are diagnosed each year. Though largely impacting the so-called “Baby Boomer” generation, new HCV infections related to injection drug use have been steadily increasing. At the same time, this increase has been paralleled by the re-emerging risk of HIV co-infection in these same populations.

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health, New England Aids Education and Training Center (NEAETC), and the Berkshire Opioid Addiction Prevention Collaborative (BOAPC), a public health program within BRPC, are working to develop new and innovative partnerships to better understand drug use and HCV/HIV infection trends and the needs and gaps of impacted populations in Berkshire County.

This collaboration builds on existing state programs, funding streams, coalitions and clinical networks. The goal is to implement responsive strategies to increase access to the HCV/HIV care continuum (such as increased referrals to clinical HCV services at Berkshire Health Systems Healthy Steps program).

One of this project’s multiple interventions is the re-launch of the Berkshire County Hepatitis C Working Group. The intention is to become a Berkshire County-focused HCV Community of Practice (CoP). Communities of Practice are a way for groups to develop and share knowledge, providing a safe environment for sharing and solving complex clinical issues, supporting collaboration, and promoting evidence-based best practice.

Building upon the statewide HCV Community of Practice, the Berkshire County CoP will meet the first Wednesday of the month (except for quarterly meetings of the statewide CoP). CoP members are primarily clinicians but include community health workers, public health practitioners, and harm reductionists. To be added to the Berkshire CoP E-Newsletter, the statewide CoP listserv, or to learn more, contact Principal Planner Jennifer Kimball at jkimball@berkshireplanning.org.

Regional Services

Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recovery Fund (CLFRF) Eligible Uses

On March 11, 2021, the President of the United States signed into law the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA). This law provides resources through the new Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recovery Fund (CLFRF) to local governments to respond to the public health emergency caused by the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19). This fund is administered by the US Department of the Treasury. On June 3, 2021, the Massachusetts Executive Office for Administration & Finance Federal Funds Office posted a memorandum regarding Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recovery Fund (CLFRF) eligible uses. To view the memorandum, please [click here](#). Additional information, is available at [Executive Office for Administration & Finance Federal Funds Office webpage](#) and on the [DLS COVID-19 Resources and Guidance for Municipal Officials page](#). BRPC is not eligible to receive these funds. However, we are assessing if it would be useful for BRPC staff to become knowledgeable about the use and administration of these funds to be able to assist communities. Please contact Tom Matuszko, tmatuszko@berkshireplanning.org if your community might be interested.

Transportation

Unified Planning Work Program Released for Comment

The Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) for FFY 2022 has been released for public comment by the Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). The UPWP outlines the work activities of transportation planning staff for the up coming federal fiscal year. Some of the areas that will receive attention include updating the Public Participation Plan to accommodate virtual public involvement, engaging towns to increase their knowledge of and participation in the TIP process, working to identify an alignment for the Berkshire Bike Path from Adams to North Adams and furthering design efforts for the Adventure Trail from Williamstown to MASS MoCA.

Other items that staff will focus on are the Transportation and Climate Initiative promoting electric vehicles and charging infrastructure, implementation of a Transportation Management Association and involvement with rail service implementation efforts.

A copy of the draft UPWP is available for review and can be found [here](#). Comments on the draft document are due by **June 16, 2021** and may be submitted to info@berkshireplanning.org. <https://berkshireplanning.org/bmpo-upwp-public-review-and-comment/>

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission
www.berkshireplanning.org

