



A Newsletter for Community Planning in the Berkshire Region

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Welcome to New Staff Members!

Alecia Herrick has joined the BRPC Administrative team as Financial Office Assistant. In addition to day to day financial transactions, she will assist Marianne Sniezek, Office Manager, with tracking over 100 funding sources (each with their own timeline, requirements, etc.). Alecia most recently worked as Assistant Accountant for the town of Dalton.

Nicholas Russo, EIT starts in August as a Senior Transportation Planner and will lead the regional transportation plan. Additional responsibilities include safety and performance measures, road condition pavement management and bicycle and pedestrian planning. We are fortunate to have this Pittsfield, Berkshire County and biking enthusiast onboard.

Leslie Drager, RN, BSN, has been a contract part-time off site nurse with the Berkshire Public Health Alliance (led by the BRPC Public Health Program) for over five years. In addition to her ongoing work investigating and managing infectious reportable disease in the Alliance contracted municipalities, she was the lead organizer of the Berkshire Community College (BCC) public COVID-19 vaccine clinic. Due to receipt of a Public Health Excellence Grant (see more below), she is now a BRPC employee and will work approximately 17.5 hours per week as a Senior Public Health Nurse.

Nancy Kibby Slattery, RN, BSN is a new full time public health nurse with the Berkshire Public Health Alliance. Public health nurses work to reduce the effects of preventable chronic diseases, premature death and improve the quality of life among residents of Berkshire County. Nancy played a major role in managing the COVID-19 crisis via her previous position with the Berkshire VNA and is fully proficient with other aspects of the job such as infectious disease monitoring and investigation, provision of flu clinics and wellness.

The Public Health Program also welcomes two new part-time, as needed health inspectors: **Claudia Sarti** and **Ned Saviski**.

Grants & Opportunities

August 16, 2021: NTIA State and Local Broadband Infrastructure Program

DOC's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) announced \$288 million in funding for broadband infrastructure. More information at: [Notice of Funding Opportunity](#), grants.gov and via a [series of webinars](#).

September 2, 2021: USDA Rural Innovation Stronger Economy (RISE) Grants

The Rural Innovation Stronger Economy (RISE) Grant Program offers grant assistance to create and augment high-wage jobs, accelerate the formation of new businesses, support industry clusters and maximize the use of local productive assets in eligible low-income rural areas.

<https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/rural-innovation-stronger-economy-grants>

<https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/view-opportunity.html?oppld=333974>

September 16, 2021: ***SAVE THE DATE*** for the **BRPC and Berkshire County Select Board Association Annual Meeting**, starting with a Commission meeting, 5:00 - 9:00 PM., details to be confirmed.

Recreation Economy at USDA Economic Development Resources for Rural Communities

USDA's Forest Service (FS), Rural Development (RD), and the National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA) have developed this resource guide for rural communities to identify resources

that develop the recreation economy.

https://www.rd.usda.gov/sites/default/files/RD_Recreation_Economy_USDA.pdf

NTIA Launches Updated [BroadbandUSA Federal Funding Guide](#)

NTIA's database has 80+ federal programs for broadband-related funding. Opportunities include direct grants, loans, indirect support, and discounts for industry, state and local governments, schools, libraries, small businesses, and other community institutions that are interested in expanding and improving broadband access. Visitors can search by agency, program purpose, and eligible recipients. As agencies release new funding opportunities, NTIA will update the site. The information is also available as a [downloadable spreadsheet](#) (look for PDF at top of linked web page) so users may sort by selected criteria.

FEMA Issues Updated Economic Recovery Roadmap to Assist Local Government and Communities with COVID19 Health Disaster

This COVID-19 Economic Recovery Resource Roadmap was developed to assist state, local, tribal, and territorial (SLTT) leaders and other interested parties with navigating some of the challenges, as well as the resources, associated with the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

<https://www.fema.gov/.pdf>

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 x23, clewis@berkshireplanning.org.

Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recovery Fund (CLFRF) for local governments. Massachusetts Executive Office for Administration & Finance Federal Funds Office [memorandum](#) outlines eligible uses. Additional information, is at [Executive Office for Administration & Finance Federal Funds Office webpage](#) and [DLS COVID-19 Resources and Guidance for Municipal Officials page](#). Please contact Tom Matuszko, tmatuszko@berkshireplanning.org if your community is interested.

Community Development & Housing

Group Purchasing says thanks for a successful FY22 bidding process!

The BRPC Group Purchasing staff would like to thank all 25 Vendors who participated in the bidding process for fuel and road maintenance products and services for FY22. We received 34 bids total, with some vendors bidding on multiple bid packages. Congratulations to the winning bidders!! And thank you to the 26 participating municipalities. This program relieves municipal staff from the activities required under the Massachusetts procurement laws and ensures best pricing. We look forward to working with you in the coming year! A complete list of the bid results is located on the BRPC website: <https://berkshireplanning.org/initiatives/berkshire-regional-group-purchasing-program/>

Community Planning

***Canceled * July 29 Training for New Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals Members**

This training was canceled. It may be rescheduled if and when we confirm a presenter.



Housing Needs Assessments

BRPC staff are developing a Housing Needs Assessment for the Town of Sheffield. A Housing Needs Assessment is a data-driven report that describes current housing conditions in a municipality and can be used as an initial step in addressing local housing needs. The report uses data to identify housing challenges which usually focus on the lack of affordability and diversity of the local housing stock.

The report also includes recommendations for next steps. This is the portion where BRPC staff coordinate with the community to develop some realistic goals and actions that can be taken. Additionally, the report includes housing resources that are available locally, regionally, at the state level, and federally.

BRPC has worked with several municipalities to develop Housing Needs Assessments - such as Great Barrington and New Marlborough. In addition to the Sheffield Housing Needs Assessment, we are

working on a report that addresses countywide housing issues. If your town or city is interested in conducting a Housing Needs Assessment or would like further information, please contact Phil Arnold, parnold@berkshireplanning.org. The Great Barrington Housing Needs Assessment from November 2020 can be found online at the following link: https://www.townofgb.org/sites/g/files/vyhlf636/f/uploads/housing_needs_assessment_nov_2020.pdf

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Data & Information Services

Educational Enrollment

Over the last year, COVID caused disruptions to the K-12 education system in the county. The state has recently released data on where students went to school over the previous year. Overall, 15,585 students enrolled in some form of schooling during the 2020-2021 academic year, a decline of 331 students since the 2019-2020 year. This decline is on par, if not slightly higher, with previous yearly declines.

Of the total students, 14,265 were in public schools, including town and regional school districts, out-of-district public schools, vocational schools, and charter schools. This public school enrollment is 645 fewer students than the 2019-2020 school year.

The difference between the overall decline and the public school decline indicates an increase of 314 students in other school types. This increase includes 294 in homeschooling (up to 552 students) and 20 (up to 768) in private and parochial schools. While homeschooling increased significantly, most of this increase may be due to parental concern about exposing children to others during the pandemic. The increase in private and parochial students is relatively minor, and while it did represent an increase, the total enrollment is still 40 below the total from two years ago (2018-2019).

Overall, the expected increase in students due to families moving here from outside of the county did not substantially change the total number of students or the enrollment trends in Berkshire County. Another year or two of data post-pandemic will aid in understanding the impact of COVID on our educational enrollment. For more information, contact Mark Maloy, mmaloy@berkshireplanning.org.

Economic Development



Economic Development Administration (EDA) Funding Opportunity Announcements

The federal EDA has received an unprecedented amount of funding to support responses to the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, including \$3 Billion through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).

An overview of recently announced funding opportunities is available at: <https://eda.gov/arpa/>

We encourage community, educational institution, and non-profit leaders to participate in upcoming webinars explaining each funding opportunity, including the following which may be particularly suited to Berkshire County projects:

- [Build Back Better Regional Challenge Webinar](#) - Monday, August 2 at 2pm
- [Travel, Tourism and Outdoor Recreation Webinar](#) - Tuesday, August 3 at 2pm
- [Economic Adjustment Assistance Webinar](#) - Monday, August 9 at 2pm
- [Good Jobs Challenge Webinar](#) - Thursday, August 12 at 2pm

For more information or to discuss technical assistance in preparing an application for any of these opportunities, please contact Economic Development Program Manager [Laura Brennan](#).

Green Infrastructure Planning in Dalton

The Town of Dalton and BRPC looked at opportunities to improve water quality and mitigate flooding through green infrastructure in a recently completed town Green Infrastructure Plan. Green infrastructure uses vegetation, soil, and other natural elements to slow the flow of stormwater while allowing it to be stored, infiltrated, and filtered before entering our groundwater, rivers, and streams. When installed throughout a community in conjunction with grey infrastructure upgrades, it is a great way to create climate change resiliency against both flood and drought. This project assessed sites throughout Dalton



with a particular focus on the Walker Brook watershed, an area with repeated historical flooding and a buried stream. Conceptual designs for the top three locations as well as potential funding and suggestions on how to promote green infrastructure through regulation are outlined in Dalton's Green Infrastructure Plan found on their town website as well as [this link](#). For a copy of the plan or interest in green infrastructure planning in your community, please contact Courteny Morehouse at cmorehouse@berkshireplanning.org or 413-442-1521 x26.

Image: [Greylock WORKS](#), North Adams rain garden and impervious pavement

StoryMaps as a Tool for Understanding Stormwater Infrastructure

Using ESRI Collector and GIS mapping tools, BRPC worked with northern Berkshire Towns of Adams, Windsor, Williamstown and the City of North Adams to fill gaps in their stormwater infrastructure mapping with a particular focus on areas experiencing greater climate impacts such as flooding and erosion from repeated freeze/thaw cycling. Conceptual designs were created at priority structures in need of replacement or upsizing. The results have been published on a project [StoryMap](#). The StoryMap format provides project background in a narrative form alongside a series of interactive maps, photos and diagrams for communities to explore. This project was funded by a regional Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Action Grant awarded through the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs. If you are interested in learning more about the MVP program, the project, or StoryMaps in general contact Courteny Morehouse, Energy & Environmental Planner at cmorehouse@berkshireplanning.org or 413-442-1521 x26.

Public Health

Public Health Excellence Grant Received

The Berkshire Public Health Alliance has received \$300,000 annually in funding for up to nine years from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health Public Health Excellence Grant Program for Shared Services to enhance cross-jurisdictional sharing of public health services. This grant provides funding for additional public health nursing and inspectional services staff, as well as an administrative coordinator for the Alliance. This grant will allow the Alliance to work toward more sustainable and comprehensive methods for providing and sharing public health services among its members. For more information, contact Laura Kittross, lkittross@berkshireplanning.org.

Replacement Vaccine Cards from Public Clinics

For the time being, the Berkshire Public Health Alliance is providing replacement vaccine cards to those who may have lost or misplaced their cards and who received their vaccine at Berkshire Community College, St. Elizabeth's or W.E.B. Dubois Middle School. Contact BRPC's Office Administrator, Kate Hill Tapia via phone or email (name and phone number only, do not send personal data via email) to request a card. Cards may be mailed or picked up. Messages 24/7, pick up hours: Mon - Fri 8:30 - 4:00. officeassistant@berkshireplanning.org, 413-442-1521 x10

Western Massachusetts Municipal Conference

SAVE THE DATE - Saturday, October 2nd at Easthampton High School from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. This is a *tentative* date for the second annual Western Municipal Conference, which promotes sustainable cross-governmental partnerships across Western Massachusetts, to share best practices. The theme of this year's conference is "The day after: Lessons learned from 2020" and the workshops will include:

- Police reform and its impact on small towns
- ARPA funding and economic recovery from COVID-19
- Impact of post-COVID population shifts on housing affordability
- Shared municipal services and collaboration

Please stay tuned for confirmation of the date, time, and location of the conference as well as the finalized agenda.

Transportation

BRTA Temporary Service Changes

The Berkshire Regional Transit Authority has been impacted by the nationwide workforce shortage. The lack of qualified drivers available to operate the BRTA vehicles has resulted in a reduction of transportation services, including fixed bus route and paratransit.

Some weekday routes will be curtailed for a short-term, approximately 6-8 weeks, as BRTA continues to hire and train additional operators. **Saturday schedules are not affected.** BRTA apologizes for this inconvenience as public transportation is incredibly important to their riders. **Monday-Friday Scheduled Bus Service:**

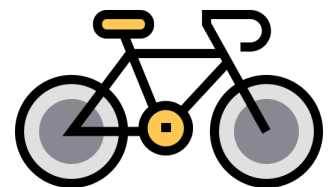
- **Route 4:** Service will start at 6:05 AM at the ITC, run every 2 hours, and end at 5:48 PM at the ITC.
 - **Route 5:** Will operate like the Saturday schedule, departing every 2 hours beginning at 8:30 AM and ending at 5:20 PM.
 - **Route 11:** Service will start at 7:35 AM from the ITC, run every 2 hours, and end at 5:16 PM at the ITC.
 - **Route 14:** There will be no service until 6:30 PM for pilot evening service and end at 10:40 PM in the Downing Garage.
 - **Route 15:** Will operate like the Saturday schedule, departing every 2 hours beginning at 8 AM and ending at 6:30 PM.
 - **Route 16:** Will operate like the Saturday schedule, departing every 2 hours beginning at 9:30 AM and ending at 6 PM.
 - **Route 21 X:** Canceled: 7 AM trip at the ITC and 7:45 AM departure at the Fairgrounds Plaza.
- Paratransit- ADA and non-ADA service:**
- Both will be on hiatus for Sunday and Holiday service.

All other trips operate on the normal schedule.

Please call the BRTA at 413-499-2782 #1 with questions about these changes.

Statewide Bicycle Survey

MassDOT is conducting a survey to learn more about why and when Massachusetts residents ride a bike. Results will inform future planning, policies, and projects statewide. Please take a few minutes to take the survey & share it widely with your networks! MassDOT wants to hear from residents across the state, regardless of frequency and experience with biking. The survey is available in English, Spanish, Chinese (traditional and simplified), Portuguese, Russian, Vietnamese, French, Italian, Khmer, Arabic, and Haitian Creole. The survey closes on August 19th- make sure to get your input in today! [Link to survey.](#)



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