



A Newsletter for Community Planning in the Berkshire Region

[this link](#)

Staff Announcements

Andrea Goodman has joined the Public Health Program as a Project Specialist supporting the public health nurses' work. We are grateful to have assistance from an experienced contact tracer.

We welcome **Colin Sykes** as a full-time off-site Berkshire Public Health Alliance Food Inspector starting 10/25. He will manage the Alliance Food Safety Program that provides health agents, inspectional services and training to municipalities and their Boards of Health.

Heather Descoteau has accepted a part-time Public Health Nurse position just in time to assist with Fall flu clinics!

The **Berkshire Public Health Alliance** is seeking a full time off-site **Coordinator**, see our [Employment web page](#) for details.

Kusik Awardees Announced

Annually, the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission recognizes projects, groups, or individuals who have made outstanding contributions to planning in Berkshire County. The award is named for **Charles Kusik**, a nationally recognized volunteer planner. A resident of Richmond, for over three decades he placed his expert imprint on the zoning bylaws of nearly every town in the Berkshires. [Click here](#) to learn more about this fascinating Estonian immigrant. This year we recognize two remarkable collaborations that grew out of the pandemic crisis.

The **Berkshire Vaccine Collaborative** was formed by the **Berkshire County Boards of Health Association, Berkshire County Public Health Nurses, Berkshire Health Systems, Community Health Programs, Fairview Hospital, and Northern Berkshire Regional Emergency Planning Committee** (sample certificate to right). They were instrumental in keeping people in Berkshire County as safe as possible in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. Their goal of getting everyone vaccinated as quickly as possible— safely, effectively, and efficiently - was extremely successful with at least 90,000 vaccination shots provided in all three public clinics from January 11, 2021 through June 26, 2021.

This was a major effort that required intense planning and coordination. Challenges included:

- vaccine supply
- securing sites
- site logistics
- traffic management
- finding and managing volunteers
- signage
- trained medical professionals to administer the vaccine
- safety of all involved

The clinics ran long hours, multiple days of the week, requiring tight scheduling of locations and personnel. While maybe not “traditional” planning work, the efforts made to get people and organizations working together was essential to improving the overall situation of Berkshire County.

The **COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund for Berkshire County** is a collaborative effort by the **Berkshire United Way, Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation, Northern Berkshire United**

Way, and Williamstown Community Chest. It was established to assist non-profit organizations to withstand the financial impact caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. It was instrumental in minimizing the potentially disastrous impacts from the pandemic on the region's non-profit organizations and their beneficiaries. It efficiently and quickly distributed funds reaching every corner of the county.

Grants funded frontline human services organizations with deep roots in the community and strong experience working with vulnerable populations. These operating grants addressed gaps in services and increased capacity to meet basic needs of individuals and families during an unprecedented public health crisis.

From March 19 to August 3, 2020, the emergency fund awarded more than \$2 million through 132 grants to 95 nonprofits supporting low-income families, communities of color and immigrants, and seniors through services such as food pantries, health care, and housing.

Earlier this year the focus of the COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund shifted from emergency response to recovery. The fund is offering a new round of grants to provide flexible resources to Berkshire County nonprofits to support innovative approaches to addressing emotional well-being for children, youth, and families.

Grants & Opportunities

Community Compact IT Grant Program, MA Division of Local Services

The IT program focuses on innovation and transformation at the local level, seeking efficiency, savings, and improved access. Grants up to \$200,000 will support the implementation of innovative IT projects by funding one-time capital needs such as technology infrastructure or software. Questions, click [here](#). Due **October 15th, 2021**. Instructions and application, [click here](#).

USDA Rural Economic Development Loans and Grants FY22

USDA provides zero-interest loans to local utilities which they, in turn, pass through to local businesses (ultimate recipients) for projects that will create and retain employment in rural areas. The ultimate recipients repay the lending utility directly. The utility then repays USDA. Applications provided through USDA [local office](#). Details at: <https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/business-programs/rural-economic-development-loan-grant-program>

Quarterly funding competition deadlines are:

- Quarter 2: December 31, 2021
- Quarter 3: March 31, 2022
- Quarter 4: June 30, 2022

FEMA Fiscal Year 2021 Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC)

The BRIC program makes federal funds available to states, U.S. territories, federally recognized tribal governments, and local communities for hazard mitigation activities. It does so with a recognition of the growing hazards associated with climate change, and of the need for natural hazard risk mitigation activities that promote climate adaptation and resilience with respect to those hazards. These include both acute extreme weather events and chronic stressors which have been observed and are expected to increase in the future.

<https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/view-opportunity.html?oppld=335226>

Recreation Economy at USDA Economic Development Resources for Rural Communities

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

NTIA Launches Updated [BroadbandUSA Federal Funding Guide](#) searchable by agency, program purpose, and eligible recipients. The information is also available as a [downloadable spreadsheet](#).

FEMA COVID19 Disaster Economic Recovery Roadmap

Developed to assist state, local, tribal, and territorial (SLTT) leaders with navigating some of the challenges and 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. 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.

Administration

[FY 2021 Annual Report](#)

BRPC had a busy and successful year in FY 21 on many fronts. As the fiscal year ended in June, there was the promise that the COVID-19 pandemic was behind us. There was a collective sigh of release: we survived (literally and figuratively.) In September though, it is a different situation. COVID is still here and still strong. Looking forward to FY 22 BRPC needs to remain flexible and adaptable to respond to the continuing crisis as well as continue to deliver high quality services to the Berkshire Community. Thomas Matuszko, Executive Director, tmatuszko@berkshireplanning.org.

Community Planning

Massachusetts Historical Commission Preservation Workshops

Workshops will be held over Zoom and limited to 25 attendees. Topics will be repeated in the new year. Click links below to register. Registration will close when space is filled or 24 hours before each workshop. Questions: Jennifer.Doherty@sec.state.ma.us

[Introduction to Historic Preservation](#), Thursday, October 7, 1 pm

[Developing an Historic Preservation Plan](#), Wednesday, October 20, 10 am

[Historic Resources Survey and the National Register of Historic Places](#), Tuesday, November 2, 1 pm

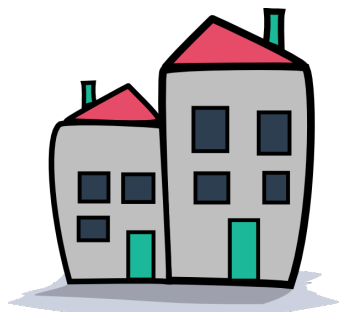
[Architectural Styles, Forms, and Building Technologies of Massachusetts](#), Tuesday, November 16, 10 am

[The Basics of Running a Good Commission](#), Wednesday, December 1, 7 pm

[Establishing Local Historic Districts](#), Thursday, December 16, 10 am

Short-term Rental Overview

Massachusetts legislature defines short-term rental as an owner-occupied, tenant-occupied or non-owner occupied property including, but not limited to, an apartment, house, cottage, condominium or a furnished accommodation that is not a hotel, motel, lodging house or bed and breakfast establishment, where: (i) at least 1 room or unit is rented to an occupant or sub-occupant; and (ii) all accommodations are reserved in advance; provided, however, that a private owner-occupied property shall be considered a single unit if leased or rented as such.^[1]



Short-term rentals have existed for as long as people have had spare bedrooms but within recent years there has been a dramatic increase in “home-sharing” and short-term rentals. This is largely because of the advancements and convenience of websites and online bookings, which make it possible to rent out a home or a room in advance from complete strangers from your smartphone. Since the prevalence of short-term rentals is relatively new, there are few municipalities in Berkshire County that have enacted legislation to regulate them.

There are many pros to short-term rentals, but regulation is largely focused on avoiding some of the cons. For example: a common complaint about short-term rentals is how homes transition from occupying a single family to being routinely rented to larger groups and creating “party houses”. Beyond the disturbance to neighbors, this can also lead to diminished property values. This is one example of many.

The purpose of this article is to spread awareness about short-term rentals since enacting local regulation may be on the horizon for many Berkshire County municipalities but also to ask how towns and cities have regulated them, if at all, and the experiences they encountered. Please send your input to Community Planner, Phil Arnold via email at parnold@berkshireplanning.org

[1] <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2018/chapter337>

Data & Information Services

Impact of COVID on Female Earnings

Females have historically earned less than men, and that remains true today in Berkshire County. The median income for females is \$42,349, while the median income for males is \$59,742, or 41% higher. We will have to wait a while to see the impact of the pandemic on these earnings, but we can make some assumptions. Females make up slightly more than half of our workforce (50.7%); however, only 45% of them have full-time, year-round employment, while males have a higher rate of 55% for full-time, year-round employment. In addition, service-related jobs employ more females than males (95% vs. 74%). The pandemic resulted in significant declines in service-related employment in some sub-sectors, such as retail trade, food services, and accommodations.

The pandemic impacted employment significantly for many individuals but disproportionately affected part-time employees and service-related industries. With females making up a more significant portion of these workers, one can assume that females saw a more substantial decline in income than males.

Economic Development

Local Rapid Recovery Planning resources available to all

Over 100 municipalities took part in the Massachusetts RRP program, including 5 in Berkshire County: Adams, Great Barrington, North Adams, Pittsfield and Williamstown. Final downtown recovery plans will be published soon. But even if your community did not develop a formal plan, **you can still access resources** including webinars to inspire project ideas, sample project descriptions, and lists of funding opportunities to cover your costs. [Read more...](#)



Tuesday, November 9th - CYBERSECURITY WORKSHOP

A **free** online workshop will address cybersecurity concerns and solutions for municipalities on November 9th at 10am. Space is limited and participation includes up to two hours of **free** one-on-one consultation specific to your community with the presenter, [Renatus Solutions](#), following completion of the workshop.

Space is limited, please use this link to register: <https://forms.gle/1LfV4Y9z3yLc7ye9>

Environmental & Energy

Eight Communities Awarded Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Grants

[Governor Baker announced \\$21 Million in grant awards](#) for Massachusetts cities and towns under the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Grant Program. The MVP Program helps communities build resiliency and prepare for climate change impacts. In Berkshire County, the towns of Clarksburg, Egremont, Savoy, and Tyringham were awarded funds to complete the MVP Planning process. Once complete, communities are MVP certified and eligible for Action Grant Funds. In Berkshire County there are 15 MVP Certified communities and 6 more on the way to certification - that is 70% of the County.

This year, Action Grant funding was also awarded to regional partnership of Lenox, Stockbridge, Pittsfield, and New Marlborough in support of a project that looks at flooding due to undersized culverts. This project will assess culverts and surrounding areas for replacement opportunities and nature-based solutions to help reduce flooding while also employing and educating local youth. We're so excited for all the Berkshire communities who were awarded funds this year and look forward to supporting them any way we can!

Interested in the MVP Program? Get in touch! MVP Planning Grant applications are now being accepted on a rolling basis until January 7, 2022. For more information you can contact Courteny Morehouse at cmorehouse@berkshireplanning.org.

Fall Round 319 Request for Responses Now Open

Mass DEP has released a fall round of 319 Nonpoint Source grants. [Grant details can be found in the Pre-RFR on the Mass DEP website.](#) Section 319 of the Clean Water Act is a federal program aimed at controlling nonpoint sources of pollution such as stormwater runoff from impervious areas, agriculture, and other sources. The program is a great source of funds to mitigate water quality issues and help address impairments to water bodies listed in the Massachusetts Integrated List of Waters. BRPC currently has capacity to help municipalities develop grant proposals, and talk through other grant opportunities that may serve as match through our 319 Regional Coordinator program. We invite any community in the Berkshires to get in touch to learn more about our services as well as the 319 program. Do it soon though, **Mass DEP has until October 13** to discuss any project ideas or answer questions! Proposals will be due **December 15, 2021**. For more information contact Courteny Morehouse at cmorehouse@berkshireplanning.org.

The Sponsors of **Mass Save** have announced an upcoming round of its **Community First Partnership** program (formerly known as the Municipal Partnership Strategy). Through this program, local utility companies will partner with your municipality or community-based organization on outreach initiatives in Environmental Justice communities to help residents and small businesses save money and energy and reach climate/sustainability goals.

Benefits of program participation for your town or organization:

- Receive up to \$60,000/yr for 3 years to support project costs and fund a part-time Energy Advocate
- Receive comprehensive trainings in energy efficiency offerings and the Small Business Turnkey program
- Promoting your energy efficiency goals with marketing resources, training, and technical assistance from your local Program Sponsor(s).
- Local event support, such as guest speakers
-

Deadline to apply for 2022 participation is **November 12, 2021 at 5 p.m.** For more information, eligibility requirements, and to apply [click here](#). The Sponsors of Mass Save will also be hosting webinars on the program on **Wednesday, October 6 at 10 a.m.** or **Thursday, October 7 at 5 p.m.** Registration is required.

Public Health

Women of Achievement Award: Berkshire Vaccine Collaborative

On September 20, 2021, the Berkshire Business and Professional Women awarded their annual Women of Achievement award to the women of the Berkshire Vaccine Collaborative. Public Health Nurse Leslie Drager (right) and Public Health Program Manager Laura Kittross (left) were among the honorees.



Regional Initiatives & Services

During these unprecedented times, it's more important than ever to show one another kindness and compassion - at home, in our

#BeKind Berkshires



Sponsored by 1Berkshires & Norman Rockwell Museum
Leo Quiles, Practice Kindness, 2021. Gouache on paper. Collection of the artist. ©Leo Quiles. All rights reserved.

communities, and in our travels.

1Berkshire and the Norman Rockwell Museum have partnered in a kindness campaign to ignite and foster a renewed sense of fellowship in our community. We hope you will join us to spread the message. A little bit of kindness can go a very long way.

Free posters, social media memes & gifs are available at [#BeKindBerkshires Toolbox](#)

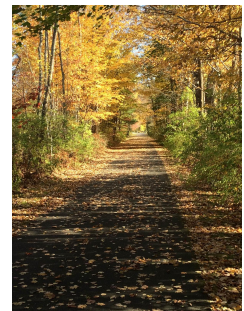
Like many destinations, our region faces increased population, seasonal visitation, and pressures on the rural infrastructure, including labor and supply shortages. Plus, we must contend with the ever-changing COVID conditions. *Be Kind Berkshires* aims to invite empathy from Berkshire business patrons for service providers and

attractions. A little appreciation, a word of gratitude, an act of kindness, reminds us all, we are in this together.

Transportation

Ashuwillticook Rail Trail (Phase IV) Design Moving Forward

Design work on the next phase of the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail in Adams and North Adams is underway. This section of the Rail Trail will connect to the current terminus at Lime Street in Adams and will continue to North Adams at Hodges Cross Road (Route 8A). This 2.4-mile section of rail trail meanders along the Hoosic River in Adams and runs on an old trolley line in North Adams until it hits McCann High School where the path will traverse along the backside of the school before crossing Hodges Cross Road and end at the North Adams DPW facility. New parking lot trail heads are proposed at both ends of this new rail trail segment.



The proposed trail is in an environmentally sensitive area with floodplain, riverfront area, riverbank, bordering vegetative wetland, farmland under an APR (agricultural preservation restriction) and priority habitats located along the rail trail corridor. The goal for this section of the rail trail is to balance impacts to the greatest extent possible and boardwalks are being incorporated into the design. This rail trail project is currently programmed for construction in FFY 2025.

Photo: jalden1003

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission
www.berkshireplanning.org

