



---

### A Newsletter for Community Planning in the Berkshire Region

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

---

#### Staff Announcements

We welcome **Cara Farrell** to the Berkshires and BRPC as a Community Planner. Cara has a Master's in Public Administration and Public Management and experience in municipal administration in New York State. Assisting towns with master, open space, and recreation plans will be her focus.

The BRPC **Public Health Program** is hiring a number of new staff persons, including a Berkshire Public Health Alliance Coordinator, an Epidemiologist, one or more Community Health Workers, and at least one onsite Planner for Berkshire Opioid Addiction Prevention Collaborative projects and community and equity building initiatives. The jobs will be posted over the next month, so watch the website for details. [Employment & Internship Opportunities - Berkshire Regional Planning Commission \(berkshireplanning.org\)](#).

#### Grants & Opportunities

##### 319 Request for Responses due December 15, 2021

[Grant details are at the Pre-RFR on the Mass DEP website](#). Section 319 of the Clean Water Act is 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. Contact [Courteny Morehouse](#) for grant proposal assistance.

##### Funding Open Space, Trails, and Active Transportation Across the Commonwealth - Free Webinar December 16, 2021, 12:00 pm.

Looking to create more green space and parks, recreational trails, bike lanes, and sidewalks in your community? Learn about state and private funding sources to help make this happen. [Registration link](#).

##### USDA Rural Economic Development Loans and Grants FY22

USDA provides zero-interest loans to local utilities, passed through to local businesses to create and retain employment in rural areas. Details at: [www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/business-programs/rural-economic-development-loan-grant-program](http://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/business-programs/rural-economic-development-loan-grant-program)

Quarterly deadlines are:

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

##### Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Grants accepted on a rolling basis until January 7, 2022

The MVP Program helps communities build resiliency and prepare for climate change impacts. MVP-certified communities are eligible for Action Grant Funds. Contact [Courteny Morehouse](#) for more information.

##### Land and Water Conservation Fund Grant Program

The LWCF grant program provides financial assistance to municipalities and the state's Departments of Conservation and Recreation and Fish and Game for the acquisition of parkland, development of a new park, renovation of an existing park, development of trails in an existing conservation or recreation area, or the acquisition of conservation land. Grants up to \$1,000,000 are available. Applications due **January 24, 2022**.

<https://www.mass.gov/service-details/massachusetts-land-and-water-conservation-fund-grant->

## [program](#)

### **FEMA FY21 Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) due January 28, 2022**

The BRIC program gives funds to local communities for hazard mitigation activities. Activities include acute extreme weather events and chronic stressors which have been observed and are expected to increase in the future.

[www.grants.gov/web/grants/view-opportunity.html?oppld=335226](http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/view-opportunity.html?oppld=335226)

**MassTrails Grants Program** is accepting applications until **February 1, 2022** for project development, design, engineering, permitting, construction, and maintenance of recreational trails, shared-use pathways and the amenities that support trails. Online submissions only. Questions to Program Manager [Amanda Lewis](#) 617-645-8314.

[www.mass.gov/guides/masstrails-grants](http://www.mass.gov/guides/masstrails-grants)

### **USDA Rural eConnectivity Program due February 22, 2022**

The Rural eConnectivity Program (ReConnect) Program provides loans, grants, and loan/grant combinations to facilitate broadband deployment in rural areas. Expansion of broadband services and infrastructure will fuel long-term economic development and opportunities.

[www.grants.gov/web/grants/view-opportunity.html?oppld=336268](http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/view-opportunity.html?oppld=336268)

### **Green Infrastructure Federal Collaborative (recorded webinar)**

The Federal Collaborative on Green Infrastructure held a webinar on Navigating Federal Funding for Green Infrastructure and Nature-Based Solutions. Download a recording of the November 2, 2021 webcast, which featured resources available through EDA, NOAA, Army Corps of Engineers & EPA:

[www.epa.gov/green-infrastructure/green-infrastructure-federal-collaborative](http://www.epa.gov/green-infrastructure/green-infrastructure-federal-collaborative).

### **Recreation Economy at USDA Economic Development Resources for Rural Communities**

[www.rd.usda.gov/sites/default/files/RD\\_Recreation\\_Economy\\_USDA.pdf](http://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 leaders with navigating some of the challenges and resources associated with the Coronavirus pandemic. [www.fema.gov/.pdf](http://www.fema.gov/.pdf)

**Rolling applications: [Community Development Block Grant Microenterprise Assistance](#)** for income-qualifying small businesses. Contact [Christie Lewis](#), 413-442-1521 x23.

**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](#) and [DLS COVID-19 Resources and Guidance for Municipal Officials](#). Please contact [Tom Matuszko](#) if your community wants to pursue this.

## **Community Planning**

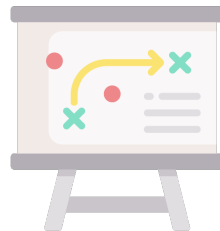
### **Housing Production Plans**

In February of 2008, the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) gave local communities a tool for proactively planning for affordable housing in the form of a Housing Production Plan (HPP). HPPs are both a resource and a strategy for evaluating affordable and workforce housing demands and identifying locations for potential development, and can also function as components of town master plans.

HPPs also send a message that a community is actively addressing its affordable housing needs. Communities with HPPs that have been approved and certified by DHCD are given more local control over their futures. Zoning Boards of Appeals decisions in these communities regarding certain types of affordable housing development will be upheld by the state Housing Appeals Committee.

Additional information on Housing Production Plan Regulations and Guidelines can be found at: [www.mass.gov/service-details/chapter-40-b-housing-production-plan](http://www.mass.gov/service-details/chapter-40-b-housing-production-plan). BRPC is currently assisting

the Town of Sheffield to prepare a Housing Production Plan. For more information contact [Chris Brown](#).



### Citizen Planner Training Collaborative

The Citizen Planner Training Collaborative's Webinar Series 2021, designed for citizen and professional planners in Massachusetts, started Nov. 10 and runs through Dec. 16. The workshops run for approximately 2 hours, including Q&A. Each workshop is sponsored by a regional planning agency. Anyone may attend.

- **Roles and Responsibilities of Planning and Zoning Boards:** Dec. 7
- **Special Permits and Variances:** Dec. 15
- **Use of Design Review:** Dec. 16

The \$20 per workshop fee may be paid online (preferred) or by check. Workshops include a PDF handout and slides. Registration closes two days prior to each workshop. [Register here](#).

### Massachusetts Historical Commission Preservation Workshop

Registration will close when space is filled or 24 hours before each workshop. Topics will be repeated in the new year. Questions: [Jennifer Doherty](#), MHC.

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

## Data & Information Services

### 2021-2022 Public School Enrollment Trends

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) recently released the public school enrollment numbers for the 2021/2022 school year. The pandemic caused drastic changes in education in the 2020/2021 school year. We saw virtual and hybrid classes, parents homeschooling their children, holding children back a year, and new families moving into the region. With the 2021/2022 data, we can begin to see what long-term impacts the pandemic has caused on our enrollment trends.

The 2021/2022 school year has seen an increase of 47 students over the 2020/2021 school year. Comparing the 2019/2020 to 2021/2022 school year (ignoring the 2020/2021 school year), we see the county has continued to lose in the student population (673 students lost over two years). The county now has 14,675 students enrolled in public schools. Some of the loss may be due to increases in homeschooling and private schooling. However, the majority is due to long-term population loss in the region. Not all districts are seeing the same trend, however. According to the DESE data, Berkshire Hills has seen an increase of three students. Farmington River, Florida, and Hancock have seen increases of 9-11 students. Northern Berkshire Vocational saw an increase of 16 students. Clarksburg saw an increase of 14 students; however, they added Pre-K this year, which is 20 students. The remaining districts all lost students, with Pittsfield losing the most (308). North Adams lost 101 students, Hoosac Valley lost 95, Lenox lost 54, Lee lost 53, Central Berkshire lost 49, and Southern Berkshire lost 42. The remaining districts lost smaller amounts.

Based on the current enrollment by grade, the long-term loss of students will continue. The current Kindergarten class is 995 students countywide, while the 9<sup>th</sup>-grade class is 1309 students. As the number of births in the region continues to decrease, each year's class will continue to get smaller. In another year, we should be able to confirm that the pandemic has not had a significant impact on enrollment trends in the county. For more information, contact [Mark Maloy](#).

## Economic Development

### Community One Stop for Growth

Expressions of Interest for FY23 programs are scheduled to open in December. Through January 31st, 2022, municipalities may submit expressions of interest for up to 5 projects. Please contact BRPC for assistance as you prepare to submit Expressions of Interest in this next round.

## Updated Winter Places Design Guide released

In 2020, Bench Consulting and Patronicity released the Winter Places Guide, with quickly implementable, low-cost winter placemaking interventions aimed at driving visitors back to Main Street and encouraging longer stays, supporting local businesses. In November 2021, Winter Places 2.0 was released, updating the guide to provide inspiration from 12 projects from across Massachusetts and information on how you can get support to activate your community during the coming winter. [View the Guide and access planning resources.](#)

---

## Making it Public: Training for Massachusetts Municipalities

Massachusetts municipalities are invited to participate in "Making it Public", free training by [Forecast Public Art](#) designed to equip administrators to strengthen local capacity to support, create, and promote public art.

At the conclusion of the training, participants will have the tools needed to create their own Call for Temporary Public Art and will be eligible to receive a \$10,000 grant from the New England Foundation for the Arts.

Eight municipalities will be chosen to participate. Each will be asked to provide two staff members who can commit to fully participating in the workshop series (March to April 2022) and conduct a Call for Temporary Public Art (May to December 2022).

Letter of Interest due **December 17, 2021**. [Learn More.](#)

## Environmental & Energy



Williamstown - Birch Hill Brook

## UMass Study Outlines Municipal Impact of Climate Change

A report conducted by UMass Northeast Center for Coastal Resilience and Massachusetts Municipal Association offers insight into how municipalities perceive climate change's challenges and impact. The study heard from 111 municipalities and ten planning agencies, including four Berkshire municipalities and the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC). 64% of respondents represented inland communities. Larger cities were better represented in this survey than rural towns, as those communities are more likely to have staff who can respond to surveys. That said, the needs of inland and rural communities came through, particularly in the comments. It is helpful to see the overlap in concerns when considering how climate change will affect our region.

### Concerns and Impacts

The report found that inland communities expect to experience less extreme climate change impacts than coastal communities. That isn't to say our region won't or hasn't already started to feel these impacts. This past summer marked floods as an increasing concern. Compared to coastal communities, inland towns and cities have a greater issue with droughts and heatwaves. Whereas coastal communities reported they are already experiencing climate change impacts, inland communities predicted greater infrastructure impacts in the future in almost all categories. Most notably, damage to historical buildings and public structures/spaces, and disconnected roads. This is of particular concern given the recent [State Auditor study that showed Western Massachusetts lags behind the rest of the state regarding infrastructure upgrades](#). Most at risk are elderly folks -

95% of communities identify elderly residents as most at risk, closely followed by people with disabilities (75%) and low-income residents (75%).

[Read complete article here.](#)

## Mass DER wants to hear about your culvert problems.

The Division of Ecological Restoration's Stream Continuity Program is conducting an informal survey of Massachusetts municipalities to determine the location and extent of culvert failures, repairs, and maintenance due to recent storms.

If your town has experienced damage to culverts or bridges resulting from any of this year's heavy rainfall events, please consider filling out this survey ([linked here](#)). The survey is for information and planning purposes only and should take 3-5 minutes. The survey is open until **December 15, 2021**.

## Public Health



The **Berkshire Public Health Alliance** celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with cake and some reflections in November 2021. Created out of the need for a regional response to emergencies after the H1N1 pandemic, the Alliance consists of 24 Berkshire municipalities that have signed an Inter-Municipal Agreement (IMA) with each other and with Berkshire Regional Planning Commission as fiscal host. Currently, the Alliance provides comprehensive Public Health Nursing Services to 19 municipalities and comprehensive

environmental inspectional services to eight towns, and as-needed or partial services to several more. The Alliance also:

- applies for regional grants to benefit its members
- offers technical assistance to local boards of health
- developed a comprehensive food protection program
- provided training to the county's food inspectors
- developed numerous model regulations, policies, and procedures

The last 18 months have been some of the hardest and most exciting for the Alliance due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Alliance was involved in all aspects of the COVID response, from vaccinations to contact tracing to developing policies and procedures to education and public information.

A DPH Public Health Excellence Grant award enabled the Alliance to hire three additional full-time staff: an Inspector, Public Health Nurse, and a Shared Services Coordinator. These positions will assist in maintaining the workload during COVID and allow for some exciting future expansion of Alliance services.



## Regional Initiatives & Services

### Webinars on COVID Aid Reimbursement

The Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency is hosting two webinars for non-profits and government agencies in Massachusetts to provide information on how they may be eligible to recoup costs related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The webinars will take place at 10 a.m. on Tuesday, December 7 and 1 p.m. on Thursday, December 9. Information on how to register for the sessions can be found at: <https://bit.ly/MEMAwwebinars>. For those unable to attend the webinars, recordings of the briefings will also be available on MEMA's website.

Since the COVID-19 Federal Disaster Declaration for Massachusetts was announced on March 28, 2020, the Federal Emergency Management Agency has made changes to its public assistance program related to COVID-19. Those changes have expanded the types of eligible costs for reimbursement, which organizations can participate, and the period of time for covered expenses. FEMA Public Assistance is available to reimburse 100 percent of all eligible COVID-19 response expenses from Jan. 21, 2020, to April 1, 2022.

Applicants that can receive this funding include local and state government agencies and the institutions that have a current 501©(3) IRS Ruling Letter, including, but not limited to: museums; zoos; houses of worship; assisted living facilities; and community centers.

Copyright © 2021 Berkshire Eagle 11/30/2021

## Transportation

### Modern Roundabouts in the Berkshires

In October 2021, the City of Pittsfield's first-ever modern urban roundabout became operational at Tyler Street and Woodlawn Ave. The only other modern roundabout in the Berkshires is in Adams, constructed in 2016 on Route 8 by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation. Pittsfield's roundabout is built entirely on city-owned roads in one of the city's densest neighborhoods: no small feat.



The most important characteristic of a modern roundabout is its safety improvement at “uncontrolled” intersections (ones without a traffic light). Many traffic studies point out the reductions in delay and improvements of traffic flow and safety. This article reviews the psychology that plays into these benefits. Why is it safer? How does the roundabout's design improve how you operate in the driver's seat? (Or with your feet or handlebars?)

[Read complete article here.](#)

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission  
[www.berkshireplanning.org](http://www.berkshireplanning.org)

