



A Newsletter for Community Planning in the Berkshire Region

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Staff Announcements

Welcome to new staff members:

[Marie Brady](#), Public Health Planner, supports the Berkshire Overdose Addiction Prevention Collaborative (BOAPC) with an emphasis on youth and child-focused projects. Additional activities include data analysis, emergency preparedness, and monkeypox prevention and intervention. She has a M.S. in Health Promotion and Disease Prevention and has specialized in epidemiology. Marie has returned to the area from South Dakota and in her free time likes to attend workout classes, travel, hike, go for bike rides, visit farmers' markets, and spend time with family, friends, and her dog Apollo.



[Krystal Bartley](#), Human Resource Payroll Assistant, performs daily payroll and benefits transactions, maintains personnel and payroll information, and will help Marianne revamp policies and procedures. She has a master's in psychology and has been a bookstore manager. When not working on home renovation projects, Krystal spends time with her sassy but loveable corgi named Dimitri, playing Nintendo Switch (notably, Breath of the Wild), and reading mystery novels.



[Ned Saviski](#) has joined the Public Health team as a full-time Inspector Training Specialist developing and conducting training for health inspectors, especially on food protection, in Berkshire and Hampden counties. Ned also conducts environmental and sanitarian inspections in Berkshire Public Health Alliance (BPHA) contracted municipalities. A Berkshire County native, he's a graduate of BCC and MCLA with a background in food service management and finance. His spare time diversions include hiking, kayaking, back road motorcycle rides and an occasional 5k. Ned makes his home in the Berkshires with his partner of 15 years and spoiled cat Maxwell, and he's excited about his daughter's wedding plans for 2023.

Recovery Grant Specialist, [Karen Pelto](#), is working to help Berkshire County municipalities, non-profit organizations, schools, and businesses identify and secure federal and state grant funds to aid in pandemic-related recovery and rebuilding efforts. Karen has extensive experience in both administering grant programs and securing grant funding for health, environmental, civic, and educational institutions.



Congratulations to 40 Under Forty Honoree, BRPC's Public Health Program Project Specialist [Stephen Murray](#)! [40 Under Forty](#), presented by Berkshire Community College, recognizes leaders that embody the spirit of community and leadership. Stephen has been a consultant and trainer with Overdose Data to Action, Community HIV outbreak exercise, Berkshire Harm Reduction, and the HEALing Communities Study. Another accomplishment is doubling the number of police and fire departments carrying NARCAN. Retired from EMT

work, Stephen is an overdose researcher at Boston Medical Center and a father of five.

Employment Opportunities

[Public Health Training Inspector](#)

Off-site Project Specialist to act as environmental health inspector/trainer to establish a local Public Health Training Hub, provide field training and mentorship, and contribute to a broad scope of dynamic and complex public health inspection and training programs in Berkshire and Hampden Counties. Full or part-time to be confirmed, based on funding.

Grants & Opportunities

Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A)

This grant program is an opportunity for capital investments in the safety of Berkshire County roadways. 20% local match required. Contact [Nicholas Russo](#), Senior Transportation Planner, to learn more. **September 15** deadline.

Connect with Fellow Western Mass Towns on Energy Issues and Funding Opportunities

The Sierra Club is hosting a free Municipal Climate Leadership Summit for Western Massachusetts. This program is designed to help Towns and Cities understand federal and state energy and climate focused programs and funding opportunities. Learn from clean energy and transportation experts and connect with others working on municipal climate solutions.

WHEN: September 17, 2022 from 11:00 am to 2:00 pm

Guests may also attend virtually via Zoom

WHERE: Springfield Central Library, 220 State Street, Springfield, MA 01103

Lunch provided. Attendees should be prepared to take a COVID test prior to attending and show proof of a negative result. Rapid tests will be available during registration.

This event is exclusively open to municipal elected and appointed officials.

RSVP link: sc.org/2022ClimateLeadership



Free Workshops for Nonprofits to Increase Capacity and Resilience

Over two dozen free webinars and in-person workshops are scheduled between September and December open to all Berkshire nonprofits. Small, all-volunteer, new, and grassroots organizations are especially encouraged to take advantage of this [free series](#) aimed at strengthening organizations in areas such as grants and fundraising, marketing, and board development.

The Level UP series is offered in partnership with Berkshire Regional Planning Commission.

Natural Resources Conservation Service Survey and Meeting

On **September 29 at 12:00 noon**, the Natural Resources Conservation Service will host a statewide Local Working Group meeting over Zoom. **Please note:** even if you cannot attend the meeting, you can make your voice heard by filling out the NRCS survey, linked below.

This **survey and meeting** are an opportunity to provide input on natural resource priorities for the NRCS and the state conservationist. Agricultural producers, owners/operators of nonindustrial private forest land, professionals representing agricultural and natural resource interests, and individuals representing a variety of disciplines in the soil, water, wetland, plant, forestry, and wildlife sciences are all welcome.

For more information on local working groups, see [What are Local Working Groups](#).

Please fill out [this survey](#) at least one week prior to the meeting. This survey will help structure the meeting so that it responds to your needs. A list of definitions of the resource concerns listed in the survey can be found [here](#). Again, **even if you cannot attend the meeting, please fill out**

this survey—responders to this survey will guide our work beyond the statewide Local Working Group meeting. To receive the link to the meeting, please RSVP by emailing [Austin Miles](#).

Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan - Survey Deadline October 1st

The MA Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs is looking for survey responses from municipal employees, land trusts, and all users of Massachusetts' outdoor recreational facilities about Outdoor Recreation in the Commonwealth. Responses help shape how federal Land & Water Conservation Fund grant dollars will be invested in outdoor recreation improvements over the next five years. Since the program was established in 1965, more than \$100,000,000 has been awarded statewide to projects in every county in the state for the acquisition of conservation and park land, development of new parks, or renovation of existing parks.

Municipal official survey: <https://forms.office.com/g/pEzYehkPau> (5 minutes)

Land trust survey: <https://forms.office.com/g/VSxhMQQqaQ> (5 minutes)

Recreational user survey: <https://forms.office.com/g/YjdBwjDeiQ> (10 minutes)

Community

Electric Energy Storage Systems

Solar photovoltaic systems have been around for many years and seem to be a widely accepted form of “clean” energy. Many communities in the Commonwealth have struggled with the requirements for ground-mounted solar installations as they demand substantial amounts of land. For example, clear-cutting dozens of acres of open, natural land to construct a solar farm has obvious consequences. There is however, a newer “clean” energy using a much smaller footprint.

Electric energy storage systems, often referred to as battery storage systems can enhance the solar equipment, or act as standalone uses. Electric generation from solar is limited by transmission lines and associated grid. Electric energy storage systems allow the storage of some of the electricity generated by solar generation when production exceeds demand to be used when demand exceeds production. Storage generally occurs when rates are low. Discharges from the battery to lower the grid-supplied energy consumption generally occurs when costs increase.

The town of Hinsdale recently reached out to BRPC for assistance writing a zoning bylaw referencing this new form of “clean” energy. Community Planner, [Cara Farrell](#) is working with the Hinsdale Planning Board to draft language allowing for this type of development.

Data & Information Services

Recent Mover and Second Homeowner Survey Results

In May 2022, BRPC created two surveys; one for second homeowners and one for people who purchased a house during the pandemic. BRPC will release the full results in September 2022. Below are some of the initial takeaways from the surveys.

Recent Movers

Respondents who recently purchased a home in Berkshire County tend to be wealthy and highly educated, with an average age of 55. Most of the respondents are employed by employers outside the county and working remotely or in a hybrid environment. Three-quarters of recent movers who responded to the survey were from outside Berkshire County, mainly from the New York City and Boston areas and throughout the East Coast. These recent arrivals plan to use their new homes primarily as second homes.

Second Homeowners

Respondents who are second homeowners also tend to be wealthy and highly educated, with an average age of 65. They primarily tend to be from the New York City area and are in the Berkshires for cultural activities, closely followed by scenic beauty and outdoor recreation. Many respondents have owned their homes for over 20 years, but a significant portion purchased them during the pandemic. Over half of second homeowners are employed, closely followed by

retirees. During the pandemic, they used their second homes more, but only 10% made it their primary home. Most of them will stop using it as their primary home over the next year, but over the next 5+ years, about 20% will make it their primary home, usually when they retire.

Economic Development

FREE Education and Training through OIG

BRPC is working with the MA Office of the Inspector General to provide Massachusetts Certified Public Purchasing Official (MCPPO) [courses and other training](#) to Berkshire County municipal leadership **at no charge to your community**. Funds are limited and registration is on a first-come, first-served basis.

Please **CONTACT US** directly if you have team members interested in participating. Email [Laura Brennan](#) with "OIG" in the subject line.

Planning Toolkit Available Online

BRPC has developed two-page tip sheets to assist municipal leaders in learning more about planning, zoning, and programs that may be appropriate for their community. More will be added in the next few months. Check out the [Planning Toolkit](#) - recent additions include:

- Community Land Trusts
- Community Preservation Act (CPA)
- Comprehensive/Master Plans
- District Improvement Financing (DIF)
- Historic Preservation Plans
- Open Space and Recreation Plans (OSRP)

If there's an additional topic you'd like us to cover, please email [Laura Brennan](#).

Environmental & Energy

Drought in the Berkshires

With over seven months of below normal rainfall and increased risk of wildland fires, Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) Secretary Bethany Card declared that the Islands and Western Regions will elevate to a **Level 2-Significant Drought**.

EEA and MEMA continue to ask local, state and regional partners and stakeholder groups to assist in disseminating this critical information to residents, businesses, and farms in their respective communities. A one page "[Drought Alert](#)" can be used to provide information on the current drought conditions and how communities across the Commonwealth can do their part on water conservation and drought preparedness.

For more information on the current drought conditions, and for technical guidance regarding drought management actions, please visit www.mass.gov/ma-drought-management and for water conservation information, go to www.mass.gov/conservemawater.

Don't Miss Out on National Grid's Public Fleet Electrification Program

Electric vehicles can cut down on fleet operations and maintenance costs, result in cleaner air for your community, and are broadly incentivized by state and federal agencies. National Grid's [Massachusetts Fleet Advisory Services Program](#) offers expert analysis on the impact of electrifying municipal, state, federal, transit, and public university fleets. It's free. And it's first-come, first-served—so now is the time to act.

Public Massachusetts fleets in National Grid's service territory can get:

- **A customized report.** Detailed and custom fleet electrification analysis, vehicle specific recommendations, and their impacts on financial, environmental, and other goals.
- **Regular updates through September 2024.** National Grid and ICF will be your partners in

the fleet electrification journey through 2024.

- **One-on-one guidance.** Technical guidance from electrification experts.
- **Access to an online portal.** Resources for navigating fleet electrification, including applying for grants or funding, case studies, trainings, and more.

Fleets currently enrolled in the program are raving about the program's practical tools, thorough reports, and tailored technical assistance. Contact justin.eichenberger@icf.com or 617-218-2100, or visit the [website](#) if interested in this limited-time program.

Public Health

The Opioid Crisis and Berkshire County

Berkshire County continues to take enormous strides to combat the opioid crisis, including an extensive history of proactive practitioner education around pain management, more and more providers able to prescribe buprenorphine, and an increase harm reduction, recover, and treatment resources available despite the pandemic. In light of this extraordinary work, it was disheartening to see [62 opioid overdose deaths reported last year](#), up 11% [from the year before](#) and the highest number of recorded deaths. In Massachusetts, the Department of Health reports an overdose death rate of **32.6** per 100,000 residents in 2021. In Pittsfield, that rate was **88** per 100,000 residents, and North Adams experienced **71** per 100,000 residents.

[Fentanyl](#) is increasingly the major driver of these deaths -- according to autopsy reports from the DA's Office, from 2018-2021, 84% of overdose deaths involved fentanyl. Simulants mixed with fentanyl is a growing concern. From 2018-2021, 42% of those deaths involved cocaine and fentanyl; it is not known if the individuals were aware there was fentanyl in the cocaine. In recent months, we [Xylazine](#) in the area, a non-opioid veterinary tranquilizer not approved for human use that carries complicated health risks. Inpatient clinical stabilization is often required, as [naloxone](#) can only reverse the overdose effects caused by opioids.

There's a lot that can be done and that we are doing. [Full article here.](#)

Regional Services

Middlefield and Washington want to Share Town Administrator

The towns of Middlefield and Washington are working with BRPC to establish and equally share a 40-hour-per-week Town Administrator position. Schedules will be coordinated for office hours and meeting attendance in both towns with the towns also sharing costs. Middlefield needs to get approval at a Special Town Meeting on September 14, 2022. If the Middlefield voters approve, the position will be posted immediately. BRPC is able to assist in coordinating this effort through an Efficiency and Regionalization grant through the state's Community Compact program. The Efficiency and Regionalization grant is also partially paying for the Town Administrator's salary this first year to help get the position established. BRPC contact: [Cara Farrell](#).

Transportation

More Funds Available for Complete Streets

MassDOT has opened another round of funding for Complete Streets. In Berkshire County, there are 13 towns that have prepared Complete Street Plans and project prioritization plans, which makes them eligible to apply for this funding. Also, the maximum amount for projects has increased to \$500,000 (to be spent over a 4-year period). Tier 3 applications must be submitted by **October 3, 2022**.

Complete Streets funding can be used for a variety of projects which benefit pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and motorists. This program continues to provide towns with additional funding at a time when resources are limited. Funding also exists to prepare Complete Streets Plans, and BRPC is available to assist communities with securing these funds and developing their plans. If your town is interested in Complete Streets or has any questions, please contact [Nicholas Russo](#).

More information on MassDOTs Complete Streets Program can be found at <https://www.mass.gov/complete-streets-funding-program>

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission
www.berkshireplanning.org



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