



A Newsletter for Community Planning in the Berkshire Region

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Staff Announcements



Congratulations and THANK YOU to Principal Financial Planner [Linda Ludwig](#) on her 10th anniversary with BRPC! The recent FY 2022 "clean" (no findings) audit is an example of her ability to manage all aspects of BRPC's complex financial administration, including cash flow, invoicing, statement preparation, analysis, payroll, and reporting to funders. Linda's attention to detail and ability to get a lot done quickly with grace and humor are key to BRPC's operation and growth and development.



We wish Cara Farrell, former Community Planner, well in the new position of Human Resources Director for the Towns of Adams, North Adams, and Williamstown. Her office is in the Adams Town Hall. Her last day with BRPC was December 30.

All the best to Community Planner Chris Brown as he pursues a new opportunity as the Affordable Housing Coordinator with Columbia Economic Development Corporation based in Hudson, NY. BRPC appreciates Chris's work on housing including developing [Community Land Trusts and Community Preservation Act](#) municipal planning tools. Chris's last day is January 13th.

Employment Opportunities

Senior Planner or Planner, Community Planning

The primary focus of this position is housing planning, working with municipalities to promote housing development readiness, identifying housing needs and opportunities, recommending ways to address those needs, and working to implement measures to promote housing development. In addition, this position would participate in a larger effort to advocate for and advance housing initiatives in Berkshire County and Western Massachusetts. Follow above link for full description.

Grants & Opportunities

Community One Stop Expressions of Interest (EOIs) are open!

The Community One Stop for Growth application portal is hosting 12 grant programs in FY24. [Expressions of Interest are now open](#). The EOI period is open through March 17, 2023. This is a great way to get your proposed project(s) in front of grant administrators BEFORE you complete a full application in the spring of 2023. Last year, **75% of successful applicants statewide participated in and received feedback through the Expression of Interest process.**

If you would like assistance in researching One Stop opportunities, refining a project profile, or filling out an Expression of Interest form, please [CONTACT US](#) soon.

Massachusetts Broadband Institute [Municipal Digital Equity Planning Program](#)

BRPC is a pre-qualified consultant to provide services to municipalities participating in MBI's Municipal Digital Equity Planning Program. The program is appropriate for last-mile towns that have high-speed broadband to most residences and towns that do not yet have this service.

As a consultant for your community:

- BRPC will organize and facilitate an intensive short-term workshop/charrette (approximately 8 hours) and/or planning process (3-6 months) that engages local stakeholders in gathering information on the digital equity needs and issues facing the municipality with a focus on people most impacted by the pandemic. BRPC will use the information gathered to identify priorities, challenges, and solutions that address the digital equity divide in the municipality.

Participating in the Municipal Digital Equity Planning Program will:

- Help guide your decision-making and investments related to services and infrastructure that increase access, adoption, and usage of the internet for populations most impacted by the pandemic.
- Prepare your community to submit grant proposals to existing or forthcoming state or federal opportunities related to solving the digital divide.

Get full program details and apply [HERE](#).

Massachusetts Historical Commission's Spring 2023 Workshops

- **Introduction to MACRIS and MACRIS Maps**, Tuesday, January 10, 10 am
- **Introduction to Historic Preservation**, Wednesday, January 25, 7 pm
- **Architectural Styles, Forms, and Building Technologies of Massachusetts**, Friday, February 10, 1 pm
- **Historic Resources Survey and the National Register of Historic Places**, Thursday, February 23, 1 pm
- **Administering Local Historic Districts and Design Review**, Monday, March 6, 7 pm
- **State and Federal Historic Resources Review and Compliance**, Tuesday, March 21, 1 pm
- **Developing an Historic Preservation Plan**, Thursday, April 6, 10 am
- **Adopting a Demolition Delay Bylaw or Ordinance**, Friday, April 21, 10 am

Sign up for the [MassHistPres email listserv](#) | Register for [virtual workshops](#)

Northern Tier Passenger Rail Study

A virtual public workshop for the Northern Tier Passenger Rail Study will be held on Wednesday, **January 11, 2023**, at 6:00 pm via Zoom. The Study team will present the two initial service plan alternatives and evaluation framework. Feedback received will be used to develop four additional service plan alternatives as part of Phase 2. Registration information is on the [website](#).



Thursday, January 12, 2023, 6:00 pm, [Zoning with Overlay Districts](#), \$25.

This webinar illustrates the various types of overlay districts, explains how they differ from traditional zoning measures, and describes the form and contents of an overlay district.

March 18, 2023: Citizen Planner Training Collaborative Annual Conference

MassTrails 2023 Grant Round Open

Details at: [MassTrails Grants Program](#). Deadline **February 1, 2023**. Questions to amanda.lewis@mass.gov, MassTrails Program Manager, 617-645-8314.



Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Action Grant

The MVP Program is accepting Expressions of Interest for FY24 Action Grant intended to make municipalities more climate resilient. The [Expression of Interest form](#) deadline is Friday, **January 20, 2023**. The submission deadline is Friday, **February 3, 2023**. Eligibility questions to kara.runsten@mass.gov. Contact [Courteny Morehouse](#), Energy & Environmental Planner, to discuss this and other opportunities. 413-442-1521 ext. 26

MHC Announcing MPPF Round 29 & Workshops

Municipalities and nonprofits may apply to the Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund (MPPF) for the 50% matching grant reimbursement program. It supports the preservation of properties, landscapes, and sites listed in the State Register of Historic Places administered by the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC). Call MHC at 617-727-8470 or e-mail [Paul Holtz](#) with

questions or to get an application. Eleven pre-application workshops will be held in person and virtually. See the [website](#) for dates, locations, and application. Deadline: **March 17, 2023**

Culvert Replacement Municipal Assistance

Dept. of Ecological Restoration (DER) has released a Pre-RFR for their Culvert Replacement Municipal Assistance (CRMA) Grant Program to help towns meet Massachusetts Stream Crossing Standards when doing culvert replacement projects. Details at [Massachusetts Stream Crossing Standards](#). Pre-RFR is open through **February 1, 2023**. To submit, email your project idea to Holden Sparacino at DERCulverts@mass.gov.

Grant Materials, including FAQs and program summary, will be posted on [COMMBUYS](#) with other technical resources available on the Division's website mid-January, 2023. A pre-RFR Grant Briefing Presentation will be held on Monday, **January 30** at 1 pm. Application deadline is anticipated **mid-March, 2023**.

Community

Public Engagement

As planning priorities evolve regionally and in Berkshire County communities, public engagement remains a constant focus regardless of the project's scope. Traditional public meetings and forums remain essential to gathering information and feedback, and how we engage those attending in person and remotely continues to evolve. Remote and web-based programs allow new techniques and technologies that give all participants a voice in community planning. One tool that is becoming more and more popular in many of our projects is the use of [Mentimeter](#), a web-based presentation platform that allows for live interactive surveying.



While the idea of live polling is not new, previous iterations from the past 20 years often involved an investment in hardware (essentially a remote control for every person in attendance) and software to run the program. [Mentimeter](#) operates through a website that anyone can access with a mobile device, tablet, or laptop and only requires a numeric code or QR code to provide access. The upside of this type of polling is that it is web-based. Those attending virtually or in person (or those watching from home in communities with live feeds) can participate without being present in the room. The program's benefits include an engaging snapshot of how those in attendance think regarding specific topics and provides anonymity for those who may not feel comfortable participating in a general discussion. If demographic questions are included, presenters are given an opportunity to understand more about participants. It can also highlight missing segments of the population or those not participating in public forums.

Feel free to contact [CJ Hoss](#) and [Seth Jenkins](#) to learn more.

Data & Information Services

2017-2021 ACS Data Released

The US Census Bureau has released the 5-year 2017-2021 American Community Survey (ACS) data. You can find the entire dataset online at data.census.gov. Some of the highlights for Berkshire County include slight increases in median household income and individuals and families in poverty, significant increases in the number of self-employed, households paying more than 30% of their income to rent or a mortgage, and immigration, and a slight decrease in geographic mobility. For more information, contact [Mark Maloy](#).

Economic Development

MassDevelopment has recently published *Realizing the Development Potential of Municipal Sites: A Guidance Manual for the Effective Disposal of Surplus Municipal Property*.

This [downloadable PDF](#) is a great resource for communities wishing to learn more about the process of redevelopment, going beyond the legal framework and walking local officials and potential developers through important questions municipalities need to consider in order to be successful and realize the full potential of redeveloping a surplus property.

Read more about disposing of surplus property and access the manual [HERE](#).

Environmental & Energy

Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Program

What crazy weather we've had! While the rest of the country got pummeled with snow, we in Western Massachusetts reached 50° and a torrential downpour then back to freezing the next day. What's going on? While it's hard to attribute any one weather event to climate change, the Berkshires is expected to see warming changes most drastically during the winter.

Climate modeling available through resilientma.org estimates that Berkshire County will lose ~23 freezing days in the next 26 years (by 2050). This increases to 32 by 2070, 40 by 2080, 47 by 2090 - and so on. Between 1960 - 2000, we have had 5-year averages of 8 to 22 days below 0°. Under a high emissions scenario, these very cold days are expected to be very rare to nonexistent by 2060. This will have all sorts of impacts from an increased number of "mud seasons" on our dirt roads, ice jams caught under our undersized culverts and bridges, and icy dangerous conditions on our roads. Just check out the river behind my house - well above the 2-year flood line in the middle of winter.



Massachusetts has set up the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness program to help communities with these changes and more caused by climate change. The expression of interest is open now. [The form can be found here.](#) If you are a certified MVP community, now is a great time to develop your projects. Municipalities, commissions, boards, and other government entities are now eligible. **The EOI is due January 20th** and BRPC is here to help you create the best application you can. Contact [Courteny Morehouse](#) if you'd like to collaborate.

The MA Attorney General's Office is looking at whether the **Department of Public Utilities & Environmental Facilities Siting Board** processes are accessible to everyone. They are inviting feedback about participation in government proceedings that affect our daily lives like energy utility rates and siting for energy infrastructure projects. Their stated goal is to promote environmental justice and energy equity. Organizations across the state are encouraging people to fill out this 10-minute survey. The survey is available in Spanish and English. Click [here](#) for the survey.

Public Health

Inspectors Training Hub

The Berkshire Public Health Alliance (BPHA), through Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, recently received funding from the Department of Public Health to establish a Regional Training Hub for inspectors. The Training Hub will bring further and consistent education, mentorship, and on-site, experiential field training to local public health inspectors and help meet the learning and educational requirements for these roles. The BPHA's Hub will cover all of Berkshire County and parts of Hampden and Hampshire Counties providing field training and mentorship while the Department of Public Health is developing classroom trainings and hiring senior trainers to train the local trainers. This train-the-trainer model was developed to create workforce standards and consistency amongst inspectors throughout the state and will cover the following areas: Housing and Community Sanitation, Food Protection, and Environmental Protection. A separate Public Health Nursing training program is also under development.

Keep your eye out for lots of training opportunities in the coming months!

Massachusetts Department of Public Health image; PHE stands for public health excellence.

Regional Field Training Model

Increasing pool of trained workforce. Increasing capacity for compliance with Performance Standards. Increasing access to credentialing.

Sr. Trainers design field training curricula and train Regional Trainers

Regional Trainers provide hands-on field training to PHE workforce

PHE workforce with increased competency, increased and standardized skills

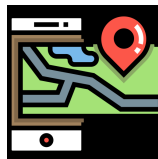
Transportation

Berkshire Transportation Advisory Committee

The Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) was created as a forum for consultation and coordination amongst local government agencies, members of the public and private sector representatives to discuss countywide transportation issues. The TAC advises the Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) on transportation policy and planning issues. It fulfills federal requirements while providing a forum for broad public participation in the transportation planning process.

Participation in TAC meetings by both municipal representatives and organizations has declined. With the development of the 2024 Regional Transportation Plan (TIP) now underway and the Transportation Improvement Program set to begin this month, it is important that the TAC provides robust discussion on transportation planning concerns and evaluating projects being considered for programming in the TIP. Municipal leaders are encouraged to evaluate their current representative to the TAC and determine if a new appointment is warranted. If individuals want to serve as a representative from business, environmental, historic, bicycle, transit, human service, or other organizations, please contact the Transportation Program Manager, [Clete Kus](#).

The Transportation Advisory Committee has a standing meeting date on the **Third Tuesday of the month at 4 pm**. Meetings are currently being held virtually. Please reach out to us should you have any questions about the TAC. We look forward to seeing more representatives at our upcoming meetings.



Images from [Freepick](#)

Berkshire MPO - FFY 2024-2028 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

We are beginning to prepare the FFY 2024 - 2028 TIP for Berkshire County. The TIP is a prioritized, financially constrained list of transportation projects expected to be built over the next several years in the Berkshires. The TIP implements the region's long-range transportation plan by programming federal-aid funds for transit, highways, bridges, transportation enhancement, bike paths, safety, and air quality improvements.

The TIP is a five-year program, which is updated annually. In January of every year, the Berkshire MPO solicits new transportation projects and updated information about active projects in the current TIP submitted by local communities. The projects received are then evaluated and prioritized for the upcoming TIP cycle. On **January 4, 2023**, the BMPO staff will send out the transportation projects solicitation email and data forms for the FFY 2024 -2028 TIP. The project submission deadline is **January 31, 2023**.

Contact Principal Transportation Planner [Anuja Koirala](#), 413-442-1521 x18 for more information.

Berkshire County Transportation Guide: Berkshires without Barriers

December 2022 update

Berkshires without Barriers is a comprehensive list of transportation providers in Berkshire County including bus services, taxis and limos, transportation for veterans and seniors, and more. The guide is intended to help everyone get around Berkshire County and encourage efficient use of existing resources.

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission updated the transportation guide in December 2022. BRPC will update the guide periodically and welcomes additions or corrections. Please send information and comments to Principal Transportation Planner [Anuja Koirala](#).

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

www.berkshireplanning.org



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