



BRPC

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

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The next meeting of the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission
Regional Issues Committee
will be held via Zoom on:
Wednesday, February 22, 2023 at 4:00 p.m.

This will be a **Virtual Meeting** as allowed by Ch. 107 of the Acts of 2022, extending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c.30 sec.20 until March 31, 2023.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84478526205>

Meeting ID: 844 7852 6205

One tap mobile

+16469313860,,84478526205# US

Find your local number: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84478526205>

AGENDA

1. Call to Order
2. Public Comments
3. Approval of January 25, 2023 Minutes
4. Continued Discussion - Community Sustainability
 - Review of municipal staffing/volunteer survey results
 - Community One Stop Expression of Interest
 - Next Steps
5. Topics for Future Consideration
6. Next Committee Meeting Date – Wednesday, March 22nd at 4pm
7. Adjournment

City and Town Clerks: Please post this notice pursuant to M.G.L. Chapter 39, Section 23B

Please Note:

For information regarding postponements or cancellations on the day of a scheduled meeting, please call Berkshire Regional Planning Commission at (413) 442-1521, x5



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REGIONAL ISSUES COMMITTEE – Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, January 25, 2022

via Zoom

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 4:02 pm by Tom Matuszko. The meeting was recorded.

Committee Members Present

Malcolm Fick, BRPC Vice Chair; Alternate from Great Barrington
Kyle Hanlon, North Adams
Sheila Irvin, Pittsfield
Christine Rasmussen, Alternate from Stockbridge
Eleanor Tillinghast, Mount Washington (non-Commission member)

Committee Members Absent

John Duval, BRPC Chair
Andrew Groff, Williamstown (non-Commission member)
Chris Rembold, Great Barrington

BRPC Staff Present

Laura Brennan, Economic Development Program Manager
CJ Hoss, Community Planning Program Manager
Tom Matuszko, Executive Director, Interim Chair of Regional Issues Committee

Guests/Public Present

Christine Hoyt Adams Selectboard member, President of the Berkshire County Selectboard Association
Kent Lew, Alternate from Washington, Washington Selectboard Chair
Mary McGurn, Egremont
Paul Sieloff, BMMA Chair
Jon Sylbert, Sandisfield
Peter Traub, Alternate from Cheshire, Cheshire Planning Board
Kathe Warden, Becket Town Administrator
David Wasielewski, Chair of Dalton Green Commission
Sabrina Damms, iBerkshires

II. Public Comments

There were no public comments.

III. Approval of December 7th Meeting Minutes

Malcolm F. made a motion to accept the minutes as written. Sheila I. seconded. Eleanor T. explained she had previously sent edits that Laura B. accepted into the document. A roll call vote was taken and the minutes were approved unanimously.

IV. Community Sustainability

Tom M. explained this meeting is a continuation of multiple past discussions on the topic of Community Sustainability and began sharing a document prepared to summarize the past several meetings. Highlighted were challenges such as an aging workforce, a limited labor pool in the region, and wages offered by communities in the Berkshires. The primary options to address these challenges involve a strategy to recruit, develop, and train candidates; raise municipal wages; and share services between communities to create more attractive employment opportunities. This introduction was followed by an analysis of the aforementioned options, the pros and cons of each, and resources needed to begin testing potential solutions (summary document is attached). Discussion was opened up to the Committee.

Jon Sylbert thought the summary is succinct and plans to share the document with the Sandisfield Select Board.

Kent L. thought the summary provides a good overview of the discussion to date. In his specific experience, there has been a lot of discussion on appetite to raise potential salaries, but also trying to understand at what point do increased salaries actual relate in enhancing the applicant pool. More data is needed to assist communities in understanding this aspect. From the perspective of increasing salaries, many communities feel their taxpayers can not sustain significant increases to the tax levy, which is where most new projects and initiatives are funded. In the past five years this aspect has been exacerbated by Washington's state aid only increasing by 5% during a period of time with the overall tax levy on property owners increasing by 30%. Education is needed to help inform residents of the cost of doing business.

Tom M. responded that education and data are needed, and explained the importance of the proposed survey that will be distributed to municipalities to help better understand the regional workforce.

David W. described recent experiences at UMass Amherst in regards to public policy and government, and most of the focus is state, national, or international, with no focus on local government.

Paul S. felt the summary should include more private sector options that communities can pursue in filling gaps due to the limitations of the municipal workforce in regards to contracting specific services. From an educational perspective, discussions regarding budget increases due to additional staffing or raising salaries can be mitigated from a thorough sales pitch to constituents.

Tom M. opened up the discussion to Christine Hoyt, a member of the Adams Selectboard and President of the Berkshire County Selectboard Association. Christine H. began summarizing discussions with the Massachusetts Municipal Association, and that retention and recruitment is an ongoing concern throughout Massachusetts. The Division of Local Services has a fellowship program focusing on municipal finance positions, with a goal of identifying two students interested in this work at each Community College in the state and tailoring curriculum and on the job training for each fellow. Christine H also mentioned that one area that has not been discussed yet is residency requirements that some communities have for eligibility for employment, and the pitfalls that have been highlighted in communities such as Springfield.

In reference to the summary document, Paul S. highlighted that there are positives to smaller communities employing part-time employees that are full-time elsewhere. Tom M. clarified that the concern that he has raised is the potential viewpoint that the communities employing staff full-time who are working part-time elsewhere are essentially subsidizing the cost of the employee for the smaller communities without a need for full-time staff.

Kent L. responded to this discussion that Washington's Town Hall positions are all part-time and are generally semi-retired or working full-time elsewhere – from his viewpoint, larger communities are not subsidizing their staff. A discussion of part-time vs. full-time pay scales is an unknown in the region at the moment to understand whether the provision of benefits (or not) is factored into full-time/part-time pay.

Jon S. followed that overall, he continues to view the topic as one where education and awareness is the primary focal point at the moment, and the group should continue working towards collecting data and a thorough approach to presenting this problem.

Christine R., Sheila I., and Tom M. all discussed the difficulties in not having a career pipeline within the community as well as limited career opportunities for persons entering the municipal workforce without moving on to a new community.

Discussion shifted to the draft survey prepared by BRPC staff that will be circulated to all 32 communities in the Berkshires. Laura B. described the thought process on creating the survey, the specific information being requested, and feedback received so far. Discussion ensued regarding the difference in size and scale of workforce, and how data will be analyzed to understand how responses will be weighted.

Tom M. directed questions regarding how to encourage as great of a response rate as possible from communities. Discussion ensued, with consensus that the regional selectboard and managers associations would co-sponsor the survey and that some follow up may be required to encourage participation.

Next steps were discussed, including raising awareness of the survey and the importance of as complete of a response as possible from the region and ensuring that the survey is sent to those best suited to respond to the survey, depending on the capacity of each.

Tom M. asked Christine H. if the Massachusetts Municipal Association had done any survey work or data collection regarding this issue. To date, it appears that this is a priority area but it is unclear if much background work has been done.

VI. Topics for Future Consideration

Tom M. referenced that Community Sustainability is planned to continue on as a topic in the near term, but other discussion items would be discussed as needed.

Moving forward, Tom M. informed the group that CJ H. would be the primary staff support for the Regional Issues Committee, with Laura B. will be involved based on the discussion topic.

Next Committee Meeting Date – February 22, 2023 at 4pm

VII. Adjournment

Kyle H. made a motion to adjourn, Sheila I. seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 5:14 p.m. after a roll call vote.

COMMUNITY ONE STOP FOR GROWTH – FY23 APPLICATION TEMPLATE

This template is provided as a guide for reference purposes only. All proposals and applications must be submitted electronically through the [One Stop IGX System](#)

SECTION 2 (P): Priority Projects / Initiatives – Describe the top priority projects or initiatives that the applicant intends to submit in a One-Stop application for grant consideration. Describe the projects, areas, and/or sites and indicate the types of funding sought, even if unsure about the specific sources. This section is meant to provide state reviewers with insight into the prospective projects.

Project / Initiative One

P1.1 **Name of Project/Initiative:** Berkshire County Municipal Employee Pipeline

P1.2 **Based on the descriptions outlined for the One Stop’s [Development Continuum](#), what is the primary funding g you would like to explore for this project/initiative:**

TOP

- Community Activation and Placemaking
- Planning and Zoning
- Site Preparation

- Building
- Infrastructure
- Not sure

P1.3 **Project Description – Provide a concise description of the project. For site specific projects, please provide an address and the ownership status of the site.**

Berkshire County Officials report increasing difficulty recruiting and retaining municipal employees; a problem only worsening as the “baby boom” generation increasingly retires. Numerous positions in many Berkshire County municipalities have been vacant for more than 60 days according to a recent survey of Town Managers / Administrators. The municipal sector needs to change its approach to employee recruitment and retention. Working closely with a group of municipal officials, including Town Managers / Administrator and Select Boards, the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) will coordinate a comprehensive effort to develop a pipeline for municipal employees in Berkshire County. This project will work with area high schools and colleges to develop and promote internship and apprentice like programs, work with municipalities to develop advancement and training programs for existing employees and develop and promote an educational campaign on the value of municipal service.

P1.4 **Project Goals – Explain how the anticipated outcomes of the project will catalyze community/economic development.**

Quite simply, municipalities in Berkshire County, similar to other Massachusetts small rural communities, are facing a crisis in municipal governance. A wide range of basic municipal services is not being met, including town administration and management, financial services, fire and police and emergency services. Literally in some of the smaller Berkshire towns, there is no one in town hall. The outcomes of this project would include a greater public awareness of the value of municipal public service, increase the likelihood that those entering the workforce would chose municipal service, and value municipal employees already working by investing in their skill set and their future

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opportunities. This would result in a robust municipal workforce as the basis for strong communities to serve as the backbone for economic development.

- P1.5 Budget Estimate – Approximately how much funding do you anticipate requesting from the One Stop for Growth? Please note that you may change your budget request when completing the Full Application.**

\$100,000

- P1.6 What would you use the One Stop funding for? If possible, indicate specific scope of work and your anticipated expenses associated with the project.**

Project Coordination (\$30,000): BRPC will conduct the following activities: Convene working group of municipal officials; conduct outreach to educational institutions, including high schools and local colleges; develop and promote public informational and recruitment material; coordinate with the MassHire Workforce Board and other hiring organizations; prepare necessary agreements for municipalities.

Training Expenses (\$20,000): There would be a program to pay for training of municipal officials, such as those offered by MMA and DLS, as well as backfill pay, for position advancement.

Municipal Incentives (\$50,000): Municipalities that hired entry level or other training positions such as an Assistant Town Manager, would be provided with a financial incentive to offset costs.

- P1.7 Timeline Information – Describe the timeline for the project and provide information about any notable dates and/or milestones. Please indicate if the project is phased and any progress made to date. Note: Grants will be announced in Fall 2023 for contracts starting in FY24.**

BRPC is using District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) funds to advance this effort and is currently working with a small group of municipal officials. BRPC has recently conducted a survey to quantify municipal hiring challenges. Limited background work will continue, such as convening the municipal workgroup, limited outreach to high schools and colleges, assessment of community interest in participation. Use of the grant funds would accelerate the effort. Changing institutional practices is time consuming. A longer than one-year period is desirable. In Fall 2023, the above activities would continue with formalization of any agreements with colleges / municipalities targeted for late 2023 or early 2024. The municipal training program would be established in Fall 2023 with trainings to occur beginning early in 2024. Recruitment / placement would commence as early as possible in 2024. Follow-up activities would be supported by future DLTA funds, provided DLTA continues.

- P1.8 Would you like to add a second project?**

Yes No