

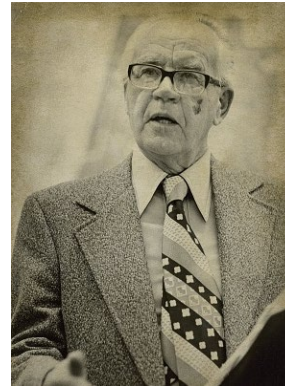


BRPC

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Background on Charles Kusik

The BRPC inaugurated the Kusik Award in 1996. This annual award is named in honor of the late Charles Kusik, a resident of the Town of Richmond, who, for over three decades, placed his expert imprint on the zoning bylaws of nearly every town in the Berkshires. He retired at age 82. He and his wife lived in Richmond until shortly before his death at age 91 in 1992.



Charles was an Estonian Diplomat who first came to the U.S. with his parents in 1921. He held a Master's Degree from New York University and, in 1931, completed all of the course requirements for a Doctorate from Columbia University Business School. He served as Estonia's Consul General in New York from 1931 to 1939 and was also in charge of the Washington legation during those years. He returned to Estonia and worked as First Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs when Soviet Troops invaded in 1940. He fled with his wife, Mary, also of Estonian descent, and two children. In need of a job, they moved to Richmond, where he bought a chicken farm on West Street. That provided him with a second career while they raised their family. He became very active in Richmond's Civic affairs, most notably serving for 28 years on the Planning Board, where he was instrumental in passing Richmond's first zoning bylaw in 1954.

From the formation of the Commission in the mid-sixties, Charles was an active Delegate. In 1967, the Commission consisted mostly of the two cities and the larger towns – that needed Regional Plans to become eligible for sewer and water grants and loans. Smaller towns with no central water supply or sewer systems were slow to adopt zoning and subdivision controls. Many had no Planning Boards until the late sixties. Tyringham was the last town to establish a Planning Board in 1978. The small towns had only rudimentary zoning, and some had none. The Commission quickly became a resource for people in the Berkshire towns that wanted to plan to control growth. Charles began his remarkable career as a "Citizen Planner." He worked as a volunteer and then as the Commission's only paid traveling consultant. (This was a third career, as he happily retired from chicken farming.) He spent countless evenings at Planning Board meetings helping towns to craft Zoning packages that could get through Town Meetings which had been notably resistant to any regulation that came from the outside. But Charles was one of their own, and his extensive knowledge and endless patience helped nearly all Berkshire towns adopt or amend their zoning and subdivision regulations. He'll quickly say that what

local Boards needed most was a basic "How To" guide for their activities, and so he wrote a large number of manuals, including:

- How a Zoning Board of Appeals Operates
- Non-Conforming Uses
- How to Conduct a Public Hearing
- Notice Requirements
- Special Permits and Variances
- Procedures for Adopting Bylaws

He devised a basic template for a one-district zoning bylaw – usually with one-acre zoning (no map required), several by-right uses, and a number more by Special Permit. Those bare bones have been fleshed out or replaced in many towns, but many remain reluctant to adopt more complicated bylaws. Because Charles knew first-hand how towns work, he was able to help Boards get their bylaws adopted and help them administer them, almost entirely with a local planner and staff.

For many towns, he **was** the Regional Planning Commission and what they saw as the reason for belonging to it, as all communities did by 1979. Charles could talk knowledgeably to Board members and lawyers about zoning problems and questions, and there were few cases in the field that he didn't know by heart.

He was honored nationally for his work, receiving a "Citizen Planner" award from the National Planning Professional Association. Charles was a night owl, and local Board members knew they could call him as late as midnight and find him working and happy to talk with them. He and his wife had a nap and an early dinner, and he was set to work far into the night.

He never lost his Estonian accent, and when he spoke, he often failed to use articles so that he always spoke about the "power of Planning Board" – a power he believed in firmly. He encouraged Planning Boards to stand up for what they believed was right, even when it was often very unpopular. He taught Boards that they needed town plans and to participate in Regional Planning activities. When asked after the passage of the first Richmond Zoning Bylaw if he thought people knew what they were voting on, he said, "no, of course not, or they wouldn't have voted voluntarily to restrict their freedom of action concerning their land, but they will learn that Richmond community will be a much better place with what they voted for tonight." He and the Richmond Planning Board continued to refine that bylaw, but you can still see the bare bones they set for in the 1954 Bylaw.

Berkshire County is far different in outward appearance and inward beauty than if Charles had not lived.

The Richmond Civic Association originally underwrote the cost of the Kusik Award. Along with the Richmond Land Trust and Richmond Historical Society, they give an annual award honoring both Charles and his spouse, Mary, for their civic contributions.

CHARLES KUSIK AWARD RECIPIENTS
Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

<u>Year</u>	<u>Recipient(s)</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1996	Mayor John Barrett, III	Reuse of Old Mill Buildings – MassMOCA
1997	Rachel Fletcher & Timothy Gray	Housatonic River Reclamation Efforts
1998	Rep. Peter J. Larkin	Economic Revitalization Efforts – Brownfields Legislation
1999	George S. Wislocki & Tad Ames Mayor Gerald S. Doyle, Jr. & Thomas E. Hickey, Jr.	Preserving Natural Resources Economic Development Efforts – GE Settlement
2000	Donald R. Dubendorf, Esq.	Berkshire Connect
2001	Leslie Reed-Evans	Agricultural Preservation
2002	Southern Berkshire Housing Coalition & Community Development Corp. of So. Berk.	Affordable Housing
2003	Robert Race	Lake Preservation
2004	Congressman John Olver	Regional Leadership & Support
2005	No award granted	
2006	Peter Lafayette	Affordable Housing
2007	Don Schmidt	Guidance to Local Planning Officials
2008	Sally Bell, Esq.	Continuing Legal Service to Communities
2009	No award granted	
2010	Marjorie Cohan	Berkshire Bike Path Council
2011	Daniel Bosley Donald Goranson	State economic development 35 years on Great Barrington Planning Board
2012	Aimee Thayer	Outstanding contributions to Planning in Berkshire County
2013	Mayor Richard Alcombright	Support for planning in North Adams
2014	Eleanor Tillinghast	Protection of natural resources of the Berkshires

2015	Donna Cesan	Support for planning in Adams
2016	Benjamin Downing	State Senator 2007 - 2016
2017	Robert "Bobbie" Orsi	Initiation and leadership of Age Friendly Berkshires
2018	Barbara Zheutin	Support for Berkshire Grown and farmers
2019	Kristine Hazzard	Berkshire United Way leadership and its community impact work
2020	No award granted (COVID)	
2021	Berkshire Vaccine Collaborative COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund for Berkshire County Berkshire Public Health Nurses	For leadership to protect Berkshire County from the impact of COVID-19
2022	Senator Adam G. Hinds Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito	For his leadership and advocacy to improve Berkshire County communities For her leadership to provide access to resources for Berkshire County communities
2023	Ilana Steinhauer, FNP	Executive Director, Volunteers in Medicine