



A Newsletter for Community Planning in the Berkshire Region

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Staff Announcements & Employment Opportunity



Congratulations and a big thank you to [Patricia Mullins](#), Community Development and Housing Program Manager, for 15 years with BRPC! Pat started November 3, 2008 as a Planner, was promoted to Senior Planner in 2011, and became a Program Manager in July 2015.

Pat is the primary organizer of the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program, the CEDAC Home Modification Loan Program, and the Group Purchasing Program. She brings a unique background in Landscape Architecture as well as planning, land reclamation, and public procurement. Her project management includes housing needs assessments, production plans and development, grant writing and administration, community engagement, procurement and consultant management, construction observation, and reporting in governmental systems.

Pat joins colleagues Tom Matuszko, Melissa Provencher, Mark Maloy, Anuja Koirala, and Laura Kittross who have been associated with BRPC for 15 years or more!

We are pleased to welcome [Jazu Stine](#) as a Food Specialist with the Public Health Program. With over fifteen years of experience in food production and sales, Jazu (*pronounced like kazoo*) will apply his expertise to environmental health inspections, enforcing the food code and related regulations, and developing a new local Public Health Excellence Training Hub. The position is full-time and off-site. He may be reached at: jstine@berkshireplanning.org, 413-442-1521 x62.



Economic Development Program Associate

The Economic Development Program seeks a Program Associate to support our Digital Equity Planning initiative and to BRPC's Shared Economic Development Planning program, working directly with municipal staff and committee members in participating communities on a wide range of economic development efforts. [View Posting.](#)

Accolades



BRPC honored [Ilana Steinhauer](#), FNP, Executive Director of [Volunteers in Medicine](#), at the October Annual Meeting Reception with the 2023 [Charles Kusik Award](#). The Kusik Award recognizes outstanding contributions to Berkshire County. Ilana has led Volunteers in Medicine (VIM) since 2014. Under her leadership, VIM has increasingly considered the social determinants of health (housing, education, food security, employment, childcare, etc.) as key components of an individual or family's health.

BRPC Public Health Program Manager [Laura Kittross](#) was among this year's Berkshire 25, awarded by [Berkshire Magazine](#) at the beautiful [Berkshire Colonial Theater](#). Laura was recognized for coordinating Berkshire County's public health response to the pandemic, pulling together resources and sustaining services in what became a marathon marked by constant changes, and achieving high vaccination participation.



The [HEALing Communities Study](#), coordinated by Senior Public Health Planner, [Andy Ottoson](#), was nominated for Berkshire's 2023 Trendsetter Nonprofit Collaborator Award. Elizabeth Freeman Center won the award, but we are proud that Andy and the HEALing Communities team were recognized for their work to reduce opioid-related overdose deaths through implementation of Evidence-Based Practices (EBPs) across health care, behavioral health, justice, and other community settings.

What an amazing region we have the honor to serve. Thank you to everyone for your contributions to our county!

Grants & Opportunities

[Citizen Planner Training Collaborative Webinar Series November 2023 - January 2024](#)

See the Community Planning section below for workshop topics and dates.

Massachusetts Historical Commission Fall 2023 Virtual Workshops

MHC's fall 2023 virtual workshop details and registration: [HERE](#).

- **Architectural Styles, Forms, and Building Technologies of Massachusetts**, Friday, November 10, 10:00 am
- **State and Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits**, Monday, November 20, 7:00 pm
- **Understanding the Secretary of Interior's Standards**, Thursday, December 7, 10:00 am

The Key Features of COMMBUYS: A Live Demonstration with OSD

Tuesday, November 7, 2023, 12:00 - 1:15 pm

Free MMA Zoom webinar with the **Operational Services Division** demonstrating how to navigate the COMMBUYS landing page and conduct an advanced search for contracts, vendors, and grants. Panelists will showcase features within the Statewide Contract and Tradespersons Indexes and discuss posting a bid notice. [Registration required](#). The Zoom Q&A function requires the use of the latest version of the Zoom desktop or smartphone app.

MassTrails Grant Round Now Open!

2024 MassTrails Grant Application Microsoft Teams webinar **Wednesday, November 15, 12:00 - 1:30 pm**. An invitation with a meeting link will be sent via email one day before the webinar. Register [HERE](#). Application deadline February 1, 2024, 11:59 pm. Funding and technical expertise for project development, design, construction, and maintenance of trails. Eligible applicants: public entities, communities, non-profits, and native nations.



[Citizen Planner Training Collaborative \(CPTC\) Western Mass Conference](#)

December 2, 8:30 - 12:30 pm

Greenfield Community College; in-person only, \$40, register [HERE](#).

- Roles and Responsibilities of Planning and Zoning Board of Appeals
- Creating Master Plans
- Drafting Zoning Amendments
- Special Permits & Variances

[Dam Busters 101: Free Zoom Webinar Series](#)

First Wednesday of each month at noon for 1 hour, started November 2; future dates: December 6, January 3, February 7

Gain the knowledge you need to successfully manage and carry out a dam removal project. Participants can attend the whole series or just webinars most relevant to them. A collaboration of the Massachusetts Rivers Alliance, Massachusetts Department of Ecological Restoration, and Charles River Watershed Association.

Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness FY25 Action Grant Expression of Interest (EOI)

MVP is accepting Expression of Interest (EOI) forms for FY25 Action Grant ideas. Through this form, potential applicants provide basic information about their project idea. MVP staff will provide feedback prior to the Request for Responses (RFR) release date. For the FY25 round, submission of an EOI for a project is not mandatory in order to submit an application once the RFR comes out (tentatively mid-March 2024) but is encouraged. [Fill out the form here!](#) **Due: December 15, 2023**

Mass DEP 319 Grants RFR to be released soon. If you are considering a stormwater related project - Contact [Courteny Morehouse](#) to discuss. BRPC has funding to help facilitate grant applications on behalf of towns.

[Community Compact Program](#)

The purpose of the [Efficiency and Regionalization](#) program is to provide financial support for governmental entities interested in implementing regionalization and other efficiency initiatives that allow for long-term sustainability. The application period is from **January 8 to noon on February 9, 2024**. Access the application page [HERE](#). Applications cannot be saved once they are started and should be completed all at once.

The [Municipal Fiber Grant Program](#) assists municipalities with the construction of municipal fiber broadband infrastructure, related projects and expenditures. It requires a match. The application period is from **March 11 to noon on April 12, 2024**. Contact [Sean Cronin](#), Senior Deputy Commissioner of Local Services with questions.

Fiscal Year 2023 BRIC and Flood Mitigation Funding Opportunities

On Oct. 12, 2023, FEMA published the fiscal year 2023 funding opportunities for the [Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities](#) and the [Flood Mitigation Assistance](#) grant programs, totaling \$1.8 billion.

For this grant application cycle, BRIC's available funding is \$1 billion, and for Flood Mitigation Assistance, the available funding is \$800 million. These funds will help state, local, tribal and territorial governments address high-level future risks to natural disasters, foster greater community resilience and reduce disaster suffering.

We were thrilled to recognize Ilana Steinhauer, FNP, Executive Director of [Volunteers in Medicine](#) with the 2023 Kusik Award at the October Annual Meeting Reception for providing and expanding access to health care with an understanding of the social determinates of health.

Community Development & Housing

CEDAC Home Modification Loan Program

The CEDAC Home Modification Loan Program (HMLP) is a state-funded program that helps Massachusetts households finance home accessibility improvements - making it possible for individuals with disabilities and older adults to remain in their own homes and communities.

HMLP offers zero percent interest loans, up to \$50,000, to assist homeowners and up to \$30,000 to owners of manufactured or mobile homes with projects such as accessory dwelling units, ramps and lifts, kitchen and bathroom modifications, sensory spaces, and fencing. Landlords with fewer than ten units may be



eligible for a 3% loan for a tenant.

While the HMLP is not a 'home repair program,' it can provide valuable assistance to eligible households when people with disabilities live in the home. BRPC is the Berkshire County Provider for the CEDAC Home Modification Loan Program. For more information, contact [Christie Lewis](#), 413-442-1521 x23, and go to www.cedac.org.

Sheffield Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)

The BRPC Community Development team is happy to announce that we will soon accept applications from interested homeowners in Sheffield for Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) housing rehabilitation projects under the new FY22/23 grant.

The FY22/23 Sheffield CDBG grant for \$966,000 includes \$750,000 for up to fifteen projects to benefit low to moderate-income homeowners. Low to moderate-income guidelines are published by HUD yearly and are shown here for **Sheffield**:

1 person	\$55,800	5 persons	\$86,100
2 persons	\$63,800	6 persons	\$92,500
3 persons	\$71,750	7 persons	\$98,850
4 persons	\$79,700	8 or more persons	\$105,250

This CDBG Housing Rehabilitation Program provides up to \$50,000 per unit to perform routine maintenance, especially for roofs, windows, electrical and plumbing issues. The Program consults with the Berkshire Community Action Council (BCAC) on weatherization needs wherever possible.

For additional information about this important opportunity, please contact BRPC's CDBG Program Associate [Christie Lewis](#) or 413-442-1521 x23.

Community Planning

Citizen Planner Training Collaborative Webinar Series

November 2023 - January 2024



All workshops are on Zoom. Registration closes 48 hours before the workshop begins. Upon registration you will receive a link to a brief registration on Zoom. Upon completing the registration you will receive the link to the workshop session. If applicable, workshop handouts will be sent by email prior to the workshop.

Payment can be made by check or credit card. Checks can be received after the workshop has ended. Should you need to cancel you must do so at least 48 hours before the workshop begins in order to receive a refund.

Monday	November 6	5:30 PM	Creating Master Plans
Saturday	November 18	9:00 AM	Zoning with Overlay Districts
Monday	November 27	5:30 PM	Special Permits and Variances
Wednesday	November 29	5:30 PM	Creating Master Plans
Tuesday	December 5	5:30 PM	Roles & Responsibilities of Planning & Zoning Boards
Wednesday	December 6	5:30 PM	Planning with Community Support
Thursday	December 14	5:30 PM	Writing Reasonable and Defensible Decisions
Monday	December 18	6:00 PM	Site Plan Review
Thursday	January 4	6:00 PM	Planning with Community Support
Tuesday	January 9	6:00 PM	Adopting and Revising Rules and Regulations of Boards
Tuesday	January 16	6:00 PM	Fair Housing Law

Data & Information Services

Berkshire County 50-year Population Projections (v23)

[Berkshire Benchmarks](#) have developed 50-year population projections based on the 2020 US Census for Berkshire County. The projections are an existing trend projection, which means they use the trend in births, deaths, and in- and out-migration from the last decade to predict what will happen over the next 50 years. These projections replace the previous projections developed in 2013. The new projections can be accessed online at <https://arcg.is/ujvCu>. For more information, contact GIS, Data and IT Manager, [Mark Maloy](#).

Economic Development

Call for Submissions: New Priority Projects for inclusion in the 2024 Berkshire CEDS Report

The 2023-2027 Berkshire County CEDS contains a Priority Project list which inventories regionally significant economic development projects. Through December 31, 2023, BRPC staff and the CEDS Committee invite submission of additional projects not yet listed in the 2023-2027 CEDS.

Please note that this is **NOT** a grant application. BRPC, which manages the Berkshire County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), is requesting this information in order to track the most impactful projects throughout the region.

Read more and submit a Project [HERE](#).

Environmental & Energy

DOER Announces Climate Leaders Program: New Grant Opportunities for Energy Efficiency

The Department of Energy Resources (DOER) announced its newly expanded “Climate Leaders Program,” which will provide tools and resources to help municipalities reduce emissions by electrifying non-electric energy uses and maximizing the efficiency of buildings and transportation. This program provides a framework to help achieve local, sustainable goals and support community engagement for clean energy and climate initiatives. It is also for designated Green Communities seeking higher climate ambition who would like to pursue competitive grants for projects not previously eligible under the Green Communities funding.



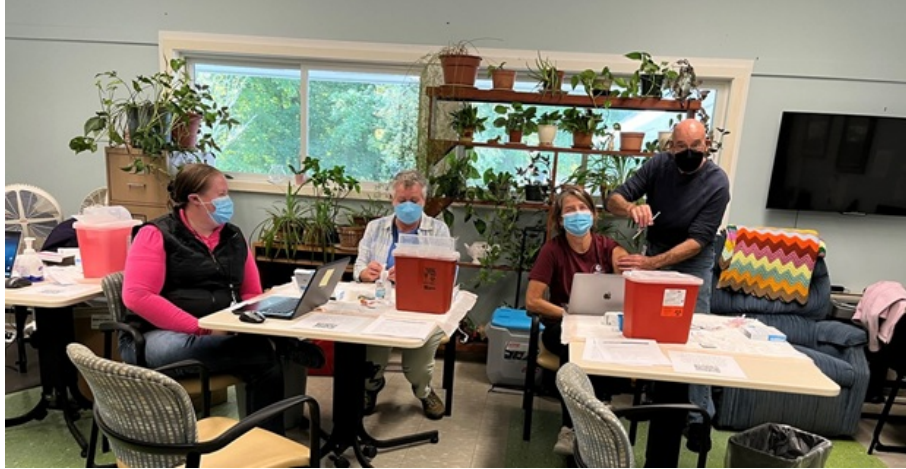
Potential Grant Funding Opportunities :

- Municipal building electrification/decarbonization
- Seed funds for a municipal clean energy/climate coordinator
- Support for on-site solar PV + storage for existing buildings and new construction
- Support for geothermal for existing buildings and new construction
- Other innovative projects

More information on the criteria to become a Climate Leader, along with a recent webinar and slides, can be found here: [Climate Leader Communities | Mass.gov](#). Please contact [Britney Danials](#), Environmental & Energy Planner, to discuss how BRPC can assist with this program.

Image thanks to dooder @ [freepik.com](https://www.freepik.com).

Public Health



Williamstown Council on Aging, The Harper Center, clinic volunteers, photo by Leslie Drager, RN BSN

Public Health Program's Fall Vaccine Clinics

Earlier this year, BRPC received a grant from the National Council on Aging (NCOA) to promote uptake of COVID and flu vaccinations, especially among those over 65 and those with disabilities. The goal was for the Berkshire Public Health Alliance Nurses, Leslie Drager and Nancy Slattery, to administer 2,501 vaccinations before the grant ends in April of 2024. As of the end of October, Leslie and Nancy have administered approximately 3,700 vaccinations.

Clinic lists, including an interactive calendar widget, were posted on [GetVaccinatedBerkshires.org](https://getvaccinatedberkshires.org), a streamlined webpage where residents of Berkshire County can learn about what vaccines may be right for them, where they can receive vaccines, how to request assistance scheduling a vaccine appointment, and more. Assistance with vaccine appointment scheduling was a key component of the NCOA grant, and as of the end of October, 42 community members received assistance setting up an appointment.

The vaccination season started off solely with doses of this year's flu vaccine before the updated COVID vaccine became available at the end of September. Many vaccine clinic attendees throughout the past month have opted to receive both vaccinations at the same time, with many indicating via the NCOA post-vaccination survey that the main reason for getting vaccinated is to protect their family, friends, and the community. Survey responses also indicate that community members typically have moderate to strong trust in the vaccines, which is a positive.

Overall, we are thrilled with the amount of vaccine doses given out in the Berkshire Public Health Alliance municipalities. According to the [CDC](https://www.cdc.gov), however, 21.1% of Berkshire County hospital admissions from October 15th to the 21st were related to acute respiratory disease, a reminder that in addition to vaccination, other disease prevention measures must be taken to prevent spreading illnesses (frequent hand washing, staying home when sick, etc.).

Keep up to date with data on contagious respiratory viruses across MA through [the Viral Respiratory Illness Reporting dashboard](https://www.viralreporting.org), and visit [the Respiratory Illness Reporting dashboard](https://www.respiratoryreporting.org) for data on hospital admission and emergency department visits related to acute respiratory disease.

Transportation

BRTA Proposes More Bus Service

The Berkshire Regional Transit Authority (BRTA) proposes adding new evening bus service to additional weekday and Saturday fixed routes. The BRTA Advisory Board recently voted to initiate a public comment period to gather customer feedback on the proposed additional service. Please visit <https://berkshirerta.com/2023/10/31/birta-new-evening-service/> to view the proposed new evening service and provide your input.



BRTA will host three public information sessions to review the

proposed enhancements, receive comments, and answer any questions. Each session will be 90 minutes in different locations throughout the county. All meeting locations are on a BRTA bus route for accessibility for everyone.

- **Monday, November 13, 6:00 pm**, UNO Community Center, 157 River Street, North Adams
- **Wednesday, November 15, 1:30 pm**, BRTA's ITC, 2nd floor Boardroom, 1 Columbus Ave, Pittsfield
- **Friday, November 17, 11:00 am**, Great Barrington Fire Station, 37 State Road, Great Barrington

Written comments can be submitted to the BRTA via US mail, email, or in person at the BRTA/Intermodal Transportation Center (ITC), US Mail: BRTA, 1 Columbus Avenue, Suite 201, Pittsfield, MA 01201; email: info@berkshirerta.com.

Northern Tier Passenger Rail Study

Work continues on the Northern Tier Passenger Rail Study. MassDOT held a public information meeting on October 26 which attracted over 140 participants. At this meeting, the study team provided an overview of the study's background and recent activities including presenting four new service alternatives. The new alternatives included electrified service, full local service, an extension to Albany, and an option utilizing MBTA service from Fitchburg to Boston (North Station). Details related to ridership projections, costs, and economic benefits for each alternative were provided.

A week prior to the public information meeting, the study's working group reviewed this information and discussed the alternatives with the consultant team. Information about the proposed alternatives and a video of the presentation can be found at the [Northern Tier Passenger Rail Study](#) website.

The consultant team will work on refinements to the data and the development of recommendations. It is anticipated that the next public workshop will occur this winter. BRPC will continue to be involved with this important initiative and share information on our website as it becomes available.

November

2023

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1	2 BRPC Executive Committee 4:00 pm	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10 Office closed in recognition of Veterans' Day	11
12	13	14	15	16 BRPC Full Commission 7:00 pm	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28 Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization 4:00 pm	29 BRPC Regional Issues Committee 4:00 pm	30	1	2 Citizen Planner Training Collaborative Conference 8:30 am - 12:30 pm

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