



A Newsletter for Community Planning in the Berkshire Region

Invite others to read Common Ground! Share [this link](#).

Employment Opportunity

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 on a wide range of economic development efforts. [View Posting](#).

Accolades

Nick Russo MassBike Advocate of the Year!

[MassBike](#) will recognize member [Nick Russo](#), BRPC Senior Transportation Planner, for his better bicycling work in the Berkshires! Tune in to the virtual [Annual Meeting](#) to hear more about Nick, his advocacy, and what you can do to support safe bicycling in Massachusetts. Much of Nick's advocacy work is volunteer, including founding and leading [Pittsfield Community Design Center](#). Support for the [Berkshire Bike Path Council](#) is part of his BRPC work.



Grants & Opportunities

[Municipal Cybersecurity Awareness Grant Program Information Sessions](#)

MA Executive Office of Technology Services and Security

Wednesday, December 6, 2:00 - 3:00 pm [REGISTER](#)

Wednesday, December 13, 2:00 - 3:00 pm [REGISTER](#)

Massachusetts Historical Commission Fall 2023 Virtual Workshops

Details and registration: [HERE](#).

Understanding the Secretary of Interior's Standards, Thursday, December 7, 10:00 am

Trail Planning and Design: Foundations of Success

This free [American Trails](#) webinar, sponsored by [MassTrails](#), will review common approaches and technologies for trail planning and design projects and provide attendees with real world examples. Register [HERE](#). Thursday, December 7, 1:00 - 2:00 pm

Premiere of *Blueprint: Building the Foundation for Recovery*, a documentary featuring stories of recovery in the Berkshires, followed by a community conversation on how we can heal our community. Presented by the HEALing Communities Study group coordinated by BRPC. *More details below in the Public Health section*. Free, but registration requested [HERE](#).

Wednesday, December 13, 7:00 pm, MCLA Church Street Center, North Adams

Thursday, December 14, 7:00 pm, Colonial Theatre, Pittsfield

Towns with less than 10,000 people can apply for a [Volunteer Fire Assistance Grant](#) by

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

FEMA published the fiscal year 2023 funding opportunities for the [Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities](#) for \$1 billion and the [Flood Mitigation Assistance](#) grant program for \$800,000 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.

BERKSHIRE Funding Focus

Overwhelmed? Reach out to your BFF (Berkshire Funding Focus) for help navigating the grant application process!

Take a look at additional grant opportunities and resources on our website: www.berkshirefundingfocus.org.

Community Development & Housing



The flyer features a woman in a wheelchair in a field of purple flowers. The text includes: 'HOME MODIFICATION LOAN PROGRAM', 'Elevate Your Living with HMLP', and four bullet points: '0% interest loan program', 'No monthly payments, with repayment required when the property is sold', 'Loans available to homeowners and landlords', and 'Simple application process'. At the bottom, it says 'Learn more about the benefits of HMLP and how to apply at www.cedac.org/hmlp clewis@berkshireplanning.org'.

Home Modification Loans Available

Do you know someone who could use some renovation or home improvement help so they can stay in their home? Rental property owners with disabled tenants are also eligible for these home modification loans.

BRPC is the Berkshire County Provider for the CEDAC Home Modification Loan Program (HMLP). Four households have been approved since the program began.

Contact [Christie Lewis](#), 413-442-1521 x 23 or www.cedac.org for more information.

Community Planning

District Local Technical Assistance 2024

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission is soliciting eligible projects from its member communities to receive technical assistance under the 2024 District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) program. Under this program, BRPC staff provides technical assistance to communities, at no cost to the community, on eligible projects. Projects must fall into one of the two general priority categories to be considered eligible for technical assistance:

1. “Planning Ahead for Housing” (or to help reach the Statewide Housing Production Goal) or “Planning Ahead for Growth”; and
2. Community Compact Cabinet Activities

Applicants must be municipalities and applications must be signed by the Chief elected official. Applications must be emailed and are due no later than **January 26, 2024**. Information and application material is on the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission website under [Solicitations](#). A fillable version of the application is also provided to facilitate the application

process.

Please feel free to reach out to [CJ Hoss](#), Community Planning Program Manager, 413-442-1521 x44 if you have questions or wish to discuss potential projects.

Save the Date: **2024 CPTC Annual Conference**
Saturday, March 16, 2024 at Holy Cross College in Worcester.

Citizen Planner Training Collaborative Webinar Series

December 2023 - January 2024



Registration closes 48 hours before the workshop begins. Upon registration you will receive a Zoom link to a brief registration, then the workshop link will be sent. 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.

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

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](#).

Massachusetts Broadband Institute Seeks Comments on Draft Plans

The Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI), our state’s broadband agency, recently shared drafts of two roadmap documents for achieving digital equity and closing the digital divide across Massachusetts that they will soon submit to the federal government:

- [The Statewide Digital Equity Plan \(SDEP\)](#)
- [The Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment \(BEAD\) Initial Proposal](#)

To ensure the voices and experiences of Berkshire County residents are reflected in these plans, which will inform decisions about digital equity programs and funding for years to come, BRPC asks for your help:

1. Read the Executive Summary (5 pages) OR the full plans (SDEP - 177 pages; BEAD Plan - 89 pages). [Find relevant info here.](#)
2. Attend a BRPC Zoom to review the plans and discuss high-level takeaways.
Register for the [December 5, 6:30 pm Zoom](#)

Traducción de idiomas e interpretación de lenguaje de señas disponibles a pedido.
Language translation and sign language interpretation are available upon request.

You may also submit comments directly via the [website](#) or mail to:
Massachusetts Broadband Institute

Public Health

Documentary Premiere *Blueprint: Building the Foundation for Recovery*

As many of you know, we're nearing the end of the [HEALing Communities Study](#) on 12/31/2023. This has been a large project for many at BRPC and our community partners. As the culmination of the study, we will premiere *Blueprint: Building the Foundation for Recovery*, a documentary featuring real stories of recovery in the Berkshires. The film will be followed by a conversation on how we can heal our community together. You can choose **Wednesday, December 13, 7:00 pm** at the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts Church Street Center in North Adams, **Thursday, December 14, 7:00 pm** at the Colonial Theatre in Pittsfield, or both! Register [HERE](#).

Over the past 18 months, local partners from the harm reduction, treatment, and recovery communities have collaborated on a shared goal of reducing opioid overdoses. Partners from across the Berkshires joined together to increase naloxone distribution, raise awareness of all pathways to treatment and recovery, and reduce stigma around substance use disorder.

Blueprint is a new documentary from Outpost Studios weaving together stories from our community with local behavioral health experts. Filmmakers George Cox and iin Purwanti have interviewed over a dozen community members for the feature, with original music by local artist Matt Cusson.

The premiere will be followed by a community conversation with a pane of local experts, including Dr. Jennifer Michaels from The Brien Center, Sarah DeJesus from BHS's Berkshire Harm Reduction, Gabriela Leon from BHS's Berkshire Connections, Steffon Ashley from the Crane Center's Black Voices in Recovery, and Ariel Killackey from Living in Recovery.

No matter who we are or where we come from, we all know someone who has been impacted by addiction. This film and conversation will explore what's been accomplished to date, what work needs to continue, what can be built up, and most importantly, what you as a community member can do to help reduce overdoses and stigma.

Registration is encouraged, but walk-ins are welcome. You can use the same [registration link](#) for both events. We look forward to seeing you at the **MCLA Church Street Center** and/or **Colonial Theatre**!



Addiction is a treatable illness.

When we stop the stigma, we support the many paths to recovery.

Support [#StateWithoutStigMA](#)

mass.gov/StateWithoutStigMA

Massachusetts
Department
of Public Health



SAG040

Transportation



Berkshire Flyer 2023 Pilot

[The Berkshire Flyer](#) had a successful second pilot year this summer; over 1,271 passenger trips occurred over a twenty-week season. The Flyer is a weekend service operated on Fridays and Sundays between New York Penn Station and the Pittsfield station via Albany/Rensselaer. The 2023 pilot service ran from Memorial Day weekend through Columbus Day/Indigenous Peoples' Day weekend.

The ridership patterns were the same in 2023 as in 2022 - dominated by trips between New York

City and Pittsfield, with less than 10% of riders to/from Albany or other stations. July and August saw the highest ridership in the twenty weeks of service.

The riders' survey shows they are here for various purposes: to attend art and cultural events, visit families, and enjoy the natural beauty and adventures in Berkshire County. The Berkshire Flyer riders are of all age groups, from millennials to older adults, some new and some visiting again, as riding the Berkshire Flyer train is convenient.

The 2022 and 2023 Berkshire Flyer pilot services have shown high demand during the summer months. Recognizing the demand for train connection between New York City and the Berkshires, MassDOT is working with Amtrak and CSX to continue the Berkshire Flyer summer weekend service in 2024. The 2024 service will run from Friday, June 21 to Monday, September 2 (Labor Day).

Berkshire Flyer service creates another opportunity to bring visitors to the region and increase tourism. Berkshire County businesses will benefit from continued Berkshire Flyer service in 2024. It improves transportation connections for Berkshire residents by providing a train connection between Pittsfield, Albany/Rensselaer, and other New York destinations.

December

2023

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1	2 Citizen Planner Training Collaborative WMass Conference 8:30 am - 12:30 pm
3	4	5 State Digital Equity Plan and Broadband Public Comments 6:30 pm	6	7 BRPC Executive Committee 4:00 pm	8	9
10	11	12	13 BRPC Regional Issues Committee 3:30 pm Film Premiere: Blueprint: Building the Foundation for Recovery Pittsfield 7:00 pm	14 BRPC Finance Committee 4:30 pm Film Premiere: Blueprint: Building the Foundation for Recovery North Adams 7:00 pm	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24 CLOSED	25	26	27	28	29	30
31 CLOSED	1					

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission
www.berkshireplanning.org



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