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## A Newsletter for Community Planning in the Berkshire Region

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### Staff Announcements & Employment Opportunities

BRPC is excited to welcome [Nikki Lewis](#) as a Public Health Senior Planner for Substance Use Disorders. This is a new full time position. We know Nikki well from her two years as the statewide Community Data Manager for the National Institute of Health [HEALing Communities Study](#) that BRPC has been coordinating in Berkshire County. Her prior experience includes working as the Program Coordinator for West Springfield's Drug-Free Communities Support Program.



Nikki will help coordinate the Berkshire Overdose Addiction Prevention Collaborative (BOAPC) and be involved in multiple initiatives to reduce the prevalence of substance use disorders and increase access to and engagement with substance use prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and recovery services in Berkshire County. Nikki holds an MPH in Epidemiology and Biostatistics from Boston University and recently completed an MS in Wildlife Conservation and Management from Unity Environmental University, fueled by her love for animals and the environment. In her free time, she loves to read, travel, and spend time outdoors, especially hiking (feel free to share recommendations!). [nlewis@berkshireplanning.org](mailto:nlewis@berkshireplanning.org); (413) 442-1521, x35.

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Details coming soon to [Employment & Internships Opportunities](#):

- Community Senior Planner for Housing
- Public Health Nurse
- Public Health Social Worker
- Arts & Culture Internship
- Outdoor Recreation Internship

### Accolades



[Courteny Morehouse](#) has been promoted to Principal Planner in the Environmental & Energy Program in recognition of her leadership and effective hard work. Courteny started at BRPC in March of 2021. Many Berkshire County communities have benefited from Courteny's expertise on stormwater, culverts, municipal vulnerability preparedness, and hazard mitigation. BRPC is grateful for Courteny's commitment, knowledge, collaboration skills, and growing role in the Environmental & Energy Program!

### Grants & Opportunities

[Citizen Planner Training Collaborative Webinar Series](#)  
Registration closes 48 hours before the workshop begins.

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

**Training on the Zoning By-law Amendment Process and By-law Filing**  
by the Attorney General's Municipal Law Unit

Tuesday, January 9, 2024, 10:00 am - 12:00 pm. Register [HERE](#).

Thursday, January 11, 2024, 1:00 - 3:00 pm. Register [HERE](#).

Municipal Law Unit staff will discuss a variety of topics including the requirements under G.L. c. 40, § 32 and G.L. c. 40A, § 5; the necessary forms and information to be submitted to the Municipal Law Unit as part of the by-law filing process; and an overview of the MBTA Communities zoning requirements under G.L. c. 40A, § 3A. There will be a Q & A session as well! Please contact Assistant Attorney General and Director of the Municipal Law Unit, [Margaret Hurley](#) with any questions.

**District Local Technical Assistance 2024**

Applications for BRPC technical assistance must be from municipalities, signed by the chief elected official, and emailed by **January 26, 2024**. Application and details are available on BRPC's [Solicitations](#) page. Contact [CJ Hoss](#), Community Planning Program Manager, (413) 442-1521 x44 with questions or to discuss potential projects.

**[Round 30 of the Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund \(MPPF\) Grant Program](#)**

The MPPF is a state-funded 50% reimbursable matching grant program to support the preservation of properties, landscapes, and sites (cultural resources) listed in the State Register of Historic Places. Applicants must be a municipality or nonprofit organization. It is anticipated that funding for Round 30 will be in the range of \$1,000,000. Grant disbursement is subject to the availability of sufficient allocated funds. See above link for January 8, 17, and 24 workshop details. Questions: 617-727-8470. Deadline: **March 15, 2024**; Grant awards: June 12, 2024.

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

The [Municipal Fiber Grant Program](#) assists municipalities with the construction of municipal fiber broadband infrastructure; match required. The application period is **March 11 to April 12, 2024**. Contact [Sean Cronin](#), Senior Deputy Commissioner of Local Services with questions.



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](http://www.berkshirefundingfocus.org).

**Data & Information Services**

**2018-2022 American Community Survey**

The US Census Bureau released the 2018-2022 American Community Survey (ACS) data in early December. The ACS is the primary source for most of the demographic data that BRPC uses and can be accessed online at <https://data.census.gov/>. Some highlights for Berkshire County include:

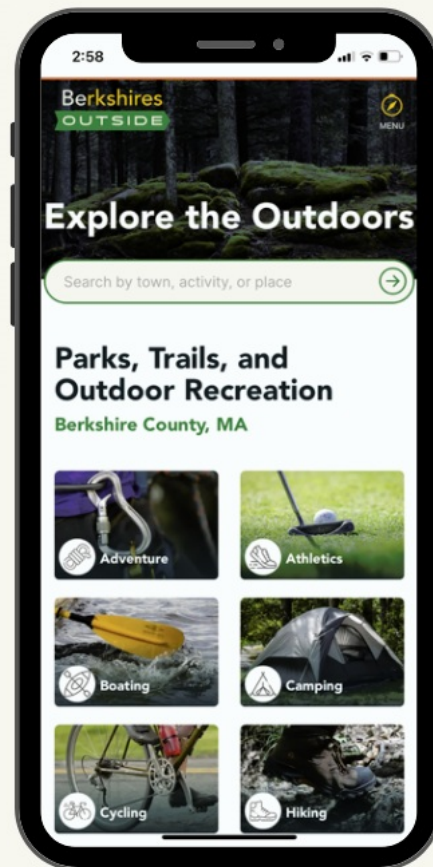
- Median Household Income is \$69,744, an increase of over \$6,500 over the last year.
- Self-employed individuals comprise 12.8% of the county's workforce, an all-time high.
- The percentage of owners and renters who spend 30% or more of their income on housing has decreased slightly, dropping below 50% for renters and 25% for owners.
- The homeownership rate has also reached an all-time high of over 70% of all households owning a home.

# Berkshires

# OUTSIDE

## NOW LIVE!

875 miles of trails  
550+ access points  
87 clubs & leagues  
**#INTHEBERKSHIRES**



## BerkshiresOutside.org

BRPC launches new outdoor recreation website, [www.berkshiresoutside.org](http://www.berkshiresoutside.org)

The new site, coordinated by Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) and built by Gemini Creative of Stockbridge, contains a clearinghouse of trailheads, boat launches, and other access points, and users can narrow their search by activity type or with filters for whether the location is dog-friendly, family-friendly, or has restroom or picnic facilities. The website is a major step toward realizing key goals of the [2020 Outdoor Recreation Plan for Berkshire County](#), created by BRPC in partnership with Mill Town Foundation.

This online portal to all things outdoors invites residents and visitors to discover over 400 parks owned and managed by nearly 100 different organizations, all within Berkshire County. The site will serve as a companion to [Berkshires.org](http://Berkshires.org), the region's official tourism website operated by 1Berkshire. BRPC created the site with input from stakeholders, including 1Berkshire, Berkshire Natural Resources Council and the MA Dept. of Conservation and Recreation (DCR).

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### Economic Development Advocacy Day 2023

BRPC Assistant Director and Economic Development Program Manager Laura Brennan joined a small Berkshire County contingent at the MA Statehouse recently to advocate for the economic development priorities of our region. The group met with several joint committee chairs as well as Anne Gobi, Director of Rural Affairs for the Healey-Driscoll Administration. Our thanks to Senator Paul Mark and his staff for hosting, and 1Berkshire for coordinating the day.

## Public Health

### Addressing the Social Determinants of Health in Extreme Heat Events

The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) Public Health Program has received a \$30,000 grant from the [New England Rural Health Association](#) (NERHA) to examine and implement strategies and best practices for rural communities with Extreme Heat Events and Emergencies.

Until recently, days with extreme heat were of limited concern to the Northeast Region of the United States. This, combined with our aging population, older housing stock, and relatively infrequent encounters with extreme heat, has left us vulnerable to extreme heat emergencies. Utilizing community stakeholder and emergency responder input, we aim to research and develop response plans and other mitigation strategies that consider the unique challenges of our vulnerable and marginalized community members.

There are a variety of additional strategies that will be researched and considered, which may include things such as:

- Developing and/or supporting a sustainable information system to ensure community members have access to emergency information and resources.
- Exploring organizational and individual engagement in personal preparedness planning and education.
- Researching best practices for rural areas in improving access to air conditioning.
- Research grant opportunities for weatherization of private residences to mitigate against the impacts of extreme heat.

With these strategies, we aim to create a more resilient Berkshire community against the impacts of climate change and the increasing regularity of extreme heat. For additional information on this project, please reach out to Senior Public Health Planner [Matthew Bryan](#).



Senior Public Health Planner [Jaymie Zapata](#) was at the [Public Health Institute of Western MA](#) (PHIWM) in Springfield to meet Representative Michael Finn, Senator Adam Gomez, and other state Representatives and Senators, who presented PHIWM with \$200,000 in state funding they secured for 413Cares in the FY2024 state budget. [413Cares](#) is a new interactive online resource directory for the four Western MA counties that BRPC is helping to adequately reach and represent Berkshire residents and community-based organizations.

## Transportation

### 2025-2029 Transportation Improvement Program Under Construction

Work on the next Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) has been initiated. The TIP is a document that outlines the transportation projects that will move forward over the next 5 years. This is an opportunity for towns to submit projects on federal aid eligible roads for consideration of federal funds. Berkshire County towns have been contacted to submit new projects and updated information on existing, previously submitted projects. Towns need to submit this information by February 2, 2024.

Once project information is received, it is compiled, and the process continues with project evaluations. BRPC and MassDOT staff facilitate the TIP development process and assist the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) and the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) in deliberations. The process continues over the next three months. By April 2024, a compilation of projects will be prepared, and with the concurrence of the MPO, a public comment period will be initiated on the draft TIP. Following the conclusion of the public comment period, the MPO is tentatively scheduled to endorse the TIP at their meeting on May 28, 2024. Information on the draft TIP will be posted to BRPC's website throughout the TIP's development. For additional information, please reach out to Principal Transportation Planner [Anuja Koirala](#).

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# January

# 2024

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday		
	CLOSED	1	2	3	4 Executive Committee 4:00 pm Commission Development 5:00 pm	5	6	
7	8	Municipal Planning Organization 4:00 pm	9	10	11	12	13	
14	Martin Luther King Jr. Day	15	16	17	Brownfields 12:00 pm Commission 7:00 pm	18	19	20
21	22	23	Regional Issues 3:30 pm	24	25	26	27	
28	29	30	Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) 1:00 pm	31				

**Berkshire Regional Planning Commission**  
[www.berkshireplanning.org](http://www.berkshireplanning.org)



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