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## A Newsletter for Community Planning in the Berkshire Region

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

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### Staff Announcements & Employment Opportunities

BRPC is pleased to welcome [Jocelyn Latvalla](#) to the Economic Development Program team as a Program Associate. Her main focus is supporting digital equity planning and assisting with community outreach. Jocelyn has a BS in Sustainable Food and Farming from UMass Amherst with a minor in Sustainable Community Development. She is a lifelong Berkshire resident and is passionate about community wellness, local food systems, and small businesses. [jlatvalla@berkshireplanning.org](mailto:jlatvalla@berkshireplanning.org), 413-442-1521 x36



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Positions currently listed at [Employment & Internships Opportunities](#):

- [Senior Housing Planner](#)
- [Public Health Nurse Educator](#)
- [Public Health Community Social Worker](#)
- [Arts & Culture Internship](#)
- [Outdoor Recreation Internship](#)

### Grants, Opportunities & Announcements

#### Community One Stop for Growth FY25 Round is Open

Prospective applicants are encouraged to register for Webinars 1 and 2. Webinar 3 and program-specific webinars will be prerecorded and posted to the One Stop website.



- Webinar 1: One Stop Overview Webinar - February 5 [Register Here](#)
- Webinar 2: One Stop Application Guidance Webinar - February 7 [Register Here](#)
- Webinar 3: Prerecorded Technology Webinar - Posted Online February 8
- Individual Program Webinars (NEW) - Posted Online February 16

Applicants may log into the [IGX system](#) and begin working on their Full Application(s). The One Stop will begin accepting Full Applications on May 6, 2024. The submission **deadline is June 5, 2024** at 11:59 p.m. BRPC staff is available to assist with applications.

For more information on the Full Application, Expression of Interest, Office Hours, etc., visit [www.mass.gov/onestop](http://www.mass.gov/onestop). Questions can be sent to [onestop@mass.gov](mailto:onestop@mass.gov).

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#### Adams Bridge Replacement Virtual Hearing February 8, 6:30 - 7:30

Design virtual public hearing on replacement of bridge No. A-04-038 in the Town of Adams; register here to participate via the internet: [www.mass.gov/orgs/highway-division/events](http://www.mass.gov/orgs/highway-division/events) This is an opportunity for the public to learn about the proposed replacement of the Quality St. bridge over the Hoosic River. Roadways will remain open to traffic throughout the construction phase. Flyer link [here](#).

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

Thursday, February 8, 10:00 - 11:30 a.m., Register [HERE](#)

Monday, February 26, 1:00 - 2:30 p.m., Register [HERE](#)

Wednesday, February 28, 10:00 - 11:30 a.m., 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.

### Select Board Handbook Released

The Massachusetts Select Board Association recently released the Select Board Handbook. Previously prepared as a printed version, this is a comprehensive online guide to the fundamentals of town government covering the full range of roles and responsibilities for Select Board members. Not only is it useful for Select Board members, but others will benefit from the easy to use and understand explanations of town governments. [Massachusetts Select Board Handbook - Massachusetts Municipal Association \(MMA\)](#)

### Rural Programs Manager, Massachusetts Executive Office of Economic Development

[Mallory Sullivan](#) is the new Rural Programs Manager at the Massachusetts Executive Office of Economic Development, working with Director of Rural Affairs Anne Gobi, serving Massachusetts' 181 diverse rural and small communities. Mallory is responsible for administering the Rural Development Fund and providing technical assistance to communities. Her background in municipal government, community development, and AmeriCorps national service has shaped her passion for cultivating vibrant and livable places. Mallory most recently worked for the Town of Northfield as grant development director, managing economic development planning and securing state and federal grants for a range of town priorities. She has a Master of Public Administration from Suffolk University. [mallory.sullivan@mass.gov](mailto:mallory.sullivan@mass.gov), 857-408-0793

### 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. Questions: 617-727-8470. Deadline: **March 15, 2024**; Grant awards: June 12, 2024.



### [Citizen Planner Training Collaborative](#)

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.

## BERKSHIRE Funding Focus

Overwhelmed? Reach out to your BFF (Berkshire Funding Focus) for help navigating grant applications! Take a look at additional grant opportunities and resources on our website: [www.berkshirefundingfocus.org](http://www.berkshirefundingfocus.org).

## Community Development & Housing



The Home Modification Loan Program (HMLP) has helped over 3,000 Massachusetts households

finance home accessibility improvements to make it possible for individuals with disabilities and older adults to remain in their own homes and communities.

Established by the Massachusetts Legislature in 1999, HMLP is a state-funded loan program that provides financing to homeowners and small landlords for necessary home modifications such as:

- Ramps and lifts
- Kitchen and bathroom adaptations
- Sensory integration spaces
- Fencing
- Handrails
- Brighter lighting
- Widening of doorways
- Flooring renovations
- Creation of additional living space, including accessory dwelling units or in-law apartments

#### Loan Information

- Up to \$50,000 for property owners and \$30,000 for owners of manufactured or mobile homes
- 0% interest rate
- No monthly payments
- Repayment is required when the property is sold or transferred
- Landlords with fewer than 10 units may be eligible for a 3% interest rate loan for a qualifying tenant

For more information or to apply, contact [Christie Lewis](#), 413-442-1521 x23.

## Data & Information Services



The Berkshire Benchmarks website ([berkshirebenchmarks.org](http://berkshirebenchmarks.org)) has the latest US Census American Community Survey Data in the Regional Indicators. In addition to getting another year of data, many indicators now include **comparable regions**. Berkshire Benchmarks has spent the last year researching comparable regions and determined eight aspirational regions to serve as regional benchmarks. Berkshire County is unique, and no other region matches it exactly, but the chosen regions have an industry mix similar to the Berkshires, have a cultural and outdoor recreation focus, a similar density, and a larger percentage of second homes than the country as a whole. These counties also have name recognition, making them easy to visualize and understand. The comparable regions are Asheville, NC; Bend, OR; Boulder, CO; Burlington, VT; Cape Cod, MA; Kingston, NY; Portland, ME; and Saratoga, NY. For more information, contact GIS, Data & Information Program Manager [Mark Maloy](#).

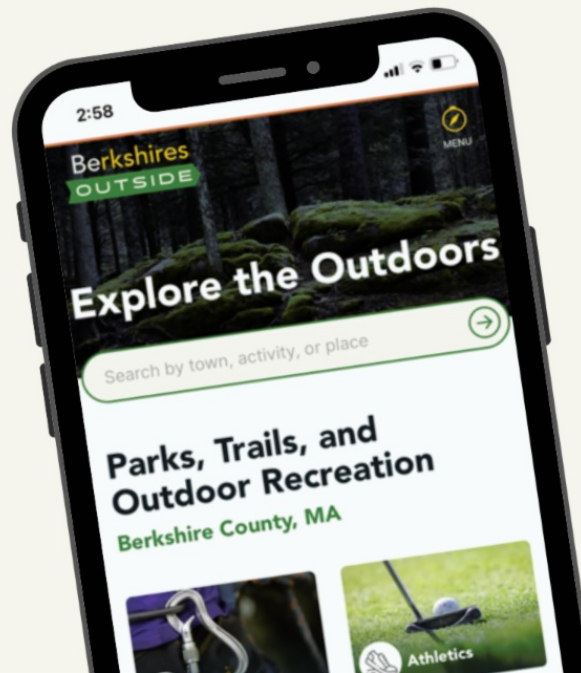
## Economic Development

[BerkshiresOutside.org](http://BerkshiresOutside.org)

NOW LIVE!

875 miles of trails  
550+ locations  
#intheberkshires

**Berkshires**  
**OUTSIDE**



BRPC's new outdoor recreation website, [www.berkshiresoutside.org](http://www.berkshiresoutside.org), is live!

The new site, built by Gemini Creative of Stockbridge, contains a clearinghouse of outdoor recreation 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. The site will serve as a companion to [Berkshires.org](http://Berkshires.org), the region's official tourism website operated by [1Berkshire](#).

**Get part-time Economic Development staff support - without having to hire a new employee!  
Join BRPC's Shared Economic Development Planning program**

The Shared Economic Development Planning program allows your town to regularly access services that fit your needs and budget. Participating communities get assistance with creating a welcoming environment for businesses and residents through a range of tactics, as well as ongoing support on economic development-related grant applications or collaborations with neighboring towns. All municipalities in Berkshire County are invited to contact BRPC to learn more about enrolling in the Shared Economic Development Planner program for FY25. Typical annual contracts range from \$10,000 to \$25,000, depending on the average weekly hours of support your town needs. Email [Laura Brennan](mailto:Laura.Brennan) or call 413.442.1521 x14.

## Environmental & Energy

**Make A Splash with Two Upcoming Grants!**

**[MassDEP 319 Nonpoint Source Competitive Grant Program](#):** In collaboration with the U.S. EPA, MassDEP offers annual grants to control Nonpoint Source (NPS) pollution. These funds can support projects to restore impaired waterbodies and safeguard high-quality ones. Municipalities, nonprofits, and regional planning commissions are eligible. Projects can address major NPS pollution sources like nutrients, sediment, and bacteria. New for this year, ***the 40% match requirement is waived!*** Stay tuned for the Request for Responses (RFR) release in mid-late February.

**[DER Culvert Replacement Municipal Assistance Grant](#):** DER estimates that more than half of Massachusetts' 25,000 culverts and small bridges restrict streamflow, create barriers to fish, and pose a risk to the public due to their vulnerability to failure during storm events. Increased precipitation and flooding highlight the need to upsize culverts to handle increased water volume. The Department of Ecological Restoration (DER) will release an RFR for the Culvert Replacement Municipal Assistance Grant in February. This grant encourages the replacement of aging culverts with structurally improved crossings that adhere to enhanced environmental

design standards and flood resiliency criteria. Eligible applicants include local government units in Massachusetts, with no match requirement.

Please contact Principal Planner [Courteny Morehouse](#) to discuss how BRPC can assist with these grant opportunities.

## Public Health

### State-Wide Food Inspector Training



BRPC's Public Health Program and the Berkshire Public Health Alliance (coordinated by BRPC Public Health staff) have provided professional FDA compliant food safety training in Berkshire County since 2017. Before the update of the Massachusetts Food Code in 2018, the Department of Public Health (DPH), with support from the state's professional organizations, offered comprehensive 3-day trainings to food inspectors several times per year, mostly in the eastern part of the state. Traveling to 3-day in-person trainings was a significant hardship for Berkshire County food inspectors. With support from small FDA grants, BRPC's Public Health Program and the Berkshire Public Health Alliance asked permission to give this training in BRPC's conference room. When the Mass Food Code changed in 2018, DPH did not update this training and stopped offering the state's Food Public Health Inspector Training (PHIT).

Leveraging funding from small FDA grants, the Public Health Program (PHP) updated and expanded the 3-day training, had it reviewed and approved by DPH, and gave in-person training for inspectors in 2019. When the pandemic canceled most in-person training, the PHP adapted the course to fit a Zoom format, made tests online using SurveyMonkey, and began offering this comprehensive food training remotely. **The result is that Berkshire County has more than its share of fully trained inspectors that meet the FDA Voluntary Retail Program Standards for food inspectors.**

Last year, the Department of Public Health set workforce standards for inspectors that required many of the elements of our Food Safety Program to create FDA "standardized" food inspectors. Many Health Departments and Boards of Health want to meet these new workforce requirements as soon as possible, but the vendors hired to create the classroom portion of the required trainings won't be ready until late spring or early summer, the busiest time for most health departments.

In December, DPH asked BRPC's Public Health Program to provide our existing food safety classroom training to food inspectors across the state. The BRPC Public Health Program team said of course and immediately began preparing. The Food Team of five has already delivered their first class to other trainers. Because the class size is limited to ensure that each inspector can ask questions and participate in the discussions, BRPC will give this training to about 30 inspectors at least four times in 2024, and there is a waiting list.

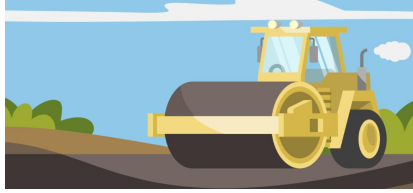
The Alliance MA Public Health Inspector Training (PHIT) Food classroom sessions are designed to enhance the comprehensive and uniform implementation of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) Food Code and FDA Voluntary Retail Program Standards, focusing on meeting FDA Standard 2 - Trained Regulatory Staff. This advanced training series assists local public health professionals specializing in Food Protection to improve their understanding of food safety and meet the new inspector workforce training requirements, including online education, the MA PHIT Food course, and associated field training components. The Public Health Program is honored to be part of the initiative to establish professional workforce standards for public health inspectors.

For more information, contact Alliance and BRPC Training Hub Coordinator [Lydia Shulman](#).

[Image from catkuro @ FLATICON](#)

## Regional Initiatives & Services

Exciting News About the  
Berkshire Regional Group Purchasing Program!



The Berkshire Regional Group Purchasing Program (BRGPP) FY25 procurement season officially began on February 1st with a Zoom kick-off meeting with municipalities and program staff. The very big news this season is that the program will transition to a 100% electronic bidding platform hosted by BRPC partner OpenGov, an electronic user-friendly bidding platform used in multiple communities across Massachusetts and the nation.

Electronic bidding is the easiest and most secure way for vendors to submit bids. It is the fastest and most transparent means of tabulating the bids and sharing the results with participating municipalities, vendors, and the public.

The BRGPP maintains an extensive database of Berkshire County municipal and vendor contacts. If your community missed the kick-off meeting and/or has experienced a change in staff contacts, please call us at 413-442-1521 x 23 or email us at [group purchasing@berkshireplanning.org](mailto:group purchasing@berkshireplanning.org).

The BRGPP staff is looking forward to having the opportunity to put this innovative technology to work on behalf of our Berkshire County municipalities!!

## Transportation

### What is Microtransit?

What if bus service was flexible, more like a taxi and other ride-hailing services - that's the idea behind microtransit! Using a smartphone app or by calling the operator, microtransit is an on-demand, shared-ride service that can pick you up and drop you off almost anywhere you need to get to!



By operating along fixed or flexible routes and using small-scale vehicles like shuttles, minibusses, or even regular cars instead of busses, microtransit offers a level of flexibility to people who need to travel to places or, at times when public transportation routes are not available - all at an affordable price!

While traditional bus service is useful to the many who live and work within or near service routes, microtransit can be an invaluable asset to people with mobility issues, households with only one car, and those with the occasional out-of-the-way appointment.

Since the pandemic, communities across the county have started microtransit services to serve people's transportation needs. In Massachusetts alone, many cities, towns, transit operators, and communities of all sizes are adopting microtransit services to address the public transportation needs of their residents. While some cover just a town or city, microtransit is most beneficial for those living in rural areas - like Berkshire County!

In a 2022 survey of Berkshire County, respondents shared great interest in using microtransit, with most responding they would likely use it at least once a week or more. Most respondents said they would likely use microtransit to get to work, shop, and attend special events and outings.

In addition to its convenience and affordability, many operators have found that microtransit can provide many secondary benefits! Increasing regional accessibility with microtransit can help bolster the economy by expanding riders' options on where to work and shop. For workplaces with commuting employees, microtransit can be a reasonable answer to group shuttle needs. And for those without access to a personal vehicle or public transportation, microtransit can be a lifeline for getting around - from attending critical appointments or simply buying groceries.

From a financial perspective, many operators have discovered that microtransit can provide similar or improved service on underutilized fixed routes, reducing operational costs and improving efficiency, all while better understanding riders' transit needs.

Realizing the benefits of microtransit to help meet rural transportation needs and improve Berkshire County residents' quality of life, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission will continue

to advocate for microtransit with BRTA and other stakeholders and explore grant funding for a pilot microtransit service in central Berkshire County. For more information on microtransit, contact Principal Transportation Planner [Anuja Koirala](#).

[Image from DinosoftLabs @ FLATICON](#)

February							2024
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	
				1 Executive Committee 4:00	2	3	
4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
18	19 Presidents' Day	20 Transportation Advisory Committee 4:00	21	22	23	24	
25	26	27 Municipal Planning Organization 4:00	28 Regional Issues Committee 3:30	29			

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



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