



A Newsletter for Community Planning in the Berkshire Region

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BRPC Chair Malcolm Fick, Executive Director Thomas Matuszko, Representative Smitty Pignatelli (recipient of the 2024 Kusik Award), EOHLIC Secretary Ed Augustus, and Representative Tricia Farley-Bouvier at BRPC's Annual Meeting on September 25th.



Secretary Ed Augustus of EOHLIC, speaking at BRPC's annual meeting. [Read More in the Berkshire Eagle](#)

BRPC Annual Meeting 2024

Thank you to all who attended our 2024 Annual Meeting! The event, held at Balderdash Cellars in Richmond, included a recap of BRPC highlights from Executive Director Tom Matuszko, a keynote address with a focus on elements of the Affordable Homes Act by Secretary Augustus of the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities, and a presentation by BRPC Chair Malcolm Fick of the 2024 [Kusik Award](#) to Representative Smitty Pignatelli. [Read more on iBerkshires.com](#)

[Download the FY2024 BRPC Annual Report](#)

Upcoming BRPC Meetings

- [Comprehensive Economic Development Committee \(CEDS\) Meeting](#) - Oct. 9th at 1 pm
- [BRPC Executive Committee Meeting](#) - October 10th at 4 pm

Staff & Agency Accolades



Berkshire 25 Honoree

Congratulations to **Melissa Provencher**, Environmental and Energy Program Manager, who was honored as one of Berkshire Magazine's "Berkshire 25" for 2024 on Sept. 30th at Barrington Stage, in recognition of her long-term work managing the [Berkshire Brownfields Program](#).



Partner of the Year

BRPC was named Community Partner of the Year for 2024 by [Central Berkshire Habitat For Humanity](#), citing advocacy for environmental justice and a belief in shared leadership. Public Health Senior Planner **Jaymie Zapata**, who embodies these values in all of her work, accepted the award on behalf of BRPC during the Habitat Annual Meeting on Sept. 30th.



Berkshire Trendsetter Finalists

Three BRPC-related projects were selected as finalists and recognized at the Celebrate the Berkshires event in September. We're proud to see [ArtWeek Berkshires](#), [Berkshire Funding Focus](#), and [Berkshires Outside](#) among so many deserving nominees.

Staff Announcements



Meet Dave Pill, our newest Housing Rehabilitation Specialist! Dave brings a wealth of knowledge and experience in property management, financial oversight, and maintenance operations. He is currently the Owner and President of BHF, Inc., a property management company. His past roles include positions at the Pittsfield Housing Authority and Berkshire Housing Development Corp.

For the past 10 years, Dave has managed and performed maintenance and outdoor work for the Morgan Manor Condominium in Lenox. Known for his leadership and ability to drive change, Dave excels at improving systems and creating sustainable outcomes.

BRPC Employment Opportunities

- [BRPC Housing Planner](#)
- [Public Health Planner or Senior Planner for Substance Misuse Disorders](#)
- [Public Health Community Social Worker](#)

Federal Grant Matching Funds

The MA Federal Funds & Infrastructure Office (FFIO) has issued guidance related to the [recently signed legislation](#) making state funding available, with the goal of making federal grant applications more competitive. [Download FAQs](#) about how the funds will be made available and about the online form that can be used to request matching funds as part of this process.

Representatives from FFIO plan to visit the Berkshires in November for an informational session. **Save the date of November 18th at 1 pm and stay tuned for details.**

Grant Opportunities

Community Compact Efficiency and Regionalization (E&R)

The [Community Compact Efficiency and Regionalization](#) grant program provides financial support for governmental entities interested in implementing regionalization and other efficiency initiatives that allow for long-term sustainability. Funds are for one-time or transition

costs for municipalities, regional school districts, school districts considering forming a regional school district or regionalizing services, and regional planning agencies or councils of government interested in such projects. Applications open **Sept. 16** and close at **noon, Oct. 10**.

Additional Community Compact programs opening soon...

[Community Compact IT Grant Program](#) - competitive program focused on driving innovation and transformation at the local level via investments in technology. The application period runs from **January 6 to noon on February 6, 2025**. Municipalities awarded in FY24 are not eligible.

The **[Municipal Fiber Grant Program](#)** is a competitive, matching grant program to assist municipalities with the construction of municipal fiber broadband infrastructure and related projects and expenditures. The application period is from **March 10 to noon on April 10, 2025**.

If you have any questions, contact **[Sean Cronin](#)**, Senior Deputy Commissioner of Local Services.

MassWildlife Habitat Management Grant Program (MHMGP) - \$10,000 to \$75,000!

MassWildlife is offering grants to fund habitat management and restoration. Eligible activities include prescribed burning, invasive plant control, tree planting, habitat improvements, and more! Eligible applicants include owners of private or municipal *conserved lands* in MA. Applications are due by **October 17**, at 4:00 pm. For further details, check **[MassWildlife](#)**.

Mass Cultural Council/Mass Development - Cultural Facilities Fund

Grants to support the acquisition, design, repair, rehabilitation, renovation, expansion, or construction of nonprofit cultural facilities. Nonprofit cultural organizations, municipalities, and colleges or universities that own or lease cultural facilities are eligible to apply. Grants range from \$7,000 to \$200,000.

Applications open October 10th and close **December 19th**. Learn More **[HERE](#)**.

EPA's Solid Waste Infrastructure for Recycling - Grants for Communities

The Solid Waste Infrastructure for Recycling program provides grants to implement the National Recycling Strategy to improve post-consumer materials management and infrastructure, support improvements to local post-consumer materials management and recycling programs, and assist local waste management authorities in improving their waste management systems.

Learn more and access application materials **[HERE](#)**. Applications due by **December 20, 2024**.

FY25 MHC Survey & Planning Grant Pre-Applications Now Available

Massachusetts Historical Commission has opened the FY25 round of the Survey & Planning Grant program. For this round, eligible applicants are anticipated to include all local historical commissions, local historic district commissions, municipal planning offices, and other public and non-profit historic preservation organizations. At the time of this writing total available funding for the FY 2025 matching grant round is still contingent on MHC's FY 2025 federal budget allocation, which has not yet been determined. For FY 2025 the MHC/Grantee match shares will be 50/50.

More information and grant guidelines available **[HERE](#)**. Pre-applications due **Nov. 15th by 5 pm**.

Cyber Resilient Massachusetts Grant Program - The Mass Cyber Center

Municipalities in Massachusetts are eligible to receive a one-time grant of up to \$25,000 to support cybersecurity improvements based on a vulnerability assessment conducted by a qualified provider. Respondents may apply grant funding towards the cost of vendors to implement the cybersecurity improvements or IT-related staff costs of the municipality performing the services in lieu of using a vendor.

Applications are rolling, reviewed quarterly. Access more information, including an informational webinar recording and the application documents, **[HERE](#)**.

Events & Announcements

The Massachusetts Association of Regional Planning Agencies (MARPA) welcomes you to join them at the **2024 Annual Statewide Conference for Municipal Officials and Staff**, co-hosted by the MA Division of Local Services (DLS). The conference will feature a keynote speech from Lt. Governor Driscoll, a panel of Healey-Driscoll Administration officials, and several breakout sessions on pressing municipal and regional issues.

MARPA/DLS Conference 2024

October 8th, 9:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. (Doors open at 8:30)

LOCATION: Holy Cross College/Hogan Conference Center (1 College St, Worcester, MA 01610)

Registration Link (attendance fee \$20): <https://mapc.ma/marpa-2024>

Breakfast and coffee will be available

Climate and Energy Grant Writing Workshop - by municipalities for municipalities
hosted by [Berkshire Funding Focus](#) & Building Electrification Accelerator

Two-part series to help identify recurring, priority grant funding opportunities and create winning grant proposals. This is a two-part workshop - please register for **both** meetings if possible.

Monday, October 21, 2024, from 10:00 to 11:30 a.m. [Register Here](#)

Tuesday, October 22, 2024, from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. [Register Here](#)

Speakers:

- Joyce Losick-Yang, Director of Sustainability and Energy, Town of Andover
- Jillian Wilson Martin, Director of Sustainability, Town of Natick

The Operational Services Division of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts will be hosting:

Introduction to Statewide Contracts and Available Resources Training

The goal is to expand your understanding of Statewide Contracts and to train you on the state's online resources. The class will consist of a presentation of the benefits and uses of Statewide Contracts, with OSD presenters highlighting the most commonly used Statewide Contracts, as well as contracts of interest to Regional Planning Agency buyers.

Class highlights will include Accessing Statewide Contract resources, including the Statewide Contract Index, Contract User Guides for each contract, Vendor Lookup, and Tradesperson Index. Students will learn how to navigate the COMMBUYS landing page, access State documents, search for goods and services, and learn the steps to make a Punchout purchase through COMMBUYS, the state's e-procurement system. The presentation will be informal with time for discussion of the buying process and Q&A.

Wednesday, December 11th at 11 am - Hybrid Session

To attend this hybrid session in person, please email lbrennan@berkshireplanning.org

To participate via Zoom, please register [HERE](#).

[Connect 351](#) - the MMA Annual Meeting & Trade Show has a new name!

The 2025 MMA conference will be held January 23-25 at the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center, and will include:

- A range of informative and timely workshops
- Compelling and inspiring speakers
- A general business meeting and important policy discussions

- A robust Trade Show featuring the latest services and solutions for cities and towns. Registration is available [HERE](#), and more information about the conference can be found here: <https://www.mma.org/connect-351/>

Community Planning

Open Space and Recreation Plans

In September, Open Space and Recreation Plans (OSRP) for the towns of Lee and West Stockbridge received final approvals from the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs Division of Conservation Services. BRPC assisted both communities in managing the OSRP process and developing the planning documents. An OSRP offers a comprehensive understanding of a community's existing conservation and recreational resources and how residents utilize these resources. This work results in an action plan that includes recommendations for steps that further community efforts to preserve and enhance these resources. In addition to the typical benefits of a current planning document, approval by the Commonwealth provides eligibility for grant resources related to open space and recreational resources. BRPC's [Planning Toolkit](#) entry for OSRPs offers greater detail on this type of planning work.

For additional information, contact Seth Jenkins at sjenkins@berkshireplanning.org

Community Development & Housing

PRO Housing Application Public Comment Period is Open

BRPC seeks public input on its [draft grant application](#) to the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). BRPC is applying to HUD's PRO Housing grant program to provide funds for policy and planning work to remove barriers to the creation of housing in the Berkshires, which includes a regional assessment as well as assistance to interested communities in planning for new housing and removal of zoning barriers, funding for housing rehabilitation programs, and funding to create and preserve affordable housing units with long term income restrictions.

BRPC seeks input from the public through October 13, 2024, at 5:00 pm. Written comments can be submitted by emailing CJ Hoss, Community Planning and Development Program Manager, at choss@berkshireplanning.org.

Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) Heating Aid Application Window Is Open

Massachusetts renters and homeowners can now apply for state financial support to help cover part of their costs during the colder winter months. The Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities opened applications on Tuesday, October 1st for the [Home Energy Assistance Program \(HEAP\)](#), which will run from Nov. 1 through April 30, 2025. Grants do not need to be repaid, and they can cover all heating sources, including oil, electricity, natural gas, propane, kerosene, wood, and coal. Payments are made directly to residents' heating companies. Program eligibility is based on factors including household size and income, which cannot exceed 60 percent of the state median income. The maximum income for a family of four, for example, is \$94,608. Anyone in need of heating assistance can explore their eligibility by applying online or visiting the nearest administering agency. **The HEAP administering agency for Berkshire County is the Berkshire Community Action Council, Inc. [Portal - Customer Portal \(toapply.org\)](#).**

Data & Information Services

Average Single Family Tax Bill in Berkshire County

The average single-family tax bill continues to increase in Berkshire County. For Fiscal Year 2024, the average tax bill was \$4,797. The average tax bill has increased by almost \$800 since 2020. This state had an average single-family tax bill of \$6,935, over \$2,000 more than Berkshire County, and a similar increase of almost \$800 since 2020. Looking at the municipalities within Berkshire County, the range goes from a high of \$7,620 in Great Barrington to \$922 in Hancock. Three-quarters of Berkshire County municipalities range from \$3,000 to \$6,000. More information

Economic Development

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) - call for NEW Priority Projects

The CEDS Committee is now accepting submissions of NEW Priority Projects for potential inclusion in the 2025 Annual Report. Submissions are due no later than March 31, 2025. Please use this form to provide the committee with information about your proposal:

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CEDS_Priority_Projects_FY25

Submissions will be considered for inclusion in the 2025 Performance Progress Report, our yearly update to the 2023-2027 CEDS for Berkshire County. Regional CEDS are submitted to and approved by the federal Economic Development Administration (EDA).

Environmental & Energy



New Shareable Resources for Healthier Indoor Living!

As fall approaches and the nights turn chilly, many of us are looking to make our homes feel cozier. But did you know that indoor air can be 2-5 times more polluted than outdoor air? Poor indoor air quality can lead to health issues, especially for vulnerable groups like children, the elderly, and those with preexisting conditions.

The **Healthy & Efficient Homes Guide** is a free resource that offers practical tips to help reduce indoor pollutants and create healthier, more energy-efficient living spaces—just in time for the cooler months. From improving ventilation to managing allergens, small changes can have a big impact on the home's comfort and family health. Plus, energy-saving tips like better insulation and efficient heating can also lead to cost savings.

Share this guide with your community within your channels to help residents stay healthier and cozier this fall. The guide is viewable on any device in available in English and Spanish with an option for a printable pdf.

Access the guide here: [Healthy & Efficient Home Guide \(arcgis.com\)](https://arcgis.com)

Public Health

Addressing Alcohol Misuse and Addiction in Berkshire County

Throughout the Berkshires, local health experts increasingly note the urgency of reducing alcohol misuse. The pervasive normalization of alcohol has a strong impact on youth, who report their own use is largely influenced by attitudes and expectations set by adults (“peer pressure” appears to play a lesser role).

Nationally, [alcohol misuse](#) is responsible for approximately 178,000 deaths per year; by comparison, in 2022 drug overdoses accounted for 110,000 deaths. In 2023, [22% of](#) County adults reported binge or heavy drinking, above state and national averages of 19%. Data from Berkshire Health Systems shows that 11.9% of patients in the Emergency Department had an [Alcohol Use Disorder](#) (AUD), compared to 5.8% at all hospitals. In 2022, Berkshire County experienced [36.9 alcohol-related deaths](#) per 100,000 people, vs. 28.3 statewide.

In response, BRPC has collaborated with multiple local agencies to prepare a comprehensive four-goal approach to [address alcohol misuse and addiction in the Berkshires](#). This approach acknowledges that alcohol tends to play a central role in many of our social lives and that reducing problematic use can occur in tandem with reducing [social isolation and loneliness](#), identified by the Surgeon General as a national health crisis. These four goals seek to reduce the “drinking culture” of Berkshire County, increase engagement with treatment and recovery, promote mental health services, and enhance social and peer support.

[READ MORE HERE.](#)

Transportation

New Fiscal Year Brings New Plans

October 1 is the start of the 2025 federal fiscal year, and with it, two new transportation plans become effective: the 2025 -2029 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and the 2025 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP). These documents were recently approved by the Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization

The UPWP outlines the transportation planning studies that will be undertaken in the upcoming federal fiscal year. Two new projects include conducting a micro-transit study and a sidewalk/trail feasibility study surrounding Tanglewood. Additional work activities include bicycle and pedestrian planning, supporting the implementation of electric vehicles and charging stations, addressing traffic and pedestrian safety, and conducting traffic studies.

The Transportation Improvement Program identifies projects to be implemented from 2025 through 2029. Included in the TIP are the following road projects: re reconstruction of Ashland Street in N Adams, Mount Washington Road in Egremont, East Street (Route 9) in Pittsfield, Merrill Road in Pittsfield and Dalton Division Road (Dalton and Pittsfield). The TIP also includes numerous bridge projects, transit projects and a multi-use trail extension project.

For more information on these plans and other transportation initiatives, please visit BRPC’s website at www.berkshireplanning.org.

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission
www.berkshireplanning.org



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