



A Newsletter for Community Planning in the Berkshire Region

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BRPC's Annual Meeting & Reception
Presentation of the 2024 [Kusik Award](#)
honoring Representative Smitty Pignatelli

Keynote Speaker
Executive Office of Housing and Livable
Communities (EOHLC) Secretary Ed Augustus

Wednesday, September 25th, 5:00 - 7:00 pm
Balderdash Cellars, 81 State Rd., Richmond



Register [HERE](#) by 9/18

Staff Announcements & Employment Opportunities



Congratulations to [Aleesha Siddiqui](#), a recent Colby College graduate and Summer Intern with our Digital Equity initiative, on her acceptance into the AmeriCorps Fellowship Program! We are thrilled she will continue working to ensure Berkshire County residents and communities can use high-speed internet. [Wylie Goodman](#), Senior Economic Development Planner, leads our Digital Equity work and secured the AmeriCorps partnership.

The American Connection Corps (ACC) is a small, selective service corps fellowship affiliated with AmeriCorps. The program places fellows in rural and emerging communities in the United States for a full year of service. Fellows help to address issues in their assigned communities, such as digital inclusion, advancing economic prosperity, and building community engagement.

- [BRPC Housing Rehab Specialist](#)
- [BRPC Public Health Planner or Senior Planner for Substance Misuse Disorders](#)
- [BRPC Public Health Community Social Worker](#)
- [Southern Berkshire Community Specialist](#)
- [Bi-lingual Northern Berkshire Community Specialist](#)

Grant Opportunities

Community Compact Best Practices Program - FY25

Beginning on August 19, municipalities that did not apply in FY24 can choose up to two Best Practices and submit [Best Practices Program applications](#). Applications are accepted on a rolling basis and will be reviewed within one month of submission. Click [HERE](#) for the complete set of best practices.

Eligible Berkshire County municipalities in FY25 include: Adams, Alford, Becket, Clarksburg, Dalton, Egremont, Florida, Great Barrington, Hancock, Hinsdale, Lanesborough, Lee, Lenox, Monterey, Mount Washington, New Ashford, Otis, Peru, Pittsfield, Richmond, Sandisfield, Savoy, Sheffield, Stockbridge, Tyringham, Washington, West Stockbridge.

Please contact [Laura Brennan](#) at BRPC if you would like help with your FY25 Best Practice application or would like BRPC to perform technical assistance work related to your project.

Additional Community Compact programs opening soon...

[Efficiency and Regionalization \(E&R\)](#) - competitive grant program providing 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 governments interested in such projects. Applications open **Sept. 16 and close at noon, Oct. 10, 2024**.

[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.

MassDEP Technical Assistance Grant (TAG) Program: FY25-26 Opportunity and Application

This grant opportunity provides \$200,000 in funding, with up to \$20,000 per community or municipal applicant group selected for an award, to enhance public involvement and promote a better understanding of the cleanup of contaminated sites in their communities. The application deadline is **Friday, September 6**.

The TAG application and information about this grant opportunity, including eligibility criteria and examples of past TAG projects, is available on [MassDEP's TAG Program webpage](#).

New England Foundation for the Arts ([NEFA](#)), ***Making it Public for Municipalities*** public art training and grant program is offering a free virtual workshop series to train municipalities in running a public art commission and prepare local artists to apply to calls for public art successfully. [Register here](#) for an information session **September 11**. The 11-week program runs Tuesdays, Jan. 28 - April 8, 2025, 10:30 am -12:00 pm. Participating municipalities will receive \$15,000 to support the commissioning of temporary public art projects. [Application portal](#).

[Landscape Scale Restoration Grant Program 2025 Northeast and Midwest](#)

U.S. Forest Service, Award: \$25,000 - \$600,000, Match: 1:1

Eligible Applicants: Nonprofits, cities and towns, special district governments, institutions of higher education. For landscape restoration projects on rural nonindustrial private forestland and/or rural Tribal, State, or local government forest land. For the purposes of this grant, rural is defined as a population of 50,000 or less.

NOTE: All partners and collaborators, except Tribes, must submit an initial draft of their project narrative and budget spreadsheet to the relevant State Forester(s) by **September 27**, or specific deadline set by the State Forester.

Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) forest conservation and expansion grant opportunity as part of the [Forests as Climate Solutions Initiative](#). Eligible entities: Qualified 501(c)(3) organizations formed for land conservation purposes, municipalities, and other conservation organizations (such as Land Banks). Maximum award: 50% of total eligible project cost up to \$2,000,000. Deadline: **Friday, September 27 at 3:00 pm**. Details [here](#).

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.

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.



Berkshire Funding Focus is honored to be named a finalist in the 2024 1Berkshire [Trendsetter Awards](#) "Breaking the Mold" category! The winners will be announced at [Celebrate the Berkshires](#) on September 19.

Events & Announcements

Western Mass. Historical Commission Coalition Virtual Session, September 18th @ 10am:
"Back To School! Adaptive Reuse of Historic School Buildings"

The meeting will include presentations on the following case studies:

School Reuse in Easthampton

Presented by Jeffrey Bagg of BSC Group

Hatfield's Center School

Presented by Micki Sanderson of the Hatfield Historical Commission

Former Johnson Elementary School in North Adams

Presented by David Moresi of Moresi & Associates

To register for this program and receive the ZOOM link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZYvc--oqTMvGdfZAgN48VUWquZ2Xvyl1KcK>

Massachusetts Federal Funds Partnership

Tuesday, September 24, 2:00 - 3:00 pm online

Learn about key federal grant information focused on local governments. Great information for nonprofit partners too! See slides from past meetings [here](#). Register for future meetings [here](#).

A draft update to the *Massachusetts State Historic Preservation Plan 2018-2022* is available for public comment on the [Massachusetts Historical Commission's \(MHC\) website](#) through **September 30, 2024**. While the state plan is prepared by the MHC, it is not a work plan for the MHC. Instead, it is a plan for all preservationists in the Commonwealth. Please provide any written comments to [Jennifer Doherty](#), Local Government Programs Coordinator, via email. Learn more about the state plan process [here](#).

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

Recovery Month Events

Revel in Recovery, Saturday, September 7, 1:00 - 5:00 pm at The Pittsfield Common.

Celebrating all those on every pathway to recovery! Information booths, bouncy house, water slide, spoken word, speakers, and the Berkshire Soul Society featuring Wanda Houston & Friends. Upstreet Smoke will be selling their amazing food. Rain plan: Zion Common Room

facebook.com/share/

Smash the Stigma, Saturday, September 14, 12:00-3:00 pm - Town Hall Park, Great Barrington. This event will raise awareness about those affected by substance use disorders in Southern Berkshire County, highlight resources, and begin to reduce the stigma associated with addiction and recovery. Food trucks, resource fair, games, activities, music, and a walk/march. Rain plan: September 21 facebook.com/events/s/smash-the-stigma-event

Fitness in Recovery 5k Run, Sunday, September 22, 8:00 am at Berkshire Running Center, Allendale Underground Shopping Center, Pittsfield. Sponsored by Spectrum Health Systems and the Berkshire Running Foundation, the program offers a health and fitness program for those in recovery and their supporters and families. The Fitness In Recovery model is a proven benefit in helping individuals with issues surrounding any type of recovery; whether it be from substance abuse, anxiety, depression, grief, food issues, or being a caregiver to someone in recovery. berkshirerun.org/fir-5k/

Voices of Recovery, Saturday, September 28, 1:00 pm at Noel Field, North Adams. This family-friendly event is about celebrating recovery, heightening awareness, and empowering the people of this great community to live more fulfilling and happy lives! Guest speakers include Rep. Barrett and Mayor Macksey. Contact Danielle Coomes at 413-398-1389 for more information or to table.

[Berkshire Mobile Farmers Markets](#) continue through October 18 in Adams, Becket, Monterey, North Adams, and Pittsfield. For more information contact [Seth Jenkins](#).

Community Planning

Affordable Homes Act Passage - Accessory Dwelling Units

In early August, Governor Healey signed the Affordable Homes Act (also referred to as the Housing Bond Bill). The legislation included a provision creating a framework for the requirement of “by-right” accessory dwelling units in all communities in the Commonwealth. Several questions related to the legislation remain unclear. BRPC anticipates that the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities will provide clarity in the near term.

Communities can expect updates and guidance from BRPC in the weeks and months ahead as we learn more - please feel free to contact [CJ Hoss](#) with specific questions or comments.

Read more from the [Berkshire Eagle](#).

Americans with Disabilities Act Evaluations and Plans

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a civil rights law requiring communities to ensure that all services and goods are accessible to people with disabilities.

BRPC recently completed ADA Self-Evaluation and Transition plans for the towns of [Alford](#), [Lee](#), and [Monterey](#), thanks to financial assistance from the [Massachusetts Office on Disability](#) (MOD). The Self-Evaluation identifies physical, policy, and programmatic barriers to services and properties. The Transition Plan creates a prioritized list of improvements to direct the town’s capital investments to eliminate those barriers. Once completed, communities can apply for additional MOD grants to implement the plan.

MOD expects to announce the recipients of the FY25 [Municipal Americans with Disabilities Act Improvement Grant Program](#) this fall and will open for new applications in the spring. BRPC is available to write the grant application on your community’s behalf and oversee the plan’s development or implementation project, if awarded. BRPC encourages any community interested in addressing accessibility barriers through the program to contact [Andrew McKeever](#).

Community Development & Housing

BRPC invites applications to the Home Modification Loan Program
0% interest loans available to qualifying households

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) is pleased to invite applications to the Home Modification Loan Program (HMLP). HMLP is a state-funded no-interest loan program to provide modifications to those in need of accessibility improvements to their homes. Eligible applicants include homeowners and landlords (with fewer than 10 units) with necessary changes needed to their homes to keep disabled or elderly family members in their own homes.

Possible modifications include bathroom and kitchen modifications, ramps, stair lifts, platform lifts, sensory/therapy spaces, hard-wired alarm systems, fences, accessory dwelling units, and more. Please note that this is not a home repair program; repairs to roofs, windows, and heating are not eligible. All work must be completed by licensed and insured contractors.

For property owners, 0% interest loans range between \$1,000 and \$50,000. No monthly payments are required, with repayment is required when the property is sold or transferred. If you own a manufactured or mobile home, 0% interest loans range from \$1,000 to \$30,000.

All applications are subject to HMLP eligibility requirements. For more information, please visit www.cedac.org/hmlp or contact [Christie Lewis](#), 413-442-1521 ext. 23.

Data & Information Services

Migration

The IRS recently released the latest migration data for counties across the US. The Berkshires have traditionally lost more people to out-migration than gained through in-migration. From 2010 to 2019, the county had an average net migration loss of 227 people annually. In 2020 and 2021 the trend reversed, and the region had more people moving into the county than moving out, averaging a net gain of 494 people annually. This gain was primarily due to the pandemic. The newest data, which covers 2022, shows that the county has reversed directions again and is now following the historic trend of having more people move out than in, amounting to a net loss of 267 people. The data is available online at BerkshireBenchmarks.org, where you can see our historical trend and that of comparable regions. For more information, contact [Mark Maloy](#).

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).



Berkshires Outside website helps residents and visitors explore more of the outdoors in our beautiful region!

BRPC launched www.berkshiresoutside.org in early 2024, and has since hosted nearly 60,000 sessions. Help us spread the word! Access the [Berkshires Outside TOOLKIT](#) for pre-made graphics and suggested wording.

Help us spread the word!



BerkshiresOutside.org is honored to be named a finalist in the 2024 1Berkshire [Trendsetter Awards](#)' "Visitor Engagement" category! The winners will be announced at [Celebrate the Berkshires](#) on September 19th.

Environmental & Energy

Green Communities Annual Reports

As the summer ends and fall is just around the corner, it's time for municipalities participating in the Green Communities program to look at the last fiscal year and collect information to complete annual reporting. BRPC supports several communities in their Green Communities reporting; for those towns and towns that may need additional support in completing these reports, BRPC will begin working to complete reporting requirements in September. You can expect direct contact from BRPC's Environmental and Energy team in the first two weeks of September.

Things to remember about reporting requirements and updating Mass Energy Insight accounts:

- Annual reports are due November 15 by 5:00 pm
- Collect fuel usage data for oil, gasoline, propane, and diesel
- For purchases or trades of municipal vehicles during the fiscal year, ensure you have the following: make and model, model year, purchase date, MPG, Usage
- If there were building stock changes, ensure you have building square footage

EmPower Grant Award

BRPC and Central Berkshire Habitat for Humanity have jointly been awarded an EmPower grant through Mass Clean Energy Center for two years to assist the residents of Pittsfield in understanding and accessing energy efficiency programs, navigating third-party suppliers, and finding ways to cut energy costs. This program runs separately from the Mass Save Community First Partnership, which has been ongoing since 2022 and has helped Pittsfield residents access energy efficiency incentives for their homes and businesses. BRPC and Habitat will work together starting in September to launch the project and offer additional support to Pittsfield residents.

Congratulations to North Adams, Pittsfield, Washington on their Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Grants

North Adams' project addresses the vulnerabilities highlighted during the July 2023 storms, upgrading the stormwater system, designing opportunities for river restoration, dam removal, and enhanced community placemaking. This project is an expansion of BRPC's Gray to Green program in conjunction with the City and Hoosic River Revival's work with the US Army Corps of Engineers's flood chute study. Washington and Pittsfield projects focus on the restoration of two stream systems - Depot Brook and Unkamet.

We're also happy to announce that BRPC is teaming up with Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG) and Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) through an MVP grant to address rural dirt roads and increased stormwater throughout Western Mass. The project will build off of and test case FRCOG's [Dirt Roads Toolkit](#), pull from PVPC's expertise in Wetlands Protection Act, and serve as an update to BRPC's 2003 Unpaved Roads Manual. As part of this project, BRPC will reach out to all our towns to discuss challenges and support needs for dirt/unpaved roads. Contact [Courteny Morehouse](#) for more information.

Grants Available

[EPA Healthy Communities Grant Program for New England](#) due November 1. This grant can be used to improve the public health of environmental justice communities by reducing environmental pollution.

[FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grants Cycle](#) is open for the fall. Have a project in mind? Submit your Statement of Interest to MEMA now through their website. *Note for those towns looking at planning funds - a Benefit Cost Analysis is not required for Hazard Mitigation Planning Grants or Scoping/Planning BRIC grants.

[FEMA Rehabilitation of High Hazard Potential Dam Grant Program](#) - FEMA is hosting a training on Addressing Dam Risk in Your Hazard Mitigation Plan on **September 3, 2:00 - 3:30 pm**. The training includes an overview of mitigation planning and dam risks. It then gives guidance on how to address dam risks in the planning process, risk assessment, and mitigation strategy of a hazard mitigation plan. [Register here](#).

For information on any of these, contact [Courteny Morehouse](#).

Public Health

Hoarding - How extreme acquisition can lead to isolation.

I am often asked what the most difficult part of being a health agent is, and without question, it is cases that involve hoarding. Hoarding is the “persistent difficulty in discarding or parting with possession, regardless of actual value.” It is accompanied by a deep distress associated with discarding items due to a need to save them. Hoarding is estimated to affect 2.5% of the population, people from all walks of life and ages, though it is most often present in older adults. These extreme acquisitions can range from recycling to food and, in some cases, animals. Someone who has a compulsion to accumulate will fill a room until parts or all of it can no longer be used in its intended capacity. Bedrooms are so full of items that a person cannot sleep in them, or a kitchen is so cluttered that the sink or stove cannot be utilized. These conditions can pose a significant risk to the person’s health and physical safety. As a result, hoarders tend not to let people into their homes, which can lead to their becoming more and more isolated. Having someone in their space is uncomfortable, so they keep everyone away.

While a relatively new diagnosis, research on causes and treatment are ongoing, but that doesn’t mean that there aren’t things that we can do. If you have a friend or loved one who is hoarding, talk with them about your concerns for their safety. Be empathetic and listen to what they have to say. Help them to be part of the solutions, and don’t push them away. Recovery from hoarding is a lifelong process that is measured in inches. If you are hoarding, know that you are not alone. There are resources for those ready and willing to begin the journey away from hoarding. There is a wonderful book called [Buried in Treasures](#) by Tolin, Frost, and Steketee that provides useful information for people who hoard and those who wish to support them on this journey. The International OCD Foundation is another great resource with information and lists of local support groups focused on hoarding disorders.

Since I started working on hoarding cases, I have wanted to try and do more on this subject. After several conversations about hoarding, I was happy to join BRPC’s Public Health Nurse, Sophie Carnes Jannen, for her education series on the topic. Communities are showing interest in these talks and have led to the first Buried in Treasures support group. It will be held on Mondays at the Dalton Free Library starting September 16 at 5:30 pm and running through the end of October. For more information email dalton@cwmares.org or call 413-684-6112.

For more information about hoarding resources or if you are interested in a presentation on hoarding in your town, please get in touch with me, Public Health Housing Specialist [Daniel Hassett](#), or Public Health Nurse Educator [Sophie Carnes Jannen](#).

Transportation

Opportunity to Comment on Northern Tier Rail Study

The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) has recently released a draft report on the feasibility of a proposed passenger rail service across the northern corridor of the state, connecting North Adams, Greenfield, and Boston - and possibly more. Having conducted a series of analyses to understand potential ridership and the desired level of service, MassDOT has proposed six possible

options for this new intercity rail service.

Each proposed service model has benefits and drawbacks. The Northern Tier Passenger Rail proposal represents a significant investment in rail infrastructure that will likely reshape our region's transportation network. Presently, the only way Berkshire residents can travel to Boston is via a personal vehicle or by using a chartered or public bus system.



It is expected that Berkshire County residents would benefit from the creation of a reliable and cost-effective transportation system with greater access to skilled professionals (such as medical providers, etc.), higher levels of tourism and economic activity, and increased job opportunities.

Berkshire residents are encouraged to review the [Northern Tier Passenger Rail Study](#) to gain insight into this proposed passenger service. The Study analyzes six significantly different service alternatives. BRPC strongly encourages all Berkshire residents to take advantage of this public comment period by submitting their opinions of the proposed service model(s) and identifying which one they support most.

The 60-day comment period runs through **October 12, 2024**. - please submit your comments using the [Online Comment Form](#).

Chapter 90 Local Road Funds Update

With the start of the Commonwealth's fiscal year 2025 on July 1, a new round of Chapter 90 funds is available to all municipalities for their local road maintenance needs. For Berkshire County, a total of \$7,660,532 will be distributed between our 32 communities, essentially unchanged from FY24's \$7,675,638, though different communities may see a small rise or decline. Each community's allocation is a portion of the \$200 million pool authorized by the state legislature. This pool is divided between all communities across the state using a formula that accounts for a municipality's local road mileage, population, and employment numbers.

In addition to the base Chapter 90 allocation provided for by statute, there are supplemental dollars provided by the Fair Share Amendment surtax that voters approved. While the total pool of Fair Share funds is not yet finalized for this year, MassDOT has provided a [breakdown](#) of how the funds will be allocated. One half of the pool will be distributed using the same formula as the base Chapter 90 program. The other half will be distributed solely based on a municipality's local road mileage. In FY24, the Fair Share supplement to the base Chapter 90 pool represented a 50-60% increase to most towns' and cities' maintenance budgets in the Berkshires. It is expected that a similar result will be seen this year.

With the increase in revenues available to communities in the Berkshires, there is an opportunity to tackle deferred maintenance on our infrastructure, particularly for bridges. Bridge maintenance activities such as under deck cleaning, power washing, painting, and deck resurfacing can help extend the service life of a bridge before costly replacement is needed. Activities that help prevent water from entering the substructure, such as crack sealing and drainage clearing, can be particularly beneficial. Chapter 90 and Fair Share funds may also be used to build an asset management plan and conduct an inventory for future capital spending. If you are unsure where to begin, visit MassDOT [Grant Central](#) to find resources for how to best allocate your community's Chapter 90 funds. BRPC's Transportation Planning team is also ready to assist you and answer any questions you may have.

September

2024

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2 Closed for Labor Day	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12 Executive Committee 4:00 Commission Development Committee 5:30	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24 Metropolitan Planning Organization 4:00	25 Commission 4:00 Annual Meeting & Reception 5:00	26	27	28
29	30					

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission
www.berkshireplanning.org



Berkshire Regional Planning Commission | 1 Fenn St., Suite 201 | Pittsfield, MA 01201 US

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