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**A Newsletter for Community Planning in the Berkshire Region**

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**Upcoming BRPC Meetings**

- [BRPC Executive Committee Meeting - November 7th at 4 pm](#)
- [BRPC Commission Meeting - November 21 at 6 pm \(Hybrid\)](#)
- [BRPC Executive Committee Meeting - December 5 at 4 pm](#)

**BRPC Employment Opportunities**

- [Public Health Planner or Senior Planner for Substance Misuse Disorders](#)
  - [Public Health Community Social Worker](#)
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***Happy Halloween!!!***

*It's a treat to work with this crew, especially when they get dressed up and hand out candy to everyone in the office!*



*Left to Right: Jaymie Zapata and Marie Brady, Public Health Program, Ryan Griffis and Nick Russo, Transportation Program, Krystal Bartley, Administration Program*

**Agency Accolades**



BRPC was honored to receive a "Vanguard Visionary Award" from the [Blackshires Community Empowerment Foundation](#) at the recent graduation ceremony for the 2024 Blackshires Leadership Accelerator Program. The award honors those whose foresight and commitment have paved the way for the program's success and celebrates their role as early believers and foundational supporters. [Congratulations to the 2024 cohort, who each received \\$2,000 to support their projects and businesses.](#) That morning, Blackshires also received an Urban Agenda grant of \$100,000 to support the continuation of the Leadership Accelerator Program.

## Grant Opportunities

### 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.**

### EOHLC - Winter 2025 Affordable Housing Competition for Rental Projects

The Executive Office of Housing & Livable Communities has announced a winter 2025 affordable housing competition for rental projects. Through this NOFA, HLC will fund hundreds of new affordable rental units and help preserve existing affordable units, carefully evaluating the applications' green, carbon-reducing, sustainable, and climate-resilient aspects. HLC will set aside up to \$5 million in subsidy funds for rural projects that meet all the program's criteria.

Eligible applicants include municipalities in partnership with for-profit or non-profit developers. More information about program eligibility and other specific guidelines can be found [HERE](#).

Pre-applications are due November 25th, 2024, and must be submitted using HLC's online system:

<https://massonestopplus.intelligrants.com>

Only projects with November 2024 pre-application approvals will be considered during the winter 2025 competition. Final applications will be due on February 27th, 2025.

### 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**.

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### Community Compact Grant Programs

[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.

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### 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](#).

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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).

## Events & Announcements

### STEPS Initiative - presentation and public input session - November 6 @ 6:00 pm

BRPC's Transportation Planning team invites Berkshire residents to a hybrid meeting at the **Berkshire Innovation Center on Wednesday, November 6th at 6 pm** to provide input on the "STEPS Initiative" (Safe Travel & Equity Plan for our Streets). At the meeting, the planning team will present background information about the need for this study and data gathered over the course of plan development. The team will then review draft recommendations for future safety projects and programs to address the concerns identified. Berkshire residents are then invited to review the draft report and provide feedback during the comment window through December 2.

To participate in the 11/6 meeting virtually, please pre-register via Zoom:

[https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_byWGtMXERVG\\_SFoaBtBcKQ#/registration](https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_byWGtMXERVG_SFoaBtBcKQ#/registration)

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### EOED webinar - Launching Successful Pop-Ups in Your Downtown - November 12 @ noon

The retail landscape in downtown districts has changed since the impact of the pandemic. The strategic use of pop-ups gained traction as a way to revitalize communities and downtowns with fresh concepts while supporting local brands ready to test drive brick-and-mortar spaces.

Since 2021, twelve municipalities in the Boston area have utilized grant funding to activate 20+ storefronts through Project: Pop-Up.

Join MA Downtown Initiative/EOED, in partnership with the Project: Pop-Up team, to hear stories

and insights from both brand founders and municipal leaders who have participated in grant-funded programs and learn how you can launch a successful pop-up in your downtown.

Register in advance: <https://www.thepopupplaybook.com/registration-page>

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### Federal Funds & Infrastructure Office (FFIO) visit to the Berkshires - November 18th @1pm

FFIO has issued guidance related to the [recently signed legislation](#) making state funding available, which aims to make federal grant applications more competitive. [Download FAQs](#) about how funds will be made available and the online form to request matching funds.

The MA Federal Funds and Infrastructure Office (FFIO) has launched a series of community events to introduce its office and share resources available to support cities and towns in their pursuit of federal funding. This community tour aims to foster collaboration and engagement, and FFIO is eager to hear from you and answer your questions about federal funding opportunities.

You are invited to meet with FFIO on November 18 at 1 PM at the Berkshire Innovation Center. We will be joined by Anne Gobi, MA Director of Rural Affairs, Maria Belen Power, Undersecretary of Environmental Justice and Equity, and representatives from Massachusetts DOT.

Register for the November 18th event [HERE](#).



# FEDERAL FUNDS & INFRASTRUCTURE OFFICE (FFIO)



## COMMUNITY TOUR

1:00  PM | 18 NOV  2024

Come meet the FFIO team, learn about our office, and how our resources can help your community.



 BERKSHIRE INNOVATION CENTER  
**PITTSFIELD**  
& ZOOM

**RSVP**



Questions? Email us at:  
[fedfundsinfra@mass.gov](mailto:fedfundsinfra@mass.gov)

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 - Virtual Session**

To attend this Zoom session, please register [HERE](#).

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**[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

### Lanesborough developing its first Comprehensive Plan

The Lanesborough Planning Board is working with BRPC to create its first Comprehensive Plan. The Board spent several months creating a public interest survey that will inform the goals and actions of the plan. The survey, which opened on August 1st, asked residents to weigh in on a variety of issues. The survey was open to both residents and businesses and sought feedback on what residents like about the community as well as priorities for public investment, housing, parks, and zoning changes. To date, the survey had received more than 320 responses. Public outreach occurred through a variety of means including articles in the Berkshire Eagle and on iBerkshires.com, e-mail outreach through Town Hall, reminders on Facebook groups, flyers at local businesses, and announcements at various town board and committee meetings. A public forum is planned for December 2nd at Lanesborough Elementary School to discuss the results of the survey. The Planning Board will work through the winter to draft an implementation plan and present it to the community in the Spring of 2025.

## Community Development & Housing

### 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 \(toapply.org\)](#).**

## Economic Development

### NEW Digital Resource Guide

BRPC has created a downloadable [Digital Resource Guide](#) focused on the digital needs of Berkshire County residents of all ages. In addition to those specifically listed, all Berkshire County libraries offer free internet access, and some lend laptops, tablets, or Wi-Fi hotspots to card holders. Senior centers may also run occasional computer classes or offer individual tech support. Check with your local library or senior center for details.



### Massachusetts 250 website and field guide

On September 17th, Constitution Day, Governor Healey officially kicked off the Massachusetts 250 campaign on the steps in front of the Massachusetts State House. As we approach the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution in 2025, the Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism (MOTT) will encourage visitors and residents to participate in events, reenactments, and celebrations highlighting the state's revolutionary history.

The website [www.massachusetts250.org](http://www.massachusetts250.org) serves as the front door for all semi-quincentennial events. **Your community's events and attractions can be added directly to the website** - include a photo or image to be listed.

The [MA250 Field Guide](#) provides information about how organizations and communities can engage with MA250. It includes implementing tours and trails, Revolutionary Weekends, educational programs, MA250 logo guidelines, MA250 Themes, and a 1774-1776 Timeline of the Revolution in Massachusetts.

[Sign up for the MA250 Industry Newsletter](#) to receive information about available grants related to the celebration.

### 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](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

### Western Massachusetts Regional MVP Unpaved Roads Project Gets Underway

The [Western Massachusetts Regional MVP Unpaved Roads Project](#) will bring together BRPC, Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG), Pioneer Valley Planning Commission and partner towns of Lanesborough, Shutesbury, Blandford, and Goshen to further develop [FRCOG's Unpaved Roads Stormwater Management Toolkit \(Toolkit\)](#). Lanesborough, as the lead applicant, was awarded \$432,096 by the Healey-Driscoll Administration's Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) program, administered by the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA). These competitive MVP Action grants help communities identify climate hazards, develop strategies to improve resilience, and implement priority actions to adapt to climate change. Lanesborough's project is one of 71 to receive action grant funding this fiscal year.

In Berkshire County, there are several towns where more than half their roads are unpaved. Climate change is increasing the costs of unpaved road maintenance due to lengthier and multiple mud seasons causing eroded and washed-out roads. In addition, eroded sediment can detrimentally impact our rivers and streams, especially those with native cold-water fish species such as brook trout. The Western Mass Regional Unpaved Roads project will provide DPW staff with the ability to complete assessments of vulnerable unpaved road segments and identify and implement recommended improvements with materials and equipment generally on hand. In the upcoming months, BRPC will perform a GIS vulnerability assessment for each municipality's unpaved road infrastructure, updating the Toolkit to ensure that it fully considers climate change and test it out with the DPW staff in the partner towns. A "Dirt Road Coalition" formed for this

project with members from municipal DPW staff, Mass DOT, Mass DER, and additional stakeholders will provide input and expertise. If you enjoy talking to people and would like to assist with outreach such as recording residents' unpaved road experiences, please contact us. We will compensate you for your time. Please contact [adixon@berkshireplanning.org](mailto:adixon@berkshireplanning.org).

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## Two FREE online Culvert Conditions Assessment Training opportunities: Nov. 7th and 13th

Many of our road-stream crossings are either “undersized,” resulting in erosion, flooding, or washouts, or are “perched” and prevent fish passage. The Culvert Conditions Assessment protocol provides a non-technical rapid assessment to help identify which road-stream crossings need repair and prioritize culvert replacement.

These sessions are instructed by Scott Jackson, a UMass Extension Associate Professor and leader in the development of road-stream crossing standards and assessment survey protocols. Learn about the issues with current road-stream crossings, especially in the face of climate change. Develop the knowledge and tools needed to assess your municipality's culverts. Participants who complete the training will be certified Lead Observers for the North Atlantic Aquatic Connectivity Culvert Conditions Module. For more information contact [adixon@berkshireplanning.org](mailto:adixon@berkshireplanning.org).

Register for the Thursday, November 7th, 1-3:30 pm session [HERE](#).  
Register for the Wednesday, November 13th, 6-8:30 pm session [HERE](#).

*Funding provided by the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) Municipal Vulnerability Program (MVP). These trainings are offered as part of the Lanesborough Regional MVP Action Grant, the Western Massachusetts Unpaved Roads project.*

## Public Health

### A Discussion on Vaccinations

Vaccinations as a concept are nothing new. Crude vaccination methods have been used since as early as the 15th century, and after centuries of progress, we have successfully eradicated smallpox and rinderpest. Eradicating other diseases, including polio and measles, are within sight as well. So with the astounding feats vaccinations have achieved, and with more in sight, why are vaccines still met with opposition?

Anti-vaccination movements have been around since the first vaccines were introduced and are still here today. Many conspiracies exist to promote anti-vax ideas, such as vaccinations changing your DNA or causing autism. This may sound farfetched, but these ideas are rooted in human nature. Considering the idea of being injected with a piece of a virus, it is understandable to initially perceive it as a danger, or at least be skeptical of it.

These feelings can be seen in the data; within Berkshire County for the 2023-2024 season, the highest municipality-level vaccination coverage was 48.6% for flu and 37% for COVID-19. County-wide, 38.9% and 24.6% of residents are vaccinated for influenza and COVID-19, respectively. While these are sizable proportions of the county, we still have much ground to cover to reach higher levels of vaccination in order to bolster our herd immunity. Increasing amounts of vaccinated people translates to increasing chances of a virus hitting a dead end and being unable to continue spreading.

Berkshire Public Health Alliance helps to curb anti-vax ideas and provide the resources necessary to access vaccines by conducting influenza and COVID-19 clinics and making them as available to the public as possible. Our combined effort with Southern Berkshire Public Health Collaborative and the City of Pittsfield Health Department offers clinics across the county to ease transportation constraints, and our vaccinations are available to anyone over the age of 6 months. BPHA alone has already administered hundreds of vaccinations this season, and there are still clinics available through November. A calendar of all available clinics with date, time, and location can be found online at Get Vaccinated Berkshires.

Get Vaccinated Berkshires: <https://getvaccinatedberkshires.org/>



## Transportation

### Public Review and Comment Period opening for Safe Streets and Roads for All Action Plan

The Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) federal funding program is bringing resources to Berkshire County to reduce serious injuries and fatalities on our roads, with the goal of reaching zero. Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) has been developing the STEPS Initiative: the Safe Travel and Equity Plan for our Streets. From November 4 until December 2, the draft Action Plan will be available for public review and comment. A final Action Plan document is planned for release in January 2025.

The draft document will be available to download starting on November 4 on the Berkshire STEPS Initiative website, [www.berkshiresteps.org](http://www.berkshiresteps.org). Members of the public can submit electronic comments using a form integrated into the website, or by contacting the project manager, Nicholas Russo, at [nrusso@berkshireplanning.org](mailto:nrusso@berkshireplanning.org) or (413) 442-1521 x19.

Project staff and our consultation partners at BETA Group, Inc. will also be holding a hybrid public information meeting to kick off the comment period on **Wednesday, November 6 at 6:00 pm at the Berkshire Innovation Center (45 Woodlawn Ave, Pittsfield)**. If you would like to attend the meeting virtually, you must register in advance [here](#). At the meeting, staff will present an overview of the Action Plan development and findings, share the top-recommended safety projects and programs, and provide an opportunity for questions and comments.

Work on the SS4A initiative will continue in the coming years after the completion of the Action Plan. Ongoing public outreach and annual reporting on the progress toward safety goals will be carried out, along with future Implementation grant applications to construct or otherwise implement safety projects and programs recommended in the Action Plan.

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### West Stockbridge Complete Streets grant award announced

On October 29th, it was announced that West Stockbridge has been awarded \$112,611 in implementation funding by MassDOT to improve their roadways as part of the Complete Streets Program, which aims to “make travel safe, comfortable, convenient, and accessible for people of all ages, abilities, and travel modes.” West Stockbridge will use the funding to improve their Village Center, which consists of Main Street, Swamp Road, and the Depot Street Parking Lot. As one of the few dozen communities to be selected as Complete Street grant recipients, this funding will help improve safety, spur economic development, and foster a more vibrant area for community gatherings.

As the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for Berkshire County, BRPC is pleased to provide a range of transportation-related services to its constituent communities and organizations. Any municipality seeking to apply for Complete Streets or any state or federal grant funding is encouraged to contact us for assistance with their application.

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





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