



A Newsletter for Community Planning in the Berkshire Region

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Upcoming BRPC Meetings

- [Comprehensive Economic Development Committee \(CEDS\) Meeting](#) - Jan. 15 at 1 pm
- [Commission Meeting](#) - January 16 at 7 pm
- [Finance Committee Meeting](#) - January 23 at 4 pm
- [Executive Committee Meeting](#) - February 6 at 4 pm

BRPC Employment Opportunity

- [Public Health Planner/Senior Planner \(Emergency Preparedness\)](#)
- [Public Health Training Specialist](#)
- [Public Health Community Social Worker](#)
- [Outdoor Recreation Internships](#)



Noé González Ortiz joined BRPC as a Public Health Planner in December. Noé is a bilingual (Spanish and English) professional with a BBA in Computer Information Systems and extensive experience in community outreach, public health, and data management. He has worked across diverse roles including DEI Coordination, Individual & family support, and marketing.

Noé is passionate about family advocacy, improving community services, supporting public health and DEIB initiatives. Noé enjoys spending his downtime tending his small farm, creating art, and writing on his vintage typewriters. Welcome Noé at ngonzalezortiz@berkshireplanning.org.

Grant Opportunities

Volunteer Fire Capacity (VFC) Program

Through the USDA Forest Service's VFC program, the Bureau is enabled to issue grants and materials to towns with a population of less than 10,000. This program provides technical, financial, and other assistance to fire departments for forest fire-related purposes. Small towns have received training, Class A foam, personal protective gear, forestry tools, and other fire suppression equipment.

Applications are due January 10, 2025. Learn more on the [program webpage](#).

Enhancing Resilience and Emergency Preparedness Through Improved Mapping



The [Water Utility Resilience Program \(WURP\)](#) supports local drinking water and wastewater utilities in their efforts to prepare for climate change. The Program is a collaborative effort across MassDEP to improve the availability of map products from water utilities.

WURP released a Request for Information (RFI) to identify and collect information from publicly-owned/operated Public Water Systems (PWS) and publicly-owned treatment works (POTWs) interested and ready to receive GIS mapping services. This effort aims to ensure that all public water utilities have accurate maps of their respective systems to enhance asset management, improve system operations and resiliency, and plan for and respond to emergencies. COMMBUYS posting: [BD-25-1045-BPE00-BPE01-110888](#). The RFI closes on January 17, 2025.

Mass Save's Municipal Energy Manager Grant

The Municipal Energy Manager (MEM) Grant helps municipalities hire a dedicated resource to manage their energy use, become more energy efficient, and reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from facilities, with a particular focus on K-12 school buildings.

Eversource and National Grid are offering this grant, which is open to communities served by either or both Sponsors.

Applications are accepted through January 31, 2025. Learn more on the [program's webpage](#).

EOEEA Drought Resiliency & Water Efficiency Grant Program

Did you know that since 2016, seven of the last nine years have seen multiple months of drought? These drought periods can strain water supplies and habitats and increase fire risks. To help communities address these challenges, the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) is offering grants of up to \$50,000 (and potentially more) for projects that reduce water use, improve drought resiliency, or enhance planning. Funding can cover professional services, software, training, public outreach, equipment, and incentives for water-saving devices. The deadline to apply is January 31st, 2025.

Eligible Projects:

- Leak detection and metering upgrades
- Water conservation programs and rebate initiatives
- Drought-resilient landscaping and irrigation efficiency
- Local drought management plans

A virtual information session for interested applicants will be held January 8, 2025. Registration is required at the following link: <https://zoom.us/meeting/register/tJYvfu6gpjsuHtfyiEiK-ajogQ1On-W1oEXy>

Visit the [COMMBUYS - Bid Solicitation](#) for more information.

[MassTrails Grant](#)

[MassTrails](#) provides grants for recreational trails and shared-use pathway

projects. The award maximum is generally \$100,000 for recreational trails and up to \$500,000 for shared-use path projects. Eligible activities include project development, design, engineering, permitting, construction, and maintenance of recreational trails, shared-use pathways, and the amenities that support trails. MassTrails grants are REIMBURSEMENT grants and MATCHING grants that require proponents to provide a minimum of 20% of the total project cost.



Applications are due by Monday, February 3, 2025 by 11:59 pm. [Learn more](#)

National Endowment for the Arts - Grants for Arts Projects (GAP) program

Grants for Arts Projects (GAP) provides funding for public engagement with the arts and arts education, for the integration of the arts with strategies promoting the health and well-being of people and communities, and for the improvement of overall capacity and capabilities within the arts sector. Units of state or local government, especially those with least 3 years of arts programming prior to the application deadline (state-designated Cultural Districts!) are eligible for this program, as well as non-profit 501c3 organizations.

Application Part 1 due February 13, Part 2 due February 26. Learn more on [NEA's website](#).

Community Wildfire Defense Grants (CWDG) help communities and Tribes plan for and reduce wildfire risk and implement the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy.

Launched in 2022, the \$1 billion five-year competitive grant program funded by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law prioritizes communities that are in an area identified as having high or very high wildfire hazard potential, are low-income, OR, have been impacted by a severe disaster within the previous 10 years that increased wildfire risk and/or hazard.

Funds can be used to:

- Develop and revise Community Wildfire Protection Plans
- Implement projects described in a Community Wildfire Protection Plan that are less than ten years old.

Applications are due on February 28, 2025. Learn more [on the program's webpage](#).

Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund (MPPF)

The MPPF is a state-funded 50% reimbursable matching grant program established in 1984 to support the preservation of properties, landscapes, and sites (cultural resources) listed in the State Register of Historic Places. Applicants must be municipalities or nonprofit organizations.

The application deadline is March 14, 2025. Learn more on the [MHC website](#).

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.

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.

Events & Announcements

Upcoming Citizen Planner Training Collaborative Workshops

Citizen Planner Training Collaborative (CPTC) training workshops will continue through mid-January. Sessions cost \$35 each.

Special Permits and Variances

Wednesday, January 8 at 5:30 pm

[Learn more and register](#)

Writing Reasonable and Defensible Decisions

Monday, January 13 at 6 pm

[Learn more and register](#)

[Foundations of Substance Use and Harm Reduction](#)

Join Berkshire Community College and MassHire Berkshire Career Center for a **FREE** workshop to learn about addiction, substance use recovery and the insight needed to benefit employees, businesses and the broader community. Join instructors who provide strategies on how to reduce stigma, support recovery and foster healthier workplaces.

Feb. 10, 2025, 9 a.m. - 1 p.m., St James Place

Feb. 11, 2025, noon - 4 p.m., Berkshire innovation Center

Instructors: Sarah DeJesus, Berkshire Harm Reduction Program Manager and Pam Cooley McCann, Licensed Clinical Social Worker. Interpreter services available for all sessions.

Massachusetts Housing Partnership - 18th Housing Institute

MHP's 18th Housing Institute will be held on June 4 & 5, 2025 at the DCU Convention Center in Worcester. This intensive two-day training engages participants in discussion and problem-solving activities related to the development of affordable homes across Massachusetts.

The conference will be in person at the DCU Center's Convention Center. More information can be found on the [Housing Toolbox website](#), registration will open in April.

Community Planning

District Local Technical Assistance 2025

BRPC is soliciting eligible projects from its member communities to receive technical assistance under the 2025 District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) program. Under this program, BRPC staff provides technical assistance to communities on eligible projects at no cost to the community. [Access the full solicitation and fillable PDF application here.](#)

Applications are due no later than Friday, February 21, 2025.

Two-Year Permit Extension via the Economic Bond

Bill H.4804, An Act relative to strengthening Massachusetts' economic leadership (or what is generally referred to as the Economic Bond Bill), includes a "tolling period" that extends local development/land use-related permits for two years beyond the original date of expiration. A range of permit types are included in the legislation and applies to permits valid at any point between January 1, 2023, to January 1, 2025.

The permit extension language begins on [line 4509 of the bill, found here.](#)

Community Development & Housing

Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) draft regulations published by EOHLIC

In December, the Executive Office of Housing & Livable Communities (EOHLC) released [draft regulations](#) related to Accessory Dwelling Units.

Please read a [letter from Secretary Augustus](#), which provides an overview of the ADU Draft Regulation process. EOHLC invites stakeholders and interested community members to comment on the Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) Draft Regulations through written comments until January 10, and during a public hearing on January 10. Public comments must be submitted through an online comment form available at mass.gov/ADU.

BRPC plans to submit comments to EOHLC based on staff review and concerns shared by communities to date. Please feel free to reach out to CJ Hoss by January 8, 2025 if you wish to share any concerns: choss@berkshireplanning.org.

The Attorney General's Office recently uploaded its review and decisions related to ADU zoning amendments from throughout the Commonwealth. These decisions can be found at <https://massago.hylandcloud.com/231publicaccess/MLU.html>.

Egremont Housing Production Plan

On December 19, 2024, the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) approved the Housing Production Plan (HPP) for the Town of Egremont. BRPC worked directly with the Town's Affordable Housing Trust to put together the 68-page plan. This plan is designed to help direct the Trust's work in promoting housing development within the Town within the next five years.

Working with BRPC, the Trust outlined five goals for housing in the coming five years. They include the following:

1. **Affordable Housing:** Strive to achieve milestones toward the MGL Chapter 40B requirement of 10 percent of the Town's housing stock qualify as affordable housing.
2. **Workforce Housing:** Promote the development of workforce-centric housing options.
3. **Options for All:** Encouraging housing options for all present and potential residents of Egremont at all stages of life.
4. **Priority Properties:** Prioritize adaptive reuse and new construction on these priority properties to achieve early success in meeting housing goals and the community's housing needs.
5. **Rehabilitation:** Focus on promoting programs and funding sources that would rehabilitate or modify housing units within the community to encourage aging in place and maintenance of the existing housing stock.

These goals are supported by 18 strategies for the Trust to consider to meet these outlined goals. [Review the Egremont Housing Production Plan here](#).

If your town is interested in undertaking planning efforts toward a Housing Production Plan, please contact CJ Hoss at choss@berkshireplanning.org.

Data & Information Services

Median Household Income

Based on the latest data from the 2019-2023 US Census American Community Survey, Berkshire County's median household income is \$72,565. This income is an increase from \$69,744 in 2022, which is a rise of \$2,821 or 4.0%. However, the county still trails behind the national median income of \$78,538 and Massachusetts' median income of \$101,341, both of which grew at higher rates of 4.5% and 5.0%, respectively.

Compared to similar regions (see [Berkshire Benchmarks](#) for our eight comparable regions), Berkshire County stands out for having one of the lowest median household incomes and growth rates. Other comparable counties with similar or smaller growth rates have significantly higher incomes, while those with similar incomes have experienced more substantial growth. Within Berkshire County, the north tends to have the lowest incomes, while the south has the highest.

For more detailed information, including data by race/ethnicity, homeowners, renters, and age groups, visit [BerkshireBenchmarks.org](https://www.berkshirebenchmarks.org) under Indicators - Economy - Median Household Income.

Economic Development

Shared Economic Development Planning Services - FY26

If your community could use help pursuing economic development goals and bringing projects to fruition, BRPC's Economic Development staff can help. The Shared Economic Development Planning program allows you to access support on a part-time basis, ranging from 2-7 hours per week, or more, as needed. In past years, we have assisted with the establishment of MCC-designated Cultural Districts, conducted downtown improvement studies, provided economic conditions assessments and developed full Economic Development Plans, as well as created communications plans to improve municipal connections with their business communities.

Now is the time to connect with BRPC about securing this service for FY26.
For more information, email Laura Brennan at lbrennan@berkshireplanning.org.

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

The CEDS Committee is 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:

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

With questions, please contact Laura Brennan at lbrennan@berkshireplanning.org.

Environmental & Energy

2025-2027 Mass Save: Municipal Energy Manager Grant opportunity

Since 2022, BRPC has been working with Berkshire County communities to increase overall participation in the Mass Save program. With the Start of the New Year, a new round of the Mass Save program is about to launch, including new incentive structures for residents, small businesses, renters and landlords, and Houses of Worship. In addition to new incentives, Eversource and National Grid are supporting a three-year Municipal Energy Manager Position. This is an opportunity for individual Municipalities or groups of municipalities to apply for funding to support hiring a full-time Municipal Energy Manager. The grant is accessible to both Municipalities and Regional Planning Agencies and runs for three years. It focuses heavily on building decarbonization and energy savings, including schools. The maximum award for this opportunity is \$120,000 per year for a total of \$360,000 for the three years. This funding must be used to pay for salaries and the benefits of a staff person dedicated to the role.

More information can be found on the Mass Save website:
<https://www.masssave.com/community/municipal-energy-manager-grant>

For more information about applying with the support of BRPC or as part of a larger regional application, contact Sherdyl Fernandez-Aubert at:
sfernandez-aubert@berkshireplanning.org or 413-442-1521 x42.

Public Health

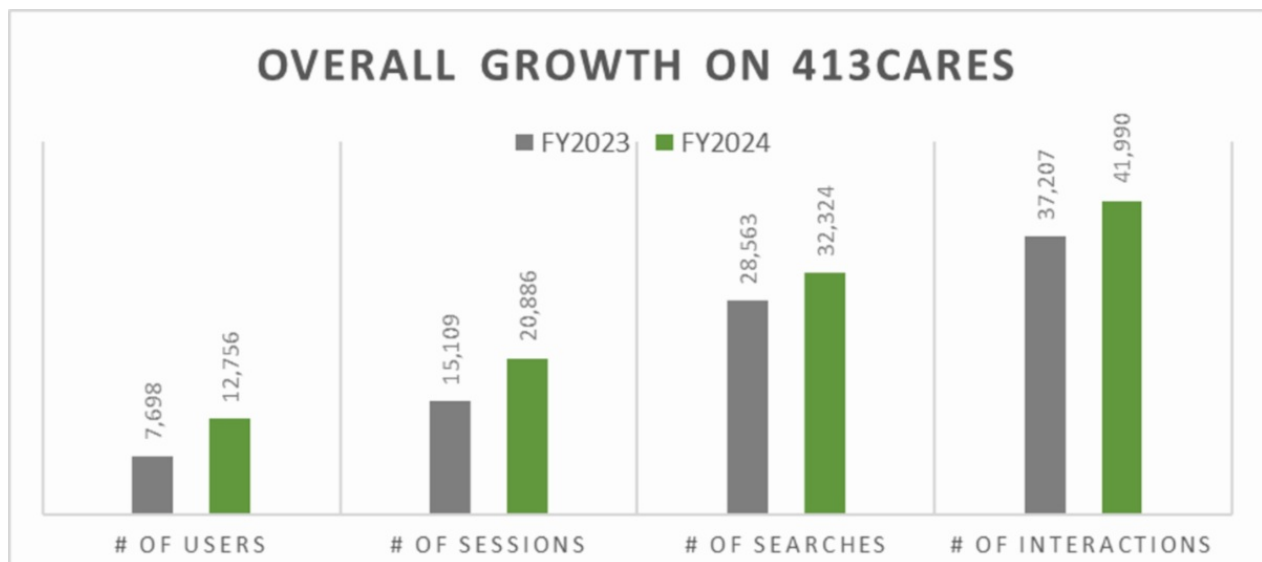
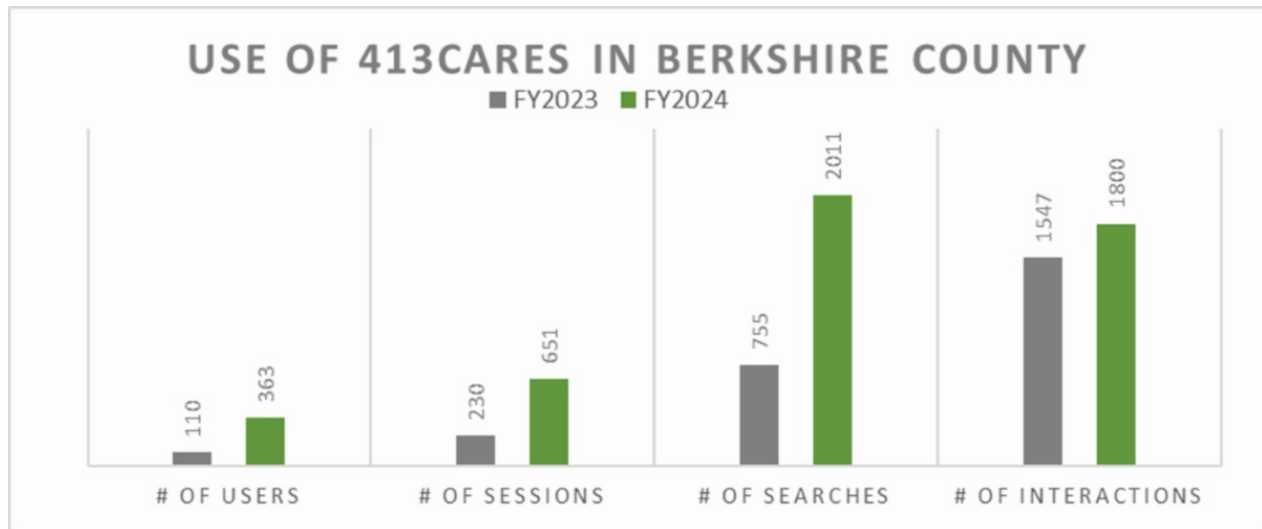
413Cares in the Berkshires

In 2023, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission joined the advisory committee of [413Cares.org](https://www.413cares.org), an initiative of the Public Health Institute of Western Massachusetts which compiles all free and reduced-cost resources in Berkshire, Hampshire, Hamden, and Franklin counties into one website. Unlike many local resource guides, which depend on volunteers or staff time to keep up to date, 413Cares is backed. As the representative agency for the Berkshires, BRPC has advocated for improved search methods that will benefit the unique

geography and needs of Berkshire residents.

In cooperation with many service agencies across the Berkshires (with a special shoutout to the Southern Berkshire Rural Health Network) BRPC has added many new resources to the website, improved searchability of existing resources, and done workshops for community groups on site navigation. In the past year, there has been a 206% increase over last year in the number of people using 413Cares to connect to beneficial programs. By the end of 2025, BRPC’s goal is to have designed a Berkshire-specific landing age built within 413Cares to make navigation even easier for our county’s residents.

Below are some graphics showing the growth of registered users, user sessions, resource searches, and website interactions in Berkshire County and 413Cares overall.



Transportation

New Evening Pilot Paratransit Service

The Berkshire Regional Transit Authority (BRTA) received funding from MasDOT for a pilot of evening Paratransit service through June 30, 2025. This evening pilot service is for BRTA Paratransit customers traveling to or from: Adams, North Adams, Williamstown, Cheshire, Lanesborough, New Ashford, Pittsfield, Dalton, Hinsdale, Lenox, Lee, Stockbridge, and Great Barrington, Monday - Saturday, 7 PM-10 PM. The launch date was December 18, 2024. This project aims to enhance and expand the ability of eligible BRTA Paratransit customers who require an accessible vehicle for travel in the evenings to destinations within these communities. To book transportation, please call (413) 499-2782 extension 3. For more information about this program or any other program, please contact the BRTA at info@berkshirerta.com.

Massachusetts Ranked #2 most Bicycle-Friendly State

This past December, the League of American Bicyclists released its biennial [Bicycle Friendly America scorecard](#), which ranked Massachusetts at #2 in the nation. The report assesses how states are doing in key areas of bicycle-friendly practices and policies. After attaining the top spot in the previous 2022 rankings, the Commonwealth relinquished its crown this year to Washington state.

Despite dropping one place in the rankings, Massachusetts saw improvement in the legislative arena with the passage of the 4-foot passing law for all public roads. The Commonwealth continues to enjoy a robust Complete Streets program, speed limit policy options for towns and cities, and received particular praise for the Shared Streets and Spaces Program, which has distributed \$50 million to 183 municipalities, according to the League's publication. Massachusetts earned the #1 ranking in the Every Ride Counts category, pointing to a concerted effort to gather data about cycling in the Commonwealth.

We know that not all benefits that comprise a top cycling state like Massachusetts are shared equally. It will take more work to help more residents feel as though they are living in the #2 bicycle-friendly state. BRPC is excited to continue partnering with Safe Routes to Schools and the Complete Streets program to bring these benefits to Berkshire County. Continued development of the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail and on-road cycling facilities will also be seen in the coming years. We also look forward to the adoption of the regional Comprehensive Safety Action Plan and further study of implementing a bike-share system in the region. Thank you for your continued support of these efforts.

Do you want to play a part in implementing the Safety Action Plan and making Western Mass more bike-friendly? Apply to join the Vision Zero Working Group this January to help us reach the goal of zero fatalities and serious injuries on the road. Learn more [on the Berkshire County STEPS website](#).

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission
www.berkshireplanning.org



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

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