



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

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BRPC

#### Berkshire Regional Planning Commission's Values

BRPC has been actively collaborating with 32 rural and urban communities since 1966 to address regional challenges, opportunities, and assets. We are proud of this work and grateful for your ongoing partnership. Our Commission is made up of delegates from each municipality's planning board, and supported by a team of dedicated staff from a broad range of personal and professional backgrounds.

In January of 2017, Commission members adopted a set of values that guide our work, along with our longstanding mission. They are to:

- Enhance the Berkshires' human, environmental, and developed resources, including its sense of place and built heritage.
- Provide the highest quality information and analysis as the basis for our work.
- Actively seek, engage, and respect varying voices to ensure all viewpoints are considered prior to reaching decisions or providing guidance.
- Engage diverse people, organizations, and interests within and outside Berkshire County who can effect change in the region.
- Balance competing public interests.
- Nurture and rely upon partnerships and collaborations to provide optimal outcomes.
- Be responsive and open to change and innovation.
- Respect the contributions of staff, community members, and organizations.
- Act with integrity and the highest ethical standards.

We remain committed to realizing those values today.

Thomas Matuszko, Executive Director

[Read BRPC's full Mission, Vision, and Values statement online.](#)

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission affirms these values in 2025 and extends sincere appreciation for the ongoing support of our delegates, alternates, staff, and partners throughout Berkshire County and beyond in striving to realize these values in our work.

For more information or with questions, please contact Executive Director, [Tom Matuszko](#)

#### Upcoming BRPC Meetings

- [Regional Issues Committee](#) - February 5 at 3:30 pm
- [Executive Committee Meeting](#) - February 6 at 4 pm
- [Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization](#) - February 25 at 4 pm

#### BRPC Employment Opportunities

- [Public Health Planner/Senior Planner \(Emergency Preparedness\)](#)
- [Public Health Training Specialist](#)
- [Outdoor Recreation Internships](#)
- [Youth Prevention & Mental Health Internship](#)

- [Northern County Community Outreach Specialists](#)
- [Central County Community Outreach Specialists](#)

The specialists focus on reducing personal and systemic substance use-related risks for three priority communities: BIPOC community members, Spanish-speakers, and young adults (18-25) not engaged in full-time college.

## Grant Opportunities

### Community One Stop for Growth Portal Open

The fiscal year 2026 application portal for the Community One Stop for Growth, which provides a streamlined process for municipalities and organizations to apply for 12 state economic development grant programs, is open.



Programs in One Stop offer direct funding and support to housing and economic development projects related to community activation and placemaking, planning and zoning, site preparation, building construction, and infrastructure.

One Stop has added two existing state economic development programs to the application portal: the Vacant Storefront Program and the TDI Equity Investment Program. The [Vacant Storefront Program](#), administered by EOED, offers municipalities access to up to \$50,000 of refundable tax credits they can use to incentivize businesses to occupy vacant storefronts within the community's downtown and commercial areas. The TDI Equity Investment Program, administered by MassDevelopment through its [Transformative Development Initiative](#) (TDI), provides grants ranging from \$25,000 to \$250,000 to breathe new life into commercial spaces in and around designated TDI Districts in Gateway Cities.

Municipalities and organizations wishing to apply for funding through the One Stop may begin by participating in an optional Expression of Interest process now through March 26th. During this time, applicants may receive guidance on priority projects from EOED staff before submitting a full application. Applicants may begin working on their applications now in the [application portal](#); EOED will accept full application submissions from May 5th through June 4th, with awards announced in the fall. For more information and to learn how to apply, please visit [www.mass.gov/onestop](http://www.mass.gov/onestop).

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### 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 on February 26.** Learn more on [NEA's website](#).

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

The \$1 billion five-year competitive grant program 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 Community Wildfire Protection Plan projects that are less than ten years old

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

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## Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund (MPPF)

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

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

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## The Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) Announces (FEMA) Hazard Mitigation Assistance Programs

The first step in applying for these programs is to complete a “Statement of Interest (SOI).”

[Statement of Interest - Construction Projects](#)

[Statement of Interest - Planning, Scoping, Capability & Capacity Building](#)

The FEMA Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) and the Massachusetts State Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for each of the three (3) programs can be found at the following links:

FY 2024 BRIC: [\(FEMA NOFO\)](#) [\(MA State NOFO\)](#)

FY 2024 FMA: [\(FEMA NOFO\)](#) [\(MA State NOFO\)](#)

HMGP 4780: [\(MA State NOFO\)](#)

Important deadlines:

- ASAP - Register for the FEMA GO [application portal](#)
  - 2/10/2025 - Statement of Interest due (required for all projects)
  - 2/24/2025 - Draft BCA due (required for construction projects only)
  - 3/10/2025 - Final subapplications due in FEMA GO
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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 6th to noon on February 6. 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 10th to noon on April 10th.

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

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## Mass Broadband Institute (MBI) Re-opening Municipal Digital Equity Planning Program

The Digital Equity Planning Program enables municipalities to engage in planning activities related to bridging the digital divide, identifying needs, interests, and key assets, and providing a framework to guide investments to increase access to and usage of the internet. The program offers two options, a short-term planning charrette or a longer-term Digital Equity Plan process. You can [learn more and view completed plans](#) on the MBI website.

BRPC is a pre-qualified consultant with strong experience in Digital Equity Plans. We would be happy to work with the remaining eligible communities: Alford, Egremont, Hancock, Hinsdale, Mt. Washington, New Ashford, Peru, Richmond, Sandisfield, Savoy, Tyringham, and Williamstown.

Applications are first come, first served through April 25. Funding is limited and will likely be depleted before the final due date. Contact Senior Planner [Wylie Goodman](#) for assistance.

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**BERKSHIRE**  
Funding Focus

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

## Events & Announcements



### BEAD Deployment Program Launched - January 2025

The Deployment Phase of the BEAD program will fund infrastructure projects that will connect the remaining Broadband Serviceable Locations (BSLs) that are unserved (below a 25/3 mbps threshold), and underserved (below a 100/20 mbps threshold). Learn more about BEAD Deployment on the [MBI website](#).

If your community has any questions about the BEAD deployment phase, please contact Senior Planner [Wylie Goodman](#), 413.442.1521 x16.

### Foundations of Substance Use and Harm Reduction

**FREE** workshop to learn about addiction, substance use recovery and the insight needed to benefit employees, businesses and the broader community. Learn strategies on how to reduce stigma, support recovery and foster healthier workplaces.

Feb. 10, 2025, 9 am - 1 pm, St James Place

Feb. 11, 2025, noon - 4 pm, Berkshire innovation Center

### 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. More information 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 Friday, February 21, 2025.

### ADA Self Evaluation and Transition Plans

BRPC is working with four communities on developing ADA Self Evaluation and Transition plans to assist towns in ensuring goods and services are available to people with disabilities. Of note, the Department of Justice (DOJ) issued a new rule in April 2024 requiring towns to make their web and mobile applications accessible by following the technical standards outlined in WCAG 2.1.

The work could involve working with website developers, vendors, and developing policies and training for staff responsible for creating content so towns should begin the process soon. [Click this link to read the Department of Justice's fact sheet about the new rule](#).

The DOJ requires towns with a population of more than 50,000 people to comply by April 24, 2026, and smaller towns by April 26, 2027. Earlier this month, the DOJ issued a new resource to guide communities in taking the first steps toward compliance. ["State and Local Governments: First Steps Toward Complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act Title II Web and Mobile Application Accessibility Rule."](#)

## Community Development & Housing

### Accessory Dwelling Units Update

The Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EoHLC) released its final version of regulations for accessory dwelling units. The regulations are effective as of January 31, 2025. For those following the progression of the regulations from the previous draft form, the website also contains a redlined final version that tracks the recent changes.

<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/accessory-dwelling-units#adu-regulations->

The Attorney General's Office continues to release decisions regarding accessory dwelling unit bylaws via their searchable database:

<https://massago.hylandcloud.com/231publicaccess/MLU.html>

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### Assessing Pittsfield's Affordable Housing and Community Development Needs

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission is assisting the City of Pittsfield in preparing its 2025-2029 Consolidated Plan, which will determine how the City will allocate its Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds for the next five years.

The Consolidated Plan is designed to help states and local jurisdictions assess their affordable housing and community development needs and market conditions and to make data-driven, place-based investment decisions. The consolidated planning process serves as the framework for a community-wide dialogue to identify housing and community development priorities that align and focus funding from the CPD formula block grant programs.

To engage the entire community in this critical conversation, the City is holding a public hearing on Wednesday, February 26, 2025, at 6 pm at the Berkshire Athenaeum (1 Wendell Ave.) to gather input on the City's greatest priority needs that can be addressed with CDBG funds.

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### Home Modification Loan Program funding available for ADU Construction



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 changes needed to keep disabled or elderly family members in their own homes. This includes the construction of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) for needs such as the housing of home healthcare services or relocation of a parent or child for day-to-day care.

For property owners, 0% interest loans range between \$1,000 and \$50,000. No monthly payments are required, with repayment 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. For more information, please visit [www.cedac.org/hmlp](http://www.cedac.org/hmlp) or contact Brett Roberts at [HMLP@berkshireplanning.org](mailto:HMLP@berkshireplanning.org).

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### BRPC Completes Two Housing Reports in South County

BRPC's Community Planning team is wrapping up two District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA)-funded projects in Monterey and New Marlborough. The DLTA funds allowed Planning Boards to complete a six-month-long analysis of their housing policies related to zoning, property taxes, and potential financing options, among other items of interest. This culminated in a report tailored for each community along with a priority list of housing-related action steps.

With reports finalized, both communities elected to complete a public engagement process including a survey on housing topics and a public hearing to discuss potential next steps.

Monterey Housing Survey ([link](#))



Public Hearing: Saturday, February 8 @ 9 am, Monterey Library (452 Main Road)

New Marlborough Housing Survey ([link](#))

Public Hearing: Wednesday, February 12 @ 6 pm, Town Hall (807 Mill River Southfield Road)

If your community would like to discuss potential housing reports or actions your community could take on housing, please contact Senior Planner [Brett Roberts](#).

## Data & Information Services

### Income Inequality (GINI)

Income inequality, or the GINI coefficient, is a way to examine income distribution within a geographic area. According to the U.S. Census American Community Survey 2023 data, Berkshire County's income inequality has continued to rise since 2020, meaning that higher-income individuals earn a larger percentage of the population's total income. Areas with a higher coefficient tend to see increased poverty and reduced economic growth. These areas can also see increased health disparities and decreased social mobility.

Comparing Berkshire County to the U.S., Massachusetts, and other comparable counties, the Berkshires have a higher GINI coefficient, meaning that we are more unequal than other areas. Within Berkshire County, the coefficient is higher in many of the southern communities, while the lower coefficients tend to be in many of the hill towns.

For more data on income inequality, visit [BerkshireBenchmarks.org](#) under Indicators - Economy - Income Inequality.

## 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, please contact Assistant Director & Economic Development Manager [Laura Brennan](#) at 413.442.1521 x14.

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### 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](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CEDS_Priority_Projects_FY25)

Contact Assistant Director & Economic Development Manager [Laura Brennan](#) with questions.

## Environmental & Energy

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

The [Western Massachusetts Regional MVP Unpaved Roads Project](#) is continuing to further develop [FRCOG's Unpaved Roads Stormwater Management Toolkit \(Toolkit\)](#) with its partners Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG), and Pioneer Valley

Planning Commission with partner towns, Lanesborough, Shutesbury, Blandford, and Goshen. This toolkit is designed to support DPW staff and identify best management practices to reduce erosion and other impacts on unpaved roads. This is a year-long Municipal Vulnerability Regional Action project.

As part of community engagement, BRPC seeks input from any Berkshire County residents who live on unpaved roads or drive them regularly. BRPC welcomes residents to enter observed issues on the online interactive dirt road problems map by visiting this link <https://tinyurl.com/Dirt-Road-Problems>. If an unpaved road issue is encountered or if there is knowledge of a long-standing issue, residents can pinpoint the problem on the map and describe the concern. Please post this link on your website and in any town news. Input is welcome until April 30.

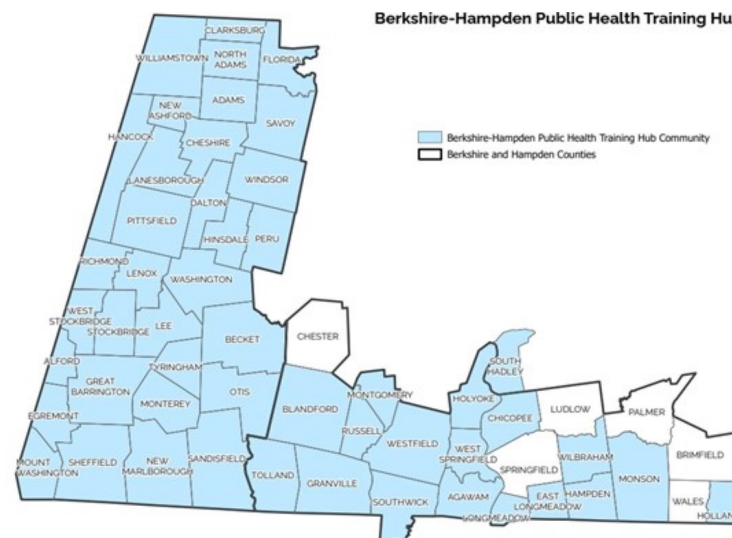


The information gathered will increase BRPC's ability to assist the towns effectively and may support a larger conversation about Berkshire County's need to maintain safe, unpaved roads. If you want BRPC to attend a Select Board meeting to discuss this project and provide more information, please contact Senior Planner [Alison Dixon](#).

## Public Health

### Reflection on My Experience as a Trainer for Conducting Tier 3 Food Applied Practice [Monasia Ceasar](#), Public Health Project Specialist Trainer/ Inspector

The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission hosts one of ten training hubs across the state, as designated by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) Office of Local and Regional Health. The Berkshire Hampden Training Hub is responsible for providing hands-on workforce training to local public health staff in Berkshire and Hampden Counties.



The training hub program follows a comprehensive 3-tiered model that includes self-paced courses, instructor led courses, and on-site applied practice training. These training opportunities, facilitated by experienced hub trainers, cover a broad range of public and environmental health topics, helping local Boards of Health staff strengthen their skills and meet workforce standards.

In 2024, the Berkshire Regional Training Hub received authorization to facilitate the Food Tier 3 Applied Practice training for qualified health agents within our assigned regions. During these training sessions, I have had the privilege of assessing and guiding health agents as they conduct on-site food inspections, ensuring they meet the necessary competency standards while refining their skills in real-world settings.

Hands-on training is one of the most effective ways to develop and perfect any skill. The opportunity to practice in an actual environment—where theory meets reality—offers valuable learning experiences. Food inspections, which may initially seem daunting, become much more

manageable when approached in a supervised, on-site context. These training sessions allow health agents to gain practical experience and build confidence as they perform inspections in real food service establishments.

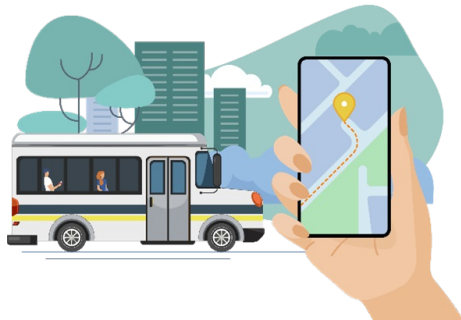
As a hub trainer, I provide assessments and guidance in a variety of areas, including inspection equipment use, knowledge of the food code, communication skills, and report writing. It has been incredibly rewarding to work alongside local health inspectors, helping them enhance their skills and improve their ability to conduct thorough, effective inspections. I am excited to continue fostering strong professional relationships with our local health agents. Together, we are working to strengthen the impact of public health professionals and the quality of food safety practices across our communities.

## Transportation

### BRPC is Kicking off a Microtransit Feasibility Study!

BRPC received a planning grant from MassDOT to conduct a Microtransit Feasibility Study for Berkshire County. Through the procurement process, BRPC has hired Foursquare, ITP, to perform the "Microtransit Feasibility Study - On Demand/Microtransit Solutions for Berkshire County." Previous studies have identified limited access to public transportation and first/last mile connections as major transportation barriers in the Berkshires. Microtransit, a shared-ride on-demand public transit service, has been explored to overcome these transportation barriers and enhance mobility.

Microtransit is a technology-enabled on-demand shared-ride public transportation that can offer flexible routes and on-demand scheduling within designated zones. It lives in the space between traditional fixed-route transit and ride-hailing technology like Uber or Lyft. It has more coverage than fixed-route service and is more responsive than traditional dial-a-ride service.



Realizing the benefits of microtransit to help meet rural transportation needs and improve the Berkshire County residents' quality of life, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission has partnered with Foursquare to explore microtransit solutions in Berkshire County.

Foursquare has started the study efforts. This study will help determine where, when, and how microtransit could operate in Berkshire County. Over the coming year, BRPC will ask for your input on the future of microtransit in the County. Stay tuned for updates about public engagement opportunities! For more information, contact [Anuja Koirala](#), Principal Transportation Planner.

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### On-Street EV Charging Program Accepting Applications

The Massachusetts Clean Energy Center (MassCEC) and Commonwealth Electrical Technologies (CET) have recently launched an **On-Street EV Charging Program** for municipalities. This program is designed to promote wide-scale EV adoption across the Commonwealth by increasing access to curbside EV charging infrastructure in Massachusetts communities, emphasizing Low Income Disadvantaged Communities (LIDAC).

Funded through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), this grant will assist municipalities in the planning process by identifying key stakeholders, proposing timelines, and estimating total project costs, as well as project implementation with installation of On-Street Charging EV



Service Equipment (EVSE) at up to three sites with 4-10 level 2 charging ports per site.

This program is 100% free to the municipalities selected for the award. Municipalities in Berkshire County are strongly encouraged to submit their application by the deadline of **Friday, February 14, 2025**, on the [MassCEC application website](#).

Any municipal official interested or considering applying may contact Environmental and Planner [Sherdyl Fernandez-Aubert](#) for assistance or any questions.

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



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