



## A Newsletter for Community Planning in the Berkshire Region

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### Upcoming BRPC Meetings

- [Executive Committee](#) - March 6 at 4 pm
- [Commission Development Committee](#) - March 6 at 5 pm
- [Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy](#) - March 12 at 1 pm
- [Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization](#) - March 25 at 4 pm
- [Regional Issues Committee](#) - March 26 at 3:30 pm

### BRPC Employment Opportunities & Announcements

- [Digital Navigator Internship](#)
- [Youth Advisory Board Consultant](#)
- [Public Health Training Specialist](#)
- [Outdoor Recreation Internships](#)
- [Youth Prevention & Mental Health Internship](#)

BRPC welcomes Samantha (Sam) Kittle, BRPC's new Public Health Emergency Preparedness Planner. This position helps manage the Public Health Emergency Preparedness (PHEP) grant program, assists boards of health in preparedness and response initiatives, develops trainings, and helps coordinate the Medical Reserve Corps. Sam has a Bachelor of Emergency Preparedness and a Master in Emergency and Disaster Management. She most recently worked in New York's Columbia County Office of Emergency Management. Contact Sam at [skittle@berkshireplanning.org](mailto:skittle@berkshireplanning.org)



In her free time, you can find her enjoying life with her dog, Belle, by her side. Some of her favorite past times include traveling around the world, reading, watching movies, water activities, and practicing mindfulness. "Do something today that your future self will thank you for."



BRPC also welcomes Christy Lemoine as the Assistant Coordinator for the [Berkshire and Franklin Medical Reserve Corps](#). This is a part time offsite position focusing on volunteer outreach, training, and coordination of the region's response to and recovery from emergencies. Christy served in this role through Fairview Hospital since 2022. BRPC is glad to have her experience transition to the Public Health Team. Hosting a public event and want a first aid tent? Contact Christy at [cleoine@berkshireplanning.org](mailto:cleoine@berkshireplanning.org).

### Grant Opportunities

#### Community One Stop for Growth Portal Open

The fiscal year 2026 application portal for the Community One Stop for Growth is open. One Stop programs offer funding and support to housing and economic development projects related

to activation and placemaking, planning and zoning, site preparation, construction, and infrastructure.



One Stop has added two existing programs to the portal this year: The [Vacant Storefront Program](#) offers municipalities access to up to \$50,000 of refundable tax credits to incentivize businesses to occupy vacant storefronts within the community's downtown and commercial areas. The [Transformative Development Initiative](#) (TDI) Equity Investment Program 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 may participate in an optional Expression of Interest process through March 26th. During this time, applicants receive guidance on projects 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, please visit [www.mass.gov/onestop](http://www.mass.gov/onestop).

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

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. **Final subapplications due March 10.**

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

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

HMGP 4780: [MA State NOFO](#)

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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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### [Diesel Emissions Reduction Act \(DERA\) Electric Solicitation Grant](#)

The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) is accepting applications for approximately \$3.66 million in funding for projects to reduce diesel emissions from vehicles and equipment across the state. MassDEP seeks to prioritize these resources to benefit environmental justice (EJ) communities and to address environmental inequities. **Applications are due April 7.**

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### Community Compact Grant Programs

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.**

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 to bridge the digital divide, providing a framework to increase access to and usage of the internet. You can [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.

## 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).

### Announcements & Events



#### MARPA Day at the Massachusetts Statehouse

On Tuesday, February 25th, BRPC Executive Director Tom Matuszko (*third from right*) joined leadership and staff from fellow MA regional planning agencies (RPAs) to share information with state legislators about the programs and activities our organizations provide statewide.

*photo credit: Old Colony Planning Council*

The 30th Citizen Planner Training Collaborative Annual Conference will be held at Holy Cross College in Worcester on Saturday, March 15. This is an opportunity to learn and network with other municipal planners and board members from around the state.



Credits offered: 9 workshops offer MIIA credit on municipal insurance. 14 workshops offer AICP CM, 1.5 credit. More information and registration at <https://masscptic.org>.

#### Navigating Public Records & Open Meeting Laws Wednesday, March 19, 12 - 1:15 pm



An overview of the Open Meeting Law and Public Records Law and what you need to know positions including meetings subject to the law, rules for holding meetings, the definition of a public record, and when records have to be disclosed. Common violations will also be reviewed. Free. Register for the Zoom webinar [here](#).

## [Equity and Justice for All Tour](#)

April 15, 6 - 7:30 pm, Hybrid, location in Pittsfield to be announced

Undersecretary of Environmental Justice and Equity, MariaBelen Power, will meet with constituents to listen to concerns, gain a deeper understanding of the economic and environmental challenges impacting local neighborhoods, and work together to find solutions. Your voice matters in shaping a more sustainable and equitable future for our communities.

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The Massachusetts Office on Disability has released [new guidance about snow removal and accessibility](#), including legal obligations, rules for adequate snow removal, how to report violations, including best practices for snow removal and accessibility for municipalities, businesses, homeowners, renters, and drivers.

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## Massachusetts Housing Partnership - 18th Housing Institute

MHP's 18th Housing Institute will be held on **June 4 & 5** 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

### Open Meeting Law Update

Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023 extends certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law, MGL Chapter 30A, Section 20 through March 31, 2025. More specifically, the temporary provisions allow for municipalities to utilize virtual meetings to conduct official business. Without action by the legislature, municipal bodies will be required to conduct meetings in person at a designated location.

This **does not** prohibit communities from continuing to provide a virtual option to allow attendance by the general public.

**It is uncertain whether an extension of the open meeting law provisions will be approved prior to their expiration on March 31.**

## Community Development & Housing

### Statewide Housing Plan and Housing Production Report

The Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing & Livable Communities (EOHLC) recently released two housing-focused documents. "[A Home for Everyone](#)" is the state's first comprehensive housing plan. In early 2024, Governor Healey created the Unlocking Housing Production Commission, which developed "[Building for Tomorrow](#)," a report identifying barriers to housing production in Massachusetts.

## Data & Information Services

### School Enrollment

According to the latest release from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), the K-12 enrollment in Berkshire County for the 2024-2025 school year as of October 1 is 13,732. The enrollment declined 212 students from the 2023-2024 school year. Including Pre-K and Post-12 Special, the total enrollment decreased by 193 students. The districts range from a gain of 20 students (Hoosac Valley) to a loss of 58 students (North Adams), with an average loss of 11 students.

The county's enrollment by grade saw a range from an increase of 95 students in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade to a loss of 86 students in kindergarten, with the average being a loss of 13 students. The current 3<sup>rd</sup>



grade class has many students who delayed kindergarten for a year due to the pandemic, leading to a significant increase in that one class.

Enrollment was remarkably stable between the 2020-2021 and 2023-2024 school years, countering decades of yearly loss. The loss of the last year runs counter to the recent stability. Enrollment will need to be monitored for several years to see if this recent decline is a one-year blip in the stable trend or a resumption of the decline the region has seen over previous decades.

## Economic Development

### 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

### Dirt Road Problems Documentation

As part of the [Western Massachusetts Regional MVP Unpaved Roads Project](#), BRPC is seeking input from residents that live on unpaved roads or drive them regularly. Residents may report issues on an interactive online map at: <https://tinyurl.com/Dirt-Road-Problems> until April 30.

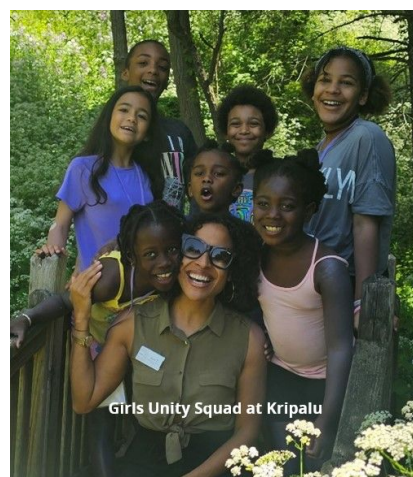
Please post this link on municipal websites and include in town news. The information gathered will increase BRPC's ability to effectively assist towns and may support a larger conversation about Berkshire County's needs to maintain safe, unpaved roads. Contact [Alison Dixon](#), Senior Environmental and Energy Planner, if you would like more information or a presentation at a Select Board meeting.

## Public Health

### BRPC's SOR-PEC Initiative: Cultivating Resilience and Preventing Substance Use

BRPC's Public Health Program recently received news that the SOR-PEC (State Opioid Response - Prevention in Early Childhood) funding has been extended! The project aims to prevent future substance misuse among youth who are at higher risk due to environmental factors.

One of the initiatives under this project is the Girls Unity Squad (GUS) for children 5-11 who identify as female and non-White. Over the past few years, this group has focused on STEM education, resilience building, trust/respect/responsibility, and increasing representation through career modeling with women of color. Some notable highlights from the past year include visiting Kripalu last May and the Berkshire Museum last August, which had exhibits on Black Woman as Muse and Women in Space. Not only have the girls been developing valuable life skills, but they have also created friendships and meaningful connections with the other participants and the facilitators.



A newer initiative under SOR-PEC is the Bright Futures Club (BFC) for children 5-11 who have been impacted by family substance use (i.e., a parent who is actively using or in recovery). We are actively trying to recruit participants for this group, which will meet on Saturdays at the Crane Center in Pittsfield. BFC will be closely modeled after GUS, with resilience building and career modeling, to help participants envision a bright future for themselves!

We have also been working with 18 Degrees to deliver a Nurturing Parenting Program (NPP) for Families in Treatment and Recovery. This program is for adults who are parents or plan on becoming parents and who are at any point in their recovery journey. The current cohort of six people is getting ready to graduate! The program includes a curriculum on self-esteem, boundary setting, and much more. Congratulations to the NPP graduates!

We look forward to many more opportunities to build resilience among Berkshire residents!

The **City of Greenfield's Warming Center**, a joint effort with the Salvation Army of Greenfield and the Franklin Medical Reserve Corps (MRC), has been open since late January and has had over 250 uses with over 700 volunteer hours. "Although not a homeless shelter due to building codes, (the center) offers some overflow capacity for the shelters that are full while helping ensure homeless community members aren't outside during the coldest nights of the year," Christy Lemoine, MRC Assistant Coordinator, explained. Read this [Greenfield Recorder](#) article to learn more.

## Transportation



As part of the [Safe Travel and Equity Plan for our Streets](#) (STEPS) program, BRPC is seeking applicants for volunteer positions on the [Vision Zero Working Group](#) (VZWG). This advisory and voting body will guide the implementation of the Berkshire STEPS Action Plan. VZWG's goal is to provide a transparent process for investing in safety projects around Berkshire County and provide valuable perspectives and an even-handed approach to reaching the goal of zero road deaths and serious injuries.

Ideal candidates should be committed to collaborative planning and innovative thinking to reduce the deaths and serious injuries on our roads to zero and sustain that goal through long-term planning and action in Berkshire County. Desired experience for the working group is shared across many disciplines, from planning and engineering to enforcement, education, healthcare, and policymaking.

Those chosen for the working group can expect to participate in quarterly general meetings and additional subcommittee meetings. Subcommittees are focused on:

- Education & Outreach - public outreach, marketing, and education strategies
- Technical Assistance - prioritization of strategies and projects
- Equity & Transparency - reports on progress toward Vision Zero goals, develops impact metrics, and guides equitable outreach and public engagement

Members should expect to spend a few hours monthly on professional and personal research and reflection, not including quarterly meetings.

Berkshire County residents interested in participating in this effort are encouraged to become familiar with the [Comprehensive Safety Action Plan](#), the [Berkshire County Data Dashboard](#), and other information on the STEPS program website. Individuals interested in applying to the Vision Zero Working Group can submit their letter of interest and resume there. Any questions or comments regarding the application may be forwarded to Senior Transportation Planner [Nick Russo](#).

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





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