



BRPC

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

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Images available upon request

2025 Kusik Award Winners Announced

Four to be Honored on October 16th at BRPC Annual Meeting

Pittsfield, MA -- Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) is pleased to announce four recipients of the Kusik Award in 2025. The Kusik Award is given annually to projects, groups, or individuals who have made outstanding contributions to Berkshire County. Nominations are submitted by staff, BRPC Delegates, or members of the public looking to recognize these contributions. This year, four impactful women from across the region and working in separate fields are receiving the honor.

Kusik honorees will be recognized at the BRPC Annual Meeting, at 5:00 p.m. on October 16th at Proprietor's Lodge in Pittsfield. Advanced registration is required and is available online at <https://bit.ly/bprc2025> or by calling (413) 442-1521 x10.

About the 2025 Kusik Honorees (in alphabetical order):

Meg Bandarra is a landscape artist, outdoor recreation enthusiast, accessible trail advocate, and outdoor accessibility consultant. After developing a disability and experiencing firsthand the limited and often inadequate outdoor options for those with mobility concerns, she founded Unpaved Trails For All, a volunteer, disability-led group dedicated to educating about and advocating for high-quality, soft-surface accessible trails.

"Meg is a knowledgeable advocate, teacher, and consultant on outdoor accessibility", says Jaymie Zapata, Senior Public Health Planner at BRPC. "She has consulted on many BRPC projects across the county, visited our towns and parks, and elevated awareness of accessibility in the outdoors across multiple BRPC departments."

Dr. Ellen Kennedy has served as President of Berkshire Community College (BCC) since 2012. At BCC, Ellen has spearheaded efforts to create accessibility to higher education for all. Her extensive involvement includes having served as a Commissioner of the New England Commission of Higher Education and on the boards of the Massachusetts Workforce Incentive, Mass Hire – Berkshires, Governor Healy's K-12 Graduation Council, Mass Tech AI Hub Education and Workforce Training, the Massachusetts Economic Empowerment Trust Fund and the Pittsfield School Building Needs Commission (resulting in a new Taconic High School). She is a tri-Chair of the Governor's Berkshire Skills Cabinet and serves on the Executive Committee of BERK12 (formerly Berkshire Education Task Force), and the Berkshire Innovation Center (BIC).

"Under President Kennedy's leadership, Community is once again the operative word, as the college is responsive to the needs of Berkshire residents as well as employers seeking workers in their businesses", says BRPC Executive Committee member Douglas McNally. "She has taken a leadership role in workforce development and economic development in the

County, partnering with MassHire Berkshire Workforce Board, Taconic High School, and McCann Technical School to provide trainings that result in certifications for incumbent workers in technical fields where the Berkshires are experiencing workforce shortages.”

Jane Winn’s career has been dedicated to upholding environmental laws, pushing for improved regulation, and training community members to be the 'eyes and ears' of environmentalism in the Berkshires. She advocates for community involvement in infrastructure projects and engages community members of all ages in appreciation for the natural world. She led the Berkshire Environmental Action Team (BEAT) through legal battles, regulatory interventions, and social movement building to prioritize environmental justice. Jane is succeeded at BEAT by Brittany Ebeling as executive director, hired two years ago as Deputy Director with an eye toward the organization’s succession plan.

“Jane’s career is a testament to the power of community advocacy and activism,” says Melissa Provencher, manager of BRPC’s Environmental & Energy Planning program. “During her time as BEAT’s founder and executive director, she matured an all-volunteer effort into an environmental advocacy leader for the region. Jane worked tirelessly to advocate for a cleaner Berkshire County free of environmental pollution, mobilized significant grassroots efforts, and worked continuously toward connected, not just conserved, spaces for wildlife to move, among so many other accomplishments.”

Rene Wood is a community volunteer who has also been elected or appointed to many Sheffield boards, including the Select Board and all land-use boards. Her work in Sheffield has focused on both zoning and general by-laws; grant writing and awards on many subjects from local, state, and federal agencies; over a decade of work to reach the Rest of River Agreement; CPA adoption; defeat of the BHRSD and SBRSD merger; accessibility improvements; and now micro-transit, to mention a few. She was Sheffield’s delegate or alternate to BRPC for twenty years, a volunteer for several non-profits, and, currently, a BRTA advisory board member.

“I had the privilege of working closely with Rene to support grants that will soon bring digital skills classes and computer devices to residents and organizations in Sheffield,” says Senior Economic Development Planner Wylie Goodman. “My respect for her deepened as I watched her lead the effort to ensure all properties in town now lacking stable, high-speed internet will finally receive it. Rene doesn't have to care this hard, but she does. Her town and our county are better for her empathy and energy.”

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission began the Kusik Award program in 1996. It is named in honor of the late Charles Kusik, a resident of the Town of Richmond who, for over three decades, placed his expert imprint on the zoning bylaws of nearly every town in Berkshire County. More about Charles Kusik and a list of previous awardees is available on the BRPC website at <https://berkshireplanning.org/about/kusik-award/>

“Each of this year’s honorees have had a significant impact on the region, and on our work here at BRPC,” said BRPC Executive Director Tom Matuszko, “They all prioritize the common good and the advancement of Berkshire County.”

About BRPC: *Berkshire Regional Planning Commission is the regional planning agency for Berkshire County, Massachusetts, providing comprehensive planning services to municipalities, which include land use, transportation, community and economic development, housing, public health, and environmental planning. BRPC promotes regional collaboration among communities and works to increase coordination between all levels of government.*

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