

# Economy

## An Element of *Sustainable Berkshires*, Long-Range Plan for Berkshire County

Adopted 3.20.14



**SUSTAINABLE BERKSHIRES**  
Community Strategies For A Sustainable Future

*Sustainable Berkshires* is a project of the  
Berkshire Regional Planning Commission.



*Berkshire  
Regional  
Planning  
Commission*

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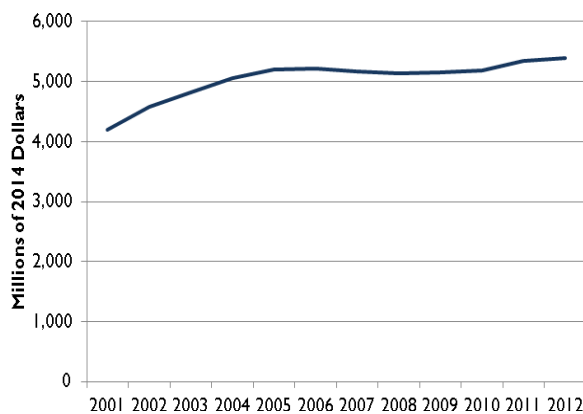


# INTRODUCTION

*The Berkshire economy has, like many other regions across the US, undergone significant economic change over the past several decades. The decline of manufacturing and the changing role of more rural regions in an increasingly global economy have resulted in steady job and population loss since 1970. In this new economic age, the region now has the challenge and opportunity to redefine a way forward. This element highlights the current economic characteristics and trends in the region as they relate to competitiveness in the new economy. Goals, policies and strategies are then identified for growing jobs and incomes in the region,*

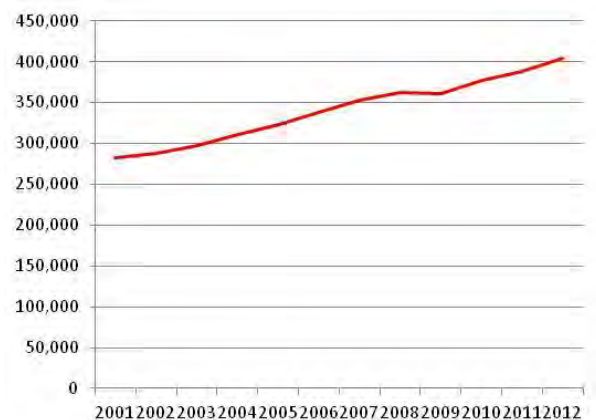
## ECONOMY OF BERKSHIRE COUNTY

The region (measured most nearly as the Pittsfield MSA) had an economy of \$5.4 billion gross domestic product (GDP) in 2012, which reflects a slight uptick in 2011 after five years of stagnant growth that proceeded the great recession. However, that growth (up 28% since 2001) lags the economic growth seen in the state as a whole (43%) in the same time period. As the charts illustrate, the economic recession, as represented by a flattening of the trend line, started earlier than the state and lasted longer, 2005-2011 for the Berkshires compared to 2008-2009 for the state.



**Figure E1: Gross Domestic Product, Pittsfield MSA**

Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics



**Figure E2: Gross Domestic Product, Massachusetts**

Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics

In economic discussions, resilience is most often attributed to diversity. As detailed in *Rural Clusters of Innovation: Berkshires Strategy Project*<sup>1</sup>, a study on the role of clusters in the Berkshire economy, the region has a number of key sectors.

- **Arts and Tourism:** Two sectors, arts and entertainment and retail trade, show the region's economy has higher activity in these sectors than is typical in the state. This is not surprising given the long history of the region serving as a vacation spot with rich cultural and outdoor recreation options.
- **Education, Health Care and Social Assistance:** The second sector where the share of economic activity is larger than the state is in education, health care, and social assistance. Berkshire Health Systems is the single largest employer in the county, but there are also other private medical practices. There are 15 school districts in the region, several private schools, one community college and three four-year

<sup>1</sup> Rural Clusters of Innovation: Berkshires Strategy Project, Monitor Company Group, LLP (2006)

colleges as well as early childhood education providers. Finally, the role of non-profits was notably profiled in *The State of Non-profit Organizations in Berkshire County*;<sup>2</sup> many of these are social service non-profits.



**Figure E3: County Economic Composition by Sector as Compared to the State (2010)**

Source: US Census

There are also two clusters identified as potential growth sectors, historically strong sectors that faced a decline but with changing market circumstances now provide renewed potential.

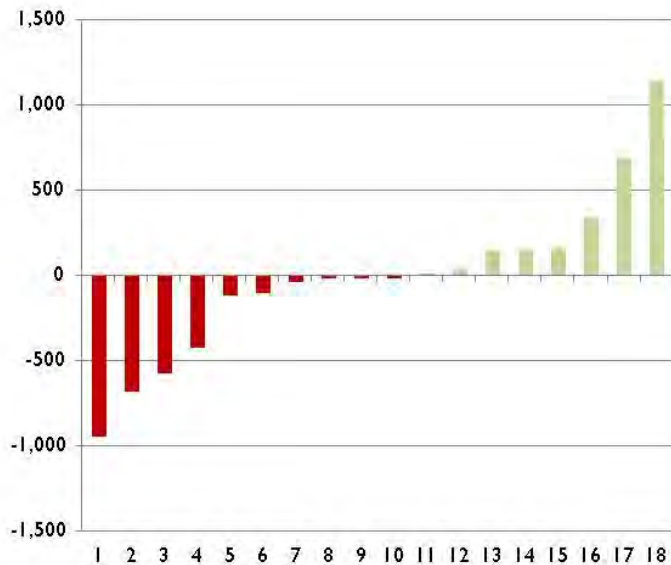
- Local Agriculture:** The region has a greater proportion of its economy in agriculture and forestry, not surprising given the rural nature of the region. The changing role of agriculture and the local food movement over the past ten years have created market demand that allows for businesses growth and expansion in this sector, including value added processing and the start or expansion of farms to increase production
- Manufacturing:** The region had a historically strong manufacturing sector, based first in mills which took advantage of the region's forests and streams for wood pulp and hydropower to produce paper and then diversifying into textiles, electronics, plastics, and defense industry products. The departure of major employers such as Sprague Electric in North Adams and General Electric in Pittsfield made a significant hit to the region's economy and employment picture for the past 40 years, as shown in Figure E4. Unfortunately, current state projections anticipate continued decline in manufacturing jobs over the next five years, as shown in Figure E5.

<sup>2</sup> The State of Non-profit Organizations in Berkshire County, Sheppard (2012)



**Figure E4: Manufacturing Jobs in Berkshire County 1970-2011**

Source: US Census, American Community Survey



1	Manufacturing
2	Construction
3	Self-Employed Workers, Primary Job
4	Retail Trade
5	Government
6	Finance and Insurance
7	Utilities
8	Management of Companies and Enterprises
9	Information
10	Wholesale Trade
11	Real Estate and Rental and Leasing
12	Transportation and Warehousing
13	Administrative and Support and Waste
14	Management and Remediation
15	Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation
16	Other Services (Except Government)
17	Accommodation and Food Services
18	Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services

**Figure E5: 2008-2018 Projected Job Growth by Industry, Berkshire County, MA**

Source: Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, 2012

However, despite these declines, which were not unique to the region but that had a proportionately large impact on the local economy and population, manufacturing remains a strong component of the regional economic picture and there is significant interest in seeing this sector rebound. The focus is on transforming the image of manufacturing from dirty or low-skill jobs to the more accurate picture of a high-tech, high-skill creative industry sector. This also links back to a national discussion and renewed push towards science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) skills development and career pathways in which local colleges and educators have already been engaged.

## COMPETING IN THE NEW ECONOMY

The Berkshires is not unique in its economic challenges. There are two main thrusts to this challenge. First, the region is part of the Rust Belt, older industrial areas which have an industrial past based in production activities that have been largely exported or mechanized reducing employment. These areas tend to have three basic challenges: leadership entrenched in now outmoded economic development methods and thinking, environmental legacies from past industrial activities and a skills gap from decades of “brain drain” – youth leaving for college and not returning because there were fewer job prospects resulting in an educational attainment and skills gap. Secondly, the region is rural in an increasingly urban-centric global economic and job market. Rural areas everywhere have struggled with population and job losses as talent and business locate in cities and major metros.

However, compared to many rural areas, the Berkshires as a region has a number of advantages:

- **Proximity:** The region is within a relatively short distance (2.5 hours) to Boston and New York and an hour from Albany and Springfield-Hartford. This means, while the region is rural, it is still relatively convenient to maintain a physical presence as needed in those major metro markets.
- **World class arts:** Living in a rural area generally means you will lack quality arts and entertainment options of major cities. However, the Berkshires excel in this regard and so offer the best of both worlds – small town charm and big city arts and culture.
- **Scenic beauty and community assets:** Compared to many places, including nearby major metros of Boston and New York City, the region has affordable housing, hassle-free commutes, safety, and charm. Anecdotal evidence suggests that people who were either raised or went to college in the region have an attachment to place which makes returning to the Berkshires a positive.
- **Colleges:** The region is fortunate to have a community college as well as two four-year colleges and several other certificate and degree schools or courses through vocational and technical schools. This means the region has the infrastructure to generate and maintain a skilled workforce and has young talent coming into the region for a few years – a retention opportunity.

Within the context of the new economy, one focused on talent and innovation or human capital, these factors take on a new prominence. Whereas prior economic development activities focused on physical infrastructure and economic incentive packages to attract large companies, newer economic development practice focuses on marketing the place and the ability to attract and retain the talented workforce that businesses need to keep moving forward and excelling.

This focus on human infrastructure is reflected in the diagram, below, of economic development system components needed for regional economic success in today’s economy: workforce, community, innovation/entrepreneurship, quality of life, and local and regional leadership. These five categories will be explored further throughout the plan and establish the framework against which economic goals and strategies are set.



**Figure E6: Economic Development System**

Source: BRPC, 2013

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE SUSTAINABILITY LENSES

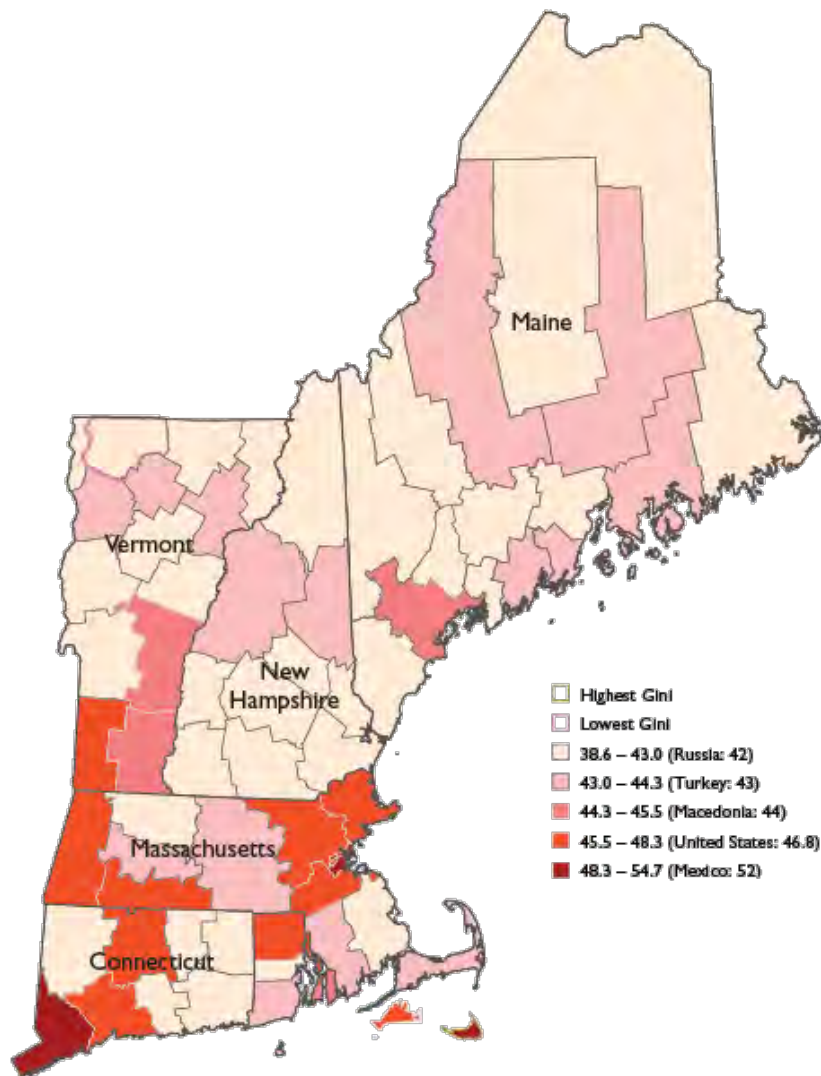
### Economic Development

- **Buying Local:** The Berkshire Chamber of Commerce has been championing a very successful buy local marketing campaign aimed at consumers. This highlights the impact of cumulative purchasing power and multiplier effect of supporting local businesses that keep money circulating in the local economy versus chains that export the money to their base of operations outside the region. As calculated by the Chamber, shifting 3% of consumer spending to local business generates \$50 million in economic impact and supports 350 jobs.

### Social Equity and Capital

- **Living Wage:** The Crittenton Women's Union issued *The Massachusetts Economic Independence Index* (2013) reporting that in Berkshire County, a single person would need to make \$22,224 a year (\$11.85 an hour<sup>3</sup>) to be economically independent; defined as being able to support oneself without subsidy programs. For a single parent with two young children, the number rose to \$53,544 (\$28.55/hour) and for two parents and two children, the household income needed was \$61,428 (\$32.76 per hour for one parent or an average wage of \$16.38 for two parents working). In weekly wage terms, that would mean \$444.48, \$1,070.88 and \$1,228.56 respectively. The region's average weekly wage in 2012 was \$771 (US Bureau of Labor Statistics).
- **GINI Coefficient:** The GINI coefficient measures relative levels of equity within geographies (county, state, nation, etc.) where perfect equality within the population would have a GINI score of zero and conditions of absolute inequality would elicit a score of 100. New England in general has lower than national average GINI scores, meaning there is less income disparity. The highest income disparities are in the Stamford, CT area, downtown Boston, and Nantucket. The next least equitable conditions in the state are located on Martha's Vineyard, metro Boston, Springfield area and the Berkshires. It is notable that Berkshire County is the most inequitable rural region in the state except for the Islands.

<sup>3</sup> Per hour pay before taxes assuming 50 weeks per year and 37.5 hours per week.



**Figure E7: GINI Coefficient of New England Counties**

Source: Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, Fall 2012, <http://www.bos.frb.org/commdev/c&b/2012/fall/mapping-new-england-income-distribution-by-county.htm>

### Environmental Quality

- **Rest of River Cleanup:** The region has the environmental legacy of PCB pollution in the Housatonic River starting in Pittsfield and moving south from decades of GE operations prior to 1970s environmental regulations. The cleanup, now being negotiated with impacted communities, the federal EPA and GE, will be a huge undertaking that could span several decades. However, the result will hopefully mean a cleaner environment and improved image for impacted areas. Other benefits under discussion include a greenway and bike path along the river, rail line improvements, and economic development funds to impacted communities.
- **Greening Business:** A number of local businesses have worked to green their operations to reap marketing benefits, control or reduce ongoing costs, and promote environmental stewardship. This includes Jiminy Peak ski area's wind turbine, Country Curtain's solar array, and smaller rooftop solar applications such as at CompuWorks in Pittsfield.



## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANNING PROCESS

The goals and policies set forth in this document were identified through a multifaceted public involvement process that engaged municipal, private business and non-profit partners, community leaders, and the public in a strategic discussion of the role and vision for economic development in the region. The different methods of public engagement used to develop this element are described below.

### Business Forums

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission partnered with I Berkshire to host a series of six forums targeted to owners and managers of small to mid-sized businesses in the Berkshires. The forums led participants through a concentrated input and prioritization exercise, the results of which are summarized in Appendix A: Small- and Mid-Size Business Forums.

### Public Forums

Economy forums were held on September 18, 2012 in the town of Lanesborough and September 19, 2012 in the town of Stockbridge. Forums included a presentation and small group exercise and discussion about the current state of the economy. Input was solicited on priority actions for long term economic development needs in Berkshire County. A summary of the forums is contained in Appendix B: Economic Forums.

### Economic Subcommittee

A regional subcommittee of 20 people representing the public and private sectors, as well as regional economic development entities, met over the course of several months to identify key issues and discuss and refine the economic policies of this element. In an effort to align concurrent economic planning efforts, this committee served a dual function of both helping with the development of this element and the update of the county's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS).

### Consortium

Once key issues and challenges had been identified through the stakeholder interviews, and the business and community forums, they were summarized and presented to the regional Consortium. BRPC then provided draft goals and policies for consideration and discussion at a second meeting.

### Public Workshop

A set of public open house events were held in early December 2012 to prioritize and discuss the policy recommendations for the first three completed elements of the Sustainable Berkshires regional plan. A total of 65 people worked their way through the draft language, posting comments and identifying the action steps they wanted to see the region pursue first.





## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT VISION

**Vision:** Berkshire County has a diverse and robust economy that offers opportunities for sustainable prosperity to all of its residents. While capitalizing on the region's heritage, intellectual vigor, cultural assets, agricultural and natural resources we encourage and excel at innovation, collaboration and harnessing the entrepreneurial spirit.

### ACHIEVING THE VISION

This vision will be achieved through the collaborative assets of communities, economic development partners, local businesses, and residents to pursue and implement strategic actions in five main areas as relates to economic development:

- **Workforce and Culture of Learning**

This section of the plan presents the workforce development system, performance and needs and sets goals and strategies for building a strong talent base and learning culture.

- **Open, Active and Inclusive Social Community**

This section focuses on the ways in which a community can work to be a welcoming place for new talent and residents to relocate to and stay.

- **Innovation-Friendly Business Environment**

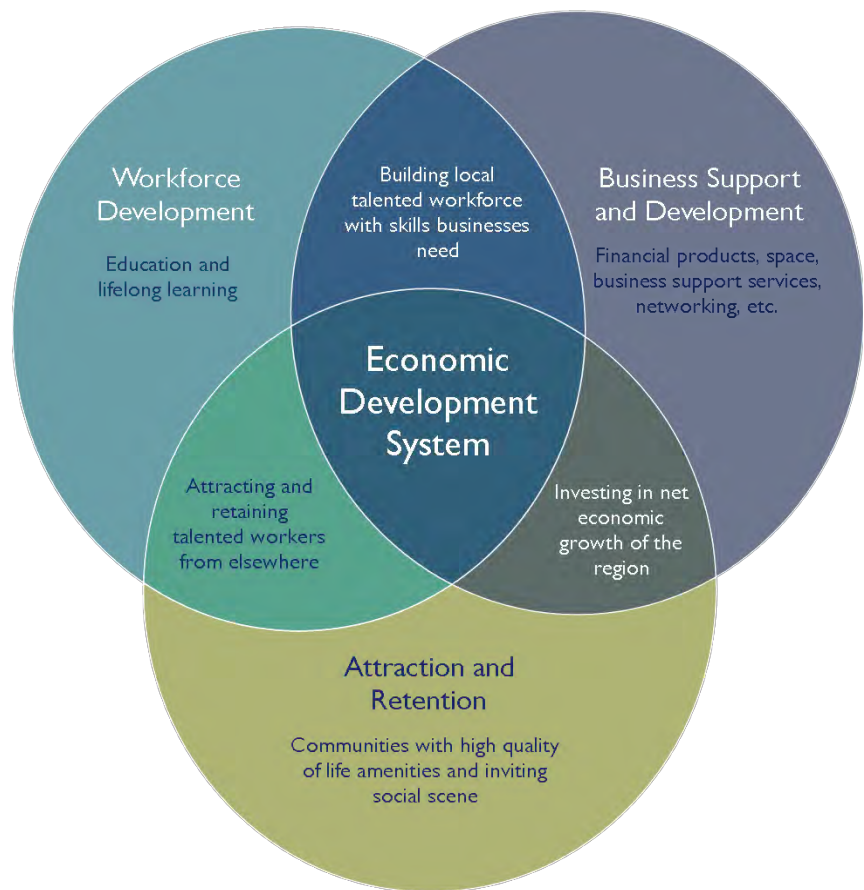
This section reviews current sectors driving the economy and describes organizations, programs and incentives available for business attraction, retention, and development.

- **Quality of Life**

This section presents key quality of life attributes and describes how to leverage them to achieve economic and social/workforce objectives.

- **Local and Regional Leadership**

This section discusses higher-level processes aimed at fostering a comprehensive and well-coordinated economic development system and leadership for the region.



**Figure E8: Economic Development System**

Source: BRPC, 2013



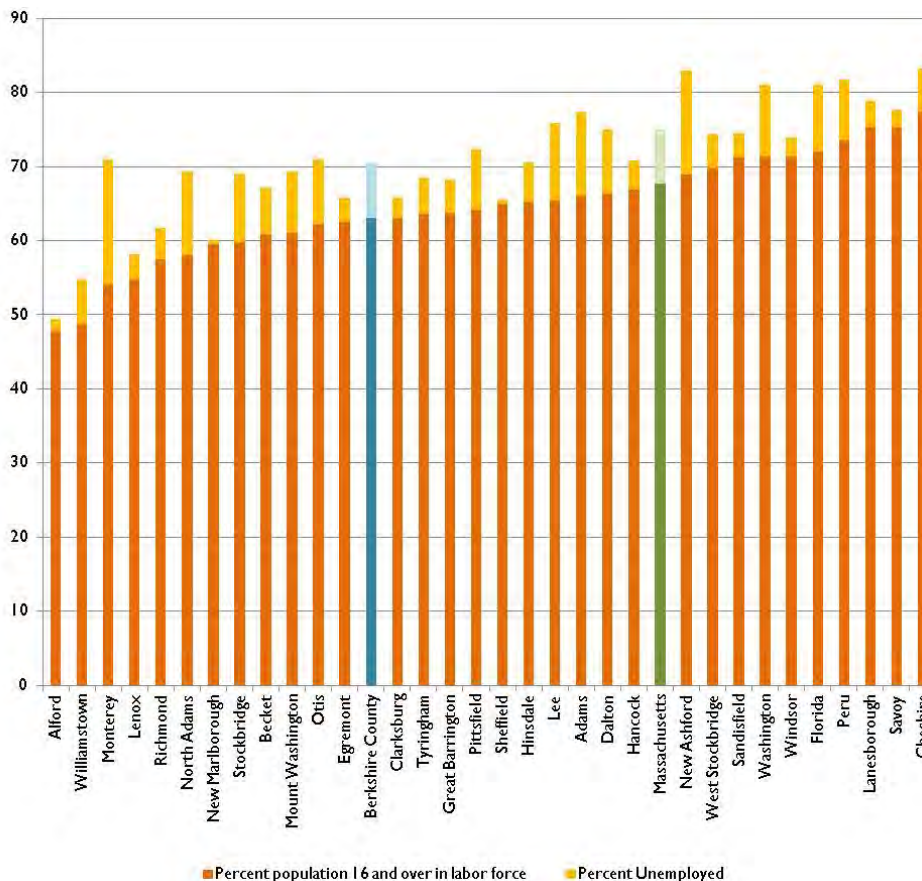
# 1. WORKFORCE AND CULTURE OF LEARNING

*In a knowledge economy, educational attainment, a skilled workforce, and an ability to offer high quality educational resources are critical components of municipal and regional economic competitiveness. This section will review current community education and workforce training resources and performance before identifying the region's goals, policies and strategies for building a strong workforce to support its larger economic development aspirations for a sustainable economy.*

## THE BERKSHIRE WORKFORCE

### Labor Force

The Berkshire workforce is comprised of 68,660 people or 63% of the population 16 years of age or older. Countywide unemployment (7.5%) has tended to track closely with state unemployment (7.4%) for the past 10 years, and is generally slightly lower than the state rate. Within the county, Monterey has the highest unemployment rate (16.8%) and New Marlborough the lowest (0.5%).



**Figure E9: Percent of Population in Labor Force and Unemployed by Community, Berkshire County, and Massachusetts (2010)**

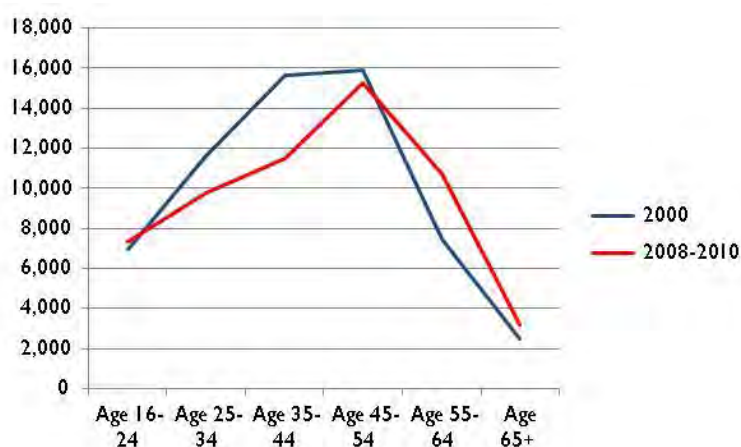
Source: US Census

## Commuting Patterns

Of those employed in Berkshire County, only 83.3 percent are also residents of the region. Nearly half of the inbound commuters come from Pioneer Valley (9.4 percent of all workers in Berkshire), with the second largest share coming from the state of New York (4.6 percent). As such, Berkshire is a net importer of workers, with 4,700 more employees commuting into the region than residents commuting out of the region. In fact, Berkshire is the only regional labor market outside of Greater Boston (Boston/Metro North and Metro South/West) that is a net importer of workers.

## Age

A full 50% of the region's current workforce is aged 45 and older; 25% is aged 55 and older. This means that the region will face a growing wave of retirements over the next decade as 50% of the current workforce reaches retirement age.



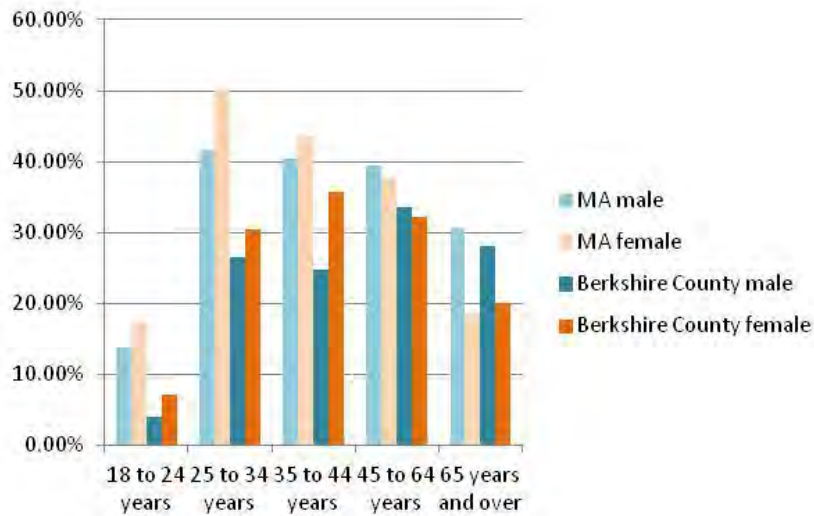
**Figure E10: Comparison of Worker Age in 2000 and 2008-10 in Berkshire County, MA**

Source: US Census, American Community Survey (2008-2010)

## Educational Attainment

*One of the strongest predictors of income growth in metropolitan areas over the past decade is the level of education of the local population. (The Young and Restless in a Knowledge Economy, CEOs for Cities, 2005)*

Educational attainment rates of adults aged 25 and older who have earned a bachelor's degree or higher in the county (29.6%) lag behind those of the state (38.3%). However, degree attainment in the county is concentrated in the adult population in the 45 and older age groups where county rates trend more closely with those of the state for the same age group. Much of the disparity is therefore due to the notable disparity between with younger demographics, particularly with the 25-44 year olds. County women in the 35-44 age group are more competitive with state rates, but degree attainment rates for men in both age groups and women in the 25-34 age group are significantly lower than those statewide.



**Figure E1 I: Educational Attainment by Gender and Age in the Berkshires: Percent of Adults with a Bachelors Degree or Higher**

Source: US Census Bureau

Beyond the talent aspect of degree attainment, there are also clear income and employment impacts. More than 60 percent of those unemployed in Berkshire County were people with a high school degree or less in 2008-2010, well above the share in both Massachusetts (49.5 percent) and the United States (56.0 percent).

## THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM

Workforce development in the region is part of a larger statewide system that was designed to implement the Federal Workforce Investment Act of 1998. The two main workforce development organizations in the region are the Berkshire County Regional Employment Board (BCREB) and Berkshire Works. These two organizations work closely together to track labor trends, identify employer labor needs, coordinate various workforce trainings, and help people looking for work to build skills and find a job.

### Berkshire County Regional Employment Board

This organization is a principal mechanism for bringing in workforce training dollars to the region. The REB performs three main functions:

**Facilitate trainings that align with employer needs:** The REB brought in over two million in training dollars in FY2012, earning them a “high performance” rating from the state. These trainings are offered in collaboration with a number of partners as discussed in the next section.

**Track labor trends to build responsiveness into workforce system:** The REB tracks labor trends including emerging or declining employment in specific sectors, and key labor force statistics such as unemployment rate and wages.

**Youth/Emerging Worker Programs:** The REB facilitates youth job shadowing and internship opportunities in partnership with area high schools.

### Berkshire Works

This one-stop-shop career center provides services to both employers and those looking to find a job or gain additional training or career skills. Programs for employees include career basics trainings such as resume writing and interview skills, searchable employment listings and on-the-job training and other training opportunities. Services for employers include job fair and recruitment assistance and labor law compliance advice.

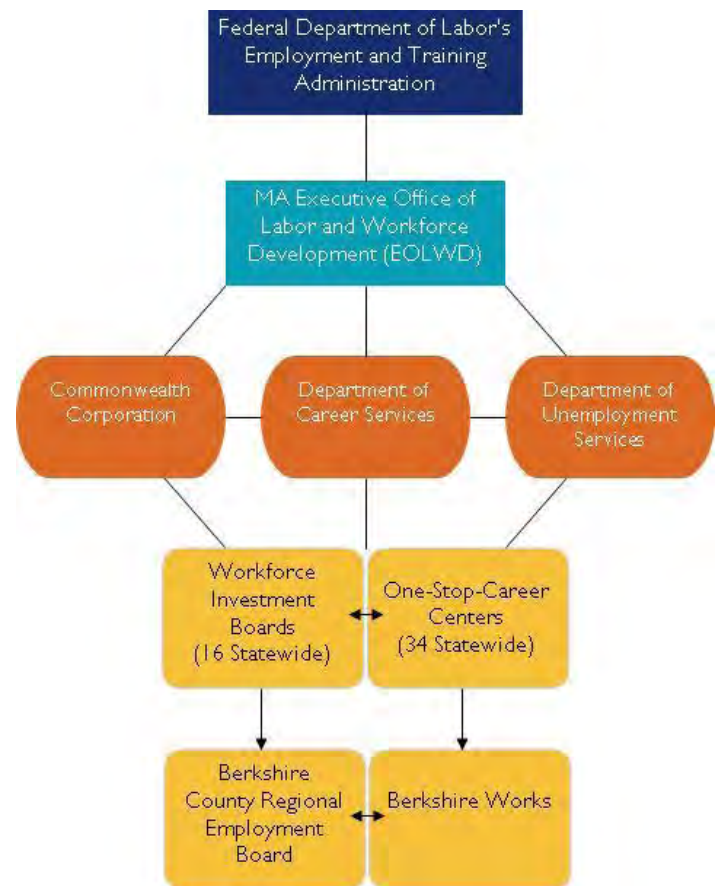


Figure E12: Workforce Development System

## TAILORING WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

The term “workforce” includes a wide range of professions and stages of advancement within a chosen career. Workforce development professionals typically divide the workforce into five basic groups:

1. **Emerging:** High School, College or Professional Training graduates looking to gain work experience to help build employment history up to and including obtaining that critical first job in their career of choice.
2. **Transitional:** Workers with experience in one field transitioning into another career field through additional education or training.
3. **Incumbent:** Workers employed in their field of choice seeking ongoing education and training to support skill development to help them maintain, refine, and grow relevant skills and experience to maintain or advance their job and career.
4. **Talent:** Typically discussed as talent attraction and retention programs, these are individuals with high levels of education, training, and experience to make them high value or demand employees. These individuals are generally highly mobile and able to choose where to locate or relocate based on the “package” of amenities a place is able to offer in terms of career and quality of life.
5. **Retirees/Free Agents:** Workers who are economically able to be more selective in their employment relationships. This group includes retired (including early retirement) workers as well as those who may, through individual or joint financial circumstances, be able to pursue interests or opportunities that are in some way “untraditional”. This could be that they are exploring a new career option from their prior experience or continuing their career in a more flexible way such as independent contracting, temporary and project work and entrepreneurship.

Given the range of needs and career stages, workforce development programs need to tailor their offerings to meet the different needs of workers in the five categories.

**Table E1: Transitional and Incumbent Workforce Development Offerings in Berkshire County**

	<b>Certificate Programs</b>	<b>Degree Programs</b>
Berkshire Community College	12	35 (AA, AS)
Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts	n/a	BA
Mildred Elley	7	4 (AA)

In addition, McCann Technical School in North Adams offers several adult education classes for electricians and advanced manufacturing and Taconic High School in Pittsfield is home to an Adult Learning Center.

The current process by which workforce development programs are identified and organized involves employers, training provider institutions, and the Berkshire County Regional Employment Board. Consistent workforce needs in major sectors are identified and linked to course offerings, certificate and degree programs. Crafting these curricula takes time and resources and is generally only undertaken if it can be assured that the courses will fill on a consistent basis. Continuing education courses, by contrast, are more flexible as they can be stand alone classes not linked to a larger certificate or degree program and are therefore easier to add or remove as interests and demands change.



## Building a Culture of Learning in the Berkshires

A strong, sustainable workforce that will support the economic needs of the region requires commitment, investment, and a long time horizon. Three key strategies have been recommended to help older industrial areas transition and be able to compete in the new economy<sup>4</sup>:

**1. Invest in Early Childhood Education:** Longitudinal research spanning several decades has illustrated the benefits of early childhood education on long-term school performance and job success, particularly for higher risk children.

**What are we doing?** For the past few years, the Berkshire United Way and the Compact for Education (including the Readiness Center) have been working with a number of groups in Pittsfield and Countywide to support enhanced early childhood education programming and broader community support and appreciation of its short- and long-term benefits.

**2. Quality Emerging Worker Programs:** Emerging worker programs perform a number of functions for young workers making the transition from high school to work or advanced studies and from those programs into the workforce. This includes mentoring, soft skills training, career path counseling, internship and apprenticeship programs, and networking opportunities. Offering this sort of programming can help transition workers into the local economy rather than having them either leave the area or be less successful in their transition than they could have otherwise been.

**What are we doing?** There are a variety of programs offered by workforce development practitioners, Compact for Education, and high schools, but they are highly variable by district. Also, there is a general sense that youth are underserved by the role of technology in the classroom, mentoring opportunities, paid career-path internships and lack “soft” employment skills such as dependability and professional communications.

**3. Workers as Learners:** Continuing education of the current workforce ensures workers remain competitive on the open market and helps to foster continuity within the workforce as people age out of the system in that others have gained the skills to step into those more advanced roles. Recently, there is growing attention being paid to this workforce “succession planning” as companies begin to brace for a wave of baby boomer retirements. This also includes meeting additional training needs for second career activities of recent retirees, which has been a growing trend nationally.

**What are we doing?** BCC and others offer lifelong learning or continuing education classes.

While particularly valuable to older industrial areas, such as the Berkshires, who tend to struggle with low educational attainment levels and talent flight, these strategies are also echoed in national and international workforce development discussions. A number of recent initiatives have begun to address these three points, which means the region is moving in the right direction to begin changing some of the labor force challenges.

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<sup>4</sup> *The Talent Imperative for Older Industrial Areas*, Kempner, American Assembly, Columbia University, 2008



## OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

### Community Education Outcomes Lagging

As illustrated in Figure E I I, educational attainment in the region is lagging for 4-year degrees or higher. This was also highlighted for two-year degrees by a recent labor force report issued by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, which found that the region has a relatively high number of students starting and then not completing a program of study. There are many reasons that contribute to this including lack of transportation or child care. Those working with higher-risk young adults note a number of pressures which can derail success and the need for more comprehensive service delivery and coaching to help people stay the course, particularly if coming from a poverty situation.

### Attracting and Retaining Young Talent

It is not uncommon to hear people remark that our greatest export is our youth. For decades, children have left for college not to return. The cumulative effect of this is directly linked to the educational attainment lag, which is in part a function of the mobility of highly educated young people and the location of major job markets for recent graduates which tend to be concentrated in major metro areas like New York, Boston and Washington DC. In this way, while building better educational outcomes for current young adult residents in the county is still a priority, the other half of the equation is attracting and retaining young talent to the area.

According to research on workforce mobility, there are some general trends in mobility. Three peak times people tend to move include young twenty something's moving to a major metro area for their first job. This demographic is highly mobile and may move frequently for job opportunities. A second major phase is young to mid thirty age who may be starting a family and therefore seek to leave the city for a more family-friendly environment. These employees have around a decade of experience and are now mid-level career people who can contribute in different ways. The final wave is after retirement, when people may opt to relocate for quality of life reasons rather than their location is not constrained by a job location. Each of these offers a "capture" opportunity.

### Linking Education to Economic Sector Growth

Workforce development professionals and prior economic studies point to some disconnect between education offerings and economic development aspirations of the region. Some sectors such as non-profits, health care, and education are well served. Others, including manufacturing and food system careers, are less so. One contributing factor has been time-lagged workforce data. The state has committed to improve the data system and so this should be improved. There are partners willing to see this improve but intentional efforts need to be made to begin a broad based discussion with long-term commitment to foster systems-level change to improve workforce development gaps.

## GOALS, POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

### Goal EI: Foster a culture of learning and raise educational attainment levels.

#### Policy EI.1: Invest in a quality PK-12 school system for children.

##### **Strategy A: Support Public-Private-Non-profit Partnerships Working to Improve Early Childhood Outcomes in the Region.**

The Berkshire Priorities group, in collaboration with the Early Childhood Education Think Tank, has been working to highlight the importance of early childhood education to later educational outcomes. They are working to broaden the base of support for early childhood education within the region and to streamline access to education and other family resources as well as the transitions from pre-k to kindergarten. Poverty is a critical factor in limiting access to early childhood education. The region should continue to support these efforts as a key activity supporting longer-term educational attainment and social equity in the region.

##### **Strategy B: Improve Third Grade Literacy**

Third Grade standardized test scores are a bellwether for educational and economic outcomes later in life. While the region as a whole generally performs comparably to the state, there are a number of schools performing far below. Early childhood education is proven to improve later performance in school, particularly for at-risk children. The lowest performing elementary schools on 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade tend to be in the most impoverished areas of the county. Target investment to these areas to improve early childhood education access and work with school districts on child transitions and outcomes.

##### **Strategy C: Foster Collaborative Approach among School Districts**

A number of schools districts facing declining enrollments and rising costs have begun exploring options to consolidate schools and share resources to reduce the administrative overhead and allow more resources go directly towards the classroom and to maintain a breadth of quality programs. These effects should be supported politically and financially.

##### **Strategy D: Facilitate Schools Using the Region as a Living Classroom**

The region's history, cultural destinations, geology, geography, and ecology make it a wonderful out-of-school classroom offering experiential opportunities to enhance the learning experience. Cost and transportation are common barriers to schools conducting more field trips. The region should encourage private support of special events or initiatives that are proven to enhance educational outcomes for children. This could include reinvigorating the corporate sponsorship model, but also expand to broaden the base of support and strengthen existing relationships with conservation, cultural, and history groups.

##### **Strategy E: Facilitate the Spread of Best Practices**

A number of schools across the region and beyond have been implementing new programs that serve as best practice models for academic performance or career training. Work to identify and highlight best practices with the aim of helping them spread across schools and districts. For example, the Compact's Passport to College program increases the rate of students pursuing higher education.

Note: See also Housing and Neighborhoods and Infrastructure and Services elements.

## **Policy EI.2: Support career aspirations and transitions and the success of young workers in high school and college.**

### **Strategy A: Expand the Range of Career Awareness Opportunities**

Build upon current offerings for high school or college internships, speakers, job shadowing, and other offerings, increasing the diversity of business or job types as well as geography. This could include creating new entrepreneurship/internship programs in local schools. Look for win-win opportunities where students can bring some expertise to the business (e.g., website and social media) while gaining real world experience.

### **Strategy B: Foster a Mentoring Culture**

Mentoring can help support career aspirations from two angles: When mentorships are with at-risk youth, they can contribute to self esteem, school performance, and career aspiration. In the workplace, a new graduate or employee will also benefit from having a mentor to help them learn corporate culture and navigate career planning.

### **Strategy C: Make Internship and Scholarship/Financial Information Readily Available**

Currently there is no central site to help youth navigate the many local scholarship opportunities or find internships. A central clearinghouse could help make those more visible.

## **Policy EI.3: Foster and support a culture that values education, personal improvement, and achievement.**

### **Strategy A: Reflect Economic Aspirations in Local Media**

Increase media coverage to reflect community's values on education and academic performance to support workforce and economic development needs and aspirations. Expand media relations to work with newer media such as electronic publications, blogs, social networks, and electronic discussion lists.

### **Strategy B: Continual Learning**

Work with employers and local education institutions to foster and support a workforce culture of continual learning through sharing practices to help employers learn new tools or approaches that have proved effective elsewhere. This could include no-cost items like schedule flexibility to attend training, staff performance planning, or recognition programs.

### **Strategy C: Improve Accessibility of Learning Options**

Many continuing education courses for adults are offered in the evening. For families, elderly, or transit-dependent students, this may be prohibitive. Work to overcome those barriers through more varied course scheduling including weekend or daytime options. Geographic distribution of courses over time can also help make class attendance more feasible. Improved access to on-line courses could also help address need, particularly as broadband access expands through the region. Improve awareness of learning opportunities and centralized education facilities in downtown areas. Improve transit services to provide a means of access.

**Goal E2: Connect a Skilled Workforce that Meets Employer Needs to Achieve Economic Development Aspirations.**

**Policy E2.1: Identify and develop new workforce development programs to fill current gaps.**

**Strategy A: Build Essential Job Skills**

Work with area schools, youth programs, and community centers as well as workforce programs to cultivate job-readiness in current and potential workers before they enter the labor market. This could be further supported through mentoring relationships and internship or apprenticeship programs that lead to later full time employment in a career of choice. For adult workers, focus training and supports through a whole-person approach that targets other life variables which may impact employment potential in addition to training and coaching on specific skills.

**Strategy B: Raise Visibility of One-Stop Job Center**

A one-stop job center operated by BerkshireWorks is located on North Street in Pittsfield. It has been cited by observers as an underused resource. Economic development partners should work to make it more visible and ensure that both job hunters and employers know its role as a career center rather than simply finding jobs for the unemployed. The region should also consider whether one or two other satellite offices of the center, in the northern and southern parts of the county, are justified to improve access to their services. Its resources should be increased in order to increase availability of offerings.

**Strategy C: Identify and Meet Additional Workforce Training Needs**

Evaluate the need for new programs in identified current or emerging clusters to fill training or workforce deficiencies and work with local training providers to fill them. To the extent possible, consider training needs that may arise several decades from now, due to technological and market changes.

**Strategy D: Improve and Disseminate Data for Workforce Development Planning**

The workforce system is very dynamic; the region will work to improve its responsiveness through better real time data. Current lags in data availability make it difficult to substantiate workforce needs in a more responsive manner. Advocate for the state to switch their labor force data tracking system to address this issue.

**Goal E3: Retain and attract new or return talent to the region.**

**Policy E3.1: Actively recruit talent to move or return to the region.**

**Strategy A: Boost Appreciation of Berkshire Living for Locals**

After several decades of economic hardship, there is a perception by some residents that there is a lack of opportunity here, which leads to a loss of many young, educated adults. If the region is to succeed in reversing this demographic loss from the region, perspectives need to shift. The region's prominence as a tourist destination stems from the fact that it is a unique and beautiful region with many culture and lifestyle options. The region needs to begin to market itself to foster a sense of pride and excitement among local people, as well as among potential new residents. If the region wants to succeed as an economically diverse community, it will need to begin to highlight and uncover the strong sense of community and rich opportunities and resources residents have at their fingertips each and every day.

**Strategy B: Host “Return to the Berkshires” Recruitment Events in the County and in New York, Boston, and other cities.**

Many former residents, vacationers, campers, and students have a fondness for the Berkshires. Transition this interest and drive into action by hosting recruitment events in various locations to highlight the economic and lifestyle opportunities of the region. Suitable locations include college campuses, to capitalize on widespread attendance at alumni reunions, and major metropolitan areas such as New York, Boston, San Francisco Bay area, and Washington, D.C.

**Strategy C: Communicate the Berkshires to Potential New Residents**

The vast majority of websites highlighting the many assets of the region are geared towards short-term visitors and high-end second-home owners, rather than current or potential future residents. Someone looking to relocate has little information about life in the region beyond a short-term visit to entice them to choose to relocate here rather than another location. The region needs to market itself to a wider audience—potential workers, retirees, entrepreneurs—and to foster a sense of pride and excitement.



## 2. OPEN, ACTIVE AND INCLUSIVE SOCIAL COMMUNITY

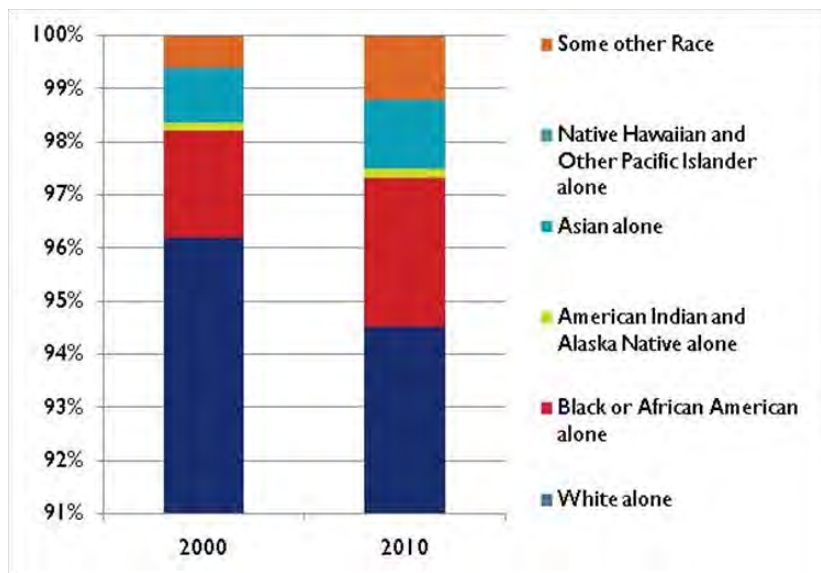
*The social character of the region is another key variable that residents and businesses assess in deciding to relocate or stay in the region. Major employers such as the hospitals, Sabic, General Dynamics, and Williams College have a labor force more diverse than the general population of the county. Additionally, the hospitality industry is highly dependent on a diverse and often immigrant work force. This section reviews current diversity in the county, organizations working with newcomers and immigrants, and then sets policies to help make the region more welcoming and inclusive.*

### DIVERSITY IN THE BERKSHIRES

The Berkshires, like most of New England, have been historically overwhelmingly white. Like many older cities in the US, neighborhoods formed based on country of origin and language spoken, but those were predominantly European immigrants. The region still has some of this pattern, with French/French Canadian, Polish, Italian, Greek, and Irish neighborhoods, to name a few, still loosely defined with a church (even if some have since been closed), country-specific community festivals and events, and restaurants.

Recently, there has been a new wave of countries providing immigrants, with a notable influx from Southeast Asia, Russia, several African countries, India, and Mexico and South America; representing over 50 languages. This is also beginning to translate into new community festivals and ethnic fairs as well as a whole stream of new restaurants and businesses. In fact, it is this influx of new residents which has helped slow the overall population decline.

As a region, however, it requires learning and growing new ways of communicating. Who we are has changed and with it we need to adapt to a more culturally competent way of thinking.



**Figure E13: Racial Composition, Berkshire County**

Source: US Census

### CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Wikipedia defines cultural competence as “an ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures and socio-economic backgrounds, particularly in the context of human resources, non-profit organizations, and government agencies whose employees work with persons from different cultural/ethnic backgrounds.” While this definition focuses on cultural and economic differences, the

concept is also frequently applied in the public health realm with consideration of mental health or neurologic conditions which could affect behavior (e.g., autism, Tourette syndrome, or dementia) as well as physical limitations or disability. There are also broader views taken in other definitions, such as that of the National Institutes of Health, who define cultural competence as involving “a number of elements, including personal identification, language, thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values, and institutions that are often specific to ethnic, racial, religious, geographic, or social groups.” This definition captures the role of individual and group identity as a factor in human interaction and understanding.

For the purposes of this section of policy and discussion, we will be inclusive of all of these dynamics as relates to the ability of the region to be open, welcoming and inclusive to new or different people. However, policies for aging in place, community-building, and accessibility as supports the health-focused competence needs are found under the discussion of integrated and inclusive communities in the Housing and Neighborhoods Element.

## Multicultural Events and Organizations

### Events

There are a number of events that celebrate the cultural fabric of the region, whether centered around food, dance or film. These events help share aspects of culture as a whole community event. The majority of current events are in the regional hub communities of North Adams, Pittsfield, and Great Barrington.

### Organizations

#### Berkshire Immigrant Center

The Berkshire Immigrant Center, located in Pittsfield, works with recent immigrants and residents of the region to get settled into the community. They do this by helping people orient to the various organizations and referral agencies for language classes, finding housing, learning the lay of the land in terms of grocery stores, public buildings, and the like, job search, and career counseling. They also provide citizenship assistance, including legal and voter education, and advocacy. They employ staff and enlist volunteers to offer a wide range of translation services and their website is available in 30 languages.

#### Multicultural Bridge

Multicultural Bridge works to raise awareness around the role of race and culture in human interactions. This includes providing cultural competency trainings for workplaces, schools, and groups. They also work to foster a sense of community and networking among recent immigrants through hosting social

**Table E2: Multicultural Events**

Event	Where Held
Lift Ev'ry Voice: Celebrating African-American Culture & Heritage in the Berkshires	Berkshire County
Greek Fest	Pittsfield
Polish Picnic	Pittsfield
GATHER-IN	Pittsfield
Annual Pittsfield Ethnic Fair	Pittsfield
Festival of Sharing Roots	Pittsfield
Annual Rock, Rattle & Drum American Indian Pow Wow	Adams
Housatonic Ethnic Fair (2011)	Great Barrington
Berkshire International Film Festival	Great Barrington
Berkshire Jewish Film Festival	Lenox
'Our Big World' Cultural Festival	North Adams



events and Housatonic Ethnic Fair (co-hosted with Town of Great Barrington). In order to highlight the role of diversity in the workplace, Multicultural Bridge recently relocated into the I Berkshire centralized economic development building next door to City Hall in Pittsfield. This building houses I Berkshire and its affiliated organizations the Berkshire Chamber of Commerce, Berkshire Visitors Bureau and Berkshire Creative as well as the Berkshire County Regional Employment Board.

## Welcoming Newcomers

### Employer-Based Programs

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For decades, many of the region's major employers have offered relocation programming for new employees and their families including networking events, pairing recent transplants with groups or volunteer opportunities, and assistance with accompanying spouse job placement. This includes Sabic, General Dynamics, Berkshire Health Systems, and Williams College. Employers list this as a critical component for employee retention over time.

## KEY ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

### Welcoming Change

The region has been experiencing population decline for over forty years. This has resulted in two contradictory social perspectives. First, a lack of people moving to the area as new (versus returning) residents has, over two generations resulted in a rather insular community culture. In many cases, this may simply be inadvertent; a small-town culture where people know each other and the lay of the land can simply forget others don't know the range of groups and channels for getting involved. Coupled with old fashioned New England reserve, this can offer a less than friendly welcome to newcomers.

However, there is also a dynamic among some of wanting to keep things the same and putting a sheen on the "good old days" of the 1970s that does not leave room for welcoming additional change. This dynamic includes a negative view of transplants, particularly New Yorkers, and generates an us-versus-them mentality. This was noted as a challenge by residents who have lived here for 20 years but are still considered "not from here" by their neighbors, as well as the Berkshire Visitors Bureau that notes the negative impact that dynamic has on tourism experience.

## GOALS, POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

**Goal E4: Offer a region and communities that are easy to navigate and comfortable to enjoy for all residents and visitors.**

**Policy E4.1: Enhance the range and accessibility of guides and resources for residents and visitors of all ages.**

**Strategy A: Regional Guides and Directories**

Support efforts of community partners to develop and distribute guides to the region to enhance community interaction, appreciation, and economic activity in the region. This includes historic or other tours, youth and adult sport leagues or clubs, and volunteer opportunities.

**Strategy B: New Resident Guide to the Berkshires**

Create accessible information using website, social media, mobile device and other appropriate technology about the region aimed at residents, including new and potential transplants, to highlight activity, volunteer, community festival and other opportunities for recreation and community involvement.

**Goal E5: Make welcoming new residents a community rather than solely employer-based effort.**

**Policy E5.1: Identify the key challenge areas faced by new residents, and develop strategies to minimize their effect now and for future newcomers. The effort should include concern for new workers, their spouses or partners and family members, retirees, and potential entrepreneurs.**

**Strategy A: Understand the Dynamics**

Host focus group discussions with new residents of all types, present residents, and short-term visitors to discuss experiences and perspectives and then craft strategies for community building.

**Strategy B: Multiculturalism Strategy for the Berkshires.**

Work with current multi-cultural organizations to develop an action plan for improving the multicultural environment in the region. This includes strategies to cultivate culturally competent school, work, and leadership experiences as well as general accessibility as in translated materials and ESL courses.

**Strategy C: Young Leadership Programming**

Continue to host Berkshire Young Professionals program and networking events across the county to help young professionals connect and build relationships in the region.

**Strategy D: Accompanying Partners as Talent Opportunity**

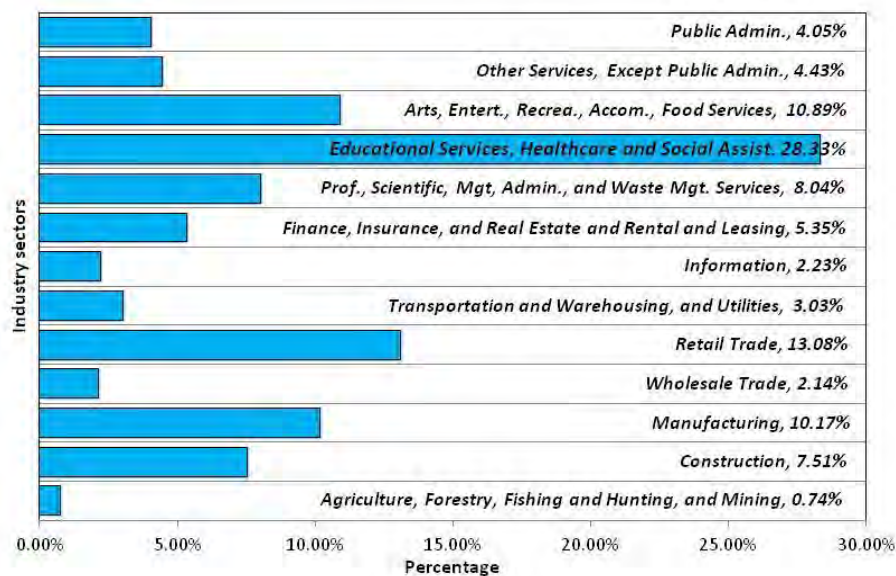
Work with employers to identify backgrounds and skills of accompanying partners to help link them into existing vacancies, small business entrepreneurship, or volunteer opportunities within the larger economy. Particular focus should be made on linking them to networking opportunities with others in their community and field of interest.

## 3. INNOVATION-FRIENDLY BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

The region has certain core clusters that define its current economic activity as well as some growth areas identified in recent studies, including high tech manufacturing and local agriculture and value-added food products. The region has a strong local ethic to its economy, with a large number of small businesses and sole proprietorships. In an era where economic development hinges on innovation and entrepreneurship, the region is well suited to offer an environment where small businesses and creative thinking help spur new business and employment growth. This section of the plan reviews current sectors driving the economy, the organizations, programs and incentives available for business attraction, retention, and development, and then sets policies for how to round out economic development offerings to help achieve economic aspirations.

### ECONOMIC COMPOSITION AND KEY SECTORS

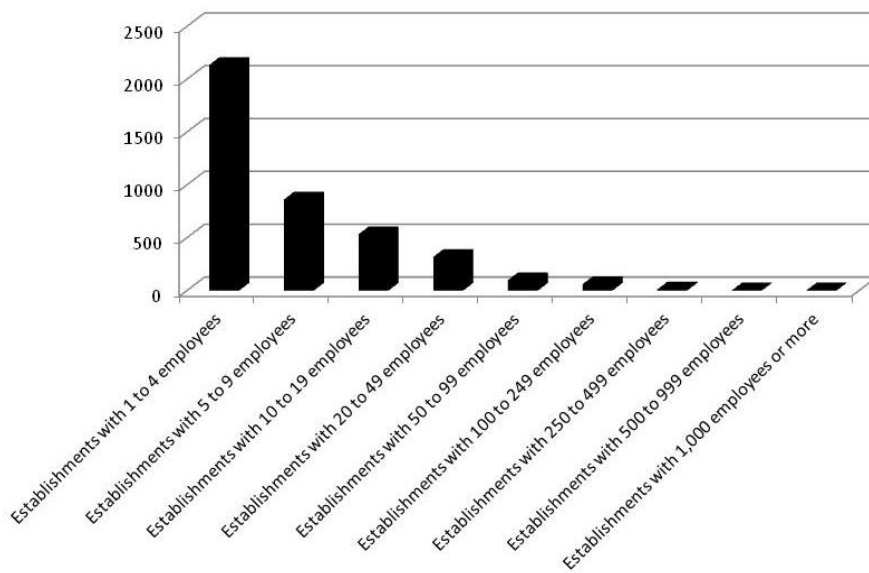
**Figure E14: Employment by Sector, Berkshire County, MA, 2008**



Source: US Census American Community Survey, 2006-2008

### A Culture of Entrepreneurship and Creativity

Small business and sole proprietorships are a major sector of the local economy. There are over 2,000 establishments with 1-4 employees, followed by over 700 with 5-9 employees. While large employers obviously make a significant impact in both net numbers and economic activity, these small establishments are locally-based, keep money in the local economy, and cumulatively, offer potential for huge job growth. If all 2,000 establishments added only one employee, it would create 2,000 new jobs.

**Figure: E15: Number of Establishments by Number of Employees, 2009**

Source: US Census, County Business Patterns, 2009



## What counts as a “small” business?

The Small Business Administration defines a small business concern as one that is independently owned and operated, is organized for profit, and is not dominant in its field. Depending on the industry, size standard eligibility is based on the average number of employees for the preceding twelve months or on sales volume averaged over a three-year period. Examples of SBA general size standards include the following:

- **Manufacturing:** Maximum number of employees may range from 500 to 1500, depending on the type of product manufactured
- **Wholesaling:** Maximum number of employees may range from 100 to 500 depending on the particular product being provided
- **Services:** Annual receipts may not exceed \$2.5 to \$21.5 million, depending on the particular service being provided
- **Retailing:** Annual receipts may not exceed \$5.0 to \$21.0 million, depending on the particular product being provided
- **General and Heavy Construction:** General construction annual receipts may not exceed \$13.5 to \$17 million, depending on the type of construction
- **Special Trade Construction:** Annual receipts may not exceed \$7 million;
- **Agriculture:** Annual receipts may not exceed \$0.5 to \$9.0 million, depending on the agricultural

## ECONOMIC SITES AND SUPPORTING INFRASTRUCTURE

### Sites

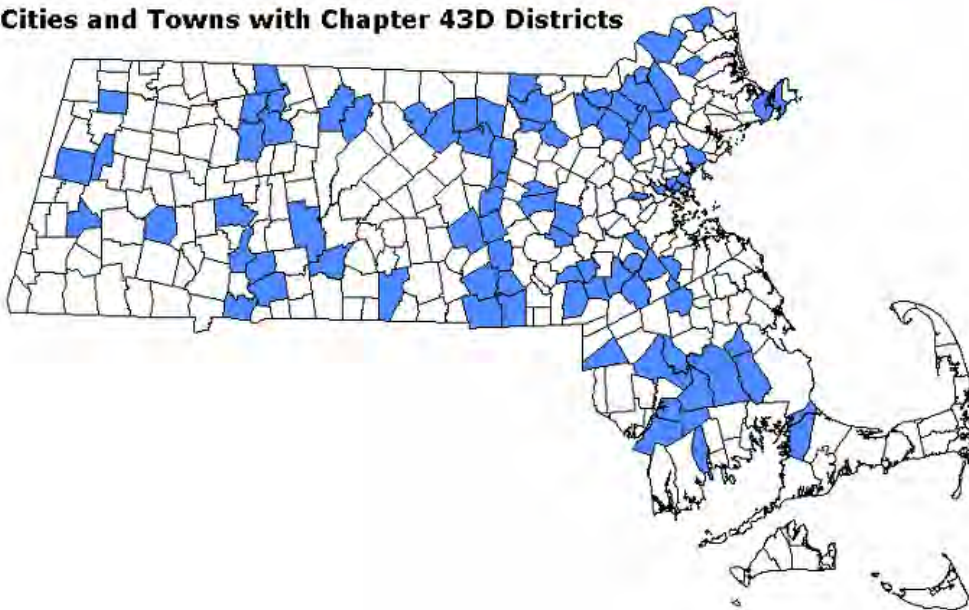
There are a number of organizations working on site readiness and marketing. Individual communities assist with site specific projects within their municipal boundaries. Within the two cities, specific groups and efforts are made regarding the Williams Stanley Business Park (Pittsfield) and the Hardman Industrial Park (Adams-North Adams). Overall, IBerkshire and the Chamber of Commerce have worked in recent years with the commercial real estate industry to identify and market on-line available economic sites for use or development.

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) includes a list of sites across the region which were solicited, submitted, and prioritized through the CEDS process with the input from municipalities and a volunteer committee. This document sets a good roadmap for site-specific priority projects at various stages across the region.

In 2006 Chapter 43D Permitting was enacted into law, establishing an inventory of Priority Development Sites (PDS) on which municipalities offer a maximum of 180 day local permitting process. Cities and towns that opt into the Chapter 43D Program are able to target areas for economic development and housing production through a streamlined local permitting process. As of February 2014, the 43D Program has been adopted by 86 municipalities on 179 sites. In the Berkshires, Eagle and Laurel Mills in Lee, William Stanley Business Park in Pittsfield, Greylock Glen and Hoosac Street in Adams and three sites in Dalton are designated 43D sites.

**Figure E16**

#### Cities and Towns with Chapter 43D Districts



Source: <http://www.mass.gov/hed/business/licensing/43d/>

## Infrastructure

The region's infrastructure is addressed in the Infrastructure and Services Element of the regional plan. As relates to infrastructure needed to support economic development and business functions, a detailed summary is contained within the CEDS document, including the status and trends in the following:

- Energy
- Roads
- Rail
- Broadband
- Water and Sewer

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

### Current Economic Development Entities

#### State

##### Mass Development

MassDevelopment is the state's finance and development authority and works with businesses, nonprofits, and local, state, and federal officials and agencies to strengthen the Massachusetts economy. It offers a wide range of finance programs and real estate development services. MassDevelopment supports economic growth, development, and investment across all sectors of the Massachusetts economy: public and private; commercial, industrial, and residential; and nonprofit, including healthcare, educational, cultural, and human service providers. It works in collaboration with private and public sector developers, businesses, and banks to identify investors and leverage public and private funds to support economic growth.

##### Mass Office of Business Development

The mission of the Massachusetts Office of Business Development (MOBD) is to strengthen the economy and increase job growth throughout Massachusetts by providing to businesses that are seeking to expand or locate in the Commonwealth a highly responsive, central point of contact that facilitates access to resources, expertise, and incentive programs available in the Commonwealth.

##### Mass Office of Travel and Tourism

The Massachusetts Office of Travel & Tourism (MOTT) is the state agency dedicated to promoting Massachusetts as a leisure-travel destination. An integral part of the state's economy, tourism generates close to \$1 billion in state and local taxes and \$16.9 billion in travel related expenditures, supporting 124,700 in-state jobs.

##### Mass Alliance for Economic Development

MAED is the state's private sector partner in promoting Massachusetts as the premier location for business growth. Since its founding in 1993, MAED has worked to ensure that business stays, grows, and thrives in the Commonwealth. They are a non-profit, non-partisan organization.

##### MassWorks Infrastructure Program

Part of the Executive Office of Housing & Economic Development, the MassWorks Infrastructure Program provides a one-stop shop for municipalities and other eligible public entities seeking public infrastructure funding to support economic development and job creation. The Program represents an

administrative consolidation of six former grant programs. It provides a one-stop shop for municipalities and other eligible public entities seeking public infrastructure funding to support:

- Economic development and job creation and retention
- Housing development at density of at least 4 units to the acre (both market and affordable units)
- Transportation improvements to enhancing safety in small, rural communities

## Regional

### I Berkshire

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I Berkshire is an independent non-profit economic development organization that serves two primary purposes. First it is the principle attraction and recruitment entity working to bring new business to the region and work on broad economic readiness and tools to raise the region's competitive advantage. This is the work that was previously conducted by Berkshire Economic Development Corporation before it was dissolved when I Berkshire was started. Second, it is a coordinating entity working to foster a one-stop-shop approach to economic development in the region by facilitating communication and collaboration between other groups working in that field. This includes the three member organizations: Berkshire Chamber of Commerce, Berkshire Visitors' Bureau, and Berkshire Creative all housed in the same I Berkshire building. Other entities such as Multicultural Bridge, Berkshire Enterprises, Berkshire County Regional Employment Board and the Berkshire Film and Media Collaborative have also co-located with the same building, although they are not formal members of I Berkshire.

#### Berkshire Chamber of Commerce

The Berkshire Chamber of Commerce advocates and supports its member businesses and economic interests of the Berkshire community. It provides a range of networking opportunities and services for businesses and other organizations from throughout the region

#### Berkshire Visitors' Bureau

The Berkshire Visitor's Bureau is the official tourism promotion organization serving Berkshire County, as well as surrounding communities outside the county who feel they are part of "the Berkshires". The Berkshire Visitor's Bureau markets the Berkshires regionally, nationally and internationally to a wide variety of audiences, serving one of the region's larger economic clusters.

#### Berkshire Creative

Berkshire Creative stimulates new job growth and economic opportunity in the region by sparking innovative collaborations between artists, designers, cultural institutions and businesses. Berkshire Creative provides the creative economy with the news, information, resources, and representation they need to do better business in the Berkshires and beyond.

### Pittsfield Economic Revitalization Corporation

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PERC is a non-profit community development corporation with its primary purpose to further the economic development and social welfare of the City of Pittsfield and Berkshire County by increasing employment opportunities and facilitating growth and development of small businesses. PERC provides direct loans and access to a variety of public loan programs to help businesses that are unable to obtain conventional financing. PERC offers several programs as assistance to entrepreneurs locating or expanding businesses in Pittsfield and Berkshire County. Each program has project eligibility requirements and most require a job creation commitment.



### **Berkshire County Regional Employment Board**

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BCREB is a non-profit corporation established to serve as the region's workforce development board. The mission of the BCREB is to provide leadership for workforce development in Berkshire County by aligning education and training with local labor market needs. The BCREB Board develops policies, allocates resources, oversees programs, and serves as a broker between business and education and training providers. The Board's membership is representative of the make-up of the Berkshire economy, including mostly small and medium sized businesses and a variety of employment sectors.

### **Berkshire Enterprises**

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Berkshire Enterprises is affiliated with Berkshire Community College and its mission is to aid, encourage, train, nurture and advise entrepreneurs in the development, start-up and management of their business.

### **Berkshire Film and Media Collaborative**

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BFMC maintains an online production guide and locations library, and assists productions with permitting, location scouting and finding local crew and equipment. Since its inception in 2009, BFMC has facilitated numerous film, television and media projects. The services provided include:

- Nurturing our community through educational courses, lectures and seminars.
- Creating job opportunities in the film and media sector through adult workforce development courses.
- Networking our local professionals and introducing them to local businesses in need of film/media services.
- Marketing our award-winning professionals and undiscovered locations to national and international film and television markets.

### **Berkshire Works**

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BerkshireWorks is the full service Massachusetts One Stop Career Center serving Berkshire County. It assists individuals in finding and preparing for jobs, connecting to training, and in seeking unemployment services. For employers, it provides on-line employment postings, provides information on employment financial resources, and provides layoff aversion strategies. On an ongoing basis, it provides a variety of workshops and seminars for job seekers and employers, open recruitments, and job fairs,

### **Berkshire Regional Planning Commission**

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The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission is a sub-state district with representatives from the 32 city and town governments in Berkshire County. Its mission is to serve the individual and collective needs of those governments and the region, through provision of technical assistance, acting as a forum for discussion of issues of regional importance, and by advocating on behalf of the region and its interests. BRPC seeks to enhance the regional resilience and quality of life in the Berkshires region of Massachusetts through a variety of initiatives and projects encompassing land use, transportation, economic development, environmental management, sustainable communities and public health.

### **Multicultural Bridge**

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Multicultural Bridge is a nonprofit organization serving Berkshire County which promotes mutual understanding and acceptance among diverse groups and serves as a resource to both local institutions and the community at large. It serves as a catalyst for change through collaboration, education, training, dialogue, fellowship and advocacy.



## **Massachusetts Small Business Development Center**

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The Massachusetts Small Business Development Center Network is committed to helping businesses succeed in Massachusetts. It provides free, confidential, one-to-one business advising and free or low-cost educational training programs to prospective and existing small businesses in Berkshire County. Areas of assistance include, but are not limited to: business plan development, preventive feasibility, cash flow analysis, personnel and organizational issues, conventional and non-conventional financing, and marketing.

## **Berkshire Grown**

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Berkshire Grown is a local food advocacy and networking organization that works to support local agriculture and food related businesses in Berkshire County. It helps match farms with restaurants and institutions, coordinate special market days to bring more local products to market, and help market local food and food events across the region. It has also recently partnered with the Berkshire Visitor's Bureau to launch a new marketing and tourism campaign around local food and farms.

## **Subregional**

### **Community Development Corporation of South Berkshire**

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The mission of the CDC of South Berkshire, a 501(c) 3 nonprofit, is to create housing and economic opportunity for low and moderate-income households in the southern Berkshires. It creates affordable housing and living-wage jobs, working collaboratively with town governments, open space organizations and other local nonprofits. It identifies sites, secures financing and carries out development projects that resonate with the natural beauty of the southern Berkshires.

### **Southern Berkshire Chamber of Commerce**

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The Southern Berkshire Chamber of Commerce serves member businesses and organizations in several towns in southern Berkshire County by providing a wide range of information about community resources and travel and tourism resources in that area.

### **Northern Berkshire Industrial Park and Development Corporation**

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The NBIPDC is a public entity established for promote economic development in northern Berkshire County. It has broad powers, including the power of eminent domain, to develop sites leading to economic development. The last project undertaken was to develop the Adams Corporate Park on the site of the former Renfrew Mills. The business park is now home to multiple small businesses.

### **Franklin County Community Development Corporation**

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Headquartered in Greenfield, Massachusetts, but offering some services in northern Berkshire County, the Franklin County Community Development Corporation (FCCDC) is an economic development non profit organization providing comprehensive business development education, access to capital, commercial office and manufacturing space plus home of the Western Massachusetts Food Processing Center. In northern Berkshire, the FCCDC has been providing entrepreneurial support services including workshops and counselling.

## Local

### Local Chambers of Commerce

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Chambers of Commerce are membership agencies that work on several main fronts to support and expand their business constituency. There are four local chambers of commerce in the Berkshires serving individual communities:

- Lee
- Lenox
- North Adams
- Williamstown

The local chambers sponsor local festivals and events attracting both residents and visitors, provide networking opportunities for members, provide marketing information for their member businesses, and serve as advocates on behalf of those businesses with local, state and federal officials.

### Municipalities

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Berkshire County has two cities and 30 towns, with no unincorporated areas. The cities and larger towns provide a full range of traditional municipal services including police, public works, permitting and inspection services. Some provide fire and ambulance services as well but those often are provided by separate districts or private contractors. The smaller towns usually also provide those services but public works is limited to roadways and does not include utilities. The smallest towns rely on the State Police to provide law enforcement services. A variety of permitting may be needed for particular uses but typical local permitting agencies may include a conservation commission, board of public health, planning board, zoning board, or city council or select board. Community and economic development activities in the largest communities (Adams, North Adams, and Pittsfield) are the responsibility of a Community Development Department, while in Great Barrington that is primarily under the purview of the Town Planner.

### Fire and Water Districts

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The larger towns often have a separate Fire and Water District which is independent of town government. The districts provide fire services and also are responsible for the public water supply, including the distribution system.

### Lee Community Development Corporation

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The Lee CDC provides economic and community development services in the Town of Lee. The Lee CDC has developed a business park, owns a multi-tenant former manufacturing building, has been responsible for key downtown redevelopment efforts, and actively markets these and former mills throughout town for reuse.

### Pittsfield Economic Development Authority

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Pittsfield Economic Development Authority (PEDA) is a quasi-public agency created by a special act of the Massachusetts State Legislature for the purpose of being the recipient and redeveloper of approximately 52 acres of General Electric Company's former industrial facility located in the heart of Pittsfield.

**Table E3: Entities Providing Business Support and Development Services**

	Economic Services	Attraction/Retention	Marketing (General)	Recruitment Events	Tax Incentives	Space Finder	Business Recruitment	Data	Building, Sites, Infrs.	Grants/Loans	Business Development	Networking
State	Mass Development								X	X		
	MA Office of Business Development	X			X		X					
	MA Office of Travel & Tourism		X									
	MassWorks								X			
	Mass Alliance for Economic Development					X	X					
Regional	I Berkshire	X					X	X				
	Berkshire Chamber of Commerce		X			X		X	X			X
	Berkshire Creative											x
	Berkshire Visitors' Bureau		X									X
	Berkshire County Regional Employment Board			X				X		X		
	UMass Small Business Development Center										X	
	Pittsfield Economic Revitalization Corp									X	X	
	Berkshire Enterprises (BCC)									X	X	
	Berkshire Works			X						X		
	Berkshire Regional Planning Commission							X	X			
	Multicultural Bridge											X
	Berkshire Grown (Keep Berkshires Farming)		X			X					X	X
	Berkshire Film and Media Collaborative											
	Carrot Project									X	X	
Subregional	CDC of South Berkshire								X			
	Southern Berkshire Chamber of Commerce		X									
	Northern Berkshire Chamber of Commerce		X									
	Fire and Water Districts								X			
	Franklin County CDC									X	X	X
	Northern Berkshire Industrial Park & Development Corporation								X			
Local	Local Chambers (Lee, Lenox, Williamstown)		X									
	Town/City Governments	X			X	X	X	X	X			
	Pittsfield Economic Development Authority								X			
	Lee CDC								X			

## KEY ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

### Emerging Sectors Opportunities for Economic Growth

Throughout prior assessments, group discussions, and this planning process, there is a sense of opportunity to be captured in certain sectors. This includes local agriculture and food products, high-tech manufacturing, health care related to growing senior needs, and small business development. This plan and its recommendations works to set the stage to make that growth possible.

### Broadband Offers New Opportunities but Better Preparation is Needed to Capture Benefits

Broadband expansion to the region is the single largest infrastructure investment in the region in a long time. In order to capture the benefits of this new resource for business development, improved efficiency, and greater connectivity to outside markets, the region needs to prepare. Preparation includes business and other leaders and workers learning more about on-line tools and options which, with some areas still being served by dial-up, have until now been impractical.

### Small Businesses Abound, but Region is Weak on Modern Entrepreneurial Supports

In discussions of how to support an innovation-friendly economic environment, small business and entrepreneurs were a major focus. The region, like many older industrial areas, has spaces and programs that may be outmoded to current work trends and tools. New spaces, such as group or co-working situations and access to high-tech tools like 3-D printers and the like, are more relevant needs and ones we are currently not meeting. Beyond physical spaces, entrepreneurs also benefit from networking and support which our region does sporadically well depending on the sector or work in question. This was a common theme in comments from small business owners.

### Missing Financial Tools or Products

During discussions with small and mid-size business owners and managers, the need for certain financial tools was raised as a critical need. This is particularly true of products appropriate for startup and first-step growth. In some cases, banks and traditional lenders do not have enough industry information to know how to assess risk variable (e.g., is common in certain agricultural markets). While some organizations, like The Carrot Project, are stepping up to more creatively meet funding needs, the region needs to assess other financial product gaps and work to fill them. This could include a mix of traditional and non-traditional funding sources, such as crowd funding, which have gained in popularity in recent years.

## GOALS, POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

**Goal E6: Offer a region that makes doing business clear, predictable, innovative and competitive.**

**Policy E6.1: Offer high-quality commercial and industrial spaces and sites that meet a diverse range of economic activity needs and communicate that effectively and consistently to all through an open web-based platform.**

**Strategy A: Inventory and Market Sites**

Build upon and maintain a comprehensive site inventory of vacant or occupied commercial and industrial space, including size, zoning, condition, special considerations, and other relevant information to track and market available space.

**Strategy B: Apply Land Trust Model to Include Expand Economic Development**

Expand the established Land Trust model to underwrite land costs for businesses. This model helps take the real estate value appreciation out of the equation to help facilitate site reuse of higher cost land for housing and commercial development.

**Strategy C: Conduct Surveys to Assess New Markets for Businesses and Nonprofit Organizations**

Conduct survey work with communities to gain a better understanding of demand for new economic activity, in both local markets and out-of-region (including international) ones to inform potential businesses. This work should include attention to the nonprofit organization sector.

**Strategy D: Invest in Making Sites Developer-Ready**

Work to make sites developer-ready by proactively addressing zoning, infrastructure, or brownfield concerns.

**Strategy E: Professional Staff to Guide Site Readiness**

Develop a system of professional staff that can work at either a municipal or regional scale to systematically remedy deficiencies that make sites unsuitable for reuse or immediate use.

**Strategy F: Community Economic Snapshots**

Develop a series of municipal and regional snapshots that provide important community information such as demographic, business mix, commercial space costs, available community incentives, and tax rates to help potential investors navigate the region's 32 communities.

**Policy E6.2: Ensure all economic activity centers in the region have business-friendly practices in place to attract and support new and existing businesses**

**Strategy A: Facilitate Municipal Preparedness**

Develop a self-assessment framework for business-friendly practices for municipalities to evaluate themselves based on what they currently offer as a means of illustrating potential for improving economic development responsiveness.

**Strategy B: Offer Range of Tools and Incentives**

Explore the range of land use and tax tools that municipalities could employ, particularly those designated as main economic activity centers.

**Policy E6.3: Support the economies of smaller towns and rural areas and recognize their role and contribution to the larger regional economy.**

**Strategy A: Cultivate a Local Food and Agriculture Cluster**

Support efforts to grow a sustainable agriculture and regional food system for local consumption as well as export to larger markets. See also Food and Agriculture Element.

**Strategy B: Market Small Town Assets Within the Region**

Market the recreation, dining, and shopping options of small towns and rural areas as destinations for tourists as well as day trips for residents. This should include working with Department of Conservation and Recreation and other recreational land holders to help promote business, recreation, and cultural destinations in host communities.

**Strategy C: Support and Expand Home –Based Business Potential**

Encourage all municipalities to have appropriate home-based business regulations in place. This is important to many current livelihoods but is also anticipated to expand in scope as broadband infrastructure is implemented.

**Policy E6.4: Address infrastructure costs or limits through strategic investment and collaborative action.**

**Strategy A: Negotiate with Utilities to Control Energy Costs**

Continue to collaborate for energy purchasing at the municipal level to achieve more competitive rates for all account holders within that jurisdiction. See also Climate and Energy Element.

**Strategy B: Support Broadband Expansion**

Continue to support broadband planning and implementation efforts. See also Infrastructure and Services Element.

**Strategy C: Strengthen Regional Transportation Connections**

Strengthen infrastructure connections within the region as well as between the region and adjacent counties and mid-size cities (Albany and Springfield-Hartford) and nearby major metropolitan areas (Boston and New York City). See also Infrastructure and Services Element.

**Strategy D: Wastewater Treatment**

Work with municipalities to minimize costs of required modernization of wastewater treatment plants. See also Infrastructure and Services Element.

**Goal E7: Support a diverse and robust small business and entrepreneurial environment to drive economic growth and opportunity in the region.**

**Policy E7.1: Address gaps to offer complete life cycle arc of business financial needs.**

**Strategy A: Create Seed Funding Opportunities and Angel Networks**

Foster a formal collaborative to link potential investors with entrepreneurs to cultivate new business relationships and put ideas into action. This could be sector or place-based, depending on the priorities of angel investors. Provide channels for early seed funding.

**Strategy B: Community-Supported Business**

Build on the success of the community supported agriculture model by adapting or extending it into other sectors. This could include equity investments, micro-investments, pre-sales, crowd funding, and other community-supported business models.

**Strategy C: Improve Access to Non-Traditional Loan Products**

Support existing and planned loan programs such as Common Capital, The Carrot Project, Berkshare Loans and faith-based lending for housing and small businesses. The faith-based community may also be able to offer seed financing if programs are organized.

**Strategy D: Improve Access to Traditional Loan Products**

Changes in bank underwriting policies can impact a small business owners' ability to secure a loan from a traditional source. Partners such as the Small Business Administration can work to underwrite small business loan guarantees to reduce risk levels to acceptable levels for traditional bank loan products.

**Strategy E: Create Small Loan Products**

Create loan products that can fill the gap in financing products that can hamper new business starts or small business expansion. One component of this could be to create or expand revolving loan funds to support investment in small business upgrades and expansion.

**Strategy F: Make Local Bank Products Easier to Navigate**

Business owners can feel overwhelmed by the commercial lending process. The region is lucky to have a strong culture of local banks and credit unions with deep ties to the community. Banks should work with business owners and the Small Business Development Center to communicate about bank expectations and products for a variety of business needs.

**Policy E7.2: Create working spaces and opportunities for entrepreneurs to grow their idea into a business.****Strategy A: Offer Interactive Startup Spaces**

Create flexible work space hubs for startups, other businesses, and nonprofits to support innovation, networking, and collaboration.

**Strategy B: Continue Creative Challenge Events**

Continue to host the Creative Challenge events to link entrepreneurs with existing businesses on real projects.

**Strategy C: Organize an Annual Innovation Challenge**

Explore potential for hosting innovation challenges as a means of recruitment, either in partnership with nearby technology schools such as MIT and RPI or through a major employer, including those in Boston or NYC who may have ties to the region.

**Policy E7.3: Improve awareness about and expand the range of services available to small businesses and nonprofit organizations. Foster a number of platforms through which owners of new or established business and non-profit leaders can meet with each other, to share information and provide either services or mentorship.****Strategy A: Promote Small Business Development Services**

The SBDC, Berkshire Enterprises and the Franklin County CDC northern Berkshire program offer a number of valuable services to new and startup small businesses but are not always on the radar of entrepreneurs. Work to make their services more visible through referrals, posters or flyers in key locations, and an on-line presence.

**Strategy B: Identify Gaps, Expand Services**

Explore the range of programs and services that other regions offer to small businesses and nonprofits and identify specific areas where services could expand. This could include creating a

library of business plans or of community-suggested business ideas to help entrepreneurs define and refine their business ideas.

**Strategy C: Social Events for Businesses and Other Leaders**

Continue to host social and networking events to help owners and managers connect, including trade fairs and expos and informal special events.

**Strategy D: Pro-Bono and Mentoring Directory**

Help local businesses and nonprofits find peers and services they need through a central directory that can match volunteers from existing businesses and organizations with new ones.

**Goal E8: Build economic resilience through a focus on strengthening local economies.**

**Policy E8.1: Continue and expand the buy-local movement.**

**Strategy A: Continue and Expand Buy Local First Campaign**

The Berkshire Chamber of Commerce has succeeded in its Buy Local campaign, highlighting the economic benefits to the region of buying from local businesses. This has resulted in better consumer awareness and support of local businesses. Continue this campaign and expand, both among general consumers, and large purchasers such as municipalities and businesses.

**Strategy B: Create Berkshire Identity Program**

Help highlight local products by creating a brand, such as a certification logo, which would clearly illustrate to consumers which products or services are local. A minimum standard of local content or money staying in the local economy could help dictate eligibility. Once established, the branding could be employed to help market products in certain displays/locations, a catalog, or a website.

**Strategy C: Local Goods and Services Directory**

Facilitate local business-to-business purchasing of products and services by providing a directory of goods and services to educate purchasing agents about local options.

**Strategy D: Facilitate Import Substitution**

Facilitate “import substitution” arrangements by identifying a number of locally-produced products that could replace imported products. This generally includes agricultural or food products or energy, but could also include locally manufactured goods.

**Strategy E: Expand the Use of Berkshares Local Currency**

The region should collaboratively work to expand the use of local currency through a combination of education, market coordination, and advocacy. Some specific steps which could be taken include:

- Use local currency as a teaching tool for financial literacy and economics, especially in schools.
- Educate local banks on the benefits of local currency, and strengthen the relationship between currently participating banks of local currency.
- Encourage regional institutions and municipalities to accept and spend local currency.
- Use local currency to promote the Berkshire region, e.g. with the Berkshire Visitor’s Bureau

**Policy E8.2: Facilitate access to alternative or community-based investment models.**

**Strategy A: Educate About Alternative Business Models**

Alternative business models, such as worker-owned co-ops, can disperse the individual cost carried by any one partner, thereby making business exploration less risky. This can be particularly helpful for individuals or communities with limited access to capital. Profits are distributed among all employees in the co-op, keeping more money in the local economy.



**Strategy B: Explore Time-banking Possibilities**

Time banking, the process of exchanging services (time) rather than money is a “pay it forward” model that allows people to essentially barter with another local entity for needed goods or services. An entity to help match needs and wants can help facilitate these arrangements.

**Goal E9: Promote green business practices.****Policy E9.1: Support businesses that use environmentally restorative practices.****Strategy A: Energy and Waste Efficiency**

Provide education and technical assistance for businesses to reduce their carbon footprint through energy efficiency, renewable energy, chemical (e.g., cleaning agents), paper, and waste use or generation. This should include linking businesses to grants or financial incentives (e.g., environmental tax credits).

**Strategy B: Translate Green Practices into a Marketing Benefit**

Develop and implement publicity campaigns that highlight local businesses that have environmentally-friendly business practices.



## 4. QUALITY OF LIFE

*The Berkshires are renowned for their quality of life amenities including scenic beauty, year-round outdoor recreation, world class theater, dance and music offerings, local farms and food, and Main Street style downtowns. The importance of investing in these assets to expand and retain the quality of life offerings will be a critical ingredient in long term economic sustainability. This section presents key quality of life attributes and how to leverage them to achieve economic and social/workforce objectives.*

### THE IMPORTANCE OF PLACE

Quality of life in a community is the combined effect of a number of factors including housing quality and options, social connections and activities, schools, entertainment, and recreation or lifestyle amenities. In terms of both economic activity and quality of life for a community, it is also about how the downtown, town center, village center, or hamlet functions as a social and economic hub for the entire community. The downtown is also a key aspect in communicating an image of what it is like to live in the Berkshires, including for younger, more urban-focused demographics.

**Table E4: 10 Characteristics of Vibrant Downtowns**

Housing and People	1	Is a vibrant neighborhood with a mix of uses	Healthy downtowns have housing which provides a ready customer base and activity at the street level.
	2	Is surrounded by vibrant neighborhoods	Similarly, downtown or activity centers thrive when there are healthy mixed-income neighborhoods surrounding them from which people can walk to shops and businesses. The condition of those neighborhoods can contribute or detract from the overall experience of the main street area.
	3	Contains or is surrounded by trip generators and main attractions (major employers, theater, sporting events, etc.)	Having a major destination, whether that is a sports field, hospital, or entertainment venue, can draw in high volumes of people. If this is not possible, special events can help provide this function.
Setting the Stage	4	Safe and clean	A safe and clear environment, where garbage cans are present and maintained, sidewalks are kept clean and clear, adequate lighting for comfort and traffic moving at reasonable speeds makes for a pleasant environment in which to spend some time.
	5	Pedestrian-friendly design, including landscaping, outdoor seating and other people-centric amenities	Traditional town centers tend to have this built-in, in terms of buildings, but ensuring that there are amenities for people including art, signage, seating, and landscaping at the ground level helps to improve the quality of the experience.
	6	Distinct character and sense of place	Vibrant downtowns have an identity, and it is an identity shaped by the character of the community which creates a sense of investment and attachment from the community to that place (aka. the “heart” of the community).

Attractions	7	Mix of business types	Vibrant downtowns need a mix of business types to give enough critical mass of things to do for people to come and stay for a while rather than just visit one place.
	8	Day and night offerings	Vibrant downtowns don't go to sleep after 5 pm. They are active day-and night.
	9	Real life relevance (grocery, gym, church, city/town hall)	Healthy town centers and downtowns have relevance to the daily lives and pursuits of residents.
Unified and Consistent Plan and Vision	10	Cohesive plan with broad buy-in and public-private partnership with an eye on constant improvement	Building and continuously improving on a healthy downtown or town center takes unified and sustained effort by a broad coalition of entities within a community. A lack of a plan, fragmented actions, or a frequently shifting vision can each cost a community in missed opportunities for grants or public or private investment, community support, and momentum.

## KEY ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

### Diversifying the Berkshire Brand

The Berkshires have a certain brand as clean and scenic, cultured yet rural, with small town charm. This is a great asset, but one that needs to be maintained and also communicated to a wider demographic. Most of the tourists and many residents are in the baby boomer generation. Broadening the appeal and options, whether that is outdoor recreation or housing is a common theme in the plan. It is also true about social options for residents to appeal to a broader demographic and lifestyle preferences.

## GOALS, POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

**Goal E10: Expand the Berkshire marketing to reach a younger demographic.**

**Policy E10.1: Increase the focus and offerings of events and marketing geared at the under 40 population of residents and visitors.**

### **Strategy A: Support the Expansion and Growth of Outdoor Recreation Events and Options**

Support healthy interaction and lifestyle options for young workers and families by expanding the range of options for youth-friendly outdoor sports such as mountain biking, kayaking, diverse adult sports leagues, swimming and rock climbing. See also Conservation and Recreation Element.

### **Strategy B: Grow a Vibrant, Diverse, Safe, and Healthy Berkshires after Dark Scene**

Many downtowns become ghost towns after dark as shops and restaurants close, leaving only a bar scene for entertainment and interaction. A lack of activity can also contribute to safety concerns and dissuade some from choosing to come downtown after dark. Work with downtown business groups in downtown centers to identify ways to grow an after-dark scene that offers a wider range of activities and options. Many young workers choose to live in either Albany or Northampton area where they see more lifestyle options. Host a set of focus groups, including for 20-Something and 30-Something people, aimed at identifying activities or concerns driving this decision-making and then work to build a more youth-friendly environment.

**Goal EII: Create vibrant community spaces.****Policy EII.1: Target investment of time and resources to building vibrant downtowns and village centers.****Strategy A: Work Locally to Translate the 10 Elements of Vibrant Downtowns into Context-Appropriate Strategies, to Build Expertise in Best Practices, and to Promote Downtown Investment.**

There are several scales and contexts of economic centers across the region and each community has its own unique character and identity. Translating the principles into on-the-ground action must be informed by both scale and character of places. Local elected officials, staff, and boards should work together to identify action items for downtown improvement, using the guidance in Table E4 as a starting point. There is a need to train such people in best practices related to the ten principles. Physical investments in downtowns are also important. Part of the strategy is to work to pursue grants for economic development, community development, and infrastructure.



## 5. LOCAL AND REGIONAL LEADERSHIP

*In order for the region's economy to move forward, strong and unified leadership employing regional-scale, net gain thinking will be needed. While section three reviews many of the actors and programs being offered, this section contains a few additional policies on higher-level processes and thinking with the aim of fostering a comprehensive and well-coordinated economic development system and leadership for the region.*

### STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP, AGILITY & VISION

Strategic leadership for economic development in the region, as well as at the municipal level, requires unified planning and action.

- **Regional Plans:** In addition to this plan element, the region also now has a current Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) which is a gateway document to draw future federal Economic Development Administration (EDA) funds to the region.
- **Municipal Plans:** Municipalities have a number of plan vehicles through which they can chart a course for economic development including the comprehensive or master plan, including an economic insert or section of that plan, specific downtown or corridor plans and strategies, and community development strategies.
- **Economic Development Entity Plans and Studies:** A number of documents have been generated over the past decade including a number that have been discussed throughout this document related to clusters, non-profits, and high-tech manufacturing. These help get to a higher level of detail in specific economic topics or sectors. These include the Berkshire Blueprint, developed by the (former) Berkshire Economic Development Corporation, and the Berkshire Creative Economy report, both of which provide in depth analysis and strategies to promote economic growth.
- **Workforce Reports and Strategies:** The Berkshire County Regional Employment Board, the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, Crittenton Women's Union and others generate valuable labor market reports including educational attainment, unemployment, sector-specific employment needs, and earnings performance.

In addition to the entities listed in section three of this plan and the 32 municipalities of the county, there are a number of other leadership groups with a role to play in advancing economic development strategies as identified throughout this plan.

- **CEO Roundtable:** A group of large employer CEOs who meet regularly on high-level economic and business topics.
- **Funders Roundtable:** A group of the main foundation and granting entities in the county who meet to discuss priority needs in the region towards which to direct initiative funding.
- **Superintendents Roundtable:** The school Superintendents of the county meet regularly to discuss education issues.
- **Compact for Education Committees:** These ongoing working groups are a great vehicle to lead or augment other group efforts to address economic development needs as relates to education at all age levels.

## KEY ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

### Parochial Thinking Still Dominates the Landscape

Not unique to the region, but still a challenge that communities in the Berkshires and nationally are struggling with, is shifting the economic development focus to one of net gains. Much of economic development work and investment nationally as focused on having regions compete for employers, offering attractive incentive packages for them to do so. What this does, however, is simply shift jobs from one location to another, with no net gain. This type of “game board” pattern has been evident in the Berkshires, where one community recruits an employer to relocate from elsewhere in the region. Discussions for long-range economic development focus on the need to start behaving more as a region and focusing on net gain of quality job opportunities.

### Focus on Living Wage

Hospitality sector jobs, while a critical component of the region’s economy and prosperity, are also generally lower-wage jobs. There was much discussion on how to focus economic development on employment and sectors which will help return some of the higher-paying jobs lost as manufacturing employment declined over the past several decades. This is a social as well as economic sustainability concern.

## GOALS, POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

**Goal E12: Establish a leadership culture that recognizes that an economic success anywhere in the region is a success for all.**

**Policy E12.1: Foster a culture of regionalism focused on net gain of jobs.**

#### **Strategy A: Focus on Adding Living Wage Jobs**

A healthy economy offers many different kinds of jobs, covering a wide range of wage levels, skill and experience requisites, and weekly working-hour requirements. Economic development wins at the municipal levels are frequently a matter of moving jobs from one community to another with no net gain of employment and opportunity for the region. While inter-municipal competition is healthy in terms of keeping costs of doing business down, a stronger focus should be placed on business recruitment and new business creation. A major concern should be to add jobs that pay a living wage. However, we recognize that such jobs inevitably are followed by unskilled, part-time, and lower-paying jobs, for example in tourism, retail, and some services. We should be receptive to those kinds of jobs, especially if they offer good on-the-job training, as long as they do not dominate employment growth. Such jobs, even part-time ones, can be valuable earning opportunities for second and third wage earners in families, for example spouses, partners, and teenagers who desire part-time work and/or do not yet have much work experience. The same is true of retirees who desire part-work, an important consideration in a region that has a large retired population.

**Goal E13: Offer a comprehensive set of economic development services.**

**Policy E13.1: Align efforts to eliminate duplication and negative competition.**

#### **Strategy A: Map Economic Services and Activities**

Currently there is a web of economic activities occurring at different scales or market focus. Both for efficient use of resources and to offer an economic development system that is easy to navigate to find the needed services, the region should collaborate to chart out current activities and



streamline efforts where possible. In some cases, there may also be a gap in service that should be addressed.

**Strategy B: Identify Priority Development Areas**

The state has begun emphasizing the identification and use of “priority development areas” which affords special consideration in grant applications. These can be priority areas for housing or economic development. They can be local or regional in scale. The state will also select state level priority development areas. In order to keep the region competitive and help direct resources to site readiness for economic sites in the region, we should work together to identify and prioritize sites and communicate that strategy to the state.

**Goal EI4: Improve the transparency of regional decision-making.**

**Policy EI4.1: Link economic decisions to regional plan.**

**Strategy A: Use Plan to Guide and Communicate Unified Approach to Economic Development**

The regional plan should serve as the blueprint for future economic development activities. Therefore, future organizational activities should work to implement the goals, policies and strategies established herein.

**Strategy B: Update Municipal Plans**

Many of the goals and strategies for economic development will need to be enacted at the municipal level through public investments, zoning changes, and collaborative relationships. Municipalities are encouraged to update their municipal plans to reflect the new regional policy and determine how they are going to implement it at the local level.

**Policy EI4.2: Work to improve the diversity of business, government and organization leadership.**

**Strategy A: Actively Pursue Diversity of Governing Boards in Businesses and Nonprofits, and Municipal Boards**

Actively work to recruit new faces to governing boards across the region, including diversity of age, gender, native/recent newcomer, race and culture.

**Strategy B: Cultivate Diverse Set of Young Leaders**

Strive to incorporate diversity in Berkshire Leadership Program, a program of the Berkshire Chamber of Commerce, seeks to prepare, involve and sustain leaders from diverse backgrounds who are committed and competent to address community challenges and improve the quality of life in the Berkshires. Work with local diversity organizations and community groups both to ensure the Program’s approach is culturally competent and to help identify potential participants.

**Strategy C: Make Value of Inclusiveness More Visible**

Create and publish a board scorecard to highlight achievements in board diversification to give credit to those making strides in this area.



## IMPLEMENTATION

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On March 20, 2014, the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission adopted the entire Sustainable Berkshires plan, which is comprised of eight elements:

- Economy
- Housing and Neighborhoods
- Climate and Energy
- Conservation and Recreation
- Local Food and Agriculture
- Historic Preservation
- Infrastructure and Services
- Land Use

The new regional plan, including the goals, policies and strategies set forth in this element, will be implemented by a variety of actors over the next decade. The plan contains numerous strategies, some of which are longer-term or “big ticket” items that will take some time and planning; others are already underway or can be implemented immediately. As a regional plan, this is a non-regulatory document whose main purpose is to set a cohesive strategy for the Berkshire region to align actions, priorities, and investments to yield the greatest benefit to the region.

Because implementation will be an active and evolving process over the next decade, the implementation strategy for all eight elements is contained under separate cover to allow it to be used as a working document. Updates to the elements will occur as needed over time to reflect major needs and trends of the region. However, the Implementation addendum to the plan is an administrative document that will serve three functions:

1. A schedule of implementation timeframes, responsible parties, and potential funding sources to be used or pursued;
2. A tracking mechanism for implementation actions taken over time to record progress as it is made; and
3. A planning tool to help the Commission and its other implementation partners pull out certain strategies to pursue in one or three-year action plans to help focus effort and achieve results.

In addition to the implementation addendum, a number of data points will be tracked over time to measure change in certain metrics. These metrics were selected based on available data that relates to the goals and strategies called for in each element. The metric reports will be openly available online through BRPC’s Berkshire Benchmarks program website ([www.berkshirebenchmarks.org](http://www.berkshirebenchmarks.org)).



# Appendices



## Economy Element

- A:** Small—and Mid– Size Business Forums
- B:** Economic Forums



# SMALL- AND MID-SIZE BUSINESS FORUMS

The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission and I Berkshires co-hosted four small business forums between March 27 and May 1, 2012. These were specifically targeted to the owners or managers of small- to mid-size businesses (up to 50 employees) across the region, and advertised through business list serves of Berkshire Visitors Bureau, Berkshire County Chambers of Commerce, and Berkshire Creative. Notices were also sent out to municipal staff to access additional, more local (e.g., downtown associations) lists. Three morning meetings were held, one each in Lee, Pittsfield, and North Adams. A fourth meeting was held in the afternoon in Pittsfield to accommodate different schedules. In total, 40 people participated in these small-group sessions.

The one-hour focus groups were designed to receive comments from each person in attendance on each topic. Nine topic areas were introduced as relate to starting and operating a successful business. Participants were provided with post-it notes to write the issues or suggestions they had for fostering a more business-friendly environment. Participants were given two minutes per topic to write down all ideas in each of the following areas:

1. **Business planning:** What are your business planning needs for starting or expanding your business?
2. **Access to capital:** Do you have access to the loan products or other sources of capital needed to start and run your business?
3. **Space:** Are the commercial and industrial spaces in the region set up to meet your needs or are there gaps in the supply? Other issues with finding and occupying the space you need for your business?
4. **Legal compliance:** What legal needs have you encountered that state, regional or municipal entities could better assist with? This could include understanding and complying with labor laws, legally establishing your business, tax issues or questions, etc.
5. **Permits and compliance:** What issues or ideas do you have for improving state and local permitting or compliance processes as they impact your business? This could include your interactions with planning and zoning boards, boards of health, building inspectors, etc.
6. **Workforce:** What workforce needs do local businesses grapple with? What are the issues and needs in terms of finding and retaining qualified, high-quality employees?
7. **Marketing:** What marketing needs or ideas do you have to improve your business performance and that of the larger region?

8. **Customers/community:** How is your customer base, or how do community conditions near your business impact your business or the business district in which you are located? This could include crime, code violations, etc.
9. **Anything else?** Do you have issues or ideas you have not yet had the opportunity to share in one of the other categories? Please add them here!

As each topic was completed, staff collected comments and placed them on sheets along the walls of the room. After all comments on each of the nine topics were gathered, participants were provided eight sticky dots and invited to review the collective comments of the group and place a dot next to the ideas they thought were the most important. The following summary lists the suggestions by topic. Because there were many commonalities in terms of the comments received across the county, individual notes have been grouped by the general theme. The numbers next to specific comments (#) show the number of dots that particular idea received across the four forums. The “group score” shows the number of votes by the larger theme.

**The Top Three:**

1. Make municipal permitting faster and easier to navigate (27 votes)
2. Better understanding of existing services offered through municipalities and other economic development groups (13 votes)
3. Better access to capital through local banks (10 votes)

These forums were hosted as a joint initiative of BRPC and 1 Berkshire as both entities are currently developing economic development strategies for the region. BRPC is in the process of drafting a long-range plan for the Berkshires, which includes economic development. 1Berkshire, as a relatively new entity in the region, is working to identify priority strategies for implementation in the next year or two. Together, these two efforts will help organize and implement a consistent set of short- and long-term actions to help advance economic development in the region. These forums are a starting point. Please stay tuned for future events and public workshops to be held on this topic over the summer of 2012 and check [www.sustainableberkshire.org](http://www.sustainableberkshire.org) for updates and event announcements on the regional plan.



## BUSINESS PLANNING

Need	Suggested Strategies (# votes as “priority”)
<p><b>Better understanding of existing services offered through municipalities and other economic development groups</b></p> <p>Total group score: 13</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better marketing of what services are available to businesses and through whom (13)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Events that offer continuing education and networking to business owners in the region</b></p> <p>Total group score: 8</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forums/group discussions on issues such as forming an LLC, retirement planning, tax issues, etc. (3)</li> <li>• Facilitate opportunities to foster strategic collaborations among local businesses such as sharing support services or teaming on projects (3)</li> <li>• Coordinate an entrepreneurs roundtable where small business owners can discuss common concerns and support each other</li> <li>• Opportunities for not-yet business owners, startups still in the development phase to meet each other as well as start to be integrated into the larger, more established business community</li> <li>• Networking (or support group) opportunities for micro-business owners to meet and talk about the issues relating to owning a business (2)</li> <li>• Work with papers to have regular business column on business resources and events in the region</li> </ul>
<p><b>Business planning 101 and new business mentorship</b></p> <p>Total group score: 6</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer group or mentorship for new business owners</li> <li>• Facilitate better understanding of competition and whether business concepts are sound <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Mentor or investor group review of draft business plans – opportunity to fail on paper</li> <li>○ Facilitate early access to applicable trade shows</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Personal finance classes</li> <li>• Business planning training series/package: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Picking the correct legal form for your business</li> <li>○ Articulating a vision for your business</li> <li>○ Understanding cash flow</li> <li>○ Estimating startup costs</li> <li>○ Working with banks</li> <li>○ Legal needs, tax rules, and labor laws</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Free or low-cost trainings on writing an effective business plan (regularly scheduled – e.g. annual, every six months rather than one-time events) (3)</li> <li>• Business startup kit – guide to local funding, legal, real estate, municipal, and other resources that will be needed to start a business – user-friendly</li> <li>• “Field Tech Support” after a business is operational (2)</li> <li>• Provide the opportunity to fail on paper (1)</li> </ul>

<b>Advanced business planning for existing businesses and executives</b>  Total group score: 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business planning assistance for businesses that may have started without one and are now looking to refine or expand their business (1)</li> <li>• Business planning for executives</li> <li>• Emergency business planning for businesses in trouble (3)</li> </ul>
<b>Translating industry and market data to local economy</b>  Total group score: 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate local networks and purchasing behavior among local businesses via information – e.g., industry cost information for manufactured products, local producers list (2)</li> <li>• Assistance with forecasting in volatile economic climate (1)</li> <li>• Market segmentation info for Berkshire County</li> <li>• Knowledge of how financial projections are created and what they say</li> </ul>

## ACCESS TO CAPITAL

Need	Suggested Strategies (# votes as “priority”)
<b>Better access to capital through local banks</b>  Total group score: 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Address loan product gaps <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Purchase of equipment</li> <li>○ Working capital at workable terms (3)</li> <li>○ Small short-term loans (under \$10,000) for cash flow downturns</li> <li>○ Better access to working capital between \$25,000 and \$75,000 dollars (2)</li> <li>○ Need for small loans for start-ups in the \$10,000 to \$50,000 range. Where and how to access? (3)</li> <li>○ Financing for property owners to build-out space for a new tenant</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Clearer understanding of what banks are looking for to save everyone time</li> <li>• Loan adjustment guidance</li> <li>• Real estate financing rules for businesses ever-changing</li> <li>• Banks partnering with Small Business Development Center to help with application process is a great starting place</li> <li>• Lack of money for building repair/maintenance or equipment</li> <li>• Options for businesses not able to get traditional financing in down economy</li> <li>• Bank lending rules change year-to-year, e.g., percent down needed for building purchase</li> <li>• Frustrated with banks (2)</li> </ul>
<b>Flexible money – grants, non-bank loans or low-risk venture capital</b>  Total group score: 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitating access to grants for non-profits at a regional scale – e.g., arts and culture non-profits</li> <li>• Develop regional micro-loan program for startup capital</li> <li>• Grant-writing assistance</li> <li>• Plenty of “Angel” investors here to provide venture capital and there is venture “spirit” here too – how do we harness this?</li> <li>• Need a private \$ pool for start-ups (1) or program to offer reduced</li> </ul>

Need	Suggested Strategies (# votes as “priority”)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>startup costs (2)</li> <li>Grant money for arts and culture small business marketing and advertising (2)</li> <li>Need help communicating a “reality check” about what grants are – and <u>are not</u> – available for small businesses. Being an entrepreneur implies taking on a certain amount of risk in exchange for potential profits.</li> <li>More grant opportunities for small businesses (micro-businesses) (1)</li> </ul>
<b>Clearer links to municipal contacts for business incentives</b>  Total group score: 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clearly educate on what resources are (and are not) available to support business startup or relocation</li> <li>Tax incentives for expanding or hiring businesses (3)</li> <li>Bank money is there locally but private investment continues to be difficult due to market conditions. Is Mass truly competitive with incentives? What more can be done with local incentives? (2)</li> <li>Guide to contacts or agencies for different municipalities (e.g., PERC) and what each does</li> <li>Community-based loan programs for business</li> </ul>
<b>Guide to business funding</b>  Total group score: 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Types of funding, what banks are looking for, pitfalls to avoid</li> <li>Understanding cash flow</li> <li>Coaching or counseling to improve chance of financing from someone with bank knowledge regarding programs that provide credit enhancement (1)</li> <li>Guide to business loans and assistance writing an effective business plan that can help persuade lenders (2)</li> <li>Understanding accurate start-up costs and cash flow needed</li> <li>Financing technical assistance, business but also setting personal finance in order</li> </ul>
<b>Understanding and accessing business incentives</b>  Total group score: 0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitate local businesses taking advantage of federal- and state-driven economic stimulus programs such as tax incentives for hiring</li> <li>Better communication about programs and incentives so people know where and what they can access</li> </ul>

## SPACE

Need	Suggested Strategies (# votes as “priority”)
<b>Finding space or creating the space you need</b>  Total group score: 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More accessibility to a list of available space that includes cost and taxes(9)</li> <li>Zoning issues for change of use (Pittsfield)</li> <li>Create co-op setting for businesses with compatible space needs to share space or facilitate matching</li> <li>Challenging to buy a multi-use space to house your business and others – have to be landlord and business owner as relates to property</li> <li>Finding capital or credit to purchase space and danger of using house as collateral</li> <li>Negotiation skills for renting space</li> <li>Timing and inspections need to move along quickly</li> </ul>

<b>Keeping costs down</b>  Total group score: 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deal with the high energy costs of the region</li> <li>• Ways to keep Downtown rents reasonable – including adding new space via mill reuse</li> <li>• Eliminate 2-tiered real estate tax on owner-occupied properties</li> <li>• Keep business property taxes down - too high</li> <li>• Keep rents down without having to sacrifice having a well-maintained space (2)</li> <li>• Tiered cost/sf rates for local versus national chain businesses to support local business (2)</li> <li>• In high-cost markets (e.g., Great Barrington) need to create more space to help keep costs reasonable – redevelop old mills (1)</li> <li>• In recovering markets, craft a space inventory and reuse strategy to transition space into private business use, including old mills and churches (2)</li> </ul>
<b>Visibility and ease of access to commercial properties</b>  Total group score: 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategies for minimizing impacts of major public development/infrastructure project</li> <li>• Improve visibility of off-Main Street businesses</li> <li>• Support retail (versus social services) in downtowns to make more active centers that are good environments for business (2)</li> <li>• Parking – nearby and affordable</li> <li>• Parking (Pittsfield) - time limits detract from visitor experience or make them cut it short (1) and monthly cost (\$25-35/mo) to employees is a negative for downtown employers and staff</li> <li>• Better pedestrian connections within downtowns and to other nearby attractions</li> </ul>
<b>Broadband internet</b>  Total group score: 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve internet access via broadband expansion</li> <li>• Address current high speed internet service gaps in downtowns (e.g. Pittsfield where pay 2-3x more than next street over) (2)</li> </ul>
<b>Keeping quality high</b>  Total group score: 0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Siting of social services in downtown (Main Streets) dilutes the vitality as shopping, business, and entertainment</li> <li>• Landlords (Pittsfield) do not maintain their spaces</li> <li>• A roundtable bringing businesses and landlords together to discuss issues</li> <li>• More “pressure” or support from economic development entities and municipalities for landlords to hear and respond to business concerns and needs</li> </ul>
<b>Spaces that are missing or very limited</b>  Total group score: 0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to site a conference space in region that can accommodate business/executive and other retreats – whether this is a single facility or a network of B&amp;B and other existing sites.</li> <li>• Need a commercial kitchen space for small-scale food production</li> <li>• Affordable warehouse space is wither missing or difficult to find – if it is there, a guide to help find space would be helpful</li> <li>• Shortage of low-cost manufacturing space for start-ups</li> <li>• Need for event spaces in both north and south county</li> </ul>

<b>Incubator space</b>  Total group score: 0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low or free use of vacant commercial spaces for a limited time, including extra space in another company</li> <li>• Shared/Common space with internet access</li> <li>• Mobile incubator space – technical support that come to you (commercial space/home)</li> </ul>
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## LEGAL COMPLIANCE

Need	Suggested Strategies (# votes as “priority”)
<b>Ongoing legal needs</b>  Total group score: 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keeping up with new/changing regulations such as the new ADA regulations (2)</li> <li>• Music venue support to ensure in compliance with Broadcast Music Inc. (BMI) (1)</li> <li>• Education on tax compliance issues (1)</li> <li>• Small business legal advice on contract and mutual non-disclosure agreements</li> <li>• Create a legal advisory board for simple questions from small businesses</li> <li>• Need assistance from local legal community on navigating intellectual property law</li> <li>• Tax relief on inventory for small businesses? (4)</li> <li>• A legal advisory board for small businesses</li> <li>• Awareness of legal issues and education supports</li> <li>• Annual training from economic development entity on labor rights laws and do's and don'ts of poster placement, etc. to be in compliance</li> </ul>
<b>Legal support for startups</b>  Total group score: 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pro-bono work for local firms to help new businesses navigate establishment and other legal needs correctly (3)</li> <li>• Small business training on legal considerations <u>before</u> opening a business</li> </ul>
<b>More carrots for good performance</b>  Total group score: 0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insurance companies should offer lower rates to companies who go without any claims for a certain period of time</li> <li>• Liability insurance rates rise with profitability – disincentive to make more?</li> </ul>

## PERMITS AND COMPLIANCE

Need	Suggested Strategies (# votes as “priority”)
<b>Make municipal permitting faster and easier to navigate</b>  Total group score: 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A roadmap for local permitting that includes an easy guide to the rules and regulations, processes, and procedures pertinent to businesses e.g., parking, signage, zoning/use/change of use. This should include easy-to-find (one place) on-line forms and resources (8)</li> <li>• Streamline permitting and compliance - should be welcoming rather than barriers to overcome (8)</li> <li>• One-stop-shop resource for guidance through the permitting and planning process – kind of ombudsman – to provide step-by-step instruction all the way through the process (11)</li> <li>• Appeals support or guidance – how to deal with arbitrary rulings and reversals (Planning Board says OK then Select Board says no)?</li> <li>• Need local regulations to be reasonable in scope and process (e.g., sign approval,, approval of plants in front of shop)</li> <li>• Keep permits for special events as flexible as possible</li> </ul>
<b>Streamline fees and payments</b>  Total group score: 0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual fee schedule to facilitate business financial planning</li> <li>• Quarterly billing for all fees</li> </ul>
<b>Consistent and predictable system</b>  Total group score: 0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Variations across municipalities in terms of application and permits</li> <li>• Sense that rules and regulations are inconsistently applied in certain locations (e.g., Pittsfield)</li> <li>• Sign laws – especially in non-downtown sections of Williamstown and Lenox</li> </ul>

## WORKFORCE

Need	Suggested Strategies (# votes as “priority”)
<b>Labor needs and recruitment</b>  Total group score: 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficult to attract or retain skilled labor/advanced degree workers (5)</li> <li>• Difficult to find qualified workers (4)</li> <li>• Population gap (mid 20s-mid 30s) – how do we keep or attract them here?</li> </ul>
<b>Hiring and legal support</b>  Total group score: 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Location to get background checks done at a low cost?</li> <li>• Training on how to hire and interview</li> <li>• Assistance refining hiring process – pre-application screening for certain basics?</li> <li>• Better information on government programs that support hiring</li> <li>• Guidance on best ways to advertise</li> <li>• Ways to work more closely with local colleges and workforce non-profits to conduct direct recruitment for open positions to streamline hiring (5)</li> </ul>

<b>Staff development and training</b>  Total group score: 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need help creating staff development plans (1)</li> <li>• Retraining workers, particularly in new technical areas</li> <li>• Longer-term – need a PhD program in the area</li> <li>• Coordinate with schools to develop internship programs (1)</li> <li>• Computer training, customer service and other seminars for employee training offered locally (1)</li> <li>• Math skills</li> <li>• Businesses need to perform needed training in the workplace – e.g., restaurants and retail</li> <li>• Need more mentor or internship opportunities to help train new career entrants</li> </ul>
<b>Economic challenges of service and seasonal economy</b>  Total group score: 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need reasonable prices housing for seasonal workers (1)</li> <li>• Ability to pay a living wage and offer benefits, this includes cost but also potential to share employees among businesses but still offer benefits</li> <li>• Low availability of legal worker pool for housekeeping jobs</li> </ul>
<b>Quality employees/work ethic/reliability</b>  Total group score: 0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low levels of dependability in service worker pool</li> <li>• Need trained, reliable people, problem solvers</li> <li>• Poor basic employment skills, how to approach an employer, interview process, customer etiquette, bringing personal issues to work</li> <li>• Unrealistic compensation expectations</li> </ul>
<b>Health care</b> Total group score: 0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health care costs are a killer</li> <li>• Difficulty stopping unemployment benefits via Department of Unemployment Insurance, inconsistent response</li> </ul>

## CUSTOMERS/COMMUNITY

Need	Suggested Strategies (# votes as “priority”)
<b>Promoting “Buy Local”</b>  Total group score: 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to promote the buy local message and expand that campaign (9)</li> <li>• Organize trade shows to highlight local products and businesses, including startups (perhaps via a shared booth option)</li> <li>• More business fairs, especially health related</li> </ul>
<b>Build or expand customer base</b>  Total group score: 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primary customer base in the Berkshires is aging. Younger generation is not coming to replace it in the same size (1)</li> <li>• Expand customers – get more customers to visit more towns in the Berkshires rather than just the one in which they are staying. Need more targeted marketing around this e.g., trip planner pocket guides (1)</li> <li>• Creating market for– including finding the facilities to support – executive and business retreats to the area from Boston and NYC (1)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Events and festivals that have a wider catchment area (e.g., adjacent states or counties) (1)</li> <li>• Concern about dependence on culture for tourism – take a broader view</li> <li>• Better collaboration among businesses to promote events that can draw in customers</li> </ul>
<b>Community supports for business</b>  Total group score: 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Occupancy tax not equal across the region</li> <li>• Hospitality/tourism seen as cash cow but not well supported by policies or attitudes of residents (negative view of tourists)</li> <li>• Phasing and timing of major projects (e.g., infrastructure or construction) can disrupt customer flow to businesses</li> <li>• Incentives/enforcement for business owners to maintain their properties – including outside of downtown areas</li> <li>• Downtown beautification (e.g., landscaping, art) to make inviting setting for pedestrians to spend time</li> <li>• Assistance making sure downtowns have balanced activity both day and night (3)</li> </ul>

## MARKETING

Need	Suggested Strategies (# votes as “priority”)
<b>Strengthen and streamline regional marketing</b>  Total group score: 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better regional marketing campaigns that are truly <u>countywide</u> and fostering a more regional perspective (common good versus competition) to marketing activities</li> <li>• Better coordination of regional marketing across agencies (1)</li> <li>• Stronger collaborative emphasis on visual arts (2)</li> <li>• Chamber and other larger entities recognition and support for efforts of micro businesses (versus small business)</li> <li>• Better regional marketing for small tourism businesses (2)</li> <li>• Marketing co-op’s to facilitate joint marketing efforts for different business sectors or businesses within a common geography/municipality (1)</li> <li>• Marketing grants to help defray costs of marketing or a matching grant for marketing larger campaigns or events that would benefit multiple businesses</li> <li>• Off season promotions (1)</li> </ul>
<b>Expand the range of tools used</b>  Total group score: 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training or seminar to highlight the different forms of media that can be used to reach potential customers - including some performance information e.g., which tools work best for different products or demographics to inform business decision-making</li> <li>• How to market effectively “beyond sales” to draw in customers</li> <li>• Better use of social media – who is doing it well, how to get social media savvy – young people available to help? (4)</li> </ul>
<b>Market research to guide strategies/techniques</b>  Total group score: 0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Berkshire County market research to better understand who our customers are and what marketing methods they best respond to so can get best bang for advertising buck – but also to better understand what products or services they are looking for</li> </ul>



**Expand quality marketing options for resource-limited businesses**

Total group score: 0

- Continuous space for local businesses to display their products beyond a trade show or special event
- Affordable memberships to BVB and Chamber
- Training on effective marketing, where to find help, ad design and placement, maximizing word-of-mouth, etc

## ANYTHING ELSE?

Need	Suggested Strategies (# votes as “priority”)
<b>Transportation</b> Total group score: 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better transit service in south Berkshires (3)</li> </ul>
<b>Green initiatives</b> Total group score: 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ways for small businesses to become more green and gain recognition for doing so (2)</li> <li>• More information in the community and business community on solar photovoltaic and hot water systems</li> <li>• Energy efficiency and technology technical assistance to better understand options</li> </ul>
<b>Leadership</b> Total group score: 0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small business advisory council of small business owners</li> <li>• Need for an entity/organization really focused on micro-business</li> <li>• North Berkshire CDC – needed</li> <li>• Foster local business philanthropy – engaged community leaders giving back – include a range of ways to give back</li> <li>• Economic development efforts (municipal, regional) should actively research successful business promotion practices from across the county - both from a financial and aesthetic standpoint (e.g. pedestrian amenities, closing off streets to vehicle traffic, etc)</li> <li>• Better/clearer/more regular lines of communication between business community and economic development entities</li> </ul>



# ECONOMIC FORUMS

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## FORUM SUMMARY

As part of the process for the Economic element of *Sustainable Berkshires*, open forums were held on September 18, 2012 in Lanesborough and on September 19, 2012 in Stockbridge to discuss the current state and future directions for economic development in Berkshire County. Ten communities were represented by members of their Board of Selectmen, Community Development Departments, and Planning Departments, and their residents. Regional Community Development and Economic Development groups and private business interests also participated.

BRPC Senior Planner Amy Kacala gave a PowerPoint presentation that presented demographic and economic data, explained global and national trends and presented a 5 step strategy for a competitive economy in Berkshire County. Those steps include:

1. Advance education and workforce development for middle-skill jobs through coordination of education, economic development, and workforce development programs
2. Support innovation and entrepreneurship
3. Support regional development through infrastructure investments and local empowerment
4. Increase ease of doing business
5. Address the costs of doing business in the Berkshire

The presentation also reported on the economic trends that were identified in the small and mid-size business forums held previously. Those trends include:

1. Make municipal permitting faster and easier to navigate
2. Better understanding of existing services offered through municipalities and other economic development groups
3. Better access to capital through local banks

After the presentation participants engaged in small group discussion focusing on the following specific questions:

- What do you think we can do – new or better – to support our main economic sectors (health care, arts-culture-tourism, high-tech manufacturing)?
- What new clusters should we evaluate supporting growth or expansion to further diversify the economy?
- What is needed to further support a robust and successful entrepreneurial environment?
- What are the potentials of having expanded broadband in the region – and what do we need to do now to glean the most economic benefit in a few years?

## ADDITIONAL OUTREACH

In addition to the Economic Forums, four small business forums were held in March 2012. These forums are summarized in Appendix A, Small and Mid-Size Business Forums.