

Housing and Neighborhoods

**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 Berkshires is home to a full range of neighborhood types, from urban neighborhoods with a higher density and mix of housing types such as downtown Pittsfield to very rural settings with sparse development intermingled with state or other conservation lands. Each context offers its residents some benefits and some limitations. In an urban neighborhood, you may reside close to jobs, entertainment, parks and services – but the neighborhood may be louder, with more traffic and less natural scenery or not provide the opportunity to have a big vegetable garden. In contrast, rural neighborhoods offer very quiet settings surrounded by nature and a feeling of being “away from it all” but require longer commutes to work, shopping or services and necessitate getting to most places by car.

The goal of this document is to provide guidance on how to improve the health, safety, inclusiveness, people-scaled and environmental performance of each type of neighborhood context. The goal is not to make neighborhoods more similar or homogenous, but to make context-appropriate improvements to make each neighborhood a more sustainable and pleasant place to live.

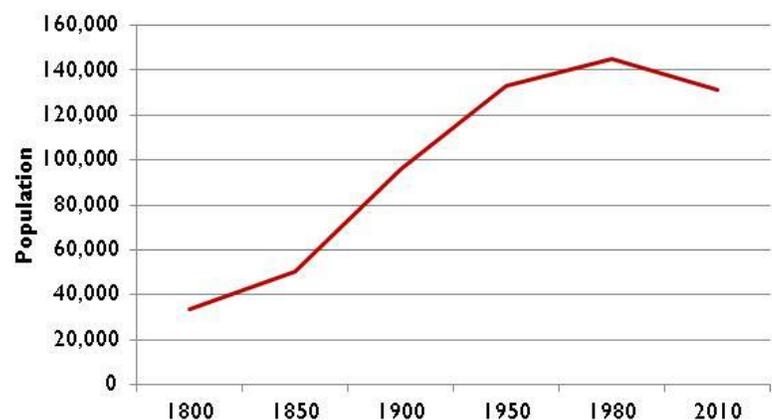
Settlement Pattern

The Berkshires are a predominantly rural region made up of 32 communities (two cities and thirty towns) in westernmost Massachusetts. The region was settled in the 1700s and 1800s due to western expansion and resource-driven economic activities including trapping, paper mills, and agriculture. Therefore, settlement happened in compact villages and hamlets, typically by waterways used for water and power, with agricultural lands and forests in between. The topography of the region, which is a north-south valley with mountain ranges on either side, means most of the larger communities are located in the valley lowlands, with less populated communities in the surrounding hilltowns to the east and west.

In the Gilded Age of the late 1800s, the region became a fashionable place for wealthy families like the Rockefellers to have summer “cottages” – large estates with mansions. The early to mid-1900s saw more manufacturing, notably electronics and defense, added to the paper and textile mill activity in the region’s largest communities. Workers at mills and plants tended to settle very near their places of employment – within walking distance or at least within the same small town. This workforce housing tended to be higher density, and included multi-family options such as row houses. City and town centers thrived, with main streets and active storefronts in buildings with 3-4 stories of housing above.

Starting in the 1960s, manufacturing employment began to decline, impacting the communities and mill-focused neighborhoods most profoundly. At

Figure HN1: County Population



Source: US Census

the same time, the region, which saw summer cottage development as early as the 1880s and 90s, gained more renown as a summer home destination as transportation improvements and the 1950s car culture emerged. As other markets closer to New York City became more cost-prohibitive and the Berkshires continued to cultivate its arts offerings, the second home market picked up even more in the 1980s and the trend continues today. This is true predominantly in south county, which is more easily accessible from both I-90 and the Taconic Parkway. Because these were summer getaways intended as country breaks from city life, most second home development occurred either around a lake or pond or in large lot residences developed outside of community centers.

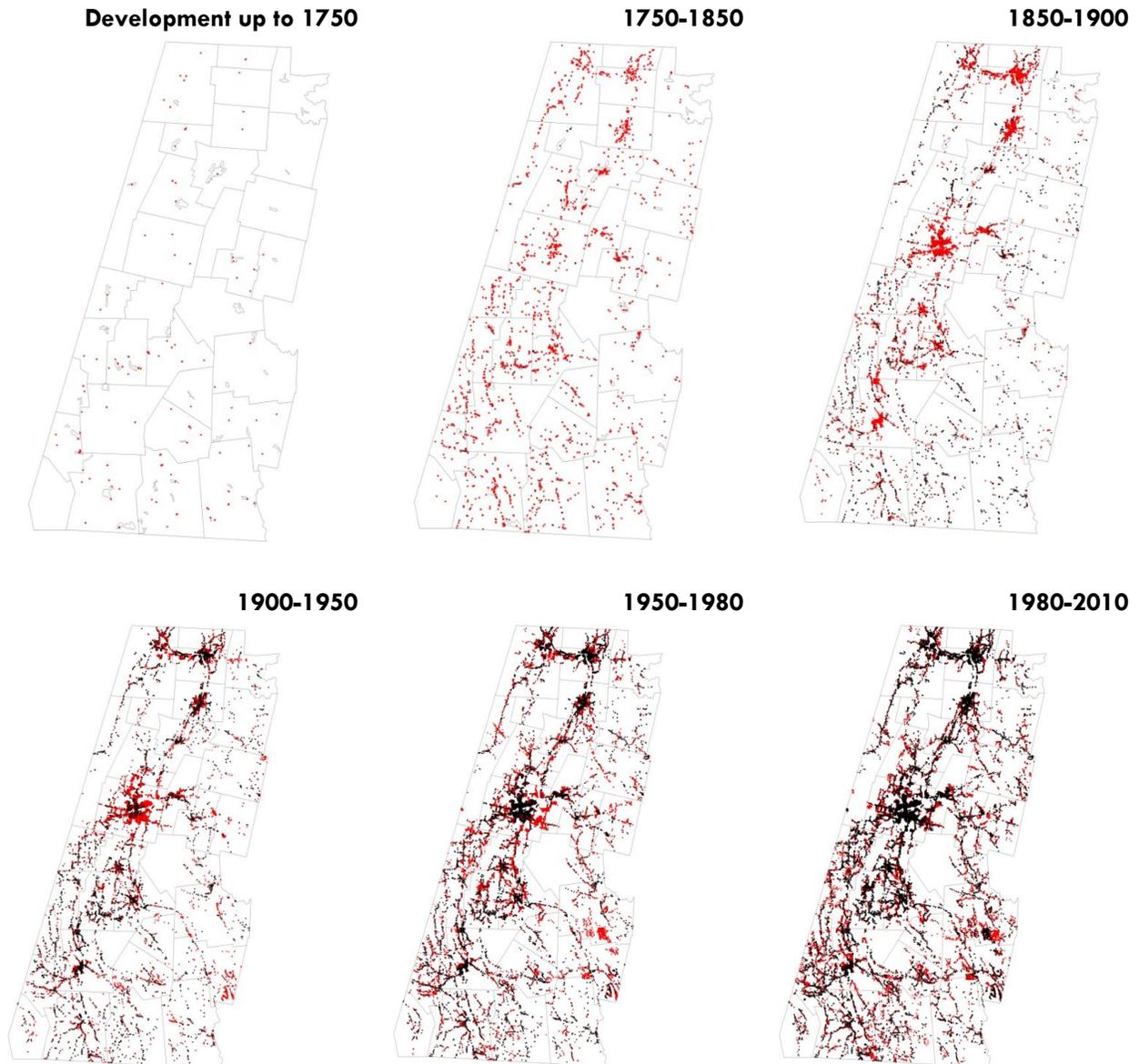


Figure HN 2: Development over Time

Source: *Mass GIS, BRPC, 2013*

LIVING IN THE BERKSHIRES TODAY

The Berkshires is still a region of small towns. Twenty of the 32 communities are very small rural communities, perhaps with one or more historic village centers and very little in the way of stores, employers, or other services such as auto repair or a doctor's office. Location matters and so there are two exceptions, West Stockbridge, which has an exit to I-90 and a village center with more shops and restaurants, and Hancock, which has Brodie Mountain Ski Resort, and so has a certain degree of associated activity and condo development dissimilar to other comparably sized communities. Of these 20 towns, 12 have populations of less than 1,000 people and eight have between one and two thousand. As shown in pale pink and white in the map, right, these are the region's "hilltowns", located in either the Taconic range to the west or the Berkshire Hills and Hoosac Range to the east.

The remaining 12 communities in the region are in the valley and are the activity hubs for dining, working, shopping, and services. The largest community by far is Pittsfield (44,737), followed by North Adams (13,708), the region's two cities and home to 45% of the county population. The next six largest towns are Adams (8,485), Williamstown (7,754), Great Barrington (7,104), Dalton (6,756), Lee (5,943) and Lenox (5,025). Again, location matters, and Great Barrington, though not the largest town is a regional hub for south county, just as Pittsfield is for central county and North Adams is for north county. Each has one of the region's three hospitals, a college, an active main street business district, grocery stores, major employers, and other goods and services used by surrounding communities. These three communities also have the majority (70%) of the county's rental housing in a region that is predominantly single family. This density helps give their downtowns a more active, urban feel.

The following sections go from community to neighborhood scale, looking at the four types of neighborhoods in the region and where they are located.

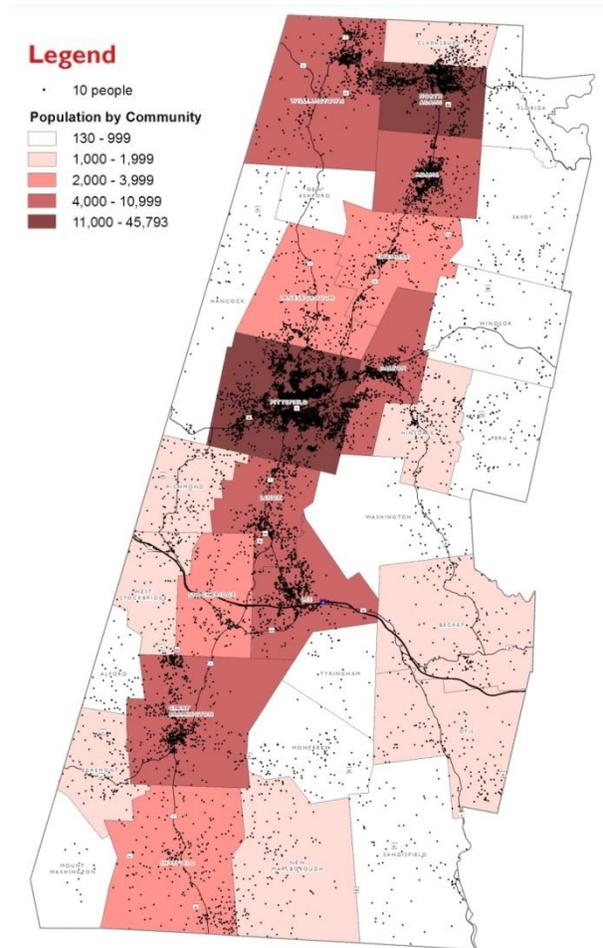


Figure HN3: Communities by Population Size with Population Density

Source: MassGIS, US Census, BRPC, 2013

Types of Neighborhoods

Urban: (35 % of county’s total housing supply)

Urban neighborhoods in the county are located in the downtowns of larger communities. These include the neighborhoods in and around the downtowns of North Adams, Adams, Dalton, Pittsfield, Lenox, Lee, and Great Barrington. These neighborhoods are well served by water and sewer infrastructure and have transit service through Berkshire Regional Transit Authority (BRTA). Densities tend to be higher and these neighborhoods are most likely to have a wider range of housing types including apartments and condo developments in addition to single-family housing.

Suburban: (34 % of county’s total housing supply)

These neighborhoods include more suburban style neighborhoods adjacent to urban areas in larger towns as well historic village centers in smaller towns. This includes the more established neighborhoods of Williamstown, North Adams, Adams, Pittsfield, Dalton, Lenox, Lee and Great Barrington just outside of urban areas. These neighborhoods are predominantly single-family residential areas, but may also include some mix of apartments, townhomes, and condos. These areas are located with easy access to jobs and transportation routes and are served by water and sewer infrastructure.

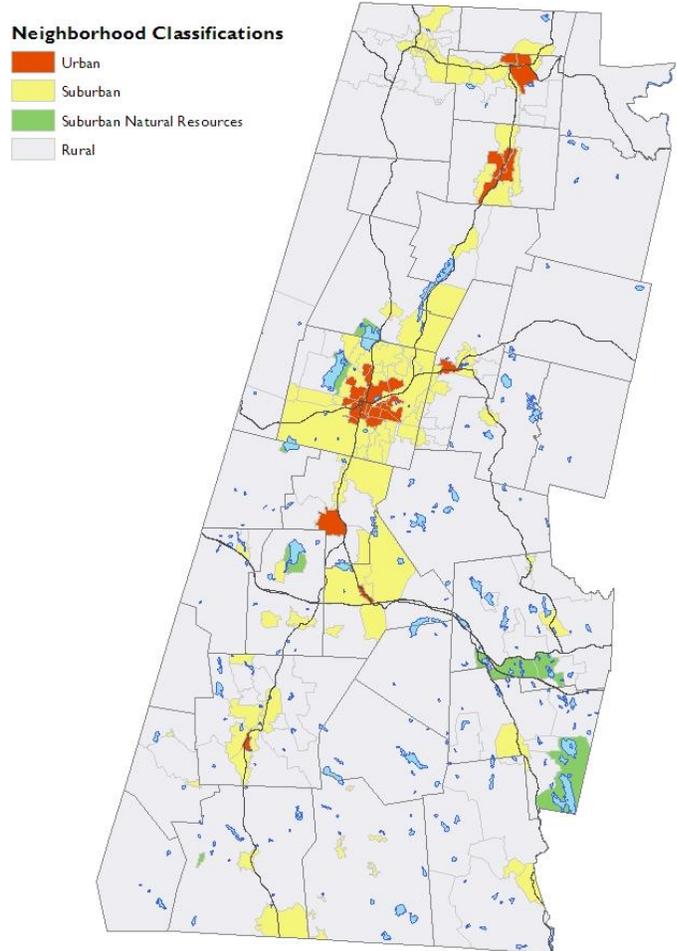


Figure HN4: Map of Neighborhoods by Category

Source: BRPC, 2013

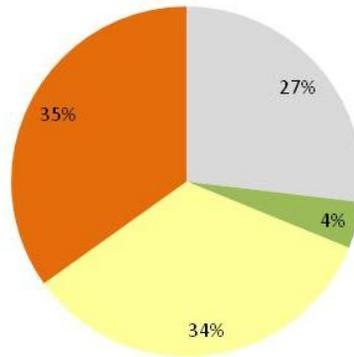


Figure HN5: Percent of Total Housing Units in Each Neighborhood Type

Source: Mass GIS parcel data, BRPC, 2013

Suburban Natural Resources: (4% of county's total housing supply)

These are neighborhoods in rural areas away from town centers developed at a higher density due to their proximity to a lake or pond (natural resources) rather than jobs and services. This includes the development around Pontoosic Lake in Pittsfield and Lanesborough, Onota Lake in Pittsfield, the Stockbridge Bowl in Stockbridge, and scattered neighborhoods on ponds and lakes in Becket and Otis. Some, but not all, are on a community septic system to safely accommodate the density and protect water quality.

Rural: (27 % of county's total housing supply)

Most of the county's land is rural, with a pattern of very small subdivisions or single-lot developments along existing roadways, but without the addition of side streets. This pattern corresponds to the fact that most of the county is on well and septic and therefore must have at least two-acre lots to safely accommodate the required separation between the water well and septic tank. These neighborhoods may include farms, very rural town centers that are set up more as a crossroads-scale where 3-4 town buildings are clustered and rural homes and subdivisions, including second home development on large rural lots. Because of their location, these neighborhoods tend to be within or surrounded by important habitat area; in fact limited development may be in part due to natural resource limitations.

WHAT MAKES A HEALTHY AND VIBRANT PLACE TO LIVE?

This element takes a holistic view of a neighborhood – including the home itself, what the neighborhood has to offer those who live there, and the way residents interact in the neighborhood and the larger community. Social interaction is higher in places with strong social capital, meaning the people have:

- **Sense of Efficacy and Empowerment**– they can take action on something of interest, with the expectation that initiating conversations with others on the topic will be met with respect and consideration and decisions will be made in a transparent, open way. They feel empowered to help shape and improve their community and so do!
- **Sense of Belonging** – they understand and relate to the values, communication style or methods, and perspectives of their community. It is something that is comfortable and clear. They know how to be a part of things and believe that their participation and perspective is valued. They feel comfortable interacting with others without concern of judgment or dismissal because of education, income level, age, or other source of difference because, despite difference, they are part of the community.
- **Feelings of Trust and Safety** – they feel physically comfortable and safe in their home, out for a walk, letting their kids play in the yard, and going other places in the larger community.



Figure HN 6: Social Capital and Community Engagement of Residents

Source: BRPC, 2014

While social capital is about human feelings as they translate into behaviors, it can still be supported by how and where neighborhoods are built and physical improvements made over time. In many cases, choosing a neighborhood can strengthen social capital in that residents have ideally made an intentional decision to be there because it reflects their values and preferences and so they may already be more like their neighbors who also made the same choice. For example, a young professional who opts for a downtown loft to be close to work and play options may have very similar neighbors or an outdoor enthusiast may wish to locate in a country setting with direct access to trails and nature.

However, neighborhood choice is not based explicitly on preference. It is also impacted or influenced by the availability of compatible housing options: right price point, size and style, condition of the home or surrounding area, availability and convenience of transportation options, and the like. Our goal is to help ensure that there is both more opportunity for choice and that, no matter what the choice, neighborhoods support healthy people and communities.

Sustainable Neighborhoods: Providing Opportunity and Balance

Characteristics of healthy and sustainable neighborhoods include the following:

1. **People-friendly places and spaces:** they are developed with people in mind (versus cars) and offer places for people to gather and interact.
2. **Safe and healthy:** they don't pose or contain threats to residents in the form of personal or property crime and violence, environmental contaminants, or poor disaster preparedness.
3. **Integrated and inclusive:** they are not segregated by age, income, or race; rather, they allow for people at different stages in their lives and from different backgrounds to interact at school, work, and home.
4. **Ecological footprint:** they allow residents to minimize their environmental impact, working to minimize resource consumption and impacts on habitat, water quality, and climate emissions.



Figure HN7: Model Components for Healthy Neighborhoods in Sustainable Berkshires

Source: BRPC, 2014

Evaluating Neighborhoods

To help evaluate neighborhood performance, a map-based model was developed to score neighborhoods on a variety of data points in each of the four categories. The results are shown in maps on a color scale of red-to-blue for low-to-high score where the higher the score, the better the neighborhood is performing.

HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOODS THROUGH THE SUSTAINABILITY LENSES

Economic Development

- The region's economy is heavily dependent on industry sectors such as hospitality and retail, which also typically have lower wages. Yet the region significantly lags behind demand in providing affordable housing for its workforce. This has far reaching impacts on the year-round population now and the next generation.
- Falling or stagnant home values in the face of inflation and rising costs stresses municipal finance. Most communities in the region are at or near their mill levy limit and so must make do with the income they have. Over the long term, this exhausts municipal reserves and leads communities to only do the minimum of maintenance or delay equipment replacements or investments in needed improvements. Communities with the lowest property values often also have the most infrastructure, including water and sewer lines, treatment facilities, as well as sidewalks and streets to maintain.

- Vibrant neighborhoods that meet the needs of different lifestyle preferences or needs (seniors, young families, etc.) are major contributors to creating the quality of life which can – or cannot – make the region or individual communities within the region attractive to keeping or attracting new residents and businesses.

Social Equity and Capital

- A neighborhood's ability to provide residents with high opportunity – access to jobs, transportation, goods and services, quality schools – directly impacts the economic mobility of its residents.
- Neighborhoods that offer places for interaction and a safe and welcoming setting can foster more interaction and stronger bonds. This has ripple effects for health, civic engagement, volunteerism and more.

Minimizing Environmental Impact

- Massachusetts generates 1.29 tons of garbage per capita each year. Waste diversion statistics for the state show only seven percent of that waste is composted and 22 percent recycled. Rates in the west by comparison are 11 percent composting and 35 % recycling. (Biocycle, 2010)
- The trend of residential development in the region is one of increasingly large lots, meaning more land consumption per household. In 1970 the region had an average lot size of 2.3 acres. Homes constructed between 1990 and 2000 went up in lot size to just over 5 acres. From 2000-2010 the average lot size of homes constructed was 7 acres per unit.

PLANNING PROCESS

The goals and policies set forth in this document were identified through a multifaceted public involvement process that engaged state, municipal, non-profit organizations, community leaders, and the public in a strategic discussion of the role and vision for future housing development and neighborhood quality in the region.

Surveys

Street surveys were conducted at major community events to gather input on factors that played a role in neighborhood choice as well as key likes and dislikes. A second survey was conducted at community meal sites to gather information from a more economically vulnerable population to gauge actual housing cost burdens (only measured in data as 35% or more), housing stability, and transportation challenges.

Roundtable Discussions

Four roundtable discussions were held across the county with housing, recreation, education, and community service providers who have a role in the actual housing or community engagement aspects of neighborhoods. Discussions were held in Great Barrington, Pittsfield, Dalton, and Williamstown. It should be noted that BRPC project staff were also assisting the city of North Adams with their new comprehensive plan and were able to bring significant input on that community's housing and community needs from that process.

Affordable Housing Summit

An affordable housing summit was held with the intent of gathering all of the affordable housing decision makers and implementation partners into the same room to review regional data and discuss policy options for moving forward. This included a public vetting of the affordable housing production framework and its background rationale as summarized in the Fair Housing Equity Assessment

(Appendix A). It also included group brainstorming on policies to both improve quality and opportunity scores of low-income neighborhoods and increasing production in high opportunity communities.

Sustainable Neighborhoods Forums

In December 2013, two public forums were held to present general housing and neighborhood trends from a more holistic stance (versus the more explicit focus on affordability of the affordable housing summit). This included discussion and review of draft policies for improving health, social connections, aging in place, environmental performance and much more.

Subcommittee

A subcommittee of 15 representatives from organizations from a range of interests and backgrounds, including social service, housing development, housing supportive services, landlords, real estate, community development, health, and youth, met several times over nearly a year to review data and deliberate about policy directions. The committee met to review the Fair Housing Equity Assessment data, refine the criteria for affordable housing development priority, and to review and refine draft policies that incorporated their work and the public input received through other avenues.

Consortium

The final draft element was reviewed and approved by the Regional Consortium at their meeting in January 2014. This group had previously helped define the information to be included in the neighborhood performance scores, reviewed the Fair Housing Equity Assessment data and findings, and had attended the public meetings for this element.

HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOODS VISION

Vision: *The Berkshire region is home to a wide variety of housing choices, from urban lofts to rural farms. Each community includes housing options that offer types and price points to meet a range of needs, from empty nesters to young families. Neighborhoods in downtown areas have a healthy mix of incomes and have reinvested heavily in the housing stock, sidewalks, parks and community ties in those areas to foster safe and active places day and night. Traditional village areas retain their distinct identities, with compatible infill and reuse of old mill sites. Rural neighborhoods and those adjacent to important habitat and water bodies have embraced the role of stewards of their surrounding natural areas.*

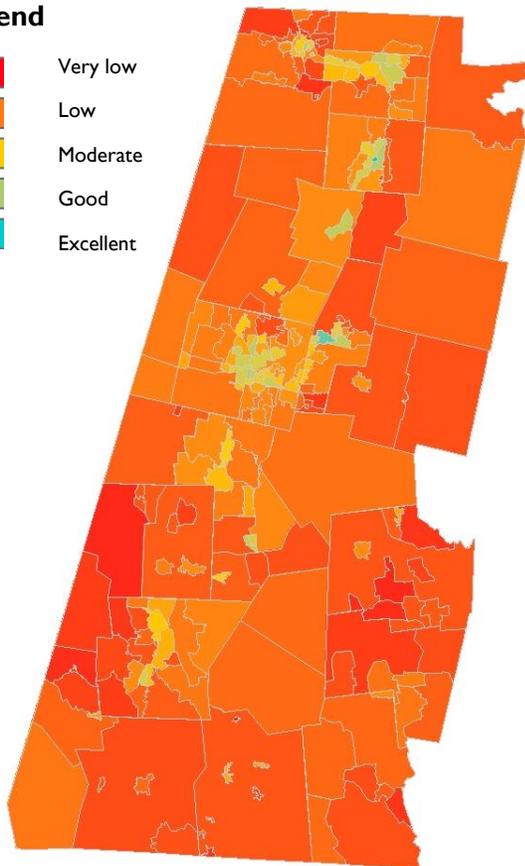
1. **People-Friendly Places and Spaces:** Vibrant neighborhoods offer services, employment and recreational opportunity along with connectivity, creating opportunities for community members to come together in common spaces and common activities. Vibrant neighborhoods draw people to them, but also retain activity by providing safe and pleasant pedestrian experiences.
2. **Health and Safety:** Vibrant neighborhoods support the health of those who live there. This means freedom from worry about environmental contamination or crime. It also means safety within the home, without risks to personal health and safety from the building itself or human interactions within the home. Neighborhoods offer social and recreation options for toddlers, seniors and everyone in between to support healthy lifestyles.
3. **Integrated and Inclusive:** Vibrant neighborhoods have diversity – children playing outside, people of different backgrounds and cultures, people in different types of housing with different economic means. They are not homogenous and segregated, rather, they are positioned to ensure people can live there today and their kids and grandkids have the option of also living there in the future.
4. **Ecological Footprint:** Vibrant neighborhoods have found their place in the natural system, understanding that they are part of watersheds and habitat areas. They work to minimize their impact and allow natural processes to go on with as minimal interference as possible.

1. PEOPLE-FRIENDLY PLACES AND SPACES

People-friendly places and spaces include two components: walkability and proximity to community spaces. Walkability refers to sidewalks, trails, and transit stops, and seeks to determine to what extent neighborhoods are served by walkable connectivity. Community spaces includes community spaces such as arts and cultural points of interest, community centers, parks or open space, and schools. Dynamic, vibrant neighborhoods offer a mix of services and community spaces, and are walkable with options for broader connectivity via public transit.

The Big Picture

Legend



What was included in the score?

- Access to safe walking spaces (whether that's a sidewalk, dirt road, or a trail)
- Provide easy access to a variety of places and spaces that allow for interaction (parks, civic buildings, schools, and cultural venues)

What do the results tell us?

- Areas with high scores are those with downtown or Main Street type districts offering a number of community points, proximity to public transit, access to recreational trails and sidewalks for safe pedestrian travel.
- Downtown Adams and Dalton scored the highest, having retained a mix of activity and opportunity in their downtown areas.

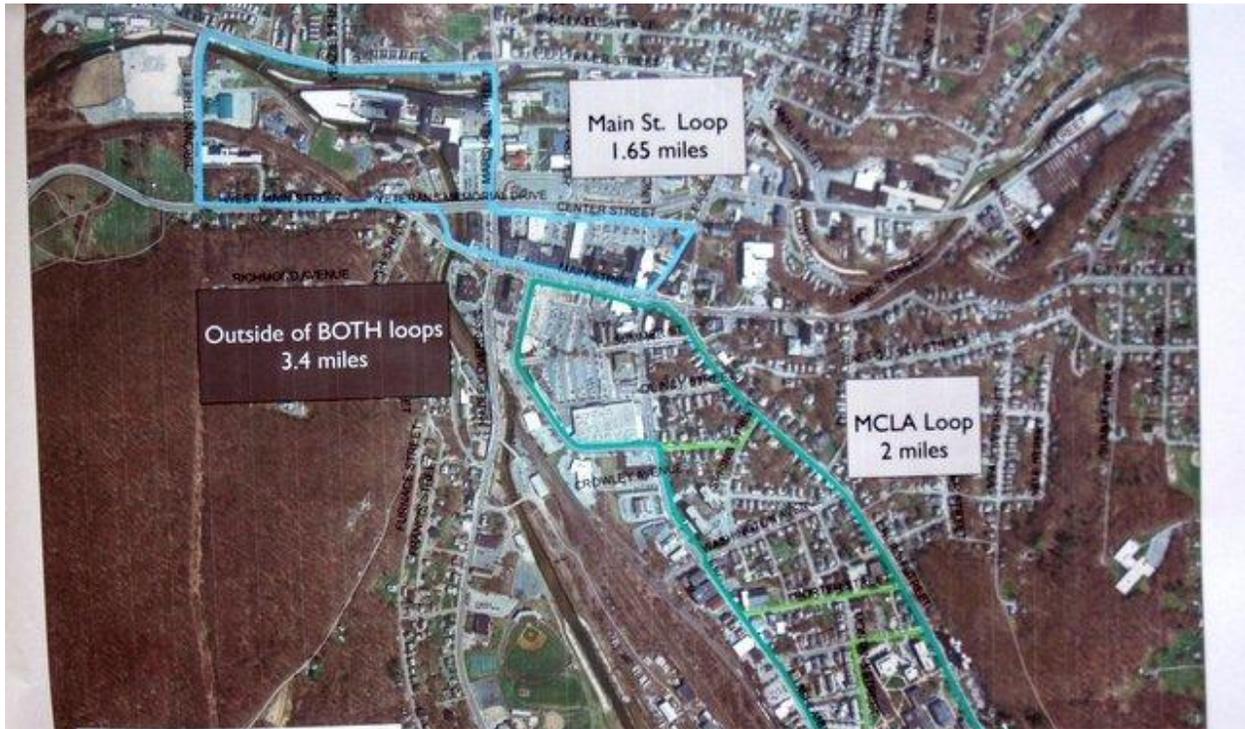
Figure HN8: People-Friendly Neighborhoods Score

Source: BRPC, 2013

LIVABILITY

Livability looks different from rural to suburban to urban communities. An urban activity center, with a concentration of residents, services, parks, employment opportunities, wide sidewalks and well marked crosswalks looks very different than a traditional village center with just one or two commercial opportunities and a common area, but may still offer space for residents to walk to, to gather and to conduct activities. A suburban neighborhood may be characterized by residential use, but is close enough to a downtown area that residents can easily walk to and from errands, work, and recreational activities.

Some neighborhoods or communities already are activity centers—they host a mix of uses, including retail, commercial and/or health services, employment opportunities, residences, parks/open space and good connectivity through walkable streets and public transit. These include downtown areas, such as the Upstreet Cultural District on North Street in Pittsfield, or the Main Street area in Great Barrington. These areas have a mix of uses, contain job opportunities and also have amenities that make walking and being there a pleasant experience, including street benches, shade trees, plantings, and art displays.



Urban walking loops in North Adams were identified and mapped through the Mass in Motion effort of Northern Berkshire Community Coalition.

Mass in Motion

Promoting the activities and services available in neighborhoods and community centers is one way to help strengthen connections, as is continuing to promote walkability for connectivity and for health. Mass in Motion is one program that has helped communities address mobility and connectivity. A program of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Mass in Motion seeks to promote opportunities for healthy eating and active living in the places people live, work and play. They work with a variety of partners to make healthy change possible. The program has helped fund walkability audits in several Berkshire communities, including Great Barrington, Lee, and Stockbridge. In Clarksburg, North Adams and Adams, Mass in Motion has identified walking loops, encouraged Safe Routes to School, and identified food outlets that could offer healthy and more nutritious options for residents. It has also promoted the use of WIC and SNAP benefits at farmers’ markets, and works with schools to promote an active life style.

Offering or Maintaining Safe Walkability a Challenge in All Contexts

Walk- or bike-ability of the Berkshires was consistently raised as a challenge. Narrow roadways offer little to no shoulders within which to safely walk or bike. Complicating this is a culture of driving which can be at times almost hostile to non-auto roadway users.

Challenges common by development pattern:

- In town and city centers:** Sidewalks generally exist only in cities and larger towns. Due to financial limitations, those communities with sidewalks can have difficulty with sidewalk maintenance and enforcement (such as ensuring sidewalks are shoveled in winter or not otherwise obstructed). Safe route to school funds have enabled some targeted investments in sidewalk upgrades, including ADA curb cuts which are still lacking in many locations. Connectivity is also an issue, with waterway, rail line, or simply piecemeal development that failed to look at its relationship to surrounding development resulting in numerous physical barriers, dead ends, and breaks within the sidewalk system. Without sidewalks, pedestrians must be on roadways or in adjacent grass, which can pose a concern on collector and arterial streets; local streets tend to be low traffic and not a safety concern.
- Between centers and rural resources:** most community centers are fairly small and offer limited routes or distance for walking, yet it is often difficult to safely walk out of town into more rural areas. This is particularly at issue where legs of unfriendly road may bar pedestrian or bike access to nearby conservation properties with outdoor recreation options. This results in both less use and more vehicle trips to access those resources than would otherwise be needed. Some communities, such as Great Barrington, have begun tackling this issue by identifying and creating desired connections – an approach that can perhaps be expanded to other communities.
- In rural areas:** Rural roads can be both pleasant and dangerous. Non-arterial roads tend to be low traffic and scenic. Driver behavior on arterials, however, can make taking a walk or bike ride dangerous and unpleasant, particularly if dogs or children are involved.

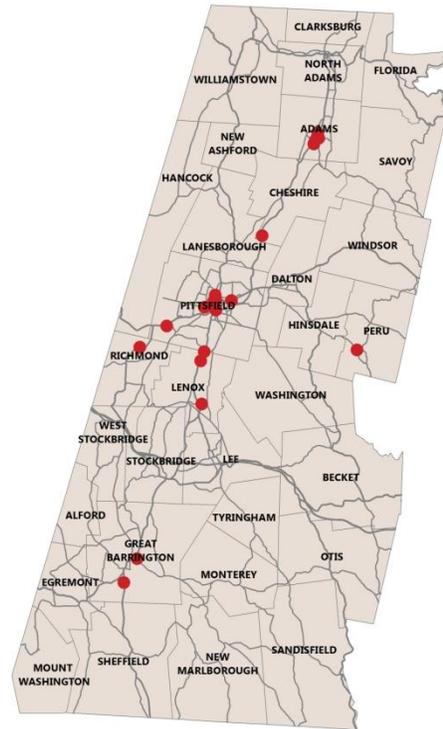


Figure HN10: Bike and Pedestrian Accident Locations

Source: BRPC, 2014

Challenges of culture and behavior:

- Drivers who think roads are (and should be) only for cars:** There is a strong sense of driver entitlement and irritation with sharing the road with bikes and pedestrians. This is exhibited through a high incidence of vehicle-pedestrian accidents, drivers passing too close and/or at speeds too fast for the situation, honking or yelling out windows, and appropriately yielding to pedestrians or cyclists.
- Pedestrian and cyclists violating safety legal or etiquette practices:** In some cases, pedestrians and cyclists also exhibit a lack of awareness of what they need to do to safely share the road, whether that is jaywalking, walking or biking on the wrong side of the road, not wearing visible clothing or reflective materials, or a failure to signal to motorists.

GOALS, POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

The following goals, policies, and strategies will be pursued to achieve the vision for housing and neighborhoods in the region:

GOAL HNI: Create welcoming communities that view difference as enhancing the whole.

PolicyHN1.1: Support programs and initiatives that foster more community engagement and interaction, particularly between groups separated by age, tenure, culture, and economic status.

Strategy A: Continue to Grow and Support Multicultural and Immigrant Programming and Networks to Support Community and Celebrate Diversity

Ensure that the multicultural events, trainings and immigrant community programs and services have the support they need to provide the connections and assistance to help bridge between backgrounds and cultures.

Strategy B: Actively Work to Identify and Include Leaders and Representatives of Underrepresented Groups (Culture, Youth, Seniors, Income, Etc.) To Be Meaningfully Involved With Planning and Implementing Community Events and Initiatives

Currently, there are varying degrees of effort made to engage different backgrounds and perspectives into events and initiatives at the community and regional level. The region should work to intentionally diversify the faces at various tables. Committees should make an active effort to ensure new and different faces participate by publicizing the opportunities for involvement and actively working to draw new people in. For municipalities establishing new committees, the same efforts should be made with an eye on going beyond known community members and casting a wider net. In the case of initiatives, this may mean reaching out before there is actually an agenda item on the table to proactively forge new relationships which may help inform and shape the initiative to make it more inclusive and impactful from the beginning. Right now, there is a sense of “token” representation on certain committees; the goal is that inclusion is a focus early on rather than as an afterthought when many decisions have already been made.

Strategy C: Enlist Volunteer Groups, Faith-based Community, and Membership Groups (VFW, Elks, etc) to Adopt a Community Cause, Event or Area

Community groups and clubs report dwindling membership and a desire to have new community service projects within their communities that will be relevant, helpful and in line with their missions and intents. Connecting groups with needed activities, whether days of service or longer term initiatives, can help foster win-wins and build social capital.

Strategy D: Pursue Sensitivity Training for Local Business and Community Leaders

Cultural competency training is a great way to kick start new discussions and awareness of cultural competency that can then be applied in the workplace and volunteer activities. These could then be followed up with other awareness topics related to special populations, such as dementia-friendly trainings, that help foster awareness and understanding of different circumstances one may encounter, particularly in a more public interactive workplace.

Strategy E: Create Asset-based Mentorship Pairings

One way to break down walls of difference between people is to allow everyone the opportunity to be both a teacher and a learner, regardless of educational background, age, or economic status.

Everyone could have a skill worth sharing with others whether in a small group or one-on-one as a matched trade.

GOAL HN2: Design and retrofit neighborhoods of all types to enhance opportunities for activity and interaction.

Policy HN2.1: Encourage the accessibility of all types of public spaces.

Strategy A: Improve ADA Accessibility of Public Buildings

The age of most public buildings in the region and limited resources to maintain them mean that many have ADA accessibility problems, including town halls, community centers, and places of worship. These barriers will become more prominent as the population ages; resolving them will help seniors, disabled, or parents with strollers access spaces and engage more comfortably with community activities.

Strategy B: Prioritize Walking and Biking Improvements to Public Activity and Employment Centers

Active town centers and downtowns allow for more interaction among neighbors and more activity of residents. A walkable, bikeable area promotes more activity and can be supported by ensuring sidewalks are in place and well maintained, cyclists have places to park their bikes, and crossings and traffic calming measures create a comfortable and safe setting. While communities have many demands on resources, prioritizing these types of improvements in downtowns can help support a sense of community.

Policy HN2.2: Identify and create walking routes and loops in each community.

Strategy A: Maintain and Connect Sidewalks (Urban)

In urban neighborhoods, there are typically sidewalks along one or two sides of the street. However, these can be in various states of disrepair, be fragmented with dead ends at rivers or rail lines, or be poorly lit so as to detract from a sense of safety after dark. In addition to making sure these systems are safe and pleasant for those walking, pushing a stroller, or in a wheelchair or scooter, communities can even go further to help promote activity such as designated walking loops as has been done in downtown Pittsfield and North Adams.

Strategy B: Maintain and Connect Sidewalks, Shoulders and Trails (Suburban)

Suburban neighborhoods typically have some sidewalks or are on local roads where one can walk in the road. However, routes are often fragmented by dead ends at rivers or rail lines or by stretches where one must either temporarily use or cross a higher-volume road. These little blocks and barriers can make walking less pleasant, particularly as a means of transportation versus recreation. Smoothing these connections, with physical connection via paths connecting the ends of two dead ends, pedestrian bridges over rivers, and slowing traffic with signage and crosswalks at key points can all help connect the pedestrian system. Neighborhood walkability audits and outreach to walking groups can help identify potential connections and problem areas.



The City of Pittsfield has put in substantial pedestrian improvements to its downtown area. Bollards to prevent through traffic also make attractive planters. In Lee, a recent sidewalk is wide, with a strip between the sidewalk and street. The crosswalk is painted with a warning sign for motorists. Great Barrington offers residents and residents a variety of walking loops and trails in its downtown and rural areas.

Strategy C: Rural Walking Loops (Rural)

In rural areas, there may be a rural road that is unpaved and easy to walk in without concern for cars, but this is not always the case. Many rural routes are narrow and traffic can move quickly, often with poor visibility due to foliage and curving roads. Communities with these challenges can consider a rural walking route, perhaps as part of a town green near a cluster of town buildings, where people of different physical conditions can walk on an easy, flat, loop.

Policy HN2.3: Grow a multi-modal culture to support safe non-car movement.

Strategy A: Create On-line Tools for Citizens to Report Problem Areas

Police staff in the region is limited and have large geographic areas to cover. Municipalities can offer on-line tools to allow citizens to report problem speeding or pedestrian areas to help target police patrol and enforcement activities to maximum impact for residents.

Strategy B: Identify and Enforce Speeding Areas

Police can prioritize speeding enforcement by citizen reports in combination with known high volume or pedestrian areas or time of day. Dedicated enforcement in specific areas over time can help create driver awareness and reduce speeding.

Strategy C: Enforce Pedestrian Right of Way in Crosswalks

Local drivers are not very aware of pedestrians except in a few, but not all, downtown centers. This includes routes to school as well as near employment or transit stop locations where pedestrian volumes may be higher. The region has seen a number of pedestrian and bicycle injuries and fatalities. Enforcement of pedestrian rights is an important tool for raising awareness and shifting driver behavior.

Strategy D: Prioritize Traffic Calming Measures

Local residents know the areas where speeding is a problem, whether within a neighborhoods or along a rural route. There are a variety of traffic calming measures communities can employ for different contexts from curb cuts to speed awareness signs. Communities can use citizen reporting to help identify problem areas and take steps to calm traffic in addition to enforcement. Depending on the traffic calming measure, this may require annual budgeting for improvements and coordination across departments.

Strategy E: Educate Drivers, Cyclists and Pedestrians about Road Sharing Rules and Practices

Drivers and non-auto travelers both need education and awareness to safely share the road. This education can start with drivers education classes, but adults will also need to “relearn” behaviors to overcome current multi-modal challenges. This could be achieved through community-based education campaigns, or marketing signs around the region to gradually shift behaviors and make each more aware of the other.

2. HEALTH AND SAFETY

There are three primary levels of health and safety: community, home, and individual. Community safety includes how places are designed and how well communities are organized to deal with major events such as a natural disaster as well as everyday events such as community crime. This also includes how well the community is equipped to provide quality health care. Safe and healthy homes include the ways the actual building can impact health, such as senior-friendly modifications or the presence or absence of lead, and the other threats that can impact health while in the home such as senior neglect and domestic violence. Finally, there is the individual level of safety, your own choices and behaviors as they impact your health, including exercise, healthy food choices, and other health-supporting behaviors.

The Big Picture

Legend

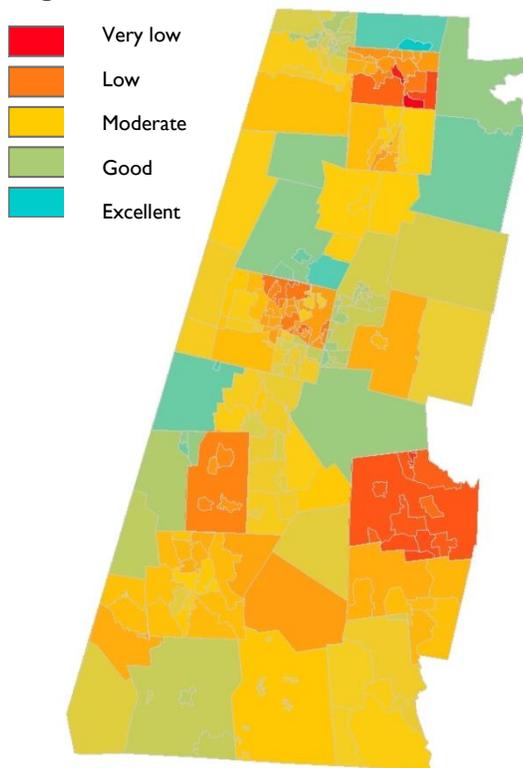


Figure HN11: Health and Safety Neighborhoods Score

Source: BRPC, 2013

What was included in the score?

- Crime rates for property and violent crime
- Proximity to contaminated sites
- Proximity to hospitals
- Unemployment rate (economic instability)
- Proximity to grocery store

What do the results tell us?

- There is no clear trend of performance across the county by town or community size and context (urban, suburban, or rural).
- Crime rates contributed to lower scores in the two cities as well as Stockbridge, where property crime has been an issue.
- The southern Berkshires and Hancock have a high percent of seasonal housing units.
- The southern and central Berkshires had more area valued at the county average of \$71.08 per square foot or higher than the northern Berkshires.
- The southern Berkshires are rent burdened especially in Egremont and Becket. In the northern Berkshires, Florida and Hancock scored highest, while cost burden of home ownership is more evenly distributed throughout the county. Despite this distribution, the southern Berkshires contain a high concentration of cost-burdened home owners, especially in Great Barrington, Sheffield, Egremont and Alford
- Contaminated sites are concentrated along main transportation routes and rivers, where mills and manufacturing were located, such as Pittsfield, Great Barrington, Lee, Adams and North Adams.
- The four food deserts in the region are in urban areas also struggling with poverty, crime and housing cost burdens, Pittsfield and North Adams.

SAFE AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Disaster Planning

Increased attention has been paid over the past decade to disaster planning at the municipal and regional level due to incidents of international and domestic terrorism as well as severe storm events. While the Berkshires have been fortunate not to have any of the former, the damage caused by Hurricane Irene brought the need for such planning into greater relief. Initiatives have been under way to raise the level of preparedness through the Department of Homeland Security and Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Coordinated Emergency Response

The Berkshires have three Regional Emergency Planning Committees (North, Central, South) made up of their local emergency planning officials. The REPC's work on developing coordinated responses to emergencies that impact the region. In addition, the Western Regional Homeland Security Advisory Council is made up of representatives from throughout Western Mass and focus on improving the response of the local emergency responders through improving communication technology, training, exercises and planning for response by looking at evacuations, sheltering, activating volunteers, etc.

Hazard Mitigation

The Berkshires have a regional hazard mitigation plan which outlines the natural hazards that impact the region and what local communities can do to minimize the impact of the hazards through mitigation activities. Examples of mitigation activities include enlarging culverts to prevent flooding, bank stabilization, flood proofing structures, adopting stricter building codes and retrofitting of critical facilities.

Environmental Contamination

The long industrial heritage of the region, including paper, textiles, electronics, and munitions, has left an environmental impact in the form of contaminated sites or areas where contamination is of concern, even though it may not be confirmed, commonly called "brownfield" sites. Beyond major industrial sites, brownfield sites also commonly include sites where hazardous chemicals are used on a daily bases – such as dry cleaners or gas stations – and sites where building practices of the day might have left hazardous materials that need to be dealt with before a property can be reused such as lead and asbestos.

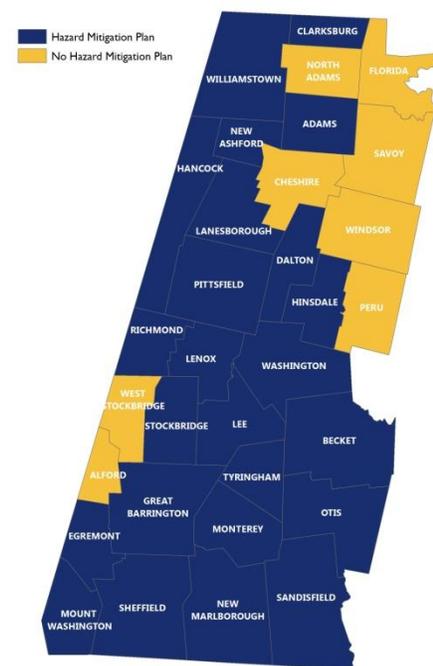


Figure HN12: Hazard Mitigation Plans

Source: BRPC, 2014

The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission began a Brownfields Program in 2004 to help the region identify, assess, and clean up these sites to remove threats to human and environmental health and bring properties back into productive use. Since that time, the program has invested approximately \$1.8 million in developing an inventory of potential brownfield sites, funding assessments on 10 properties, assisting with four additional properties, and managing cleanup on two sites.

Crime

The size of police force varies widely across Berkshire communities – from no police force to a full force with both uniformed patrol and detective divisions. In communities with no or only part time police staffing, the Massachusetts State Police, with barracks in Lee and Cheshire, help fill in patrol functions as well as specialized detective and crime scene investigations as cases require. While crime reporting in the region typically focuses on incidents in the two cities, there are context-specific issues countywide. While some communities struggle with violent crime rates, others work to combat high property crime rates. This is particularly true in communities with a high proportion of second homes, where typically higher-end homes sit unoccupied for long stretches.

Health Care

The region is served by three hospitals: Fairview Hospital in Great Barrington, Berkshire Medical Center in Pittsfield, and North Adams Regional Hospital in North Adams. (Note: North Adams Regional Hospital closed due to financial reasons on March 28, 2014. Future plans are uncertain.)

SAFE AND HEALTHY HOMES

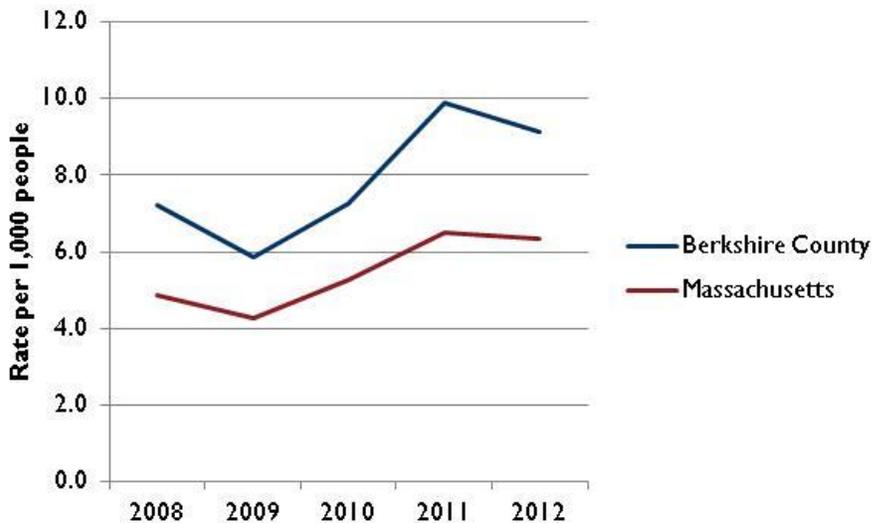
Healthy Homes

- **Lead and Asbestos:** With 40% of homes in the region constructed before 1940 and 60% before 1960, there is fairly widespread presence of lead and asbestos in the housing stock. Lead was only banned in paints in 1978 and asbestos was a common feature in everything from floor tiles to pipe insulation until phase outs were implemented in the 1970s and 1980s. Lead abatement programs funded through the Department of Housing and Community Development provide lead testing and abatement for low-income households. This has been historically been run locally through the Berkshire Community Action Council.
- **Age-Friendly:** The region currently has 33 percent of its population aged 55 or older. By 2030 this is projected to increase to 45 percent. The health care industry has already identified injuries from falls as an important health priority. This means there is a current and growing need to address home retrofits and safety measures to prevent falls. The National Association of Homebuilders, for one, has a comprehensive home renovation checklist for aging in place.
- **Indoor Air Quality and Toxics Exposure:** There has been increased attention paid to the role interiors can impact health. While the region is fortunate to not have large problems with “too tight” homes and toxic mold growth as has been reported in other areas of the country over the past decade, there are other threats. Air quality and respiratory health statistics have been flagged as a priority among the region’s public health community. While there is little the region can do to combat particulate matter in the air from states to the west, indoor air quality does offer the potential for local action to improve health outcomes. This can include everything from indoor paint and carpet selections to cleaning products.

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence rates for the region are consistently higher than average for the state. Three of the region’s communities are in the top five of highest domestic violence rates of the 351 communities in the state. A look at the number of restraining orders issued shows this point, controlled for population size, the number of orders issued per 1,000 people show the region is consistently higher than the state and has seen an increase from a low around six per 1,000 in 2009 to over nine per 1,000 in 2012.

Figure HN 13: Abuse Prevention (Restraining) Orders



The majority of domestic violence services in the county are provided through the Elizabeth Freeman Center, which operates a shelter network and provides case management services in partnership with local police departments. Youth intervention and counseling services, in addition to Department of Children and Families, are provided by Berkshire County Kids’ Place.

Source: Mass Department of Children and Families, 2013

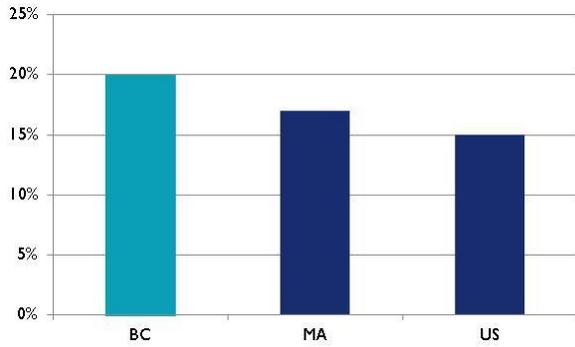
SAFE AND HEALTHY INDIVIDUALS

The Berkshire County Boards of Health Association, Tritown Health Department, Berkshire Public Health Alliance and Berkshire Health Systems have been collaborating to identify and prioritize regional health challenges. Using a variety of data points, including some of those highlighted in the Countywide Health Rankings, which put Berkshire County 11th overall out of 13 counties in the state, they have identified six top priorities:

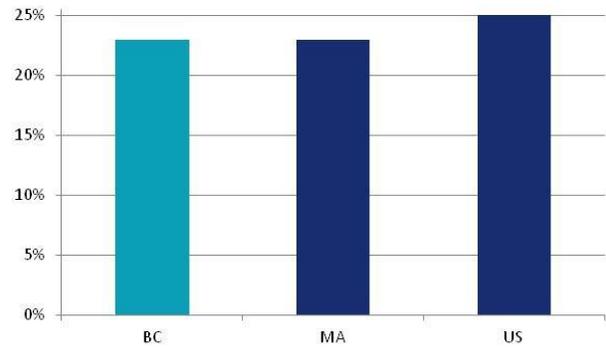
- Smoking
- Obesity
- Substance (Alcohol) Abuse
- Teen Pregnancy
- Motor Vehicle Accidents
- Mental Health (Depression)

Figure HNI4: Six Priority Health Challenges

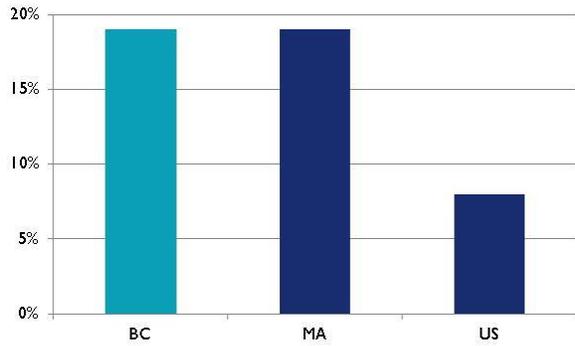
Smoking



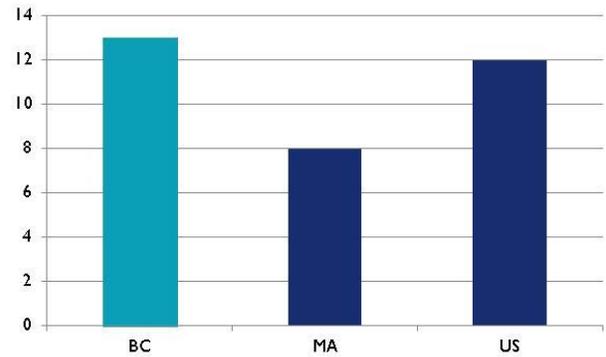
Obesity



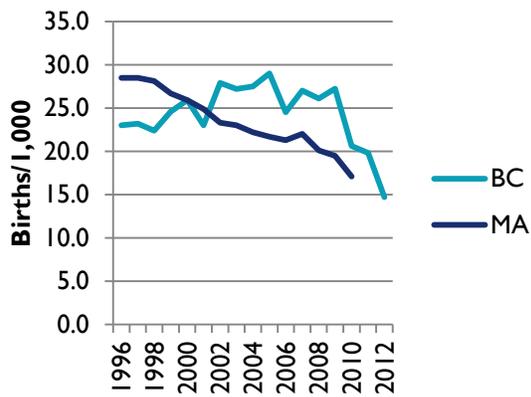
Substance Abuse (Heavy/Binge Drinking)



Motor Vehicle Accidents



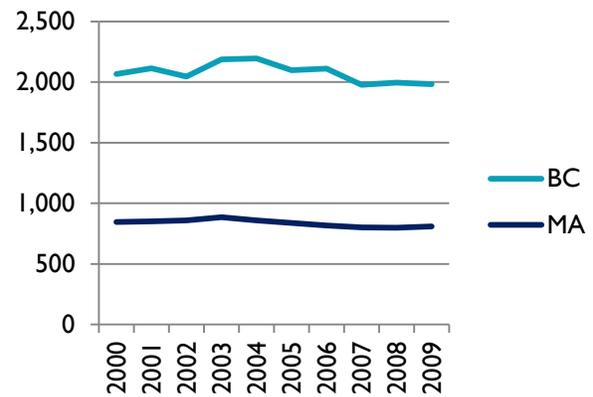
Teen (15-19yrs) Pregnancy Rate



Rate per 1,000 births

Source: Countywide Health Rankings, MassCHIP

Mental Health Hospitalizations Rate



Rate per 100,000 people

KEY ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Community

Need for Neighborhood Disaster Readiness

Several roundtable participants expressed concern that emergency evacuation and other emergency response plans were not known to residents in the County, especially in rural areas. Most Berkshire County municipalities are actively engaged in planning and preparing for emergency situations, but public awareness of those plans is not uniform. Generally emergency plans are available to the public by contacting a municipality's Emergency Management Director (EMD) but clearly, for any plan to be effective, the public needs to be informed prior to an emergency. Municipalities are continually working to refine their emergency plans, but should also simultaneously be engaged in awareness programs that will ensure that the public is prepared as well.

Home

Unsafe Homes due to Domestic Violence and Child Neglect

Three out of the top four highest rates of domestic violence in Massachusetts occur in Berkshire County municipalities. Child maltreatment and neglect is also a serious threat to health and safety in the Berkshires; two out of the top three highest rates of child maltreatment cases in the state were reported by Berkshire County municipalities. The region has a number of risk factors for domestic violence including a struggling economy, high substance abuse rates, and high incidence of mental health challenges such as depression.

Individual

Health of Berkshire Residents Improving, But Risk Factors & Barriers Persist

It was widely recognized during roundtable discussions that there is a measure of disparity in the overall health of residents in Berkshire County. Such disparity can result from economic status, levels of education, financial access to health care, transportation issues in rural areas, language barriers and cultural and religious differences.

Lack of access to services may pose increased problems for County residents in this current period of austerity in both government and private services. For example, the recent move to consolidate the North Adams and Pittsfield offices of the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Services results in North County residents travelling to Pittsfield for services, or waiting in long lines during the few hours each week the office is open in North Adams. As another example, residents of mountainous, rural communities may find their options and access to medical and other services constricted or curtailed due lack of transportation, as most professionals have offices in more central locations.

The 2012 Berkshire County Community Health Assessment states that improvements have been made over the last decade in Berkshire County with regard to mortality rates for major disease categories, with mortality rates trending downward. The top three causes of death are cardiovascular disease, cancer and respiratory disease, but there has been a steady decline in mortality rates from all three over the last nine years.

On the other hand, residents' health and welfare continues to be impacted by issues such as smoking, obesity, substance abuse, motor vehicle accidents, teen pregnancy and depression. There are a high percentage of persons living under 200% of the poverty limit (working poor), and suicide rates are somewhat higher than the rest of the state.

According to that same report, the birthrate to adolescent mothers in Berkshire County is 40% higher than the state average, at 27.2 births per 1000 (women ages 15-19). While the Massachusetts teen birthrate has declined by 31% since 1996, in Berkshire County it has *increased* by 18%. Smoking during pregnancy is also a major risk factor. Approximately 35% of pregnant teens smoke in Berkshire County, compared to 14% statewide.

Among adolescents, alcohol, marijuana and tobacco appear to be the most prevalent substances being abused, but use of opiates has become a concern throughout the County as well, manifesting itself in wealthy, rural areas as well as the cities. Roundtable participants blame the lack of healthy social opportunities available and a lack of parental guidance for both the high rate of teen pregnancies and substance abuse among teens.

Food Security Poses Major Health Challenge

There is concern that many households in Berkshire County are not receiving adequate nutrition, whether due to financial constraints or simply to poor eating habits. The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts estimates that one in eight residents in Western Mass struggle with hunger. Children are most impacted, with an estimated one in five children living in hunger. In some cases this trend is negatively impacting children's health and school experience and performance and rates of obesity in children. Despite the ongoing efforts of a number of active organizations, such as the United Way, operating in the county, poor nutrition may also be experienced within populations of low income elderly and handicapped residents, and is certainly pervasive among the county's homeless population.

There are several areas of the county where 'food deserts' exist, in other words, where distance makes it impossible to walk to a grocery store or restaurant. Farmer's markets are generally located within cities and town centers, but may not be conveniently located for more rural residents. Produce from local farmers' markets may also be fresher and more likely to be organic, but it is also more expensive than local supermarkets, making these venues a less likely choice for lower income households.

The community garden movement is on the rise, and there are many opportunities within the county for expansion. But there are significant challenges posed by organic gardening requirements, and Integrated Pest Management requires supervision by trained personnel for successful implementation.

GOALS, POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

GOAL HN3: Offer homes that support the health and wellness of those who live there.

Policy HN3.1: Remove or minimize threats to health posed by environmental contamination and brownfield sites.

Strategy A: Prioritize Brownfield Sites within Urban and Suburban Neighborhoods for Cleanup and Reuse

The brownfield program has set forth criteria for prioritizing sites to receive funding. The regional brownfields committee has, in the past, been fortunate to have enough money to allocate to avoid tough choices and so has not had to stress the use of the criteria. Current funding levels of the highly solicited program, coupled with federal budget uncertainty, prompt the need to revisit these criteria which will likely be employed more moving forward. Scoring of factors should be revisited to ensure that the proximity of a site to higher numbers of people is weighted appropriately to give these sites some level of priority.

Strategy B: Support Passive Uses of Vacant Lots to Deter Dumping

Passive uses of vacant lots, whether as a pocket park or community garden, turn what could be or become a source of blight into an asset. These can be established and maintained at a relatively low cost and communities could take a proactive approach to identifying problem spots and prioritizing them for reuse by community members.

Policy HN3.2: Work to reduce toxic chemical exposure in home, work, and school environments.

Strategy A: Campaign to Get Third-party Certified Cleaning Products Sold in Stores

Recent work through an EPA Source Reduction grant worked to raise the awareness of toxic cleaning agents, their impacts and alternatives, within the hospitality industry and boards of health. Recommendations out of this effort include working to get local stores to sell certified third party cleaning alternatives, perhaps as a school project with high school students and school districts. This should be coupled with education about the reasons for purchasing alternatives and how to identify certified third party options versus the various “green” labels that still contain the same toxic chemicals as the traditional line of the same brand.

Strategy B: Support Green Business Initiatives to Promote Schools and Businesses Making the Switch

Work with boards of health and business groups to educate on the benefits of making the switch to higher volume non-toxic concentrates which can save money in purchase costs up front as well as potential saving on staff turnover or sick time due to chemical exposure in high cleaning agent industries. Businesses that do make the switch could also potentially use that as a marketing tool, which could be organized and overseen at the regional level.

Strategy C: Implement or Promote Municipal or Subregional Medical Drop-offs

Police, hospitals and boards of health have collaborated to coordinate prescription drop-offs to facilitate safe disposal of unused medicines to safeguard against their use or abuse by someone other than the patient. Similar programs have been run for safe sharps disposal (needles) from injected medicines, which could pose a health threat if disposed of improperly. These and similar programs should be continued to reduce in-home threats.

Policy HN3.3: Modify older homes to remove contaminants (lead and asbestos).

Strategy A: Pursue Additional Funding to Conduct Lead and Asbestos Removal

With 60% of our homes constructed before 1960, lead and asbestos are simply a part of life. Lead identification and removal programs provide help property owners identify and either eliminate or reduce exposure risks. Once lead has been identified, removal should be conducted by a lead safe certified contractor to make sure they will properly contain and remove lead from the home. Some people, fearing requirements and disclosures if lead is confirmed, choose to simply not have an inspection done. There is also concern over added cost of having to use certified lead contractors. In Massachusetts, DHCD provides funding for low-income homeowners to abate lead, with Pittsfield on a short list of priority communities across the state. The City should pursue more direct funding through this program and other communities in the region should work to apply directly to federal HUD programs for funding as other communities do in the state. While much of the asbestos policy focuses on workplace exposure, asbestos was common in a number of building materials before identified as a threat. While it is relatively harmless if contained, once an asbestos component is exposed it should be removed by a certified professional who can contain fibers and dust.

Strategy B: Educate People about the Presence of State Certified Contractor Listing for Consumers

Finding a qualified contractor is perceived as a barrier to some homeowners, given the informal and widespread number of “contractors” around the county. However, the state maintains a list of certified and licensed contractors. This list should be better publicized by building departments and housing groups to help inform homeowners about available contractors.

GOAL HN4: Grow a violence-free community that does not tolerate domestic and other types of violence inside or outside the home.

Policy HN4.1: Reduce crime or concern of crime.

Strategy A: Ensure Safe Lighting in Urban Neighborhoods and Public Spaces

Urban neighborhoods, those typically adjacent to downtown areas of larger communities, should be active and safe environments to allow for residents to walk to downtown restaurants and businesses after dark and allow people parking on side streets to safely and comfortably reach their destinations. However, many urban neighborhoods have very poor lighting along streets which, coupled with sidewalks in disrepair, can be hazardous. Public spaces such as pocket parks and civic buildings and lawns should also be well lit to promote a sense of safety and comfort and transition the image of urban neighborhoods to safe and fun places to live.

Strategy B: Increase Police Visibility and Community Relationships

Each community’s police department can likely point to the certain “hot spots” they frequently visit due to calls and incident reports. These areas likely have lower levels of neighborhood connection and may also either have some distrust of police or would like to see more proactive presence to help deter crime from happening in the first place. Police should prioritize working with these hot spots and forge relationships that build on getting to know each other and building social bonds to help reporting and sense of security in neighborhoods.

Strategy C: Continue to Grow and Support Network of Neighborhood Watch Groups

There are a number of neighborhood watch groups who raise vigilance in their neighborhoods to look out for and report suspicious activity. These groups work with police departments but may not always have a sense of connection to each other within a community.

Strategy D: “Securing Your Home” Programs in Collaboration with Business

An evidence-based crime deterring strategy is to operate programs to improve at home security by covering basics such as motion lights, window locks, and dead bolts. Local home improvement or hardware stores may wish to partner with communities to educate homeowners and businesses on simple how-to tips, particularly where property crime has been a challenge.

Strategy E: Design Spaces with Safety in Mind

As public spaces are renovated or created, they should be designed with safety in mind, such as by incorporating good lighting, eliminating dark spots or low- or no-visibility areas, allowing for easy patrol, and minimizing steps or terrain changes that can pose a hazard for young children and the elderly.

Policy HN4.2: Reduce the incidence and impacts of domestic violence and gender discrimination.

Strategy A: Start Educational Programs in Grade School on Domestic Violence

While domestic violence happens at the household level, research shows how community norms can create a setting where it may be more likely. A better understanding and elimination of these verbal indicators, coupled with self esteem building, and violence identification programming, can help support a generational change in the domestic violence rates.

Strategy B: Gender Report Card to Track Progress on Key Indicators

The region should generate a gender report card to help bring the role of women in to greater focus including educational attainment, highlight female leaders, wages and wage gaps, leadership board and committee composition, gender and sexual violence incidence, and the like.

Strategy C: Continue to Support Positive Youth and Leadership Development Programs

The Berkshire Youth Development Project (BYDP) is a coalition of social service providers working to provide programs to support healthy choices and positive opportunities for youth. This coalition has conducted anti-substance abuse programs, anti-bullying, teen pregnancy awareness, and other programs to help make sure high-risk area youth stay on track and build leadership skills. The region should continue to support this partnership and their initiatives in schools and elsewhere.

Strategy D: Provide More Funding Support for Domestic Violence Shelters and Services

The region has a high domestic violence rate within the local community to contend with. In addition, the region also operates a shelter system for domestic violence victims, which takes in women and children fleeing their homes outside of the region confidentially so as to stay hidden from their abuser. Events like the “walk a mile in her shoes” event in Pittsfield help raise money and awareness about domestic violence, but the region should explore other ways to support this important work given the extent of the need.

Policy HN4.3: Build a culture of social diversity and acceptance.

Strategy A: Provide Diverse Outlets for Youth Leadership and Positive Development

There are a number of internship programs operated out of the Berkshire County Regional Employment Board and a young leader's group program through the Berkshire County Chamber of Commerce. South County is fairly well served with groups like Railroad Street Youth Project and Greenagers. North County has some activity at Mount Greylock and through the youth programming of Northern Berkshire Community Coalition, but there are gaps. Central County, while it has a number of recreation facilities like the YMCA, Boys and Girls Club, and Catholic Youth Center (CYC) offering various sport options, does not have the same program diversity for non-sports activities and leadership development programs that empower youth to take an active role in their communities. There has also been a lot of instability in recent years in providing youth mentoring programs. Given that there are higher poverty rates and larger total populations of youth in the two cities, the region should work to ensure that youth in these areas have programs that offer support and leadership to help advance school and life success.

Strategy B: Provide Anti-Bullying Training to Youth

Bullying has been increasingly in the news and awareness nationally and this should translate down to the community level in the Berkshires as well. While the region is relatively progressive in its stances, it is also relatively homogenous in cultural background and norms as well as outlets for different interests. Cultivating sensitivity and appreciation of difference can help ensure all kids don't have to face the stress and strain of bullying.

Strategy C: Use Prevention Needs Assessment Survey to Gauge Culture Shift on Gender Roles, Bullying, and Other Types of Tolerance or Sensitivity Behaviors

Every two years, school districts across the county administer a Prevention Needs Assessment Survey on substance abuse exposure as well as protective and risk factors. This could be slightly expanded to add questions on other behaviors to help measure the longer term impact of programs already on the ground or called for in this plan without creating a whole new data gathering process.

GOAL HN5: Support healthy aging in place.

Policy HN5.1: Facilitate soft retrofit options to enable seniors to safely stay in their homes longer.

Strategy A: Provide Free Home Safety Audits to Remove Potential Threats from Falls Linked to Free or Reduced Cost Upgrade Programs

Falls in the home by our senior population are a major source of hospitalization in that age demographic. The region should work to offer some proactive services to help make homes safer and reduce the risk and injuries sustained from falls.

Strategy B: Create Expedited Permitting Process to Make Exterior Improvements Such as Wheelchair Ramps over Stairs

Making exterior modifications to homes to ensure safety of seniors should be made as clear, quick and easy as possible for them to navigate. This means easy checklists, short timelines for approvals and perhaps some guidance in terms of available design options, cost ranges, and advice on hiring a contractor. Any such guide can be promoted through medical community, councils on aging, and others to help spread the word.

Strategy C: Evaluate Level of Service for Senior Transportation

Transportation is a recognized challenge in the region for those without a car. This includes seniors; including those who may need a wheelchair van to get around. While there are some transportation services, such as Berkshire Rides, who help fill this need, there is not a clear understanding of where there may be gaps in service or how current capacity lines up with demand.

Strategy D: Promote Screened Ride-Share Options for Seniors

Aging in place was a major theme in the planning discussions for this element, including the challenges of transportation and the desire of people in rural communities to stay in those communities as long as possible. That is a desirable option for many because of their many ties and community identity. There are a number of informal ways neighbors help each other out with a ride to the grocery store or eye doctor. However, some seniors may have fewer community connections or haven't asked for help. Communities, through councils on aging, can work to help pair people, vetting drivers to ensure seniors safety.

Strategy E: Provide Health Service Delivery and Neighborhood Based Support Services

There are a number of programs, such as visiting nurse programs, that help bring care to the patient at their home. This is typically for people who need daily check-ins and medicine monitoring. However, some communities have been experimenting with other mobile health delivery options. Options like mobile clinics that can provide certain basic tests like blood pressure or diabetes management checks help bring more frequent care to rural areas otherwise lacking in medical services. This is particularly important for aging in place in rural small towns.

Policy HN5.2: Focus all stages of senior housing in co-located areas next to or otherwise linked to medical services and social opportunities.

Strategy A: Conduct Senior Housing Plan in Collaboration with Health Care, Faith-Based Community, Councils on Aging, Senior Care Organizations, and Others

Create a senior housing plan that will link demographics with housing supply to assess and plan for how to meet current and anticipated needs. This should incorporate best practice on aging in place, longer, more active senior lifestyles and co-locating couples at different care stages so they can see each other with ease, and other factors as emerge through the process. Strong senior involvement in the planning and input should be emphasized.

Strategy B: Track Supply and Demand for Graduated Care Needs

Once a senior housing plan is complete, including demand projections, the supply and demand for graduated care should be tracked so that options are appropriately expanded to meet demand. This will likely need to be completed on a sub-regional level with several municipalities as higher-care options will likely be located nearer to hospitals rather than in each individual town.

Strategy C: Incentivize Universal Design in New Construction

New construction should be encouraged to incorporate universal design to meet the housing needs of those with disabilities as well as the growing senior population, while keeping it flexible for occupancy by anyone.

GOAL HN6: Grow a healthier region by working together to combat common health challenges.

Policy HN6.1: Support collaborative programs aimed at prevention as well as treatment of region's health challenges.

Strategy A: Continue to Support Regional Health Alliance Collaborative Initiatives

The alliance of regional health and wellness agencies and programs has worked diligently to forge a more collaborative approach to tackling area health problems. Their work to document and prioritize major health challenges will dovetail into coordinated strategies which will hopefully lead to measureable change. Health and wellness is engrained in all aspects of the community and will likely have the potential to engage people in a variety of ways and disciplines. The region should continue to support this work through funding, in-kind partnerships, and collaborations.

Policy HN6.2: Promote healthy lifestyles at home, work, and civic settings.

Strategy A: Healthy Lifestyle Leaders

Launch a campaign with area leaders to promote healthy lifestyle choices through people's own actions, new work site policies, and communicating components of the initiative through the media and schools.

Strategy B: Work With Whole Families on Healthy Food, Activity and Lifestyle Options for All Ages

Healthy eating and living begins at home, make recreation options easier for parents to find, afford, and access. Host cooking classes to provide people with the tools and confidence they need to engage in food preparation at home. This could be advanced by religious and civic groups as well as schools, youth centers and municipalities.

Strategy C: Work to Remove Barriers to Youth Recreation Participation Such as Transportation and Gear Costs

Cost and transportation can be real barriers for lower income and working class families sending their children to recreation classes or teams, which sets a pattern of income separation and reduced opportunity for parents and their kids.

GOAL HN7: Build disaster-resilient communities.

Policy HN7.1: Complete countywide hazard mitigation planning and communicate results.

Strategy A: Promote Household and Business Emergency Planning

Work with health and safety services to communicate the importance of emergency and evacuation planning at the building level. In the case of employers, landlords and employer service groups may be able to bring resources to the table.

Strategy B: Continue to Work with Communities to Ensure All Have Up-to-Date Disaster Plans in Place

Ensure all of the region's communities have a current disaster plan in place to achieve countywide coverage.

Strategy C: Create Community and Subregional Emergency Guides with Shelter and Evacuation Route Information and Distribute to Each Home

Make sure disaster preparedness plans are actionable, when and if needed, by communicating with the emergency management and working to ensure each community has a maps and resources to share with residents through tax bill mailings, city/town census, or other regular business functions to reach all residents.

Strategy D: Develop a High Risk Registry for Emergencies and Evacuations

High risk individuals who may have mobility barriers or be more susceptible to emergency situations should be identified so that people know to check on them to ensure they are safe.

See also similar Climate and Energy strategy for high heat days.

Policy HN7.2: Be proactive about minimizing natural hazard risks, particularly in areas known to experience repeat problems.

Strategy A: Consider Zoning Modifications to Reduce Impacts to Developed Areas

As communities gain a better understanding of flood areas and those subject to frequent washouts or other storm-related problems, they should consider modifying zoning to reduce development of those areas to proactively reduce potential loss of life and property from a documented risk.

See also Climate and Energy and Infrastructure and Services element.

3. INTEGRATED AND INCLUSIVE

A healthy community, one which is to sustain a balanced population and workforce from one generation to the next, needs to both have a mix of different ages, incomes, and backgrounds and ensure that it provides the housing, activities, and services needed to support that population. This section looks at how well communities are doing mixing in different housing options and price points, incomes, ages and races into its community fabric. It then identifies a number of goals and strategies for making or sustaining an inclusive and well-integrated community and region over time.

The Big Picture

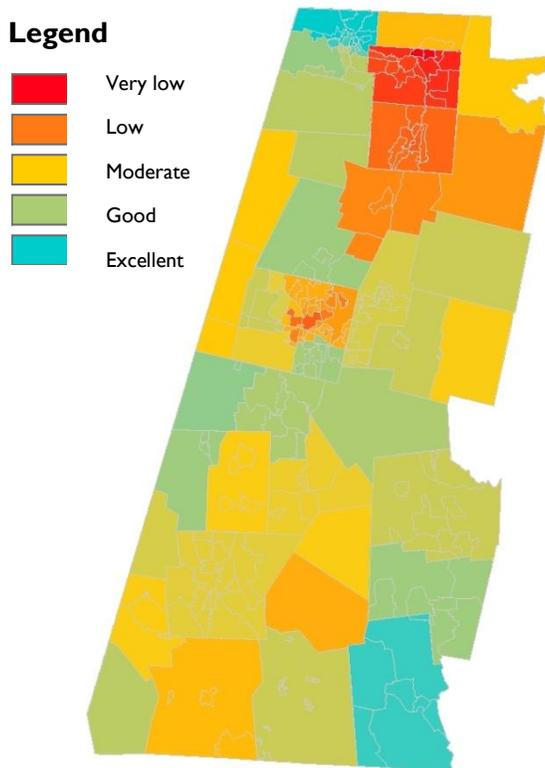


Figure HN 15: Integrated and Inclusive Neighborhood Performance

Source: BRPC, 2013

What was included in the score?

- Have a mix of ages, incomes, and cultural backgrounds
- Offer access to jobs and high performing schools
- Offer different housing options/choices, including rental and ownership opportunities
- Contain a mix of home values

What do the results tell us?

- Population poverty is concentrated in Pittsfield and North Adams,
- Income equity is low in population centers such as Great Barrington and parts of Pittsfield, North Adams and the northern Berkshire hilltowns.
- Housing equity, or a balanced mix of housing costs, is low in the entire county except for pockets in Williamstown, Lanesborough, Pittsfield, Lenox, Lee, Otis and Sandisfield.
- There are concentrated pockets of communities lacking in age diversity or equity, also communities with a high percentage of seasonal ownership—Hancock, Becket, Alford, Egremont, New Ashford and parts of Williamstown.
- Diversity is relatively low throughout the county, although Williamstown and Pittsfield score high, because of Williams College and the number of employment, housing and educational opportunities available in the Pittsfield area.

INTEGRATED AND INCLUSIVE PLACES

Fair Housing Equity Assessment

A significant focus of the housing and neighborhoods planning process was on how well neighborhoods worked to ensure an integrated community – by age, race, and income. Offering a welcoming community emerged as a main theme of the plan, being raised in this housing and neighborhoods element as well as in economic development discussions. It is central to both the comfort of those wishing to age in place in the Berkshires and the ability of the region to compete for new or returning residents and families to sustain a population and workforce for a balanced community in the future.

One major piece of analysis that contributed to this entire element, but particularly this section, was the Fair Housing Equity Assessment (FHEA). The FHEA reviews how well affordable housing supply is keeping up with demand, whether the region is seeing racial or economic segregation patterns that exceed certain thresholds into an “unhealthy” range, and what different locations have to offer in terms of access to personal and economic opportunity. This document was developed by gathering and analyzing qualitative and quantitative data, engaging different groups in conversations on housing need in different formats and venues, and then making and vetting policy recommendations to address identified challenges.

The complete FHEA is contained in Appendix A. While data-heavy, it is broken down to key points:

Key Trends and Findings

1. The region has seen a steady decrease of population while the number of housing units increased.
2. The largest communities have seen the most significant population loss, while the smallest communities have seen the largest population gain. This indicates some trend of “urban” flight or hollowing out coupled with rural sprawl.
3. Affordability is a problem in all communities for both renters and owners but less than a third of the region’s communities offer any subsidized affordable housing. Those who are providing the bulk of the region’s affordable housing are struggling to maintain neighborhood and school quality in the face of increasingly concentrated poverty in certain neighborhoods.
4. The population of the county is aging and so are its homeowners; 55% of homes are owned by someone 55 years or older, yet there is no comprehensive strategy to address senior housing needs and production.
5. The region, while still homogenous, is becoming more diverse. The Berkshires has very good performance in measures of integration such as the Dissimilarity Index, including compared to adjacent regions. However, while there are no racially concentrated areas of poverty, poverty is concentrated in certain areas and these also tend to be more racially diverse than the general population.

Moving Forward: Affordable Housing Production Framework

Measuring Opportunity

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) created a number of indices to help assess relative opportunity provided in different census tracts of the county. They looked at a number of criteria, listed in the table below. These were mapped and analyzed to see how opportunity scores aligned with affordable housing supply. Patterns began to emerge and then the subcommittee made a number of local refinements based on state and local data or knowledge and practical considerations.

Table HNI: Opportunity Factors Considered in Developing the Affordable Housing Production Framework

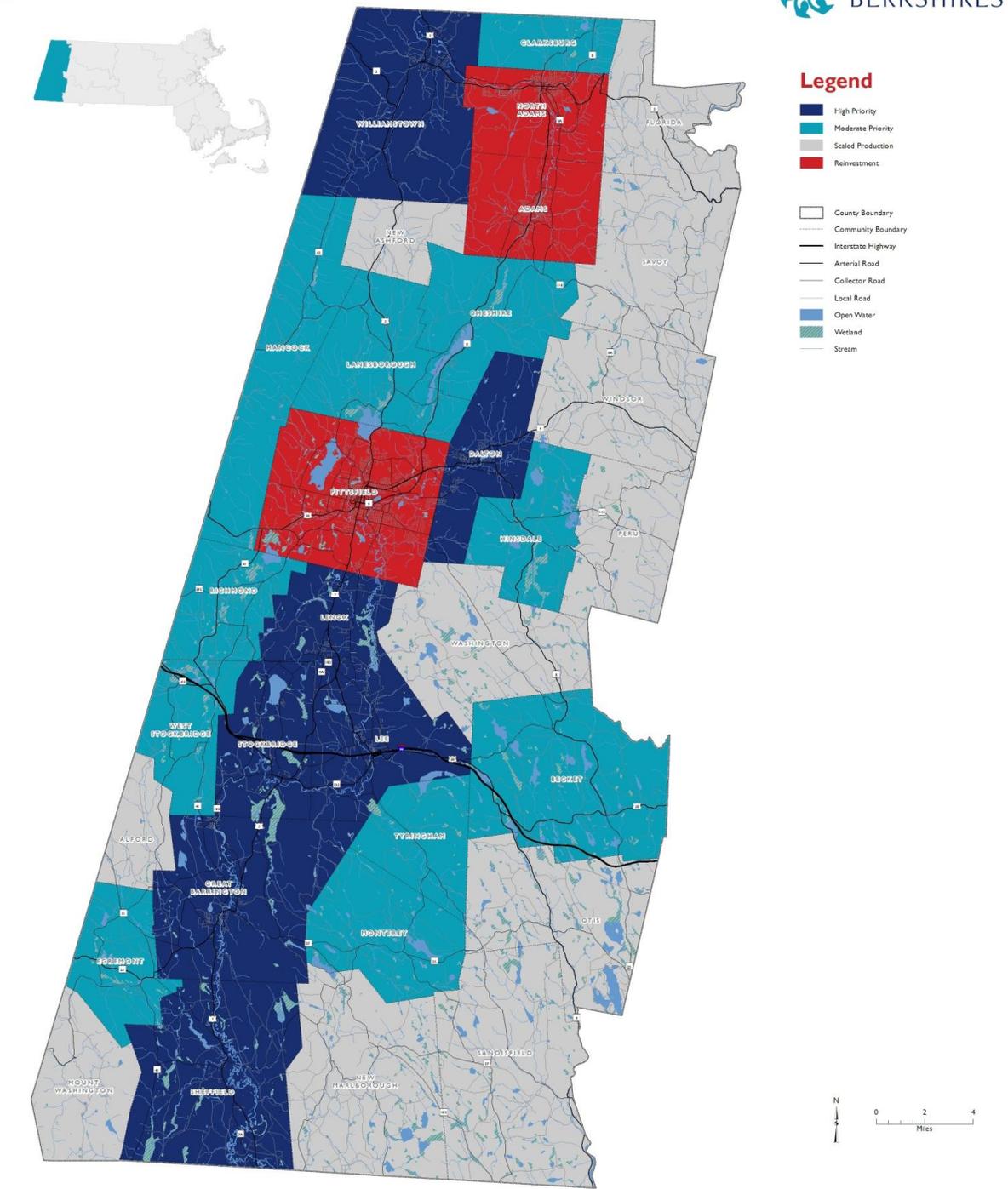
HUD Opportunity Criteria	Local Refinements
Low poverty levels	Poverty (don't create or exacerbate concentrations of poverty)
Access to jobs	Access to Jobs – considered knowledge of area and roads to refine what data said
Labor market engagement	Proximity to transit
Housing and neighborhood stability	Access to services, including hospitals
School performance	Utilities (water and sewer service)
Shortage of health care professionals	Political will (active on the issues, CPA Passed)

Prioritizing Affordable Housing Production to Maximize Opportunity

The resulting framework breaks the county into four policy zones:

- High Priority:** These areas have high opportunity scores but a low supply of affordable housing. There are seven towns in this category: Williamstown, Dalton, Lenox, Lee, Stockbridge, Great Barrington and Sheffield. The recommendation is that these towns, with easy access to employment, served by transit (except Sheffield), higher performing schools, and served with water and sewer, should be targeted for new housing development.
- Moderate Priority:** These communities are secondary markets, near jobs and with good schools, but less served by transit and municipal infrastructure. These are generally adjacent to high priority areas or those communities targeted for reinvestment. Also, these are slightly smaller towns with lower staff capacity. This category includes Clarksburg, Cheshire, Lanesborough, Hancock, Hinsdale, Richmond, West Stockbridge, Becket, Tyringham, Monterey and Egremont.
- Scaled Production:** Some towns are so rural they don't have jobs or services and are also not easily accessible to places that do. They are not well served by municipal infrastructure which limits the density of development possible and viability of affordable housing at a meaningful scale. These communities are encouraged to increase their housing mix through duplex or accessory dwelling unit options, but are not a primary focus for new affordable housing production. This includes New Ashford, Florida, Savoy, Windsor, Washington, Otis, Peru, Alford, Mount Washington, New Marlborough and Sandisfield.
- Reinvestment:** These three communities (Pittsfield, Adams, and North Adams) are the largest and have experienced the largest population declines over the past decades. They struggle with high poverty rates, low property values, and housing conditions. They also provide the bulk of the region's current affordable housing supply. The focus for these communities is to improve opportunity conditions to better serve current residents, including affordable housing occupants.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING PRODUCTION FRAMEWORK



2/17/2014



The work that provided the basis for this publication was supported by funding under an award with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The substance and findings of the work are dedicated to the public. The author and publisher are solely responsible for the accuracy of the statements and interpretations contained in this publication. Such interpretations do not necessarily reflect the views of the Government.

This map was created by the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission and is intended for general planning purposes only. This map shall not be used for engineering, survey, legal, or regulatory purposes. MassGIS, MassDOT, BRPC or the communities may have supplied portions of this data.

Figure HN 16: Affordable Housing Production Framework

Source: BRPC, 2013

KEY ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Neighborhood and Income Segregation Prevalent Across County

The region has a number of dynamics that have, over time, gradually created and then reinforced both income and racial segregation in neighborhoods.

Concentration of Poverty: The historic development pattern of mills and nearby mill worker housing has set a pattern whereby workforce housing has tended to be located in larger towns and cities. In many ways, this is an example of best practice – housing is located near jobs, services, health care, and along transit routes. However, over time, this has resulted in a concentration of poverty in certain areas. As mills closed and household incomes fell, the communities hardest hit also became higher demand areas for more affordable housing with lower property values which made housing development more feasible. By siting affordable housing within already low-income neighborhoods and communities within the region, there has been a growing pattern of economic segregation. Two demographic trends have also contributed to the decline of more urban neighborhoods in the county. First, aging homeowners in aging housing stock mean that a lot of housing has experienced several decades of deferred maintenance. As those residences turn over as “fixer-uppers” it has precipitated value declines in certain, once stable, neighborhoods. Secondly, as conditions in certain neighborhoods have declined, some of those with the financial means to leave have done so (see next section), further concentrating poverty by reducing the income mix of the area.

Rural Expansion of Wealth: Wealthier households in Berkshire County are often located in the less densely developed parts of the county and in discrete, well established neighborhoods in the county’s two cities and various town centers. Again, the boundaries of wealthier neighborhoods are generally determined by the value and quality of the housing stock and other amenities the neighborhood offers. Berkshire County has historically been an attractive destination for wealthy patrons of the arts, and has become a very desirable location for expensive vacation homes and large estates, establishing increased income disparity.

However, whereas in more urban neighborhoods with lower-incomes homeowner aging may result in more concentration of poverty, the opposite has proved true in rural areas and select village centers. This is particularly true in south county where, if and when long-term low- or moderate income homeowners sell, their homes likely sell to higher income households, due to the prevalence of wealthy, second home buyers eager to purchase property in that part of the county. In some communities, the result is a huge jump in average home sale price and, given the older demographics of the region, hints that the affordability of many communities could change dramatically over the next two decades and beyond. Rural areas have also seen the most population growth and new construction, despite the fact that the county’s population has been in steady decline.

New v. Old Resident Dynamic Poses Barrier to Social Cohesion

An additional barrier to social cohesion is the tendency to view newcomers as separate from long time residents and area natives, and vice versa. Newer property owners are often 2nd home owners who do not spend the whole year in the Berkshires. Some are drawn to the area by its vibrant summer cultural scene, and have little time to become vested in the local community. But many 2nd home owners are very active and engaged in civic organizations such as historical commissions, neighborhood groups, etc.

In parts of the county where tourism is more active, there may be some friction between local residents and tourists during the height of the season.

Another barrier to social cohesion is the current lack of stability in jobs and the economy, which demands that people stay prepared to change jobs and to relocate more frequently than in the past. Many are therefore less inclined to invest in the local community.

Socio-economic Barriers to Building Strong Social Capital in Youth

Across all income levels, one of the most successful ways social capital has been built within past generations is through organized athletics and activities at schools, churches and communities. Increasingly, lack of funds to promote and sustain such programs, both at the neighborhood or community level, but also within families, has become one of the greatest impediments to building strong social capital in today's youth. Today's families often struggle to make ends meet. The extra money for athletic fees and equipment is often not available to families, and many school or community organizations have no other resources to fall back on.

Additionally, with two working parents or a single parent heading many households, it has become increasingly difficult to provide safe transportation to and from practices and games, or for parents to devote time to encourage and mentor student athletes. Children from homes and families which are more transient and less stable in other ways have even more difficulty engaging in sports at an early age, and attempts to join a team or compete later, even by middle school, can be intimidating or even impossible for children.

These changes in family and community demographics can also negatively impact other types of social opportunities, such as after school activities like the Boy Scouts, Girls Scouts, Library and Drama Clubs, Band and 4-H programs. The cumulative impact is that children engaged in sports or other activities tend to be from higher-income families. Relationships between youth, but also parents, as a result of participation in these activities set the stage for income-segregation within social interactions of both adults and children. Given the strong relationship between participation in extracurricular activities and school success (better performance, lower dropout rate), this dynamic also places low-income youth at greater risk for later academic and social problems.

Lack of Affordable Housing

There is a lack of affordable housing in all cities and towns in the Berkshires. 'Affordable' is defined as costing not more than 30% of income, for either rental or home ownership. Fifty percent (50%) of all renters in Berkshire County are rent burdened, and the percentages of rent burdened households are much higher in the more affluent communities.

Even market rate rental properties are scarce to non-existent in many parts of the county. The popularity of 2nd homes and vacation rentals drives the real estate market, making housing options even scarcer, and less affordable, for average year round residents in both the rental and sales markets. Second and third generation natives from many towns in the Berkshires cannot afford to buy homes or rent in the communities where they were raised, and professional people attempting to relocate to the area for jobs cannot find affordable rental housing or buy homes in many of the communities. There is also a lack of information and programs to assist potential home buyers with the mortgage affordability gap.

The net result of these conditions is to further amplify the number of working poor Berkshire residents, as well as those living in poverty, and to exacerbate the long term effects of an aging population in the Berkshires.

Figure HN 17: Ratio of Income to Housing Costs by Mortgage Status, 2011

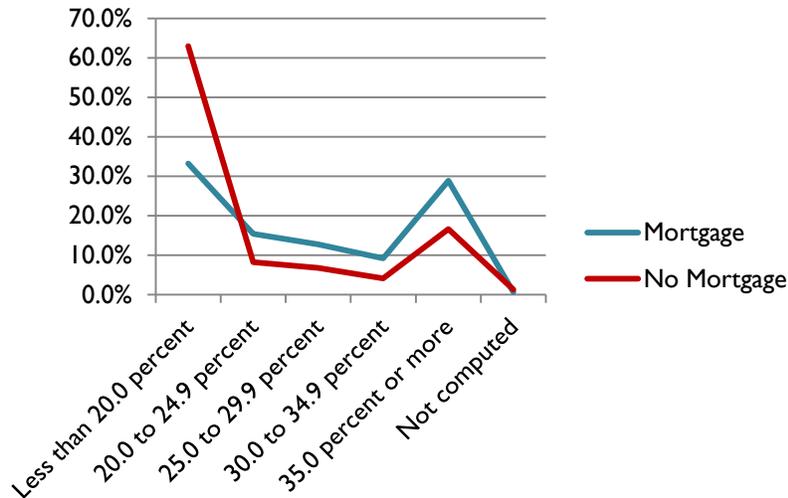
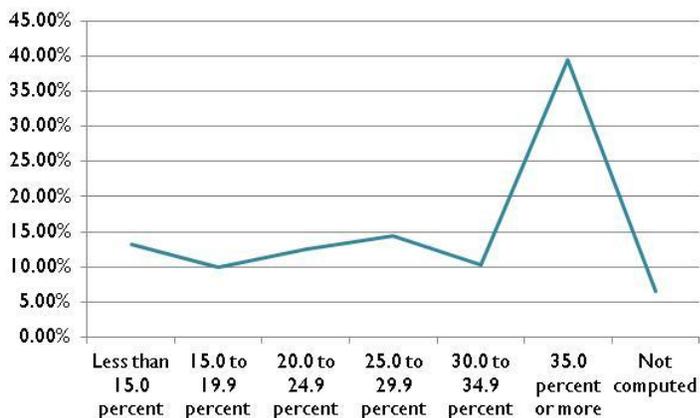


Figure HN 18: Ratio of Rent as a Percentage of Income, Berkshire County, 2011



Source: American Community Survey

Poor Quality Existing Housing Stock

Much of the existing affordable housing is aged, built during the height of the paper and textile manufacturing periods in the early 20th century, or during the expansion of other industries from the 1960's to the early 1990's. Many of these properties are single family homes that have been adapted to use as multi-family homes, and are in poor condition with code violations common. Efforts to preserve existing housing are impacted by higher costs and code requirements that can make rehabilitation cost prohibitive and result in tear-downs. Lead paint removal often needs to be addressed, greatly increasing the cost of rehabilitating properties. Low- to moderate-income homeowners are often hard pressed to make repairs. Fixed income elderly homeowners can't physically keep up with maintenance and can't

afford to hire contractors to perform the work. Even property owners of greater means are challenged to hold down the fees charged for rentals while they attempt to keep up with the costs of repairs.

The Housing Needs of Some Demographics Not Being Well Met

The housing stock, which tends to be older and predominantly single-family, does not meet the needs of certain populations, including seniors, families, disabled, and young workers. For seniors and physically disabled populations, there are limited rental options for accessible units with universal design attributes. Young workers and families also have some challenges. Young workers have difficulty finding well-maintained market rate rental units near jobs and activities. Young families are underserved by the rental market, which tends to be skewed towards one bedroom apartments; this is anecdotally attributed to landlord concerns over lead regulations as well as property damage from kids. Purchasing, for both young workers and families, if financially capable and desiring to own versus rent, is often laden with hidden costs from long-term deferred maintenance that can cause unforeseen financial hardship or continued deferred maintenance. Some, seeing the work involved, prefer to keep renting, particularly if in a community with fairly stagnant home values and declining population. Communities in the region with more robust housing markets are generally cost prohibitive for young people or families to buy.

GOALS, POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

GOAL HN8: Increase the supply of affordable housing across the county, both for low income and moderate income households, in a manner that relies on each municipality doing their fair share and maximizes access to opportunity for lower income households.

Policy HN8.1: Increase capacity of towns and region to develop more affordable housing and housing which is attractive to younger workers and families.

Strategy A: Create Affordable Housing Committees in All High-Priority Production Communities

Very few communities in the county have professional staff that can focus on affordable housing planning and development; this is most often shepherded through by a volunteer housing committee. While the development itself may likely be conducted or managed by a housing-focused CDC, or nonprofit, having a municipal champion to assist those groups can make all the difference to a project's success. Communities with relative priority for housing production should work to form and support housing committees.

Strategy B: Create Local and Regional Staffing Capacity to Engage in Multi-year Development Projects

Staffing capacity is a critical barrier to more affordable housing development in the region. While affordable housing committees can be a great help they may lack the expertise to handle the complicated funding and legal aspects of a development particularly given the longer timeframe it can take to see a project come to fruition. Membership of a committee can change or lag. Professional staff offers consistency and expertise at a different level and can help support the efforts of the committees.

Strategy C: Involve Local and Regional Communities in Visioning Process

One identified barrier to affordable housing development is that communities have not gone through a process to discuss the scope and type of housing needs, who those residents may be, and how it's important to their long-term success as a community. This can translate to a waffling of support as

projects go from a conceptual idea to a real proposal requiring financial commitment. And that is only if it's gotten that far along, some affordable housing discussions devolve long before then when communities react negatively to the idea of a "project" and have concerns over who would ultimately live there. Communities should think through their aspirations and envision the types of housing they think would be most appropriate to their character and needs -seniors, families, and/or town staff? Having a sense of who is being housed and thinking through design and density can make later discussions go more smoothly.

Strategy D: Conduct Housing Needs Assessments and Create Housing Production Plans to Quantify Needs and Demonstrate Community Commitment

Only one town currently has an approved housing production plan in place, and four (4) of 32 municipalities have a current housing needs assessment in place. These are vital tools to communities serious about meeting their affordable housing needs. The results from either planning process should help to inform the discussion and visioning in each community.

Strategy E: Secure Public Funding to Conduct Site Identification & Feasibility Studies with Market Analysis Component

Housing-focused entities and municipalities should collaborate to help identify funding streams to support site identification and feasibility assessments to move affordable housing projects along the pipeline. Given the rural setting, size and scale are often issues in a project being financially feasible and so market analysis components should be included and carefully considered to ensure sites are viable from that standpoint before investing further resources and time.

Policy HN8.2: Build a regionally inclusive collaborative environment between municipalities, CDC's, banks and other funding organizations

Strategy A: Organize a Regional Semi-Annual Housing Summit

Accessing training and sharing information can be challenging in Western Mass where there is a larger volunteer role in seeing projects move forward and as many resources are centered several hours away in Boston. Also, the density and development process in a small town context is somewhat dissimilar to the challenges faced in larger, more urbanized communities further east. Having an event closer to home that can focus on rural affordable housing development will go a long way to keep attention on the issue, raise the capacity and networking support of volunteers, and bring context-appropriate resources to the table.

Strategy B: Create and Maintain a Regional Housing News Bulletin and Resource List of Organizations and Funding Opportunities

A regional (Western Mass) housing bulletin coordinated across the four counties would be a valuable tool for municipalities and volunteer committees and make smart use of scarce resources.

Policy HN8.3: Increase capacity of community development corporations and other non-governmental organizations to maximize additional resources

Strategy A: Pursue Public Funding to Provide Outsource Development Expertise and Staffing

A main barrier to more affordable housing development, which is generally spearheaded by a regional CDC or non-profit housing group, is a lack of resources to support the up-front time needed to plan projects. Various state and federal agencies provide resources, though limited, to assist housing groups and municipalities in securing consultants, but most funding streams require

access through an application process, which is in itself often convoluted and time consuming. Assistance from the regional planning agencies, as well as regular networking through methods suggested in HN8.2 A&B, can help to keep information about opportunities current and to eliminate barriers through collaborative efforts.

Policy HN8.4: Implement appropriate zoning tools to facilitate development of affordable housing and enhance housing mix in different community contexts.

Strategy A: Work Locally & Regionally to Incentivize Housing Development in Areas of High Opportunity but Low Supply; Concentrate on Areas with Access to Major Transportation Corridors

Each municipality must develop strategies for meeting its own housing needs that are not only consistent with conditions within its own borders, but that also take into consideration proximity to existing transportation, commerce, educational, recreational and medical amenities, as well as those in neighboring communities. Municipalities with areas of high opportunity in terms of all of the above amenities, but low housing supply should receive regional support and incentives for developing new housing within their borders.

Strategy B: Adopt Accessory Dwelling By-laws in Each Community

There is considerable potential for creating additional housing units, specifically designed as needed to accommodate aging parents, young professionals and/or other family members, by modifying existing single family properties where accessory dwelling by-laws exist. There are few more expedient methods for rural municipalities to increase the number of housing units within their own borders.

Strategy C: Implement Inclusionary Zoning to Allow Multi-Unit Family Housing By right

Inclusionary zoning uses local zoning powers to achieve a legitimate public purpose: to maintain a diverse population and work force by keeping housing affordable to individuals and families across a wide range of incomes. True inclusionary zoning requires that a small percentage of units (typically 10 percent) in every market rate housing development be kept affordable to moderate-income families. Currently zoning powers are used by many cities and towns to keep communities exclusive by making it difficult or impossible to build multifamily housing, by requiring expensive amenities such as ornamental lighting and granite curbing, and by imposing dimensional rules that require oversized house lots.

Strategy D: Adopt Smart Growth Zoning Overlay District (40R) in Larger High Opportunity Towns and Compact Neighborhoods

Under Chapter 40R communities that adopt special zoning districts allowing as-of-right higher density residential development are provided financial rewards.

Smart growth zoning districts can be in one of three locations:

1. Areas near transit stations, including rapid transit, commuter rail, bus terminals, and along transit (bus) routes;
2. Areas of concentrated development, including town and city centers, other existing commercial districts in cities and towns, and existing rural village districts; or
3. Areas that by virtue of their infrastructure, transportation access, existing underutilized facilities, and/or location make highly suitable places for residential or mixed use smart growth zoning districts.

Policy HN8.5: Work collaboratively to implement tools and practices that make the development of affordable and moderate income housing more financially viable.

Strategy A: Expand Community Land Trust Activity in Region

Community Land Trusts help low and moderate income families build equity through homeownership, and at the same time preserve the affordability of these homes so that future residents will have the same affordable homeownership opportunities. The land trust owns the land and leases it for a nominal fee to individuals who own the buildings on the land.

Strategy B: Investigate and Implement where Appropriate Transferable Development Rights

Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) is an innovative way to direct growth away from lands that should be preserved, to locations well suited to higher density development. Areas that may be appropriate for additional development include pre-existing village centers or other districts that have adequate infrastructure to service new growth. Since the required infrastructure is generally already in place, the cost of developing new housing units is decreased.

Strategy C: Create Affordable Housing Trusts

Massachusetts law (MGL Chapter 44, Section 55C) allows establishment of municipal affordable housing trust funds, to be managed by the municipality. The purpose of the trust is to provide for the creation and preservation of affordable housing in municipalities for the benefit of low and moderate income households. Trust funds can be capitalized by donations, grants, Community Preservation Act funds, and more. Funds can be used for a variety of affordable housing initiatives, including but not limited to creating new affordable housing, rehabilitating distressed properties, or assisting first-time homebuyers with homeownership costs.

Strategy D: Establish Local Land Banks

Land banks, which are government or non-profit organizations, acquire, hold, and manage abandoned or tax-delinquent properties. Land banks have been used as a revitalization tool across the country to convert properties into new affordable housing.

Strategy E: Promote Local Adoption of a Community Preservation Act (CPA) to Help Fund Affordable Housing Efforts

The Community Preservation Act is a smart growth tool that helps communities preserve open space and historic sites, create affordable housing, and develop outdoor recreational facilities. The CPA allows municipalities to develop a fund to be set aside for affordable housing, which can be used to gain site control or purchase property, or in some cases it may be used to provide rental assistance. Over 7,300 affordable housing units have been created or supported in Massachusetts since the CPA was signed into law in 2000.

Policy HN8.6: Work as a region on multiple fronts to broaden understanding of wide range of affordable housing and its role in a healthy, socially-sustainable community.

Strategy A: Launch a Marketing Campaign to ‘Put a Face’ on Affordable Housing and to Combat with Facts the Underlying Attitudes That Contribute to the Stigma Accompanying the Term ‘Affordable Housing’, Including Brochures and Flyers

Some communities across the country have taken a marketing campaign approach to building community support and awareness around affordable housing and its role in the long-term health of the community. These campaigns work to put a face on who is residing in that housing, humanizing

the idea and making it very relatable to everyday life (it's your child's teacher, the barista at your favorite coffee shop, etc.) with the goal of avoiding later NIMBYism.

Strategy B: Educate Municipalities on the Range of Options and State Funding Incentives for Increased Density

Berkshire County is fortunate to have several municipalities with excellent professional planning staff. However, most of the county's towns do not have this advantage, and so additional barriers exist to keeping municipalities informed on the range of options and funding incentives that exist for working towards increased density in appropriate areas. Regional planning agencies are in a position to research programs and funding opportunities and to assist municipalities in becoming familiar with these incentives.

Strategy C: Explore Funding Opportunities to Assist in Prioritizing Affordable Housing Opportunities for Young Professionals Such as Teachers, Police and Firemen

The term "workforce housing" is sometimes applied to housing for people who are gainfully employed, a group not usually expected to be the target of affordable housing programs. Workforce housing is commonly targeted at "essential workers" in a community i.e. police officers, firemen, teachers, nurses, medical personnel. Workforce housing may be targeted more generally at certain income levels regardless of type of employment, with definitions ranging from 50% to 120% of Area Median Income (AMI). As with all affordable housing initiatives, municipalities could use existing tools like inclusionary zoning, up-zoning, and density bonuses to create desired outcomes.

Developers could receive density bonuses, i.e. the right to build more units than current zoning allowed, in exchange for providing units geared towards people making 80-120% of AMI.

GOAL HN9: Improve opportunity scores in communities, prioritizing investment into those currently providing most of the subsidized and market rate affordable housing in the region.

Policy HN9.1: Preserve and improve existing affordable housing stock in low-income communities.

Strategy A: Continue to Combat Blight Conditions in Targeted Areas Through Traditional Re-Investment Programs Such as CDBG

The HUD-funded MA Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program provides communities with resources to address a wide range of unique community development needs. Established in 1974, the CDBG program is one of the longest continuously run programs at HUD. Through a competitive grant application process, the CDBG program provides funds for housing rehabilitation, infrastructure improvements, social services, and economic development programs. CDBG funds are considered to be most effective when municipalities 'target' specific neighborhoods during successive grant years.

Strategy B: Establish a Regional Housing Rehabilitation Program

The preservation of existing affordable housing is one of the highest development priorities Berkshire County municipalities share. Many of the single and multi-family units housing low to moderate income persons are over 50 years old, and many repairs are needed simply to bring buildings up to code. There are few programs and resources that exist to assist low to moderate income homeowners in such work, other than the CDBG program, Community Preservation Funds, and private lenders and community action groups such as Habitat for Humanity. In order to direct the available resources to areas of greatest need, a regional approach should be established, with

two or more communities joining to further increase the competitive advantage of regional funding applications.

Strategy C: Respond to the Increased Need for Senior Housing and the Growing Need to ADA Retro-Fit Homes

Berkshire County is experiencing a demographic trend evident across much of the country, albeit at a more rapid pace: a disproportionately large population of ‘Boomers’ who are aging, with successively smaller numbers of residents in following generations. As this ‘aging out’ occurs in many rural communities, the elderly are increasingly found to be isolated and often unable to maintain their own homes. Programs that allow ‘aging in place’ must be established that provide support services and safeguards. ADA retro-fitting of homes will assist some elderly to remain in their own homes as long as possible. Planning for and development of new senior housing should be done while considering the regional viewpoint, in order to manage limited resources and to provide the elderly with proximity to transportation, social opportunities and medical services.

Strategy D: Study and Address the Impact of Aging Demographic and Aging Housing on the Regional Housing Market

As the Berkshire County homeowner population ages and greater numbers of older residents prepare to sell their homes, the regional housing market may experience fluctuating values. This will be especially true if many of the homes are in disrepair, or are concentrated in areas less desired as second homes. Even where property values continue to be supported by the interest of potential second home owners, the ‘hollowing out’ of south county communities, especially, will need to be closely monitored.

Strategy E: Identify Opportunities for Adaptive Reuse of Brownfield Sites and Older Public Housing Projects for Mixed-Income and Mixed-Use Redevelopment

Opportunities for the adaptive reuse of former mills, older housing projects, and/or Brownfield sites should be explored as these sites are evaluated for multi-family and mixed use development. These sites generally have advantageous locations close to transit and village centers, and often have large common grounds which are conducive to reuse as play areas and parks.

Strategy F: Develop Performance Criteria for New Affordable Housing Developments in Low-Income Neighborhoods

While three communities are targeted for reinvestment aimed at raising opportunity scores rather than new production of affordable housing, those communities are still open to seeing new projects if they can help improve the quality of the neighborhoods in which they are in, can add affordable housing to a neighborhood that does not have a lot of housing mix or choice, or meets a specific housing need of an underserved population. Each of the three communities in the reinvestment category can determine their own performance criteria.



The Rice Silk Mill project in Pittsfield converted an old mill building in one of the City's highest poverty neighborhoods into 45 units of affordable housing complete with community gardens, community room, exercise room, playground and laundry facility.

Strategy G: Explore Creative Models for Incentivizing Rehab Investors and Developers

Poor housing conditions, particularly rental units in lower income areas, are the result of deferred maintenance and landlords who put minimal investment to maintaining the property. When these properties change hands, or when a homeowner considers buying in these areas, the low sales price belies the actual cost of what it will take to bring the property back up to good condition. Pittsfield, for one, has begun to see new market strength for downtown housing and a recent market study in North Adams shows the same. These communities should explore ways to incentivize rehabilitation to start turning the tide of conditions in some areas.

Strategy H: Improve Code Enforcement and Map-Based Tracking Capacity

Very few communities have GIS mapping capability and those who do, which include the three reinvestment communities, could expand its use to track code violation problems. This would allow the cities and towns to better identify and quantify problem areas to link them with programs. Better code enforcement could also help drive improvements to improve housing and neighborhood conditions in certain areas.

Strategy I: Support Strong Neighborhood Groups in High-Need Areas to Facilitate Action

Neighborhood organizations are often well organized and very effective in keeping area residents informed and involved in community affairs. Such groups should be supported and encouraged in their activities as a means to developing and preserving a sense of place, and as motivation for investing in one's own community.

Policy HN 9.2: Prioritize economic development and job training in communities with high supply and low opportunity.

Strategy A: Incentivize Priority Economic Development Located in Communities with Access to Transportation and Employment

Private businesses frequently seek to locate in areas where a potential work force is concentrated. Municipalities should further incentivize this practice wherever practicable, especially in areas where there exists a high supply of housing, but little opportunity for employment.

Strategy B: Form a Regional Public-Private-Non-profit Collaborative to Identify and Address Workforce Development Barriers for Low-income Households

The region lags in education attainment and has a high rate of people starting, but not completing, a degree or certificate programs through one of the area training options. It is recognized that there are a number of life stresses contributing to this as well as transportation challenges. More work is needed, however, to work with low-income households and workforce development providers to understand what needs to be done to yield higher success rates. This process should also involve municipal and private sector representatives and a whole community approach as recommended in recent initiative work out of the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston. Their working cities challenge initiative, and the emerging best practice examples that effort will generate, should be tracked to inform local efforts.

Strategy C: Continue to Advocate for Enhanced State Transit Funding to the Region to Support Expanded Service

The region has limited transit service due to low funding rates from the state. This is a perennial battle, but one the region should continue to engage in pursuit of more resources to support transit service to the region.

Policy HN9.3: Work collaboratively to improve educational performance in communities with lowest MCAS scores.

Strategy A: Explore Best Practice Models for Improving Educational Performance at the Neighborhood Level

There is a clear link between high poverty schools and low MCAS scores. However, a number of models across the country illustrate how those scores can be improved despite the presence of poverty. These efforts generally entail a multifaceted approach and a deconcentration of poverty and should be explored in low scoring elementary schools to begin testing initiatives to improve scores.

Strategy B: Work with the School Districts and Early Childhood Education Impact Council Network to Implement Models that Hold Promise

There is a regional group of early childhood education providers, funders, business leaders and other agencies or non-profits who have been meeting to coordinate efforts to expand community awareness, offerings, and participation in early childhood education programs. This group can partner with school districts in high poverty areas to help implement strategies, particularly as relates to the role early childhood education and smooth transitions to kindergarten have in high-risk student performance.

Strategy C: Capitalize on Intellectual Capital of Retiring Seniors to Advance Youth

Outcomes

The region has a wealth of seniors, retirees from schools and major employers, who have stayed in the region. Seniors who are looking to stay engaged and continue challenging themselves and giving back to the community in their retirement, could help fill needs such as career counseling for parents, soft skill coaching, youth or parent literacy, tutoring, and mentoring. They also have time to devote to volunteer activities, like many of the initiatives which require significant staff or volunteer input just to coordinate activities when there are no other resources to support formal staff time.

GOAL HN10: Reduce Housing and Financial Instability in the Region

Policy HN10.1: Increase the capacity of homeless shelter and transitional housing network of providers in the region.

Strategy A: Assess Capacity of Shelter System and Develop Strategy to Link Supply with Demand

There is a recognized shortage of sheltering and transitional housing in the region. Transitional housing, with rapid rehousing, is the goal. However, there is limited supply in the region, particularly given demand streams such as exiting inmates from the county jail. In some cases, however, rehousing is not a viable option. The chronically homeless are often struggling with mental health and sometimes addiction issues which hinder their ability to gain or sustain stability in the form of housing or income. Facilities like Soldier On, which deal specifically with a homeless veteran population, are great examples of how to build supportive networks and meet housing need for complicated chronic homeless populations. The region has also been struggling to manage current shelters due to organizational capacity and stability issues from the main shelter organization which has had the operations of shelters in a state of uncertainty for the past few years. A comprehensive system of how to meet demand and reduce impacts of homelessness on the individuals and service providers (e.g., ER visits, faith based community, etc.) should be developed to improve the capacity of the region.

Strategy B: Implement Regional Network of Providers for Referral and Supportive Services in the Berkshires

While there are a number of sources, like Mass 411, for service provider listings, these are not often either used or quickly navigable by user groups. There is interest in exploring ways to map out the referral and supportive services in a user-friendly decision tree way to empower those either seeking help or agencies or entities to whom they first go for help, to be able to quickly find the services they need with minimal running around, misinformation, and frustration.

Strategy C: Continue to Support High-functioning Housing and Service Models for Veterans and Victims of Domestic Violence in the Region

Soldier On (veterans) and the Elizabeth Freeman Center (domestic violence) are two examples of high-functioning shelter programs in the region. These should continue to be supported and expanded as needed.

Strategy D: Improve Linkages between Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services with Shelters

Despite the co-occurrence of mental health and substance abuse with homelessness, there is still a service disconnect between health care and shelters. The result is either lack of care with sustained

homelessness or higher costs later on in terms of mental health hospital admissions and emergency room visits. Improving linkages to proactively promote more stability and health should be explored.

Strategy E: Improve Transitional Housing Model, Particularly for Recent Prison Releases

There are very limited transitional housing options, the lack of which can result in homelessness. This includes released inmates who need a transitional place to be while they reenter society if staying with a friend or family member is not an option. It also includes other sheltering cases such as homeless people and families sent from Boston or other places by bus to the region. With low shelter capacity and no transitional options, this can and has resulted in more costly options such as using motels to make up the gap. This tactic, however, significantly exhausts the resources of those working on homelessness issues.

Policy HN10.2: Enhance access to financial literacy and wealth building programs for households.

Strategy A: Provide First Time Homebuyer Education and Financial Incentives

The region is a high homeownership area but there are also many homeowners paying more than 30% each month for housing costs. The region should work to provide first time homeowner education, including financial planning, budgeting, and saving, to tenants looking to buy their own home to make sure it is the right financial and lifestyle decision for them. Often the cost of a mortgage is lower than rent but households lack the financial capital to make the purchase. Financial incentives, like down payment and closing cost assistance can help bridge that barrier and make homeownership an option.

Strategy B: Work with Private Sector to Support Financial Literacy and Income Preservation Programs

There are a number of risks people who are unbanked face including predatory check cashing schemes, payday loans, and risk of robbery from having too much cash laying around. In some cases it is matter of upbringing or culture, in others an inability to get ahead of debt enough to start an account. The region should support financial literacy programming, beginning in grade school, as well as proven wealth creating programs such as tax preparation assistance (LITC) or savings matching programs linked to bank accounts to help people learn skills, escape predatory traps, and begin to build financial security.

Policy HN10.3: Work with tenants and landlords to improve stable tenancy arrangements.

Strategy A: Continue to Support Tenancy Preservation Programming

The Berkshire County Regional Housing Authority has been very successful in helping people retain their housing by moderating and negotiating landlord-tenant disputes, upholding tenant rights, and supporting tenants being good tenants. This helps reduce homelessness and transiency as well as the emotional and financial costs eviction and frequent moves can have on individuals or families.

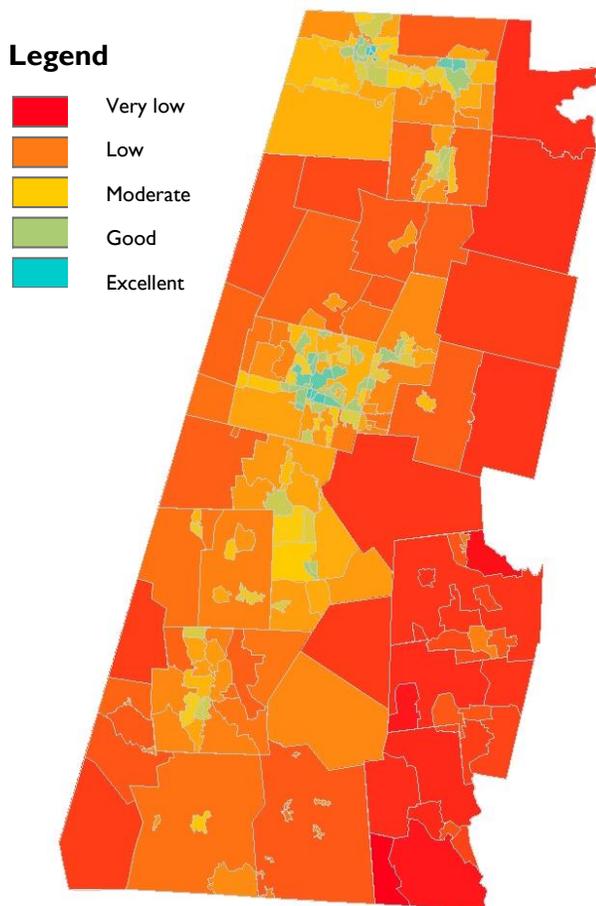
Strategy B: Work With Landlords Association on Property and Tenant Issues

Just as there are people to work with tenants, the landlords association, which is made up almost entirely of small, local landlords, can help build skills within the landlord community to screen out bad tenants, understand legal requirements, and supports and services they can either use or refer tenants in trouble to before problems escalate.

4. ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT

As detailed in the Conservation and Recreation Element, the region is home to rich biodiversity, including many rare species. The natural beauty is both a major draw of the area but has also resulted in a development pattern where people seek to have a “getaway” feel to their home in a rural lot surrounded by nature. The more people who opt for that neighborhood setting, however, the more encroachment and fragmentation we have on the very setting that served as a draw in the first place. This section reviews the patterns of development and ways development patterns and homeowner practices can help minimize impacts no matter what the neighborhood context.

The Big Picture



What was included in the score?

- Lot size per unit
- Intersection with identified important habitat areas
- Served by water and sewer infrastructure

What do the results tell us?

- Downtown areas of largest communities have the smallest footprint because of smaller lot sizes, proximity of jobs, goods, and services, and availability of transit service.
- Rural hilltowns along the eastern boundary of the county have the biggest footprint as they typically have longer commutes, larger lot sizes, and have no major employers, goods, or services in their boundaries.
- Most communities perform moderately well and urban development, while less consumptive, still has measures to take to reduce impacts from stormwater runoff and habitat fragmentation (e.g., riverways through more urbanized areas.) In other words, everyone has room for improvement.

Figure HN 19: Ecological Footprint Neighborhood Performance

Source: BRPC, 2013

SHRINKING OUR ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT

Market demand, personal preference, and private property rights mean that people do and will continue to live in a variety of neighborhood contexts. While compact urban neighborhoods are the most resource efficient overall, they also have challenges such as stormwater runoff. Rural neighborhoods, by contrast, have larger footprints but make some green living practices like composting and local food production easier. This section looks at some best practices for greening your home and garden that can be applied to make all neighborhoods have a smaller ecological footprint.

Solid Waste Reduction



Promoting composting and recycling is an important tool to reduce the volume of solid waste that goes to landfills. In the Berkshire region, some communities offer curbside pick-up of waste and recyclables. Some rural communities offer composting and recycling at the transfer station. Resident education and outreach can help identify how to participate, and teach residents the benefits of participation.

Over time, a number of communities have also used grant programs to set compost bins at a reduced cost. For those who don't want to compost at home, they can buy compost and drop off yard waste to be composted at Meadow Farm in Lee, Agresoil Compost in Williamstown and Holiday Brook Farm in Dalton. Commercial composting is perhaps more rare, but that picture could change radically over the next few years as the state's food waste ban goes into effect, generating a new business demand and service that will make commercial-scale composting more viable.



Water Resources



A rain barrel (above left) and permeable pavement (above right)



The waterfront house on the right has a view and direct water access, but incorporates vegetative buffers to slow and filter runoff before it enters the lake, unlike the house on the left.

Stormwater runoff and water efficiency can be improved by individual homeowner choices. Rain barrels can store rain water from gutters for later use. Permeable pavement allows stormwater to move and filter through the surface, reducing and filtering run-off. These green infrastructure tools can help reduce water consumption while mitigating development impacts to our water resources and landscape.

More unique to residential developments along lakes and ponds, choices made about landscaping, mowing, and fertilization can greatly impact water quality in those surface water bodies. This image (left) from the state of Maine shows how a waterfront home can use its yard to protect water quality while still having a clear view of and access path to the water.

The Conservation and Recreation Element contains a number of policies on stormwater runoff. The few mentioned here are ones that are very much individual property owner choices.

Wildlife-Friendly Practices



Bat houses (upper left) and butterfly gardens (upper right) with water supplies and butterfly-friendly plant selections can help make yards mini habitat areas.

Bat houses and native landscaping support species native to our landscape, including species vulnerable to development. Native landscaping can provide food and habitat for bees, butterflies and other insects. Waterfront buffers protect water quality and habitat through slowing down and reducing run-off via natural landscaping and plantings. Such tools not only help the natural environment; they also enhance the quality of life for residents and neighbors.

GOALS, POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

GOAL HN11: Reduce the amount of waste reaching dumps and landfills.

Policy HN11.1: Expand composting capacity of the region.

Strategy A: Conduct Countywide Assessment for Achieving New State Solid Waste Ban Provisions

The state is soon to require institutions generating one ton or more per week of food waste to compost as a waste stream diversion strategy. The region has three composting facilities but it is unclear who will be subject to the new rules, whether the current composting operations are willing to accept this food waste, and how compost will be transported to receiving locations. The region needs to better prepare to ensure that local businesses subject to the ban will be able to comply on schedule.

Strategy B: Expand Reach of Programs Offering Reduced Cost Composting Bins

The state once provided grants to help subsidize compost bins. While their program ended in 2007, some local municipalities and service districts have continued to offer the reduced cost bins. The state should be encouraged to continue its support of composting, and the region should work to promote local implementation.

Strategy C: Work With Business Community to Increase Composting and Recycling as a Cost-Savings Opportunity

Given businesses have to pay by volume for waste removal it is in their interest to reduce garbage volume through waste diversion methods such as composting and recycling. However, many businesses and office buildings do not provide recycling options. CET and others have worked to increase recycling activity; composting remains marginal. Education and outreach within the business community, as well as supporting programs to help facilitate the implementation of new practices, can help save businesses money while also helping the environment.

Policy HN11.2: Expanded recycling and reuse activity in the region.

Strategy A: Promote Home Renovation and Construction Material Reuse Programs

The number one source of landfill material in the US is construction debris. Much of this could be diverted through reuse of materials removed in a renovation (e.g., kitchen cabinets and windows) and ways to donate or sell extra raw materials such as tile and wood. The Center for EcoTechnology operates its ReStore in Springfield and Habitat for Humanity operates a used furniture and kitchen appliance store in Pittsfield, also called the 'ReStore'.

Strategy B: Work to Expand Municipal Recycling Programs

Most municipalities in the region offer recycling through municipal pickup at either the transfer station or a town building. Some communities do not provide recycling and others have a more narrow focus of what they recycle. The region should work to expand programs and increase waste diversion through recycling and reuse. This could even take a more creative route: some transfer stations have started swap areas where people can bring a variety of household goods, from unused paint to old light fixtures, for others to take.

Strategy C: Work with Landlords Association to Launch Campaign to Raise Recycling Rates in Low-Participation Areas

Many apartments and businesses do not provide recycling bins or service and recycling rates are low. This means resource waste which translates into more waste going to the dump or landfill. Landlords have a natural interest in reducing the volume, and thereby associated cost, of waste to be removed. They can work alone or in partnership with host communities or with the assistance of a waste reduction business to develop a cost effective strategy for increasing recycling rates in their buildings.

Strategy D: Place Recycling Bins Next To Garbage Bins in Main Street Areas to Make Recycling More Visible

Incorporate recycling bins in downtowns and other high-traffic areas to promote recycling and make recycling as an activity more visible as a community practice and value.

Strategy E: Implement or Promote Municipal or Subregional Toxics Drop Off/Recycling (Paint, Oil, Electronics, etc.)

Waste with toxic components needs to be handled differently than regular trash or recycling. Toxics and electronics can be and are handled by both municipal waste programs and retail establishments that sell them in the case of electronics waste and certain auto repair shops for used oil and fluids for proper disposal. Where there are gaps in programs in a municipality or sub region, it makes it more difficult for people to dispose of something appropriately. While most people want to do the right thing, they first need to know what should not be thrown out and how to recycle or drop off different items. Create or expand programs to ensure at least subregional coverage of major toxics drop off/recycling and promote them through a variety of avenues to encourage their use. This includes groups like CET but also municipalities and the drop-off sites themselves to grow casual awareness through repetition.

GOAL HN12: Reduce residential energy and water consumption.

Policies and strategies for this are contained in both the historic preservation element and the climate and energy elements of the plan. They include increasing energy efficiency of homes as well as improving individual behaviors that can reduce energy consumption from driving, lights, etc.

Policy 12.1: Promote Water Saving Practices and Retrofits to Reduce Water Waste

Strategy A: Promote Low-flow Upgrades in Collaboration with Local Home Improvement Stores

Low-flow plumbing upgrades are an easy way to save water and should be promoted, particularly in places with municipal water service.

Strategy B: Expand Reach of Rain Barrel Subsidy Programs

Subsidized rain barrels have been offered by fire and water districts (e.g., Adams) as a means of promoting residential adoption of this practice. Municipalities interested in increasing the use to both decrease water demand or addressing specific stormwater concerns should work to offer a similar program and could even target promotion to areas of concern.

GOAL HN13: Reduce environmental impacts of residential development.**Policy HN13.1: Reduce water runoff from residential properties.****Strategy A: Transition Driveways to Permeable Materials**

Transitioning driveways or portions of driveways and parking areas, to permeable materials can help absorb more rainwater on-site and reduce stormwater flow speeds and volumes during storm events.

Strategy B: Expand the Use of Rain Barrels

Rain barrels, attached to downspouts, are another way to capture rain for use later watering garden plants. This reduces stormwater runoff as well as water processed by municipal systems and paid for by customers.

Strategy C: Add a Rain Garden

Another way to reduce stormwater runoff is to plant a rain garden to retain more on-site. These are attractive and functional.

Strategy D: Explore Ways to Reduce the Residential Footprint

The use of innovative of innovative housing concepts, including the small home movement, is another way to reduce stormwater runoff.

Policy HN13.2: Wildlife-Friendly Yards and Gardens**Strategy A: Wildlife-Friendly Fencing in Rural Areas**

Development in rural areas, particularly when setback in a rural subdivision off of a main road, should work to ensure their yards do not pose a barrier for wildlife movement. Using fencing that is open or keeping the fenced area footprints smaller and not enclosing the entire lot (such as just fencing in the vegetable garden or an area for pets), can help ensure the property can still serve some of its original habitat function.

Strategy B: Plant a Bird and Butterfly Garden

Local songbirds and butterflies have been under strain as important succession forest habitats, those shrub and wildflower areas at the edges of forests, have been lost to mowing. Most areas have a sharp field to forest transition without the food and shelter of the succession forest areas. Homeowners can help by planting a mix of plant and shrub species in their yards and making water available in the summer in a bird bath.

Strategy C: Natural Lawn Care

Residents have grown more aware of the dangers posed by spraying or laying gallons of toxic chemicals on yards in pursuit of the perfectly green and manicured lawn. These chemicals have persistent and far ranging impacts on water quality, soil health, and wildlife – as well as demonstrated increased cancer rates in pets. With better understanding of compost, soil health, and nativescaping, lawns can be healthy without or with minimal use of chemical products.

Strategy D: Lakeside Vegetative Buffers in Resource Subdivisions

The region has a long history of summer cottage development around its lakes and ponds. These subdivisions are typically at fairly high densities with lawns right down to the water. This landscaping decision, however, has the unwanted impact of increasing pollution in the water, leading to weed growth, warmer temperatures, and fish kills. Simple changes, such as leaving a vegetative buffer

between yard areas and the shoreline, can have a huge positive impact on water quality. A path can still provide access to any beached area or dock and more appropriate vegetation can allow visibility between home and water.

Strategy E: Birdfeeders and Bat Houses

Native songbirds and bat populations have been under strain from environmental stresses and loss of habitat. Residents can help support them by providing bird food in the winter months and by installing bat houses. An added benefit, they'll help keep backyard bugs and mosquito populations under control.

IMPLEMENTATION

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).

Appendices

Housing and Neighborhoods

- A:** Fair Housing Equity Assessment
- B:** Housing and Neighborhoods Forums

APPENDIX A: FAIR HOUSING EQUITY ASSESSMENT

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INTRODUCTION

The Fair Housing Equity Assessment (FHEA) is a three-step planning process designed to help communities and regions assess their current affordable housing supply and then identify policies to guide future investment. The three steps are:

1. **Data:** The starting point for the FHEA is to gather and analyze relevant data on housing, affordable housing supply, income, transportation, school performance, job access, and other variables. This includes both quantitative analysis of data and qualitative input from residents gathered through meetings and surveys with residents and meetings with housing and service stakeholders, municipal boards and officials and other regional leaders.
2. **Deliberation:** Review the findings and discuss their ramifications for the future. This could include ideas on where to site new housing, how to address needs of current stock, and how to sync other community investments, policies, and practices to help support equity and opportunity for lower-income households. This includes engaging the community in a dialogue about critical needs and potential solutions to build awareness and consensus.
3. **Determination:** Finalize a set of agreed-upon policies for municipalities and agencies to use to guide future decision making, policy revision or adoption, and investments.

It is important to note that the FHEA not only identifies gaps in affordable housing supply but also focuses on “smart siting” of affordable housing so that residents have access to opportunity in the form of nearby employment options, easy and affordable transportation choices, quality schools, and other goods and services. The following report walks through steps one and two, answering four central questions:

- Is there enough affordable housing in the region to meet demand?
- Are there areas where income or racial segregation is occurring?
- Are affordably-priced housing options located in areas that offer residents equitable access to social and economic opportunity?
- How can we prioritize new development and investment to maximize opportunity moving forward?

This more holistic approach and its focus on combating intergenerational poverty is entirely consistent with numerous recent efforts in the region to draw attention and craft multifaceted and meaningful strategies to improve outcomes for adults today and, for our region’s tomorrow, their children. In the Berkshires, there is a general awareness that housing is more expensive in South County and Williamstown and less expensive in central and northern communities. This analysis helps put numbers to that general picture and informs policy development for how the region can ensure equitable housing access across the region. It is a launching point from which we will engage the region in discussion and priority-setting over the next several months.

Findings At-A-Glance

Detailed findings of the major trends in access are summarized below:

Segregation and racial/ethnic disparities



While Berkshire County is relatively well-integrated and becoming even more so in general, Hispanics have become increasingly segregated from Non-Hispanic whites.



According to the HUD provided data, there are no Racially Concentrated Areas of Poverty in Berkshire County.



Nonetheless, two cities and larger towns tend to have concentrations of racial/ethnic minorities, while other towns show a stark lack of diversity—five towns in Berkshire County have no non-white populations at all.



While Berkshire County has a large low-income white population, many of whom live in areas with poor access, Black and Hispanic residents have significantly less access to affordable housing and quality education.



Significant disparities in access to services and opportunities from town to town often parallel the sharp differences in income and home values, with lower-income households concentrated in lower opportunity areas.

Access to quality education is best in areas with the lowest percentage of affordable housing available.



Investments in services, infrastructure, housing and transport have focused on high population areas, which are more likely to have higher-than-average non-white populations.



Berkshire County has a large affordable housing gap, with a few towns providing well above their fair share of affordable housing, while other towns provide very little.



Even in the cities and towns that are providing more than their fair share of affordable housing, quality of homes remains an important issue, and will require further study in order to quantify.



Zoning in less-populous areas creates barriers to multifamily development. However, many of these areas are remote and un-serviced and are not considered desirable locations for affordable housing.



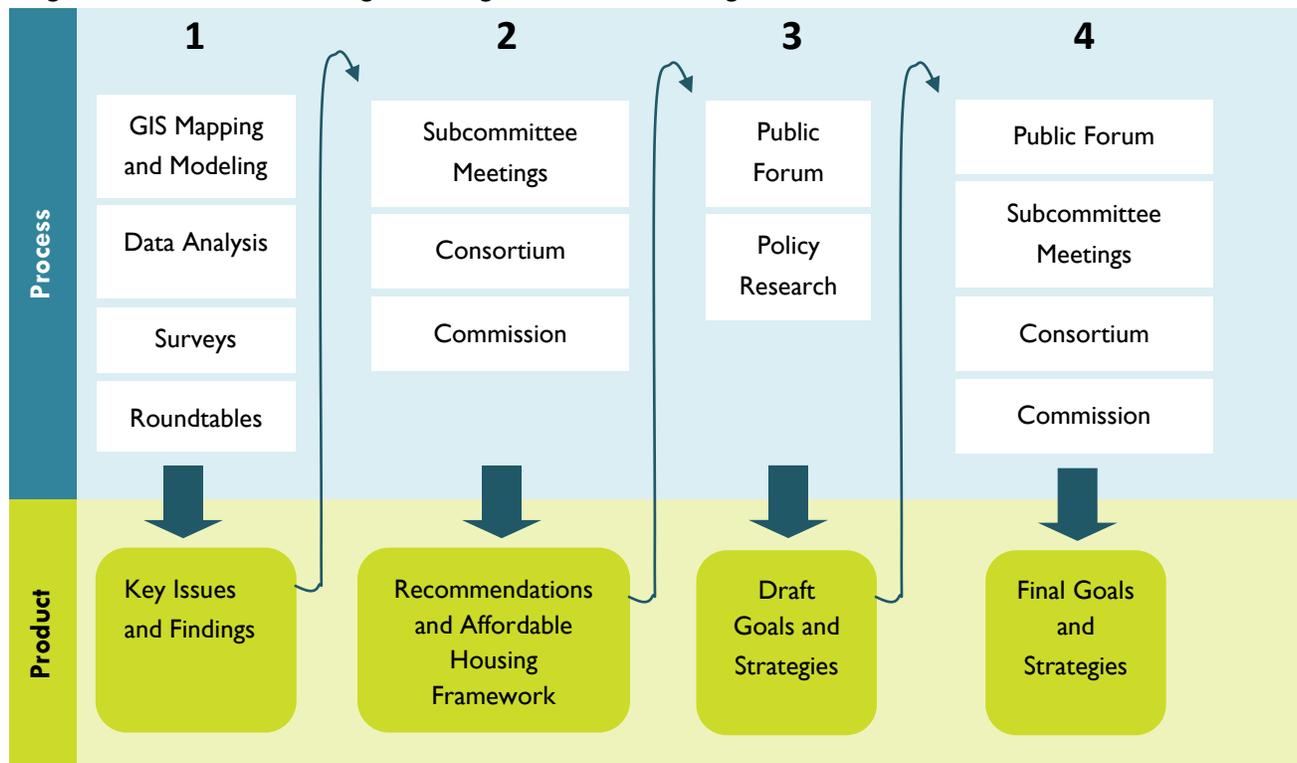
A study completed in 2011 on the impediments to fair housing in the City of Pittsfield identified discrimination based on disability, against families with small children and against households that receive public assistance as the main complaints submitted by city residents.

Access to opportunity, and investment in services and infrastructure

FHEA Planning Process

The FHEA planning process was integrated into the larger housing and neighborhoods discussion of the regional plan. For the most part, the FHEA policy content is reflected in the Integrated and Inclusive policy section of the resulting document. The diagram below reflects the multifaceted and iterative process used to shape the FHEA and policy creation.

Figure 1: FHEA and Housing and Neighborhoods Planning Process



Phase 1: Gather Information

After gathering and analyzing a wealth of data on housing and neighborhood performance, including a packet of indices prepared by HUD, the planning team began gathering qualitative input from a variety of sources.

- Street surveys were conducted at summer street fairs to gather information on housing and neighborhood preferences and concerns. Approximately 60 surveys were gathered.
- Surveys were conducted at soup kitchen meals to gather information on transportation, homelessness, and rent burden. Approximately 55 surveys were completed. A follow-up discussion was then organized with willing participants over a pizza lunch at one of the meal sites in collaboration with the regional housing authority and interfaith council.
- Roundtable discussions were organized across the county. Four were organized as invite-only events to gain input from stakeholders involved in providing housing and community services. This included representatives from school districts, housing-focused foundation and non-profit entities, youth program providers, homeless advocates, mental health practitioners, police,

municipal community development staff, housing committee members, and employers. An additional roundtable was organized to gain input from recent immigrants with a translator present and side interview-style conversations were held with elder services and health care representatives to focus on senior needs for aging in place.

Phase 2: Translate Findings to a Strategic Framework

Once information was gathered and summarized, it was presented to the subcommittee for review and discussion. This included an initial draft of the FHEA data and analysis, survey findings, and a key issues summary. Revisions were made over the course of several meetings before it was forwarded on to the Consortium and then Commission for their review and discussion. A critical component of this discussion was to deliberate priority areas for new housing development and criteria for making that determination. The result of this was a map that prioritizes new affordable housing development in the region.

Phase 3: Identify Tools to Implement the Framework

Once the group had agreed to the affordable housing production framework, which targets new affordable housing development in high opportunity areas, it was taken out to the public for discussion. The FHEA analysis, findings and recommendations were held at a special forum focused on affordable housing. Attendees included most of the major housing development entities, social service providers, faith-based community members, municipal staff, and representatives from most many of the region's affordable housing committees in addition to members of the general public. There was agreement on the production framework and then the group broke into breakout tables to brainstorm policy responses needed to implement the framework.

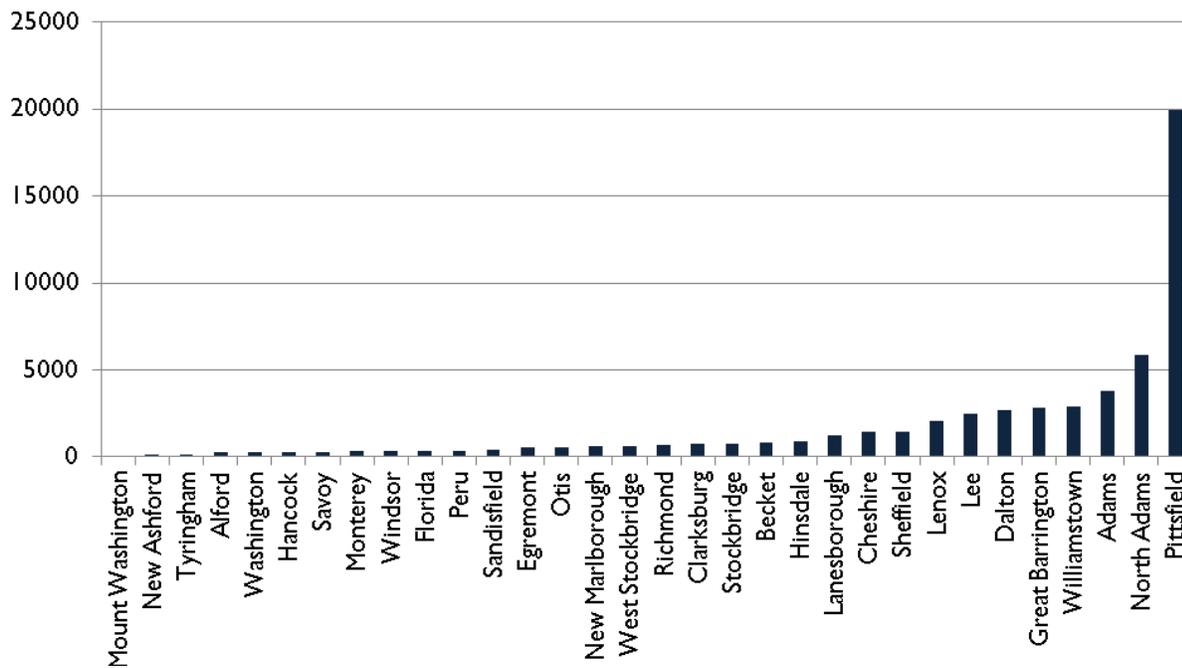
Phase 4: Final Vetting and Review

The framework and policy input was then translated into draft goals in the integrated and inclusive portion of the plan, which were then taken to the subcommittee for review and discussion. To round out the housing and neighborhoods section, additional modeling and policy development was conducted on other attributes of healthy neighborhood settings. These model results and draft policies were taken first to the subcommittee before going out to the public in another forum focused on healthy and vibrant neighborhoods. This included all of the draft policies contained in the plan element. Feedback was incorporated before being wrapped up with final review and approval cycles from the subcommittee, Consortium, and Commission.

HOUSING AND AFFORDABILITY IN THE BERKSHIRES

The region has 55,793 housing units, with 36% of all units in Pittsfield, the largest community. Of the 32 communities in the region, 21 have fewer than 1,000 units, while eight communities (Lenox, Lee, Dalton, Great Barrington, Williamstown, Adams, North Adams and Pittsfield) contain 75% of all units in the county.

Figure 2: Housing Unit Count by Community



Source: 2010 US Census

Housing Mix and Ownership

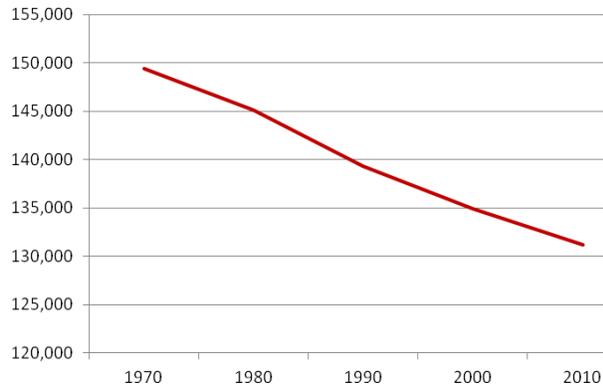
The housing market in the Berkshires is predominantly single-family. Of the region's occupied units, 70% are owner-occupied and 30% renter-occupied. There are 16,250 rental units in the county. The three regional hub communities (Pittsfield, North Adams, and Great Barrington) account for 68% of all rental units in the county. Seven mid-size communities account for another 27% of all units: Adams, Dalton, Lee, Lenox, Sheffield, Stockbridge, West Stockbridge and Williamstown. Very little rental housing (6% of county supply) is located in the remaining 22 smaller communities and hill towns.

Age of Housing Units

The region has an older housing stock, with 60% of units built before 1960 and 40% before 1940.

Trend #1: Decreasing Population but Increasing Housing Unit Count

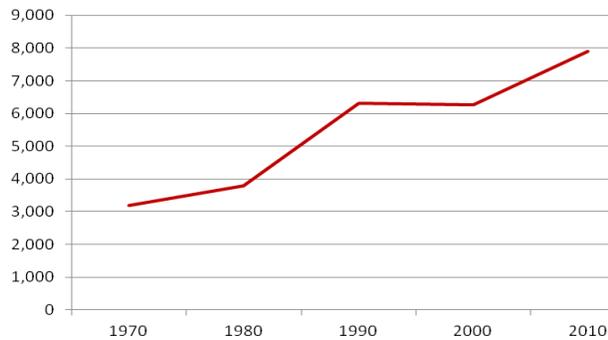
Figure 3: County Population 1970 - 2010



Source: US Census

The region lost approximately 18,000 people since 1970. Much of this population loss is attributed to corresponding job losses, notably in the manufacturing sector. The losses therefore disproportionately impacted larger communities such as Pittsfield, which lost GE as an employer, North Adams, with the loss of Sprague Electric and others, and other mill closures in the region's large towns.

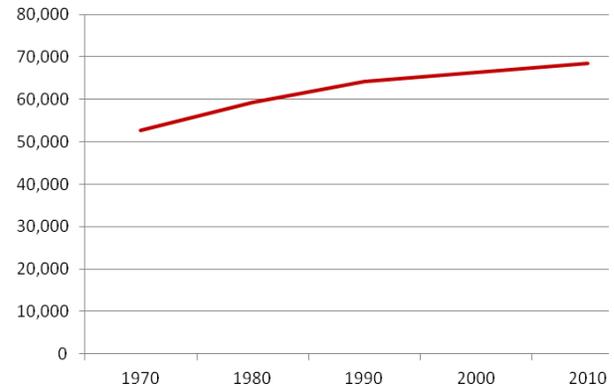
Figure 5: County Seasonal Home Units 1970 - 2010



Source: US Census

The region added nearly 5,000 seasonal units since 1970, with two bursts: one in the 1980s and a second after 2000. The 1980s led to more weekend home construction whereas post 9/11 saw a temporary surge in NYC residents both converting seasonal homes to year-round residences and more second homes being constructed.

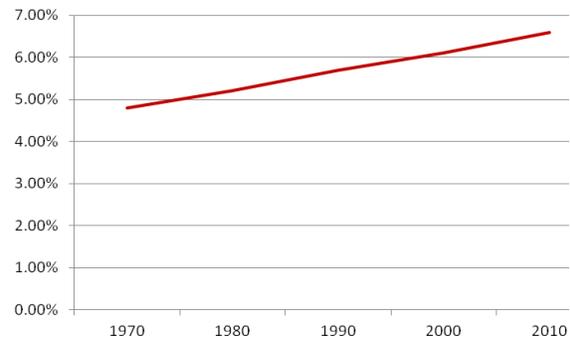
Figure 4: County Housing Units 1970 - 2010



Source: US Census

Despite steady population loss, the region continued to add new housing units to its stock. As illustrated in Figure 5, some of this is attributable to the increase in seasonal homes during the same time period. The average household size also decreased during this time period from 3.09 in 1970 to 2.23 in 2010. Despite these two trends, the vacancy rate still rose, as shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6: County Vacancy Rate 1970 - 2010

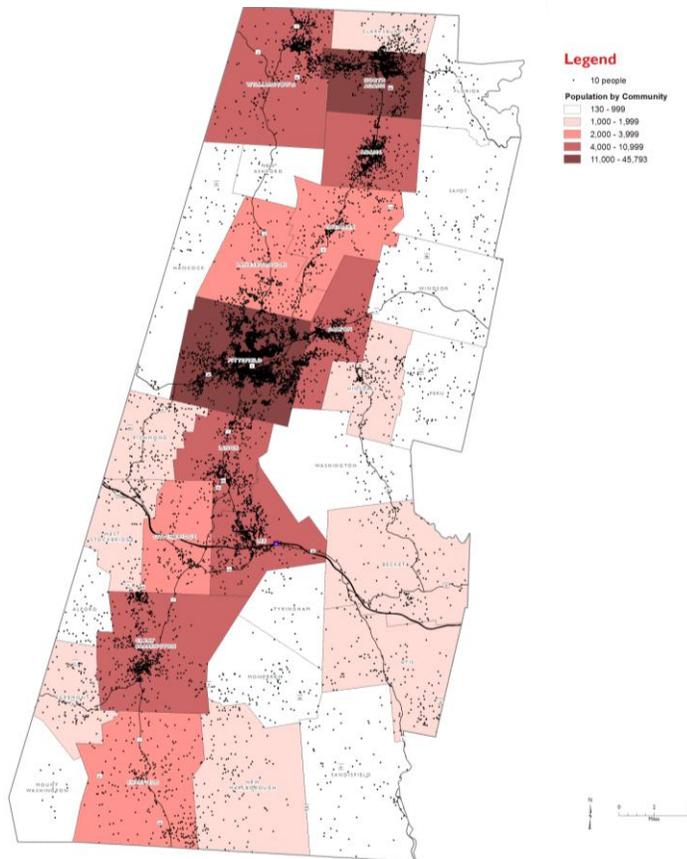


Source: US Census

The vacancy rate in the region increased nearly 2% between 1970 and 2010, with just over 4,500 units sitting vacant in 2010. Vacancies are attributed with property crime in both urban and rural contexts within the county. In rural communities and those with high seasonal home numbers, property robberies occur as people know homes will be sitting vacant. In cases of truly abandoned and vacant properties, it can result in vandalism, property stripping (aka copper piping) which can precipitate demolitions, and squatting with potential related nuisance activities such as drug use or trash build-up.

Trend #2: Population Exiting Largest Communities While Smallest Rural Communities Grow

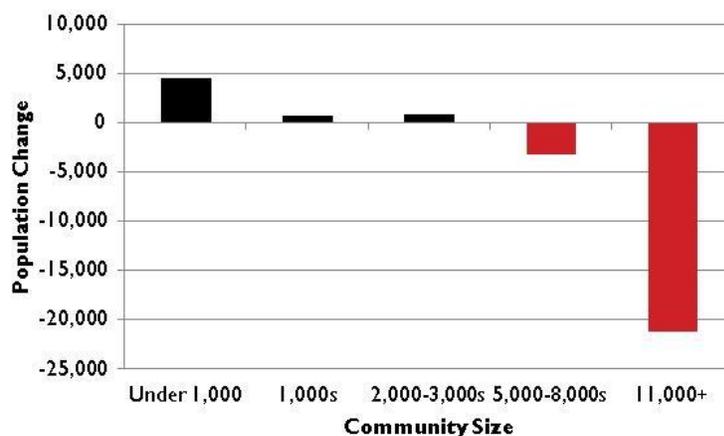
Figure 7: Population Distribution 2010



The largest communities are located in the primary north to south valleys, with less populous communities in the hilltowns to the east and west. The map figure to the left shows the communities with the lowest populations (fewer than 1,000 residents) in white and communities with up to 2,000 residents in pale pink. Together these represent 20 of the 32 communities in the region. Small towns of Cheshire, Lanesborough, Stockbridge and Sheffield make up the next grouping, with populations between 2,000 and 3,999. The larger towns of the region are in the second darkest shade; Williamstown, Adams, Dalton, Lenox, Lee, and Great Barrington. These communities generally have populations between 5,000 and 8,000s. The two cities in the region are also the most populous communities; Pittsfield alone represents approximately 30% of the region’s population.

Source: US Census, BRPC

Figure 8: Population Change by Community Size 1970-2010



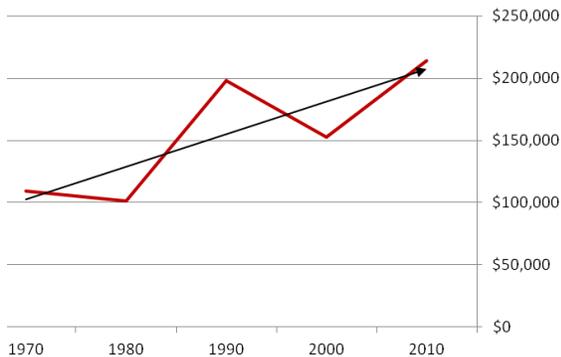
Source: US Census

There is a clear trend in population growth and loss within the region. Communities under 1,000 people gained in total population, while the larger towns and two cities lost considerable population. What this means is a hollowing out of the most developed communities—those with the most jobs, housing, services, and infrastructure – and growth in rural areas with limited services and infrastructure, no transit service, and few jobs.

Trend #3: Increasing Home Values, Rising Rents, and Decreasing Household Incomes Yield Affordability Gaps

Owner-Occupied Housing Values

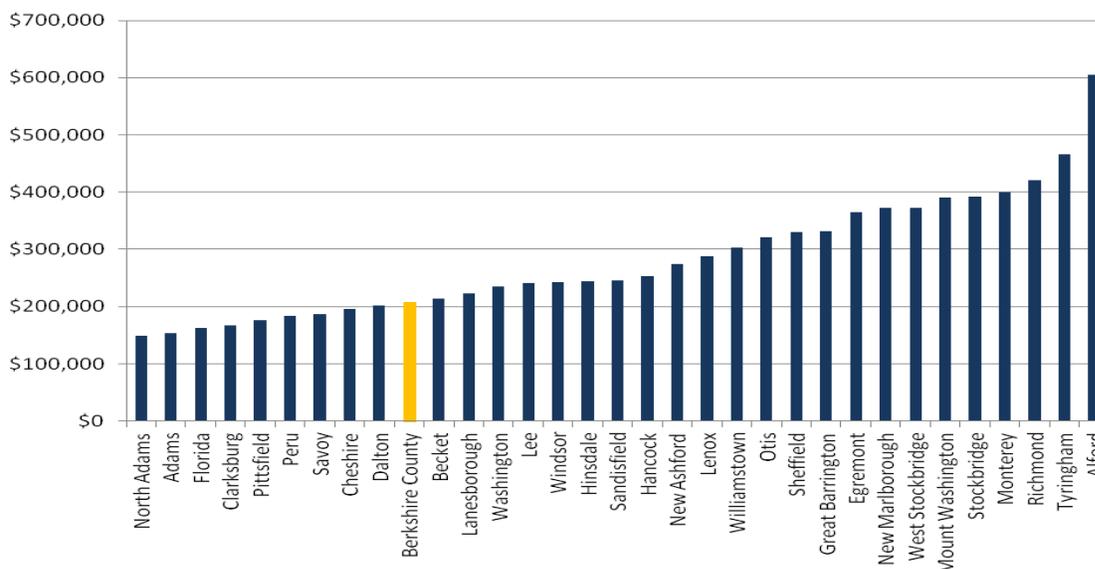
Figure 9: Median Home Value, 1970-2010 (2011 Dollars)



The county median home value (owner-occupied units) rose 96% between 1970 and 2010. Median values by community vary significantly (see Figure 8), however, and there is a strong geographic relationship to value with six of the eight communities in northern Berkshire below the countywide median value. South county, by comparison is home to all but one of the top-ten median home value communities in the region.

Source: US Decennial Census, American Community Survey (2007-2011), BRPC 2013

Figure 10: Median Owner-Occupied Home Values by Community



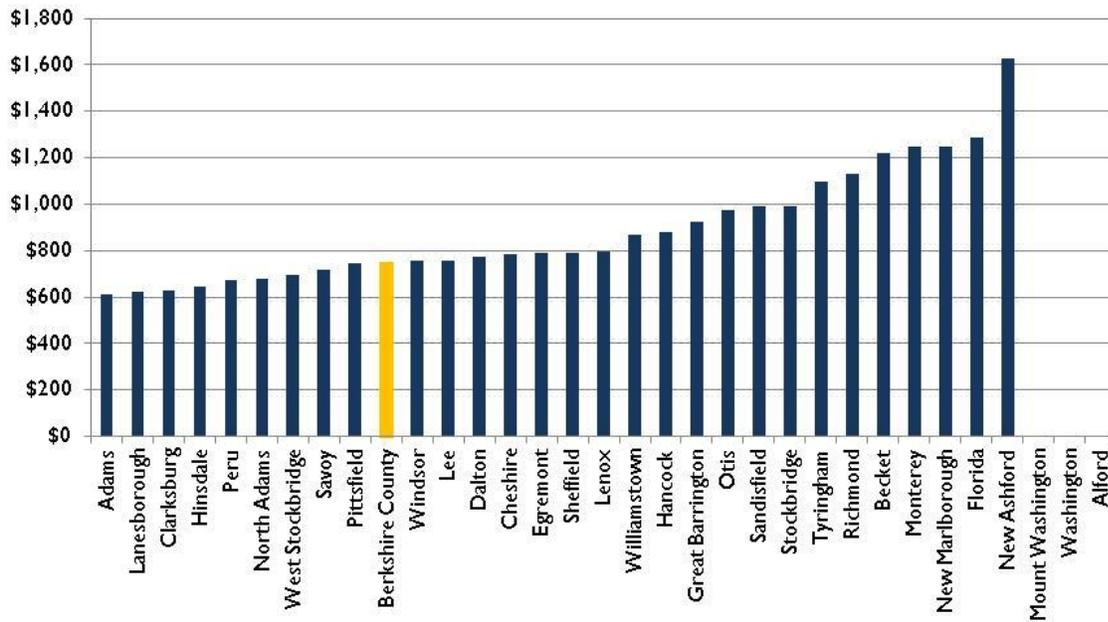
Source: American Community Survey (2007-2011)

Rental Property Availability and Costs

There are 16,250 rental units in the county. The three regional hub communities (Pittsfield, North Adams, and Great Barrington) account for 68% of all rental units in the county. Seven mid-size communities account for another 27% of all units: Adams, Dalton, Lee, Lenox, Sheffield, Stockbridge, West Stockbridge and Williamstown. Very little rental housing (6% of county supply) is located in the remaining 22 smaller communities and hill towns.

The median gross rent in the county is \$750, which would require a household income of at least \$31,034 to be affordable.

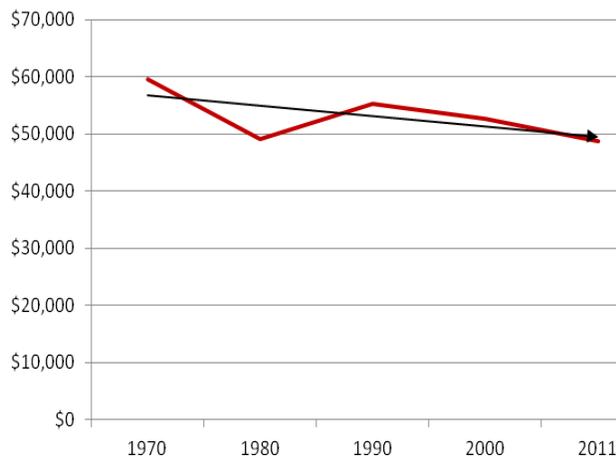
Figure 11: Median Gross Rent by Community



Source: American Community Survey, (2007-2011)

Household Income Trends

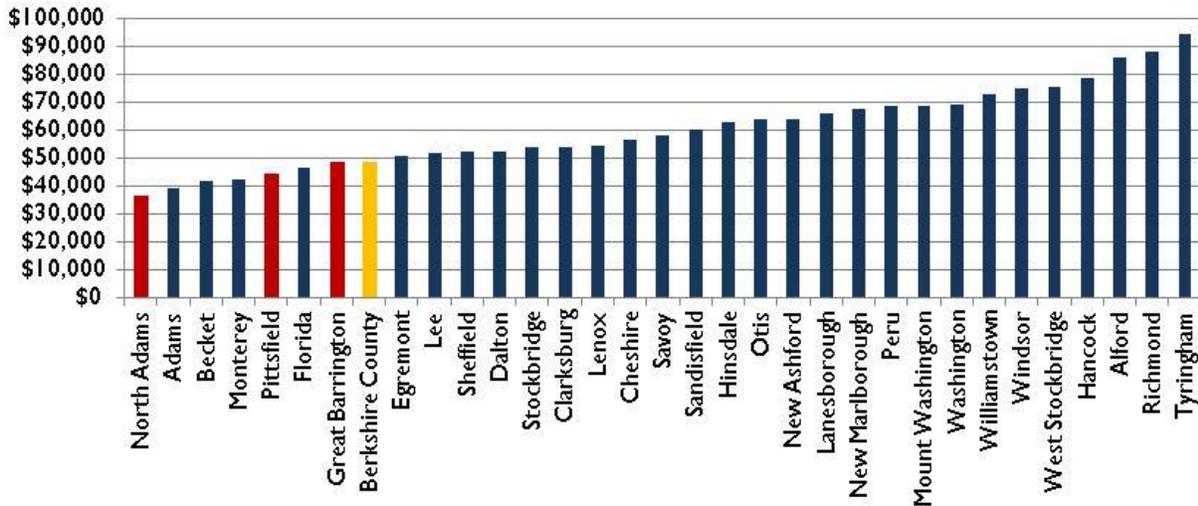
Figure 12: Median Household Income 1970-2011 (2011 Dollars)



Median household incomes fell 18% between 1970 and 2011 from \$59,500 in 1970 to \$48,705 in 2011, adjusted for inflation. Unlike home values, however, incomes do not show the same geographical pattern. Incomes naturally vary by community. Currently, North Adams has the lowest median income level (\$36,424) and Tyringham the highest (\$94,375). The region is generally understood to have three regional activity centers from north to south: North Adams, Pittsfield, and Great Barrington. All three of these communities have lower median household income values than the county.

Source, US Decennial Census, American Community Survey (2007-2011), BRPC 2013

Figure 13: Median Household Income, 2011

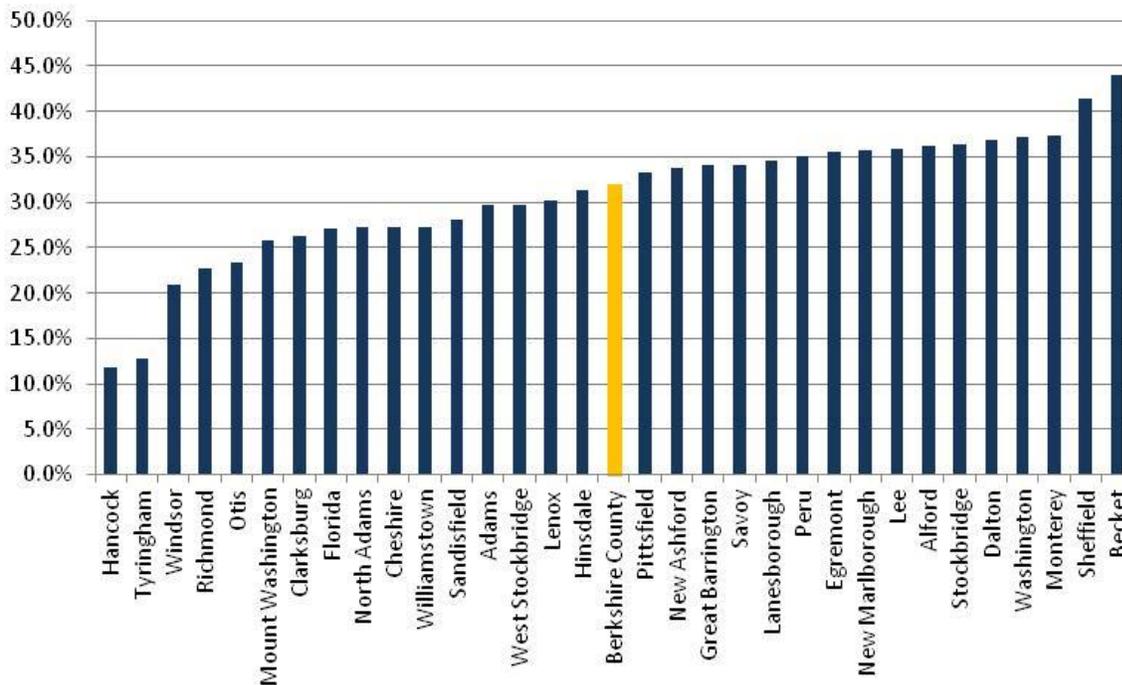


Source: American Community Survey, (2007 – 2011)

Affordability Implications of These Trends

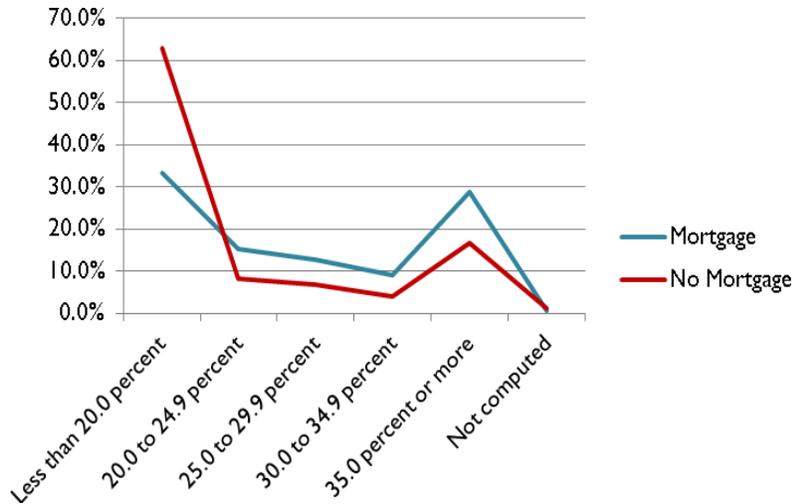
The result of these housing and income trends is that over half of the communities in the Berkshires have 30% or more of their homeowners paying more than 30% for housing costs.

Figure 14: Percent Homeowners Paying 30% or More for Housing Costs by Community, 2011



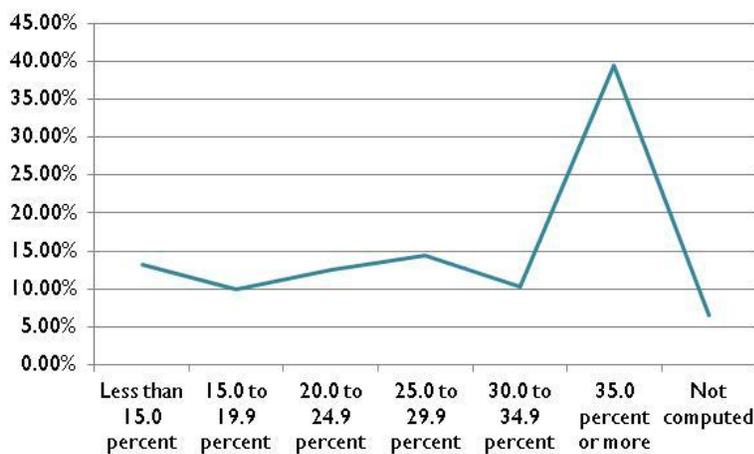
Source: American Community Survey, (2007 – 2011)

Figure 15: Percent Homeowners Paying 30% or More for Housing Costs by Mortgage Status, 2011



Source: American Community Survey, (2007 – 2011)

Figure 16: Rents as a Percent of Income, Berkshire County



Source: American Community Survey, (2007 – 2001)

A closer look at homeowner costs shows that those with a mortgage are more burdened than those without. Burdened homeowners show a spike at the 35% or more, showing that the cost burden is not “marginal” as in very near the 30% threshold.

Affordability is worse for renters; approximately half of all renters pay 30% or more for their housing and 40% of all renters pay 35% or more. This issue is compounded by the fact that there is not enough supply to meet demand; many communities have little to no market rate or subsidized rental housing supply.

Of the large to mid-sized communities, West Stockbridge has the fewest rent burdened households (33%) while Sheffield has the highest proportion (60%) followed by Stockbridge (59%) and Great Barrington (57%).

While the rural communities tend to be within the same ranges as the larger communities and track the county rent burden rate as a whole, there are some outliers worth noting: Alford (100%), Egremont (86%), Hancock (83%), Becket (81%), Florida (77%) and Peru (70%).

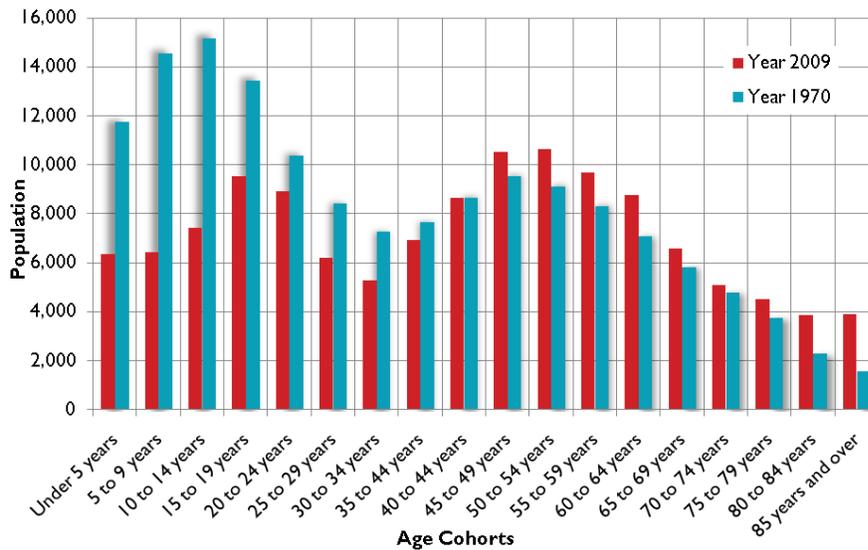
Table 1: Rent Burdened Households by Community Type

Major Activity Centers	Total Rental Households	Total Rent Burdened	% Rent Burdened
North Adams	2,539	1,202	47.3%
Pittsfield	7,464	3,711	49.7%
Great Barrington	1,041	589	56.6%
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>11,044</i>	<i>5,502</i>	<i>49.8%</i>
Minor Activity Centers			
Williamstown	537	237	44.1%
Adams	1,412	705	49.9%
Dalton	558	272	48.7%
Lenox	574	286	49.8%
Lee	685	352	51.4%
Stockbridge	257	152	59.1%
West Stockbridge	66	22	33.3%
Sheffield	269	162	60.2%
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>4,358</i>	<i>2,188</i>	<i>50.2%</i>
Rural Communities			
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>848</i>	<i>418</i>	<i>49.3%</i>
Total County	16,250	8,108	49.9%

Source: American Community Survey, (2007 – 2011)

Trend #4: Aging Population, Aging Homeowners

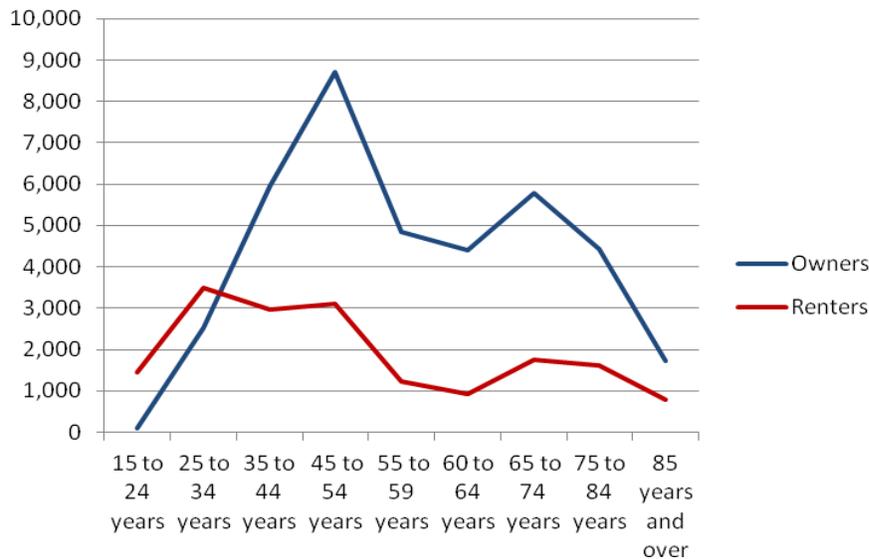
Figure 17: County Population by Age Cohort (1970 & 2010)



The median age in the county has risen from 30.7 in 1970 to 44.7 in 2010. This is evident in the age cohort comparison which shows significant losses in the under 35 population, including children, and increases in those 45 and older in 2010 compared to 1970.

Source: US Census

Figure 18: Head of Household Age by Housing Status (2010)

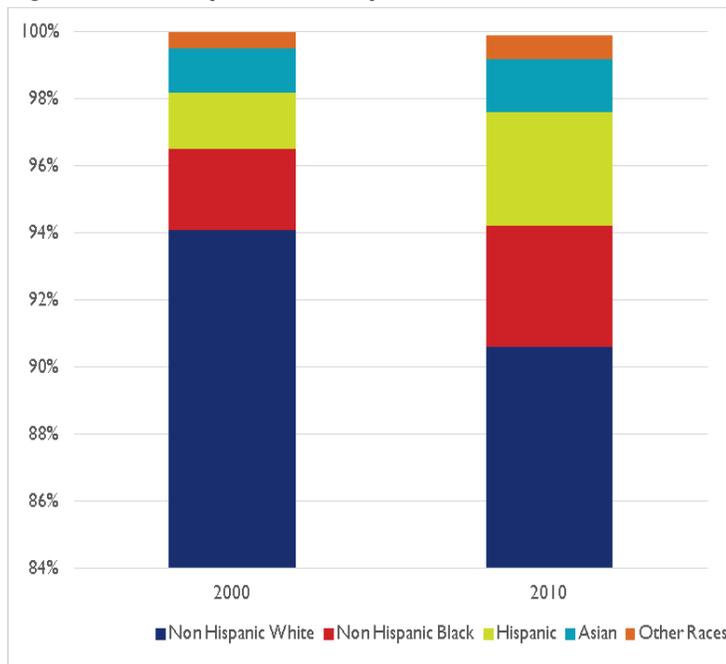


An aging population has a number of impacts on the community, both in changing housing needs and service demands. Currently 55% of homeowners are 55 or older compared to 36% of renter heads of household. With a decreasing population, it raises the question of replacement homeowner supply as people look to downsize, move after retirement, or transition into senior housing options.

Source: US Census

Trend #5: Increasing Racial Diversity and Integration

Figure 19: County Racial Composition 2000 & 2010



While the total population of Berkshire County decreased by three percent since 2000, the White population decreased at a faster rate (16%). At the same time, Berkshire County's non-White population increased more than 35%. The Hispanic population, in particular, has doubled its portion of the total population since 2000, and now represents roughly the same percentage of Berkshire County's population as Non-Hispanic Blacks.

Source: Analysis with data from US Census

Table 2: Population by Race and Ethnicity

	Total Population	Non Hispanic White	Non Hispanic Black	Hispanic	Asian	Other Races
1980	145,110	141,395	2,000	874	445	396
		97.4%	1.4%	0.6%	0.3%	0.3%
1990	139,352	134,177	2,454	1,407	966	348
		96.3%	1.8%	1%	0.7%	0.2%
2000	134,953	126,961	3,249	2,286	1,699	758
		94.1%	2.4%	1.7%	1.3%	0.6%
2005-09 ACS	130,168	120,154	3,073	3,234	1,876	1,831
		92.3%	2.4%	2.5%	1.4%	1.4%
2010	131,219	118,926	4,709	4,530	2,138	916
		90.6%	3.6%	3.4%	1.6%	0.7%

Source: US Census. American Community Survey (ACS)

How the region deals with diversity has emerged as a critical discussion point in terms of social or population sustainability as much of the influx of population (keeping our population from falling more precipitously) is non-white people including immigrants. This is also an economic development concern given that major employers such as the hospitals and General Dynamics tend to recruit from outside the

region and have a workforce that is more diverse than the county as a whole. Workforce retention in many ways is linked to the region's ability to welcome newcomers.

KEY FINDINGS: IMPLICATIONS OF HOUSING TRENDS ON EQUITY AND OPPORTUNITY

So what do these trends mean for fair housing in the region? The following sections highlight key findings which will set the basis for policy creation in the regional Housing and Neighborhoods Element.

Finding 1: Demand for Affordable Housing Exceeds Supply

Current Affordable Housing Supply

Housing affordability is a relative term tied to the income of the household in question. Ideally, each household in the region should be able to access and afford safe, quality housing plus utilities for no more than 30% of their monthly income. Recent efforts have worked to further refine this equation to also factor in transportation costs, important as often housing nearer to strong employment hubs can be more expensive and cause employees to have to live further and further away. Affordable housing supply located far away from jobs may no longer be affordable once transportation costs are factored in, not to mention the quality of life costs to those households from long commute times. While the region is relatively small geographically and does not struggle with traffic to the same degree as more urbanized areas, there are still price, commute and transit factors at play in finding affordably priced market rate housing.

Subsidized Affordable Housing

In terms of federal and state programming and subsidies, there are set income guidelines that must be met by potential residents in order to qualify for subsidized affordable housing placements. These guidelines are specific to an area and scaled to account for different household sizes. The income guidelines for Berkshire County in fiscal year 2012 are shown in the below table.

Table 3: HUD Income Guidelines FY12

HUD INCOME CATEGORIES		FY 2012 Values for Berkshire County by Household Size							
Category	Income	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Extremely Low Income	30% of AMI	18,100	20,700	23,300	25,850	27,950	30,000	32,100	34,150
Very Low Income	50% of AMI	30,200	34,500	38,800	43,100	46,550	50,000	53,450	56,900
Low Income	80% of AMI	45,500	52,000	58,500	65,000	70,200	75,400	80,600	85,800
Area Median Income	100% AMI	56,875	65,000	73,125	81,250	87,750	94,250	100,750	107,250

It is important to note that the area median incomes defined in the guidelines varies slightly from the median household income of Berkshire County (\$48,705) due to the fact that the rate is set for a larger area that includes Franklin County and portions of Hampshire, Hampden, and Worcester counties.

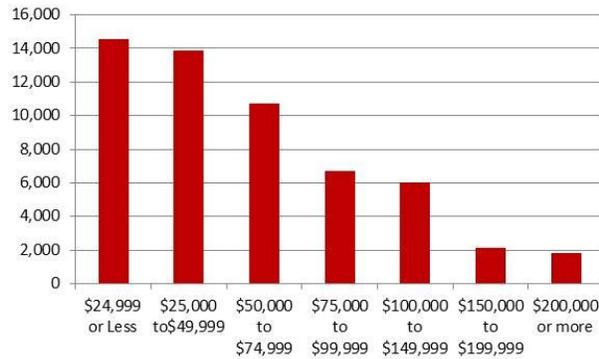
Table 4: Total Income-Eligible Households by Community Based on ACS Household Incomes

Geography	Total Households (HH)	Extremely Low HH (0-30% AMI)		Very Low HH (30.1-50% AMI)		Low Income HH (50.1-80% AMI)		Total HH Income Eligible (80% AMI or less)	
		Total	Percent	Total	Percent	Total	Percent	Total	Percent
Berkshire County	55,793	11,309	20.3%	9,410	16.9%	7,724	13.8%	28,443	51.0%
Adams	3,770	943	25.0%	743	19.7%	679	18.0%	2,365	62.7%
Alford	232	19	8.2%	27	11.6%	30	12.9%	76	32.8%
Becket	790	187	23.7%	158	20.0%	108	13.7%	453	57.3%
Cheshire	1,408	161	11.4%	342	24.3%	115	8.2%	618	43.9%
Clarksburg	727	72	9.9%	104	14.3%	164	22.6%	340	46.8%
Dalton	2,663	358	13.4%	461	17.3%	454	17.0%	1,273	47.8%
Egremont	529	108	20.4%	98	18.5%	49	9.3%	255	48.2%
Florida	337	49	14.5%	59	17.5%	71	21.1%	179	53.1%
Great Barrington	2,792	582	20.8%	454	16.3%	421	15.1%	1,457	52.2%
Hancock	254	22	8.7%	26	10.2%	20	7.9%	68	26.8%
Hinsdale	860	72	8.4%	150	17.4%	102	11.9%	324	37.7%
Lanesborough	1,240	159	12.8%	196	15.8%	135	10.9%	490	39.5%
Lee	2,486	439	17.7%	313	12.6%	411	16.5%	1,163	46.8%
Lenox	2,084	380	18.2%	324	15.5%	177	8.5%	881	42.3%
Monterey	302	33	10.9%	77	25.5%	60	19.9%	170	56.3%
Mount Washington	64	4	6.3%	4	6.3%	10	15.6%	18	28.1%
New Ashford	109	10	9.2%	10	9.2%	22	20.2%	42	38.5%
New Marlborough	591	76	12.9%	67	11.3%	85	14.4%	228	38.6%
North Adams	5,867	1,703	29.0%	1,128	19.2%	907	15.5%	3,738	63.7%
Otis	571	82	14.4%	62	10.9%	49	8.6%	193	33.8%
Peru	337	48	14.2%	39	11.6%	50	14.8%	137	40.7%
Pittsfield	19,966	4,758	23.8%	3,380	16.9%	2,774	13.9%	10,912	54.7%
Richmond	702	51	7.3%	65	9.3%	63	9.0%	179	25.5%
Sandisfield	381	42	11.0%	78	20.5%	30	7.9%	150	39.4%
Savoy	293	26	8.9%	71	24.2%	35	11.9%	132	45.1%
Sheffield	1,464	196	13.4%	303	20.7%	192	13.1%	691	47.2%
Stockbridge	765	129	16.9%	137	17.9%	97	12.7%	363	47.5%
Tyringham	149	5	3.4%	14	9.4%	23	15.4%	42	28.2%
Washington	240	23	9.6%	26	10.8%	29	12.1%	78	32.5%
West Stockbridge	640	97	15.2%	53	8.3%	89	13.9%	239	37.3%
Williamstown	2,859	467	16.3%	395	13.8%	239	8.4%	1,101	38.5%
Windsor	321	8	2.5%	46	14.3%	34	10.6%	88	27.4%

Source: American Community Survey (ACS)

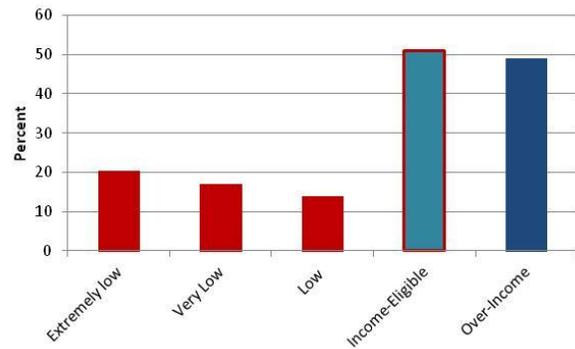
Note: Using AMI income guidelines for a 2-person household, given that the average household size for the county is 2.3 persons.

Figure 20: Number of Households by Income



Source: US Census, 2010

Figure 21: Percent Households by HUD Income Category (30%, 50%, 80% AMI)



Source: US Census, 2010, FY12 HUD Income Limits

SUBSIDIZED AFFORDABLE HOUSING

In discussing subsidized affordable housing, it is helpful to understand the different components of an affordable housing system.

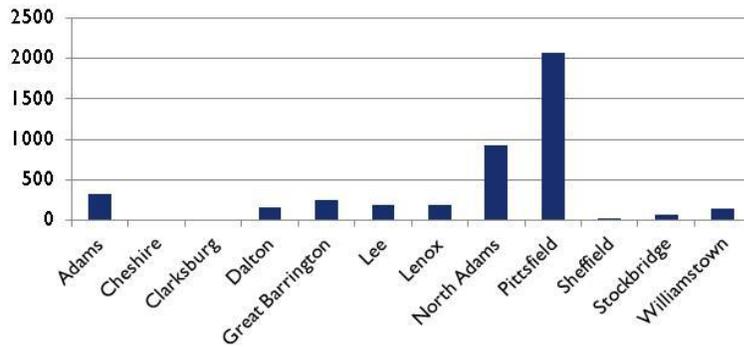
Table 5: Types of Subsidized Affordable Housing

Type of Housing	Owner/Operator	Description
Public Housing	Housing Authority	Sliding scale rental costs based on tenant income and can typically offer rental rates much lower than attainable through any other affordable housing provider. Tenants must be income-eligible based on area-median income guidelines and complete an application process.
Senior Public Housing	Housing Authority	Same as above but tenants must also be 65 years or older.
Multi-family Subsidized (Stationary - Subsidies Tied to Property)		Landlord/property manager receives a subsidy for keeping housing units within affordable price points. Tenants must be income-eligible based on area-median income guidelines and complete an application process.
Voucher Programs (Mobile -Subsidies Tied to Person)	Certified rental units in properties	Voucher covers the gap between what is affordable for the voucher holder and the fair market rent for the unit. Units must meet certain inspection requirements in order to be eligible.
Special Needs Housing		There are a number of programs for mentally ill or disabled people.
Housing	Homeowner or landlord-tenant	Market Rate - Homeowner or renter monthly housing costs do not exceed 30% of their monthly income

Source: Mass Legal Help. 2013

CURRENT SUBSIDIZED AFFORDABLE HOUSING SUPPLY

Figure 22: Subsidized Housing Units by Community



Source: DHCD Chapter 40B Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI), June 2011

Table 6: Geographic Distribution of Subsidized Affordable Housing Units in the County

Housing Units by Type	North	Central	South	Total
Multi-Family Subsidized	645	323	215	1,183
Public Housing	379	891	196	1,466
Total	1024	1,214	411	2,649
Percent County Total Supply	39%	46%	16%	

Source: DHCD Chapter 40B Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI), June 2011

Table 7: Units by Town and Proportion of All Stock that is Subsidized Affordable

City/Town	2010 Census Year Round Housing Units	Subsidized Housing Inventory Units	% All Units
Adams	4,337	324	7.5%
Clarksburg	706	8	1.1%
Dalton	2,860	160	5.6%
Great Barrington	3,072	219	7.1%
Lanesborough	1,365	20	1.5%
Lee	2,702	176	6.5%
Lenox	2,473	179	7.2%
North Adams	6,681	873	13.1%
Pittsfield	21,031	2,066	9.8%
Savoy	318	14	4.4%
Sheffield	1,507	30	2.0%
Stockbridge	1,051	117	11.1%
Williamstown	2,805	147	5.2%

Source: DHCD Chapter 40B Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI), June 2011

AFFORDABLE HOUSING GAP

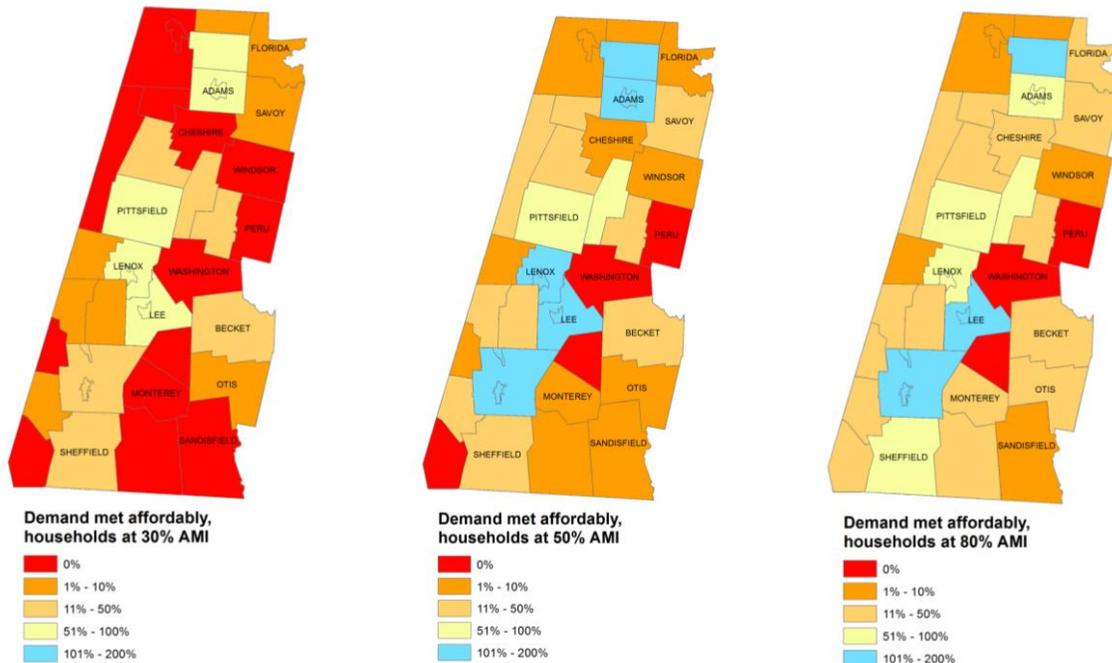
Three methods used to identify affordability gaps	Berkshire County		
1. Household payments: More than half of Berkshire households pay more than 30% of income for housing	46% of renters; 63% of owners		
2. Availability of units: Less than 10% of units are affordable to households earning less than 80% of average median income (AMI)	30% of AMI	50%	80%
3. Percent of demand which is met: Less than one-third of the estimated need for affordable units is met.	2% of stock	6%	9%
	19%	34%	37%

Figure 23: Percent of Demand for Housing Met by Affordable Supply

For households earning 30% of AMI

50% AMI

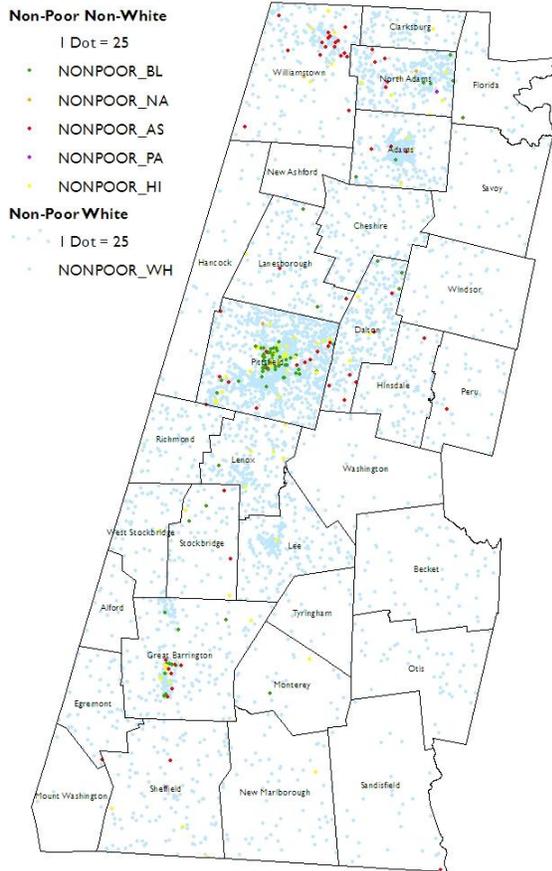
80% AMI



Finding 2: Racial Segregation Patterns Unclear

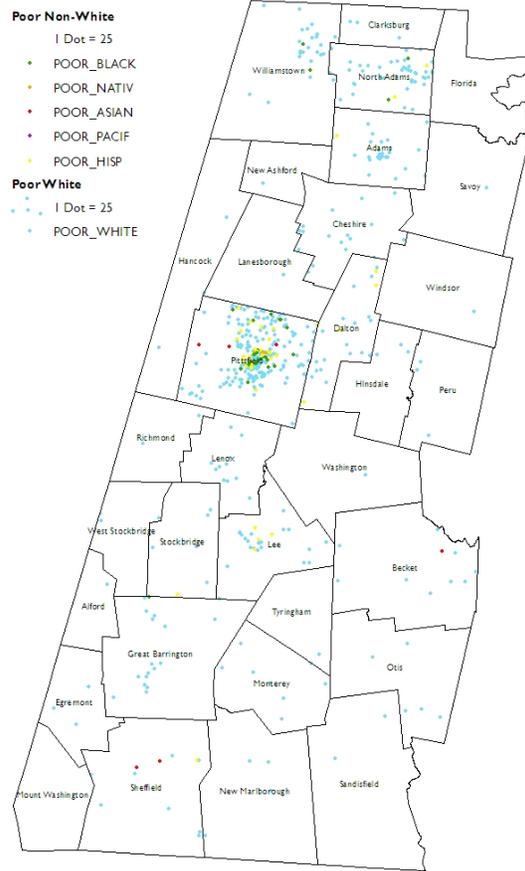
The majority of Berkshire County’s non-White households are clustered in just five communities: Pittsfield, Great Barrington, Williamstown, North Adams, and Adams. These towns are the five most populous in the county, accounting for just over 60% of the total population.

Figure 24: Non-poor population



Source: HUD with data from Census 2010

Figure 25: Poor population



Source: HUD with data from Census 2010

Given that non-White populations tend to be concentrated in a few, more populous areas, particularly Pittsfield, a more detailed analysis of segregation in Pittsfield should reveal further trends. Pittsfield concentrates 47% of Berkshire County’s non-White populations while concentrating only 34% of the county’s total population. White populations have declined even more sharply in Pittsfield since 1980 than on the county scale. On the county scale, White populations dropped by almost 14%, but by nearly 23.3% in Pittsfield. During that same period, the non-White population of Pittsfield grew by 230%, and now represents 14% of the city’s population. Growth in the Black and Hispanic communities has been particularly sharp over the last three decades. Non-Hispanic Blacks have doubled their share of Pittsfield’s total population and Hispanics have more than quintupled their share.

On the other end of the spectrum, there are five towns with populations of less than 1,000 residents that have no non-white residents. Of the 32 communities in Berkshire County, only eight contain non-white populations that match or exceed predicted rates of non-white populations.

MEASURING INTEGRATION: THE DISSIMILARITY INDEX

A look at how integrated the population is in terms of where people choose to live is one component of the picture. If there are patterns of segregation, then it is an indication that there may be some specific forces at play which could include banking, zoning, or social exclusion or self segregation. A look at Berkshire County's measure of integration shows the county is performing fairly well in both absolute terms (national performance standards) and in comparison to adjacent regions. The tool for measuring this is the Dissimilarity Index. The Dissimilarity Index (DI) measures the distribution of two racial or ethnic groups between census tracts in Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs), and identifies what percentage of one group would have to move to create an equal distribution across tracts. A DI score of 0% suggests that the areas are perfectly integrated, and higher scores, up to 100%, measure the uneven distribution of a particular group. A DI of less than 30% is considered to be low, and values between 40% and 50% are considered to be moderate; above 60% is typically considered highly segregated. For example, if one town had 100 Asians and the neighboring town had 50 whites and 50 Asians, the dissimilarity index would be 25%; because to equalize the white and Asian populations, 25 of the Asian households would need move.

Table 8: Dissimilarity Index Performance in Berkshire County (2010)

Percent total population	White	Black	Asian	Hispanic
White	X	37.1	27	31.5
Black	37.1	X	37.6	20
Asian	27	37.6	X	29.7
Hispanic	31.5	20	29.7	X

Source: Brown University, with data from Census 1980, 1990, 2000, 2010.

Table 9: Comparison of Dissimilarity Indexes (2010)

	Berkshire County ¹	Pioneer Valley ²	Albany and capitol area ³	Massachusetts	National average ⁴
White-Black	37	62	59	64	63
White-Hispanic	32	63	39	60	59
White-Asian	27	38	41	50	46

Source: HUD Office of Sustainable Housing and Communities (OSHC) 2011

¹ Pittsfield MSA, Census 2010

² Springfield MSA, Census 2010

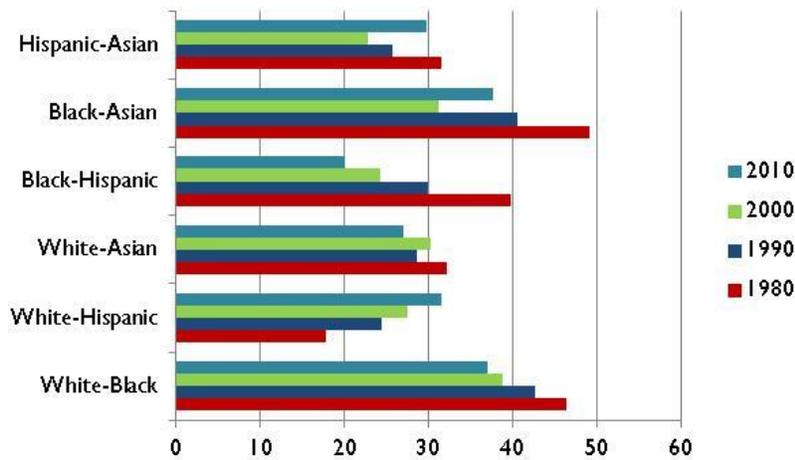
³ Albany-Schenectady-Troy MSA, Census 2010

⁴ Of the 366 MSAs in the 50 states

The city of Pittsfield has shown similar trends toward overall integration, with decreases in White-Black, White-Asian and Black-Asian dissimilarity but an increase in White-Hispanic dissimilarity.⁵ Despite these decreases, Pittsfield was the sixth-most segregated city in Massachusetts (out of 41 cities) in 2000 for the Black and White population. Nationally, Pittsfield fared better; at 227 out of the 318 metro areas.

However, in communities with smaller populations, such as the majority of Berkshire County’s towns, the Dissimilarity Index is difficult to apply. A finer-grained study of Berkshire County reveals the majority of towns exhibit minimal, if any, diversity. In general, areas with larger populations are more integrated, while less populous rural areas are almost exclusively non-Hispanic White.

Figure 26: Dissimilarity Index for Berkshire County, 1980 – 2010.



Source: Brown University, with data from Census 1980, 1990, 2000, 2010

Hispanic-Asian	The Asian population in Berkshire County has had a fluctuating score in the Dissimilarity Index. While Asian households have tended to be better integrated with Whites since the 1980s, since 2000, they seem to be increasingly segregated from Hispanic and Black households. Income segregation is likely one of the core drivers behind this shift; over that same time period, the median incomes of Asians have also increased from to \$49,000 to \$55,000, exceeding the median income for Whites. ⁶
Black-Asian	
White-Asian	
Black-Hispanic	The Dissimilarity Index between Blacks and Hispanics has been cut in half since 1980, suggesting greater integration between these two groups.
White-Hispanic	A quick analysis of changes in Dissimilarity Indexes over time indicates that Berkshire County is becoming increasingly more integrated, with the exception of Hispanics, whose Dissimilarity Index has changed from 0.18 to 0.31 since 1980. Although this index has increased, it still suggests a low level of segregation for Hispanics relative to Whites. Given that Massachusetts as a state has the 6 th highest rate of segregation between Hispanics and Whites, the trend towards greater segregation in Berkshire County must continue to be monitored, along with tracking any potential disparities in access in those areas.
White-Black	Despite a steady decrease in Dissimilarity Index scores, Whites and Blacks in the region

⁵ US 2010, Brown University, “Pittsfield City”

⁶ US 2010, Brown University, “Pittsfield MSA”

continue to be one of the most segregated racial pairings in the county. The trend of integration between Blacks and Hispanics and growing segregation between Hispanics and Whites is concerning.

BEYOND THE DISSIMILARITY INDEX

A second frame for analyzing segregation is the difference between the current number of non-White residents in a given census tract and what the number would be given complete integration – when each census tract would have the same racial and ethnic makeup. While no standard indices are set to determine ‘segregation’, under this metric there are clear differences in census tracts in Berkshire County.

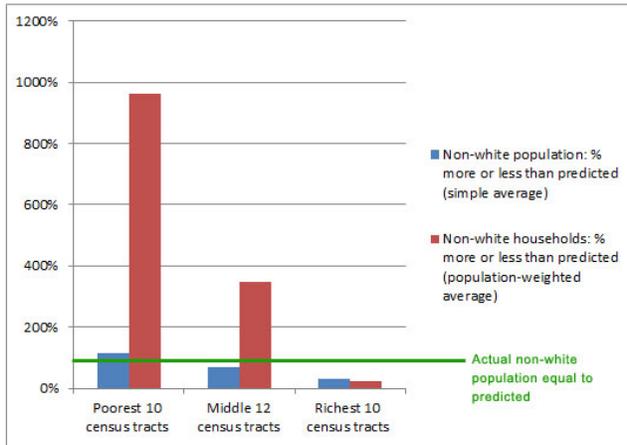
Higher than expected non-white population (125% + of expected)	Relatively integrated (75-125% of expected balance)	Disproportionately low minority population (0-75% of expected non-white population)
Great Barrington, Florida, Stockbridge, Washington, Pittsfield	Williamstown, North Adams, Hinsdale, Sheffield, Lee, Egremont	Sandisfield, Adams, Dalton, Lenox CDP, Housatonic CDP, Otis, Lanesborough, Becket town, Richmond, Savoy, Monterey, Alford, Clarksburg, Remainder of Lenox town, Great Barrington town, Peru, Remainder of Adams town, Cheshire, West Stockbridge, New Marlborough, Remainder of Lee town, Hancock, Mount Washington, New Ashford, Tyringham, Windsor

Non-whites in Berkshire County are more likely to be living in poor areas. Wealthier tracts in the county have less than a third of the non-White households predicted by even distribution. Tracts with the lowest average AMI have many more; after adjusting for population - because several of the poorest census tracts are located within the larger communities—the poorest tracts have nearly 10 times their expected population of non-whites.

The ten tracts with the highest rate of growth in AMI between 1999 and 2009 have far fewer non-White residents than predicted; the ten tracts with the slowest income growth have far more.

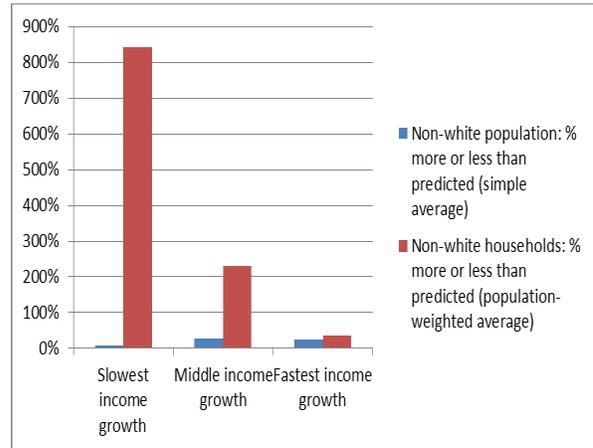
Non-white populations are concentrated in areas with lower average income and lower income growth.

Figure 27: Average Median Income and Actual/Expected Non-White Ratios



Source: ACS 2009, Alarife Associates, 2013

Figure 28: Growth in AMI 1999-2009 and Actual/Expected Non-White Population



Source: ACS 2009, Alarife Associates, 2013

IDENTIFICATION AND ASSESSMENT OF RACIALLY CONCENTRATED AREAS OF POVERTY (RCAP)

Using HUD's current definition, no racially concentrated areas of poverty are present in the BRPC planning area. There is some correlation between areas of concentrated poverty and concentrations of non-white populations, particularly in Pittsfield and other more heavily populated areas. However, these areas also concentrate poor whites, as well. It is important to note, nonetheless, that with the exception of Asian populations, non-whites have a higher poverty index than whites. Further research is needed to conclusively confirm or negate the existence of RCAPs at scales smaller than the HUD assessed census tracts.

Pittsfield In Focus

Major barriers to access have been documented in Pittsfield, and may contribute to the concentration of racial/ethnic minorities in high-poverty areas near the City core.

Table 10: Ethnic and Racial Composition, City of Pittsfield

	Total Population	Non Hispanic White	Non Hispanic Black	Hispanic	Asian	Other Races
1980	51,974	50,104 96.4%	1,234 2.4%	273 0.5%	193 0.4%	170 0.3%
1990	48,622	46,086 94.8%	1,480 3.0%	535 1.1%	351 0.7%	170 0.4%
2000	45,793	41,951 91.6%	1,970 4.3%	934 2.0%	653 1.4%	285 0.6%
2010	44,737	38,437 85.9%	3,028 6.8%	2,225 5.0%	707 1.6%	340 0.8%

Source: US 2010, Brown University, "Pittsfield city"

Pittsfield shares the same trends with Berkshire County in terms of segregation. The city seems to be becoming more integrated since 1980, while Hispanic populations continue to become more segregated from Whites and Asians. Overall trends show decreases in White-Black, White-Asian and Black-Asian dissimilarity. At the same time there has been a sharp rise in white-Hispanic dissimilarity, a troubling trend that requires further study and monitoring.

The City of Pittsfield completed a study of “Impediments to Fair Housing Study” in 2005. There do not seem to be recent reports highlighting fair-housing issues for other parts of the region. The Pittsfield study, updated in 2009 and 2011, found that some barriers to accessing housing remain for non-white households.

Between 2008 and 2011, residents of Pittsfield submitted 58 complaints related to Fair Housing. However, on a year to year basis during that same time period, the number of complaints has decreased from 22 complaints in 2008, to 14 in 2009, to 13 in 2010, to 9 in 2011.

The top three complaints received by the Housing Discrimination Project were based on (1) familial status, (2) disability, and (3) receipt of a housing subsidy. The most prevalent forms of discrimination in Pittsfield were against families with children under the age of six and persons receiving public assistance due to the age and condition of housing stock and the prevalence of lead based paint hazards. The report also identified a lack of handicapped accessible housing units

In addition to the above, the *Impediments to Fair Housing 2011 Update* for the City of Pittsfield identified the following main issues:

- While the majority of low-income households are white, minority populations have a much higher incidence of poverty and are more likely to reside in areas of low-income concentration.
- Minorities experience mortgage loan denial rates which are two to three times greater than white applicants.
- There is an imbalance between rental and home ownership in specific census tracts and based on race and ethnicity.
- There is a general lack of understanding of fair housing law by residents and housing providers.
- There is a lack of accessibility to banking services for individuals who have a limited English proficiency.
- Between 2008 and 2010, the percentage of African Americans leaving Pittsfield was greater than that of White individuals. There was also a higher rate of white residents remaining in the city than that of African Americans.
- A majority of the City’s section 8 certificate and voucher holders reside in low income neighborhoods and also a greater majority of minority Section 8 certificate and voucher holders reside in neighborhoods of both minority and low income concentrations.

Of the complaints received since 2004, the Massachusetts Fair Housing Center settled ten cases, and compensated plaintiffs more than \$150,000 in cash and services.

In response to the impediments listed above for the City of Pittsfield, the Massachusetts Fair Housing Center recommended: (1) strengthening education and outreach efforts, to help communities and housing providers to understand their rights and to offer this outreach in many different languages; (2) create affordable and accessible housing, particularly by developing blighted and vacant lots and also by

helping voucher users to find housing outside of the urban core; (3) investigate fair housing issues to maintain monitoring of the main issues; and (4) foster compliance with the Fair Housing Act by continuing to enforce the Act through the performance of audits and improving the intake of complaints.

Finding 3: Less Wealthy Communities Doing More Than Their Fair Share⁷ of Affordable Housing Supply Compared To Their Wealthier Neighbors – Concentrating Poverty and Limiting Access To Opportunity For Low-Income Populations.

ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY

A major part of the FHEA is to identify any overlap between concentration of racial or ethnic groups with disparities in infrastructure, services, and accessibility to other amenities. This more holistic approach acknowledges the persistent importance of place to individual opportunity; equitable proximity and access to transport, jobs, education, and other services are crucial for county-wide economic development. By layering access over key demographic information, such as income and race, this approach can provide planners, residents, and businesses a framework to identify areas of highest need, and, eventually to develop strategies to increase opportunities.

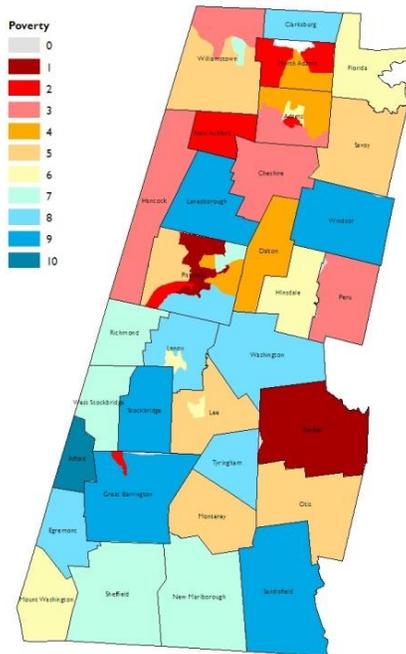
Each component of opportunity is described and mapped on a county level below.

Opportunity dimensions used in the FHEA	
Poverty Index	Family Poverty Rate ACS 2005-2009 Pct. Households Receiving Public Assistance ACS 2005-2009
School Proficiency Index	Math & English Proficiency, 3 rd grade MCAS*
Labor Market Engagement Index	Unemployment Rate ACS 2005-2009 Labor force Participation Rate ACS 2005-2009 Pct. with a Bachelor's or higher ACS 2005-2009
Job Access Index	Tract-level Job Counts LEHD, 2009 Tract-level Job Worker Counts LEHD, 2009 Origin-Destination Flows LEHD, 2009 Aggregate Commute Time ACS 2005-2009 Tract-Tract Average Commute Time by Mode CTPP 2000
Housing Stability Index	Homeownership Rate ACS 2005-2009 Pct. Loans Low-Cost (Re-Fi) HMDA, 2009 Pct. Loans Low-Cost (New Purchases) HMDA,2009 Pct. Vacant (Non-Seasonal) ACS 2005-2009 Pct. Crowded ACS 2005-2009
Neighborhood Health Access Index	Health Professional Shortage Areas HRSA, HHS 2013
<i>*BRPC substitution; more accurate than tract-based HUD calculation.</i>	

⁷ "Fair Share" was determined by the affordable units in the town as a percentage of the overall county need for affordable units (30, 50 and 80% AMI), weighted by town total population.

POVERTY

Figure 29: Poverty Index



Source: HUD, 2012

About the Index

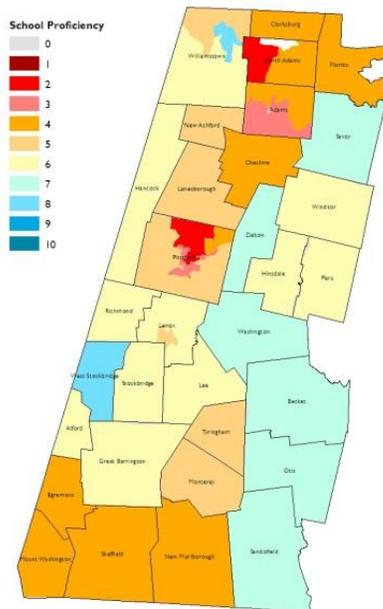
The FHEA poverty index is calculated from the percentage of households in a particular tract living in poverty and the percent receiving public assistance, and then indexed across the county on a 1-10 scale.

What it shows:

- Poverty is highest in the north part of the county, especially in the centers of larger towns.
- Berkshire County has very wealthy census tracts and neighborhoods with high poverty.
- In terms of population, poverty is concentrated in Pittsfield and North Adams.
- Berkshire County has areas of persistent and high poverty, in particular in central Pittsfield, Housatonic (Great Barrington), Adams, North Adams, along with two more rural towns, Becket and New Ashford.

QUALITY OF SCHOOLS

Figure 30: HUD School Proficiency Index



Source: HUD, 2012

About the Index

The FHEA School Proficiency Index uses school-level data on the performance of students on state exams and then indexed across the county on a 1-10 scale.

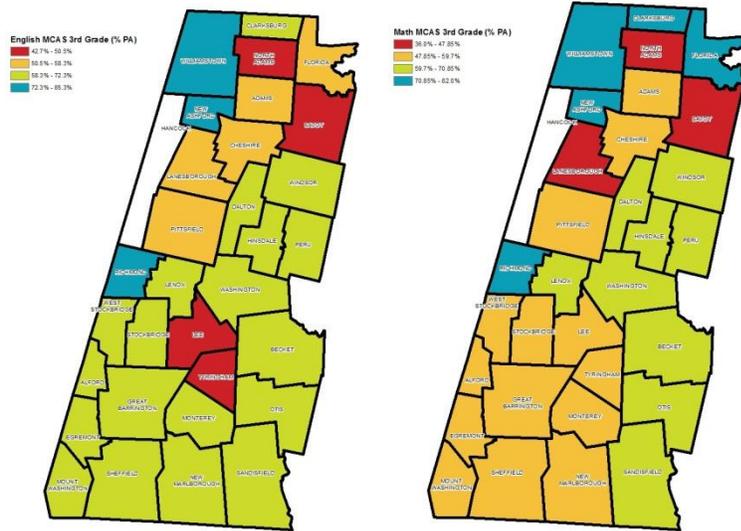
What it shows:

- Quality schooling is a powerful driver of social mobility in community economic development. Significant disparities exist between districts in Berkshire County. Some districts score more than twice as high as others; higher-scoring areas are generally concentrated in the higher-income towns in the north-west and south-east corridors of the county.
- Some correlation with income appears consistently in the school proficiency data.
- Sections of North Adams and Pittsfield are the outliers on the low end of achievement, while the south-east section of the county ranks above-average.

Figure 31: 3rd-Grade MA Test Scores, English

Figure 32: 3rd Grade MA Test Scores, Math

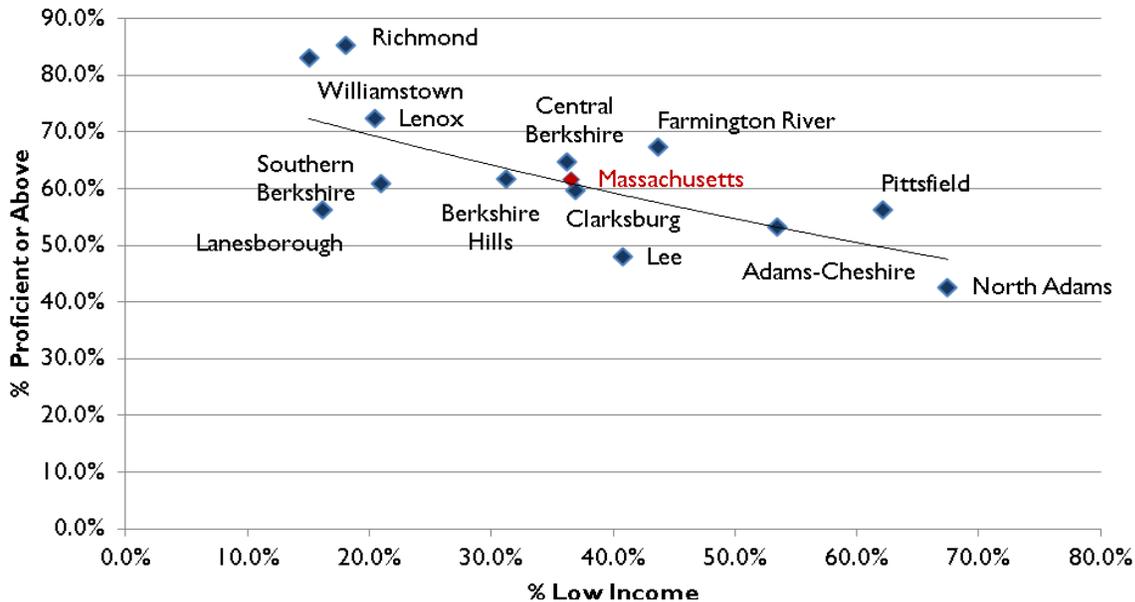
Local Adjustment



Source: Massachusetts DOE, MassGIS, BRPC, 2012

Because there are numerous regional school districts in the county and because there has been so much focus on third grade MCAS scores in the region due to current early childhood education campaigns, the committee wanted to also look at those scores as relates to school performance. See maps by percent proficient or above, left. Perhaps more telling, however, is looking at MCAS scores within the context of the percent of low-income students. This shows that schools with high proportions of low-income students – including North Adams, Pittsfield, and Adams-Cheshire – have lower performance on tests than those in wealthier areas.

Figure 33: Third Grade English MCAS Scores Compared to Percent Low-Income by School District (2010-2012)

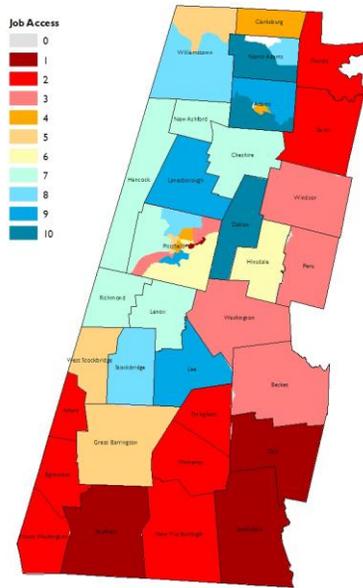


Source: Massachusetts DOE, BRPC, 2012

ACCESS TO JOBS

Figure 34: Job Access Index

About the Index



Source: HUD, 2012

The FHEA Job Access Index summarizes the accessibility of a given residential neighborhood as a function of its distance to all job locations, with distance to larger employment centers weighted more heavily, indexed across the county on a 1-10 scale.

What it shows:

Access to jobs is best in the north and west of the county, but labor market engagement remains low in the centers of the larger and poorer cities and towns.

Central Pittsfield, Lee, Adams, North Adams, and Housatonic, along with the whole town of Monterey have the highest unemployment rates, lowest levels of labor force engagement, and lower-than-average percentage of residents with a bachelor’s degree. Tracts on the edges of the County, including Windsor, Washington, Richmond, West Stockbridge, and Egremont have the highest rates of engagement, along with parts of south Pittsfield.

Job opportunities are concentrated along the transportation corridor, yet unemployment remains high in two of the lowest-income census tracts in Pittsfield and North Adams.

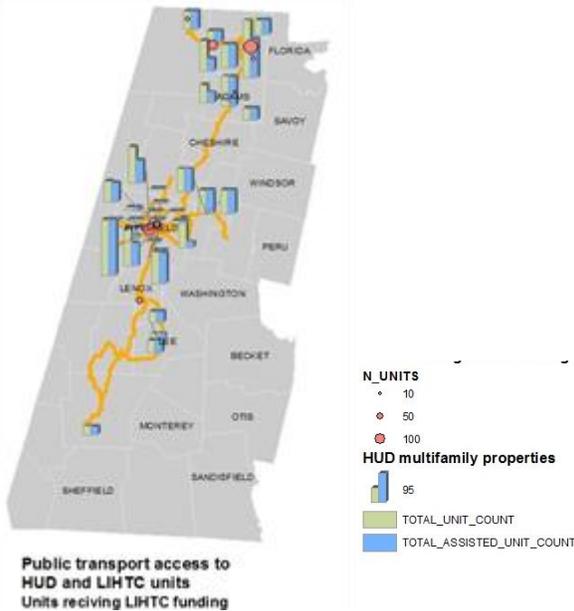
Job access is highest in the county’s more populous areas, along the Route 8 corridor connecting Pittsfield and North Adams. Job access drops dramatically for households living in the more rural southern and eastern areas of the county. Southern Berkshire County is a hub for seasonal employment.

NEIGHBORHOOD STABILITY

Figure 35: Housing and Neighborhood Stability Index

What it Shows:

Figure 36: Transportation and Housing



Source: BRPC 2012; HUD 2012

What it shows:

Housing with HUD funding is currently clustered around the main public transport routes. This map only represents larger housing developments with ongoing funding from HUD and is also most accessible in the areas with higher percentages of non-white households.

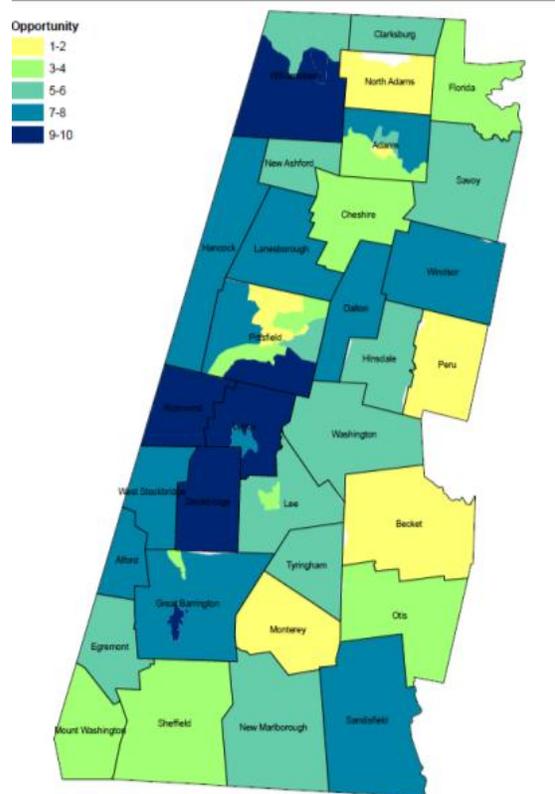
AGGREGATE OPPORTUNITY INDEX

Taken together with a HUD calculation, a clear pattern of disparities in opportunity emerges for the county. Mid-sized towns along the southern half of the transportation corridor, and Williamstown in the north, have excellent access on nearly every metric. Despite above-average access to transportation and jobs, the two largest communities, Pittsfield and North Adams, score at the bottom. The two cities are also the poorest and those with the largest concentration of non-white residents. Among the smaller towns, the center-west of the county fares well, while more isolated towns on the eastern edge of the county have low rates of access overall.

In general, Asian residents had the highest access to opportunities across all categories recommended by the FHEA, White and Black households the lowest. Hispanic indices were generally lower than whites, except in job access, where Hispanic job access was approximately equal to that of Whites.

Similar trends can be said about poorer populations.

Figure 37: Aggregate Opportunity Index



Source: HUD. 2012

Poor Asians had the best access indices, except job access. Poor Asians' Job Access is significantly lower than all other groups. Poor Whites also had lower access to jobs than both Blacks and Hispanics. High job access indices for Hispanics and Blacks could be a result of their concentration in center Pittsfield and other, more-highly populated areas where job access is higher.

North Adams is relatively integrated, but has a low opportunity index. Despite its extreme poverty, low educational attainment, low engagement in the labor market, scarce housing and neighborhood stability, and low access to food, North Adams presents high access to jobs and good health care access.

Pittsfield, with a disproportionately high non-white population, shows low school proficiency and poor access to food. At the same time, Pittsfield's population maintains high access to jobs and good access to health care. Within the city, sections have both high & low neighborhood stability, as well as areas/sections with high and low opportunity index levels.

Finding 4: Transportation and Infrastructure Pose Limitations

Most public investment in Berkshire County goes to maintain existing infrastructure and programs, nearly all of which have experienced budget struggles. The few new projects have been modest, yet several directly increase access for low-income and non-white populations. All transportation projects that receive federal funding are included in a 2012-2016 “Transportation Improvement Program”, a multi-year prioritized plan. Standard maintenance and improvement of roads (\$44.4 million budgeted for the coming four years), as well as bridge replacement, (\$14.7 million) is prioritized on need, and appears to be well-distributed across the county. Sidewalk construction and reconstruction is a prominent component overall and is prioritized in projects in Pittsfield and Great Barrington, both areas with concentrations of Black, Hispanic and Asian residents. In Pittsfield, sidewalk construction will focus on the routes used by children to walk to school; increasing opportunity, access, health and safety.

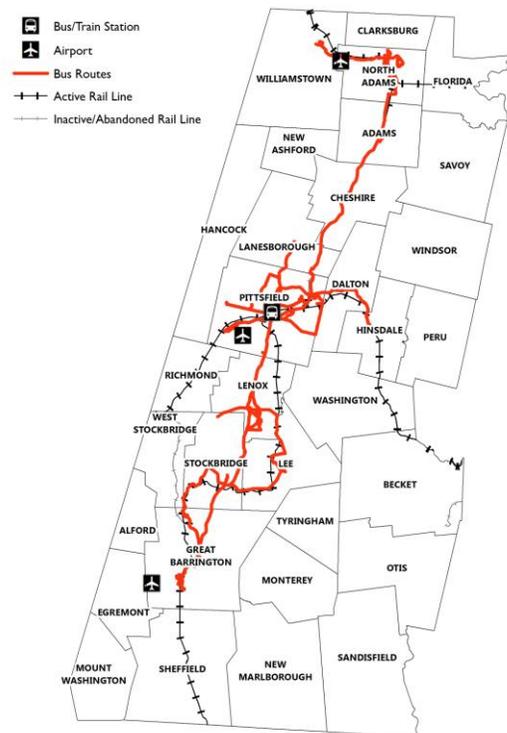
Table 11: Planned Federal Investment in Transport, 2012-2016⁸

	Budgeted 2012-2016 (million)
Improvement and maintenance of highways, including sidewalks, rail trails	\$ 44.4
Bridge replacement	\$ 14.7
Public transportation, including handicapped services (RTA CAP) and the countywide bus system	\$ 15.9

A significant new walk and bike trail is under design to connect North Adams and Williamstown, and an extension to Adams, connecting to the Ashuwillticook rail trail to Lanesborough, is planned for 2014. In addition to increasing access overall to recreation, the investments will be especially significant for households without cars living outside of the current walkable range of the town centers of North Adams and Williamstown. For example, the new trail establishes walkability to key services and amenities in North Adams for residents of a subsidized housing project who previously relied on taxis or walking on the shoulders of a state highway to get groceries.

Public transportation options are also essential to many of the county’s residents. The current bus lines connect the main population centers, home to the majority of non-white and poor households live. Funding constraints limit bus service to daytimes on weekdays. Service is infrequent, and transport times are long; the trip from

Figure 38: Transit Lines and Non-Auto Transportation



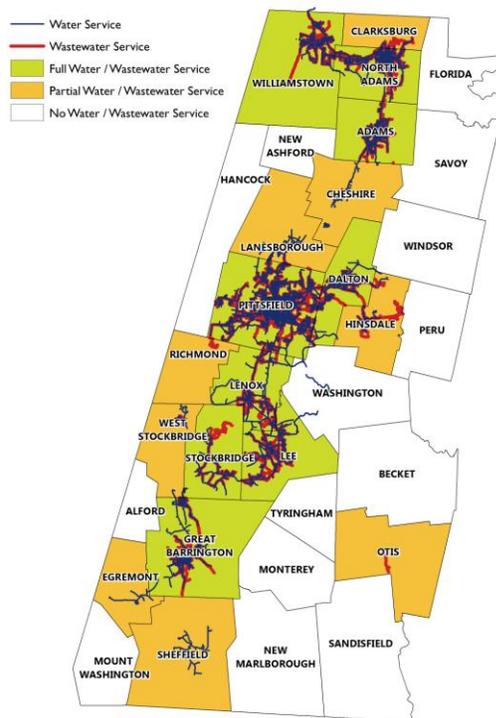
⁸ BRPC, Transportation Improvement Program. October 1, 2012 - September 30, 2016

North Adams, Berkshire County’s poorest town, to Great Barrington, in the wealthier south, takes nearly four hours.

Overall, the investments planned are predicted to have a positive impact on access and opportunity for areas with high non-white and poor households. The investments are not anticipated to have a significant impact on the diversification of specific towns. However, the continued support for public transportation that connects many of the towns with high low-income and non-white populations at the least prevents worse inequities in access. Similarly, new initiatives, such as sidewalks, intersection safety and trails, in Pittsfield, Great Barrington and North Adams, will increase non-vehicular opportunities for residents there, who are more likely to be non-white than in other parts of the county. It is critical for Berkshire County to retain that commitment moving forward to ensure a continued shift towards integration and equitable opportunities.

Water and Sewer Infrastructure

Figure 39: Water and Sewer Infrastructure



The majority of water and sewer infrastructure is focused in the larger towns along Routes 8 and 7. Without this infrastructure, development is generally on 2-acre lots where there can be adequate separation of the well and septic system.

Finding 5: Housing Needs of Some Demographics Not Being Well Met

The housing stock, which tends to be older and predominantly single-family, does not meet the needs of certain populations, including seniors, families, disabled, young workers. For seniors and physically disabled populations, there are limited rental options for accessible units with universal design attributes. Young workers and families also have some challenges. Young workers have difficulty finding well-maintained market rate rental units near jobs and activities. Young families are underserved by the rental market, which tends to be skewed towards one bedroom apartments; this is anecdotally attributed to landlord concerns over lead regulations as well as property damage from kids. Purchasing, for both young workers and families, if financially capable and desiring to own versus rent, is often laden with hidden costs from long-term deferred maintenance that can cause unforeseen financial hardship or continued deferred maintenance. Some, seeing the work involved, prefer to keep renting, particularly if in a community with fairly stagnant home values and declining population. Communities in the region with more robust housing markets are generally cost prohibitive for young people or families to buy.

A STRATEGY FOR MOVING FORWARD

The following section reviews the process by which the committee and public, through public workshops, translated the prior data and analysis into a framework for affordable housing development in the Berkshires.

Improving Access to Opportunity for New and Existing Affordable Housing Residents

Berkshire County towns have diverse needs. Taking the region as a whole, the need for more healthy affordable housing in areas with good access to jobs and services exists alongside the need for more quality units and the social infrastructure to catalyze social mobility. These two demands can be met through a complementary slate of policies.

HUD OPPORTUNITY SCORE FINDINGS

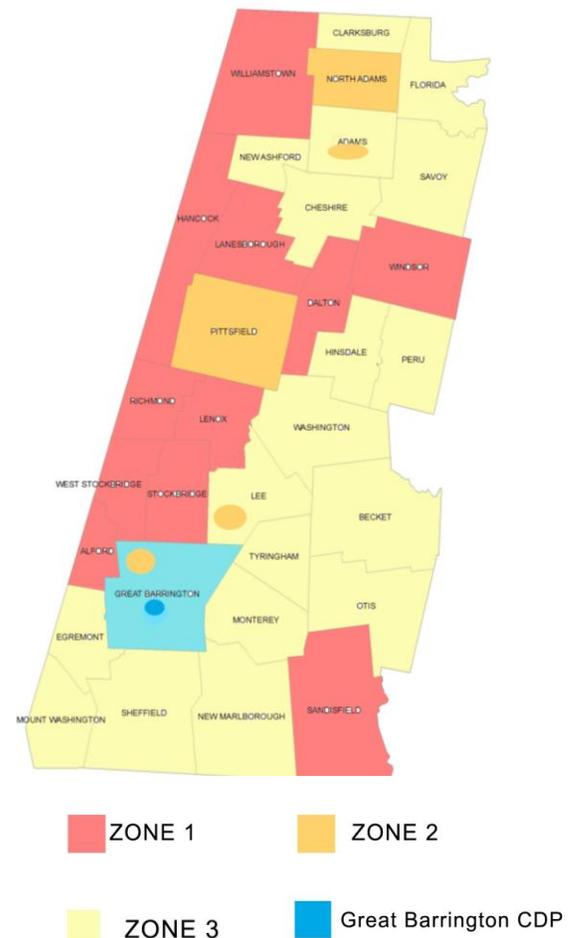
An analysis of the opportunity factors identified by HUD breaks the county down into four zones:

Zone 1: High opportunity, low supply of affordable housing (25 % of units)

The first zone, with a quarter of the County’s homes, primarily covers the middle-sized towns in the south and west of the county. These areas enjoy high access to opportunity, but have little available affordable housing, far less than the ‘fair share’ on a county level. The long distances between the middle and low-income jobs in these towns and where employees can afford to live dampens the towns’ long-term economic growth potential, and long commutes place a burden on household budgets.

- **Municipalities in this zone:** Richmond, Remainder of Lenox, Stockbridge, Williamstown CDP, Windsor, Sandisfield, Remainder of Williamstown, Alford, West Stockbridge, Hancock, Remainder of Great Barrington, Lanesborough, Dalton, Lenox CDP.
- **Recommendation:** In these areas, more affordable housing would expand opportunity to lower-income residents and help supply a close by workforce for employers.

Figure 40: Preliminary Opportunity Findings



Zone 2: Better housing affordability, needs investment to improve housing quality and opportunities (47% of units)

In the second zone, with nearly half of all homes and concentrated in large towns in the center and east of the county, the ‘fair share’ of available affordable housing is met or close, but economic growth remains constrained by low access to opportunities such as jobs and quality education. Although rents may be affordable, a cycle of low investment, low rents, and low quality has left a significant portion of the stock with major safety and accessibility challenges.

- **Municipalities in this zone:** Adams CDP, North Adams, Pittsfield, Lee CDP, Housatonic CDP
- **Recommendation:** For these towns, investment to increase opportunity, such as jobs and quality education, will help residents increase income. Housing improvement programs can alleviate housing stock quality problems.

Zone 3: Low affordability and opportunity (25 % of units)

Another 25% of the county’s homes are in rural towns to the center and east of the county; while these have few affordable units and opportunity, physical distance from transport and economies of scale makes investment more difficult.

- **Municipalities in this zone:** Tyringham, Washington, New Marlborough, Clarksburg, New Ashford, Savoy, Egremont, Remainder of Lee, Hinsdale, Remainder of Adams, Mount Washington, Otis, Cheshire, Florida, Sheffield, Peru, Monterey, Becket.
- **Recommendation:** Because of low population density, likely not a priority for concentrated investments in housing and opportunities, however, should contribute fair-share to affordable housing. Strategic investments to increase transportation connectivity to specific areas can be considered.

Zone 4: High affordable supply and opportunity (3% of units)

The final zone is also the smallest, just Downtown Great Barrington, with 3% of units.

Local Refinements to the Opportunity Criteria

The initial findings from the HUD data analysis were reviewed and discussed by the subcommittee over several meetings. The four-zone framework was, by and large, determined to be correct, but a few local refinements were made by the subcommittee which particularly affected very small communities with only the most basic of services available. Recognizing while they each have affordable housing needs, those are of small scale. There are almost no opportunities for services, given the region’s transportation infrastructure there provides very limited access. Promoting any significant development in these communities was encouraging sprawl. Conversely, there are more opportunities and needs in some of the larger towns for new affordable housing in areas with good schools and services, and proximate employment opportunities. Finally, the three largest communities already have significant populations of low to moderate income, very aged housing which tends to be very affordable but of questionable quality, and already contains most of the region’s official “affordable housing.” Encouraging further concentrations of lower income people and affordable housing in these three communities is not

good policy; however maximizing reinvestment in these communities is important. In some instances in these communities, replacing deteriorated affordable housing with new affordable housing would be an appropriate reinvestment strategy.

HUD Opportunity Criteria	Local Refinements
Low poverty levels Access to jobs Labor market engagement Housing and neighborhood stability School performance Shortage of health care professionals	Poverty (don't create or exacerbate concentrations of poverty) Access to jobs – considered knowledge of area and roads to refine what data said Proximity to transit Access to services, including hospitals Utilities (water and sewer service) Municipal readiness and political will (active on the issues, CPA Passed)

MUNICIPAL READINESS

Of the towns in the Berkshires, only Lenox has an approved Housing Production Plan, although Tyringham has made gallant efforts to develop one in recent years.

Zoning

Low density zoning in much of the county is driven by the combined effects of: rural history, difficult Annual Town Meeting adoption process, relative (1970s) newness of zoning combined with lack of staff in most towns to assist in zoning changes (writing and adoption process), and limited infrastructure which necessitates lower density to safely accommodate well and septic. Most towns have made minimal changes to their zoning since it was first enacted and there are thirteen one-zone towns.

The zoning adoption process is easiest in the two cities where there is not the annual town meeting process.

Figure 41: County Zoning by Density and Use

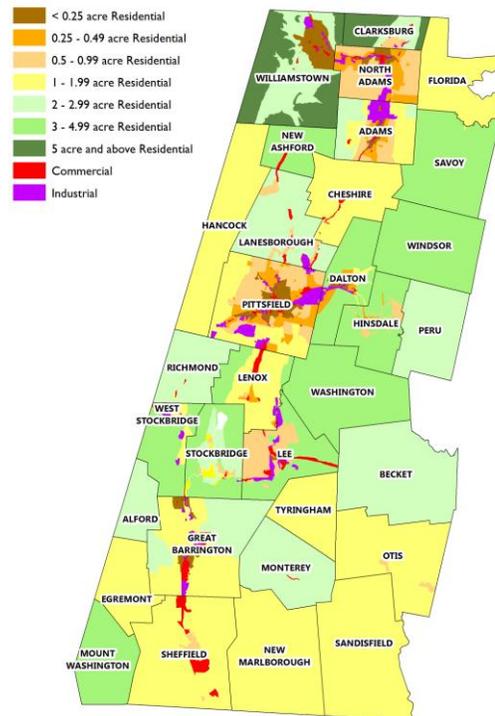


Table 12: Affordable Housing-Supportive Zoning

Municipality	<i>Inclusionary Zoning</i>	<i>Accessory Dwelling Units</i>	<i>40R Smart Growth District</i>
Adams		Y	
Alford		Y	
Becket			
Cheshire		Y	
Clarksburg			
Dalton		Y	
Egremont		Y	
Florida			
Great Barrington	Y	Y	
Hancock			
Hinsdale		Y	
Lanesborough		Y	
Lee		Y	
Lenox	Y	Y	
Monterey			
Mount Washington		Y	
New Ashford		Y	
New Marlborough		Y	
North Adams	Y	Y	
Otis		Y	
Peru			
Pittsfield	Y	Y	Y
Richmond		Y	
Sandisfield		Y	
Savoy		Y	
Sheffield		Y	
Stockbridge	Y	Y	
Tyringham			
Washington		Y	
West Stockbridge		Y	
Williamstown	Y	Y	
Windsor			

Housing Authorities and Committees

Nine communities have housing authorities to actively manage properties and seven communities have housing committees to plan for and implement strategies to promote the development of affordable housing.

Five communities, Lenox and Williamstown, Stockbridge, Becket, and Great Barrington, have passed the Community Preservation Act, which can provide funding for affordable housing development.

Figure 42: Communities with Housing Authorities

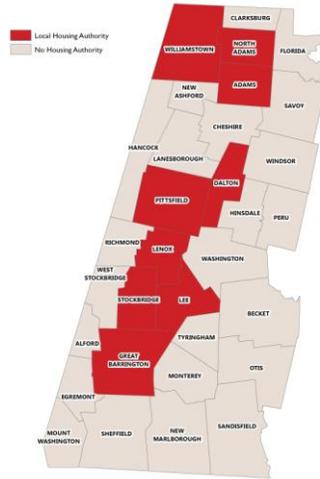
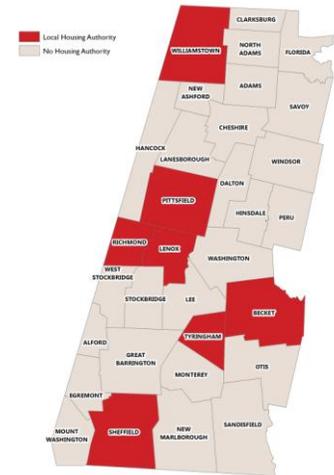


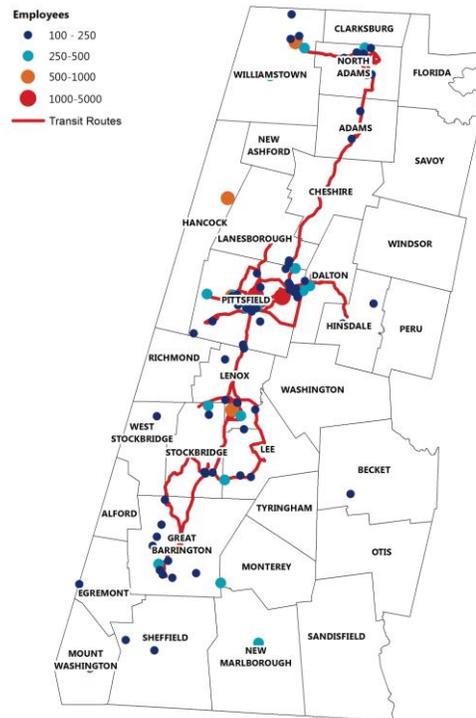
Figure 43: Communities with Housing Committees



ACCESS TO JOBS AND SERVICES

The region has a number of natural connections between communities where road connections and occasionally even some service and identity connections, exist. Given the size and scale of the region, a community-by-community approach to assessing access and attributes needs to be refined with on the ground knowledge. For example, Richmond, while it has few jobs itself, is an easy commute to Pittsfield or West Stockbridge. Similarly, Dalton, Lanesborough and Cheshire are all easy commute locations for Pittsfield jobs. In the north, Clarksburg and Florida have a strong relationship to North Adams. In the south, Tyringham is closely linked to Lee, its nearest shopping and job options. Lee and Stockbridge have strong connection along Route 102, which includes some major employers, and Great Barrington is the employment and service hub into which all surrounding communities feed. This is especially true for Stockbridge and Sheffield, connected by Route 7.

Figure 44: Major Employers and Transit Routes



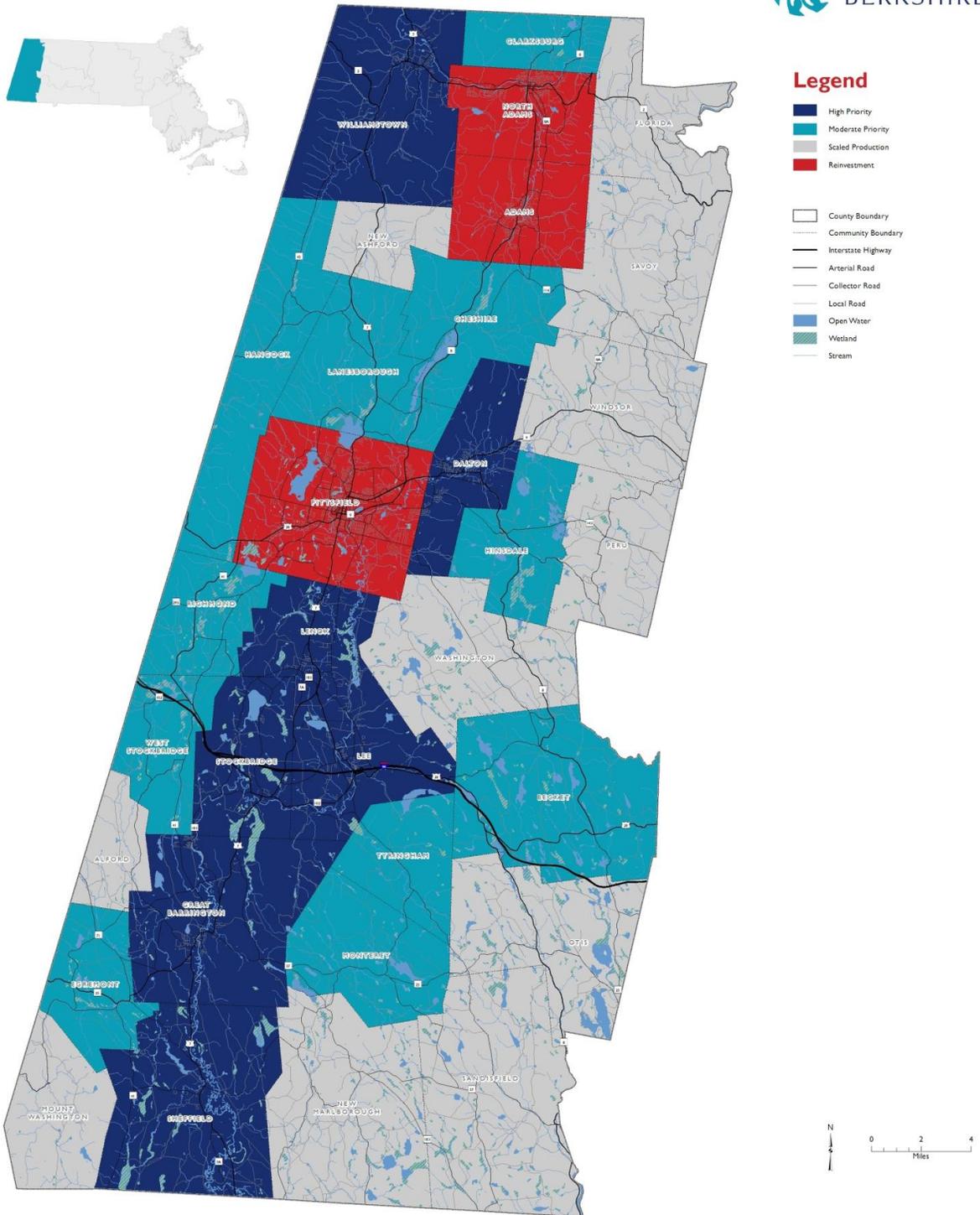
By contrast, other communities are more isolated, Alford, though close to Great Barrington has poor east-west road connections which make it farther to drive to than it seems looking at the map. Hill towns in general have few jobs and long drive times. They also lack infrastructure such as water and sewer as well as transit service.

Prioritizing Affordable Housing Production to Maximize Opportunity

The resulting framework breaks the county into four policy zones:

- **High Priority:** These areas have high opportunity scores but a lower supply of affordable housing. There are seven towns in this category: Williamstown, Dalton, Lenox, Lee, Stockbridge, Great Barrington and Sheffield. The recommendation is that these towns, with easier access to employment, served by transit (except Sheffield), higher performing schools, and served with water and sewer, should be targeted for new affordable housing development.
- **Moderate Priority:** These communities are secondary markets, near jobs and with good schools, but less served by transit and municipal infrastructure. These are generally adjacent to primary, high priority areas or those communities targeted for reinvestment. Also, these are slightly smaller towns with lower staff capacity. This category includes Clarksburg, Cheshire, Lanesborough, Hancock, Hinsdale, Richmond, West Stockbridge, Becket, Tyringham, Monterey and Egremont.
- **Scaled Production:** Some towns are so rural they don't have jobs or services and are also not easily accessible to places that do. They are not well served by municipal infrastructure which limits the density of development possible and viability of affordable housing at a meaningful scale. These communities are encouraged to increase their housing mix through duplex or accessory dwelling unit options, but are not a primary focus for new affordable housing production. This includes New Ashford, Florida, Savoy, Windsor, Washington, Otis, Peru, Alford, Mount Washington, New Marlborough and Sandisfield.
- **Reinvestment:** These three communities (Pittsfield, Adams, and North Adams) are the largest and have experienced the largest population declines over the past decades. They struggle with high poverty rates, low property values, and poor housing conditions. They also provide the bulk of the region's current affordable housing supply. The focus for these communities is to improve opportunity conditions to better serve current residents, including affordable housing occupants.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING PRODUCTION FRAMEWORK



2/17/2014



The work that provided the basis for this publication was supported by funding under an award with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The substance and findings of the work are dedicated to the public. The author and publisher are solely responsible for the accuracy of the statements and interpretations contained in this publication. Such interpretations do not necessarily reflect the views of the Government.

This map was created by the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission and is intended for general planning purposes only. This map shall not be used for engineering, survey, legal, or regulatory purposes. MassGIS, MassDOT, BRPC or the communities may have supplied portions of this data.

From Analysis to Policy

The analysis and outreach conducted as part of this planning process directly informed the policies developed for the Housing and Neighborhoods Element of the Sustainable Berkshires plan. The majority of FHEA topics are addressed within the policies contained in the Integrated and Inclusive section of the plan. However, there are also a number of policies related to health, including brownfields, in the Safe and Healthy section.

ANNEX A: TOWNS BY INCOME, INCOME GROWTH, AND ACTUAL/PREDICTED NON-WHITE POPULATION

Median Income 2009	Town	% change in income since 1999	Actual non-white/predicted non-white	Total populations
\$93,750	Tyringham	55.6%	0.00%	327
\$87,682	Richmond	43.9%	35.48%	1,475
\$82,500	Alford	66.2%	31.61%	494
\$74,750	Windsor	45.5%	0.00%	899
\$74,205	Hancock	63.6%	0.00%	717
\$69,583	New Ashford	35.8%	0.00%	228
\$68,906	Washington	26.2%	155.59%	538
\$68,750	West Stockbridge	34.8%	13.39%	1,306
\$66,458	Lanesborough	42.9%	42.57%	3,091
\$66,250	Peru	48.8%	24.28%	847
\$65,833	Mount Washington	23.9%	0.00%	167
\$63,750	Otis	23.8%	44.60%	1,612
\$63,045	Williamstown	21.5%	110.03%	7,754
\$62,411	Sandisfield	35.8%	70.93%	915
\$60,766	Hinsdale	43.0%	103.55%	2,032
\$60,604	Lenox	33.0%	47.56%	5,025
\$57,917	New Marlborough	23.6%	12.90%	1,509
\$57,419	Cheshire	36.8%	13.74%	3,235
\$57,222	Dalton	19.5%	47.61%	6,756
\$55,500	Savoy	33.8%	32.63%	692
\$55,096	Stockbridge	13.4%	165.95%	1,306
\$53,333	Florida	24.0%	195.81%	752
\$52,843	Great Barrington	16.2%	460.06%	7,104
\$52,054	Clarksburg	20.0%	30.75%	1,702
\$51,856	Egremont	3.7%	84.03%	1,225
\$50,599	Lee	21.8%	89.02%	5,943
\$47,145	Sheffield	4.6%	91.20%	3,257
\$43,188	Pittsfield	21.1%	135.81%	44,737
\$42,031	Becket	-10.2%	41.61%	1,779
\$41,625	Monterey	-16.3%	32.48%	961
\$38,340	Adams	19.2%	65.00%	8,485
\$35,401	North Adams	28.3%	115.26%	13,708

APPENDIX B: HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOODS FORUMS

FORUM SUMMARY

As part of the process for the Housing and Neighborhoods element of *Sustainable Berkshires*, open forums were held on December 9, 2013 in Lenox, Massachusetts and December 10, 2013 in Adams, Massachusetts to discuss the current state and future directions for housing and neighborhoods Berkshire County. Ten communities were represented by members of the public and local government.

BRPC Senior Planner, Amy Kacala began the forums with an overview of the Sustainable Berkshires Regional Planning process, an overview of the region and an overview of the issues the region is facing related to housing and neighborhoods. This overview included a description of the characteristics of the region's housing stock, aging of the population, and the economics of the region and how they impact our neighborhoods. BRPC staff led a discussion about what makes a great neighborhood, including people-friendly places and spaces, safe and healthy, integrated and inclusive communities and ecological footprint. Large size maps of existing conditions and posters with the proposed Goals, Policies and Strategies were available for people to review at their own pace after the presentation was given. BRPC staff members were available to provide greater information about the topic as well as available for questions and discussions. Snapshots for the elements were also available in printed form.

The following comments were received:

- A comment was made that the lack of public transportation affects housing choices
- The second home market is changing Berkshire County
- Physical constraints are major determinants to housing given the lack of physical infrastructure.
- The aging of the population is changing Berkshire County neighborhoods

Adjustments were made to the draft Goals, Policies and Strategies, as appropriate, as a result of the forums.

ADDITIONAL OUTREACH

In addition to the public forums, an affordable housing forum was held in Pittsfield MA on October 18, 2014. The intent of this forum was to gather all of the affordable housing decision makers and implementation partners into the same room to review regional data and discuss policy options for moving forward. This included a public vetting of the affordable housing production framework and its background rationale as summarized in the Fair Housing Equity Assessment. It also included group brainstorming on policies to both improve quality and opportunity scores of low-income neighborhoods and increasing production in high opportunity communities.

