



BRPC

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

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Executive Director

MEMORANDUM

TO: Berkshire Municipal Managers

FROM: Kenneth E. Walto, Project Specialist

Cc: Thomas Matuszko, Executive Director, CJ Hoss, Community Planning Program Manager

RE: Discussion Paper - 2022 Municipal Staffing Survey

DATE: January 4, 2024, (Original draft report completed July 2023)

A July 2023 BRPC Memo summarized a 2022 Municipal Staffing Survey: *“In September 2022, BRPC’s Regional Issues Committee began a discussion centered on the future sustainability of municipal government given concerns related to the recruitment, retention, and training of both paid and volunteer positions in Berkshire County. In December, As a result of multiple meetings with stakeholders, BRPC staff developed a survey to supplement the discussion and contacted the 30 towns in Berkshire County to request a response. Of the 30 towns, 23 responded to the survey. Six of the seven communities that did not respond have less than 1,000 persons, and all seven are below 2,000. For perspective, 20 of the 30 towns have under 2,000 persons, so despite not having results from every community, the survey is well represented by communities of all sizes.”*

The principal issue was found to be the recruitment, training, and retention of paid staff for certain critical positions. This “Discussion Paper” will attempt to briefly outline recruitment challenges facing Berkshire Communities, for certain critical paid positions, options to address those challenges and action steps to further positive outcomes.

A. POSITIONS THAT ARE DIFFICULT TO FILL

A list of those positions that a majority of communities deemed difficult to fill is as follows: Town Administrator/Manager, Accountant, Assessor, Building Inspector, Assistant Building Inspectors & staff, DPW staff, Fire Fighters, Police Officers/Constables, Tax Collector* and Treasurer. (Tax Collector is included even though slightly less than a majority of communities found it difficult to fill). A minority of communities also found these positions difficult to fill: Ambulance staff, Community Development Director, seasonal staff, Sewer Director, Water Director and wastewater staff.

B. BARRIERS TO ENTRY & RETENTION

Compensation including benefits was mentioned most often as a barrier to hiring and retaining qualified people. Secondly, a significant minority of communities noted skills/licenses and training to be a challenge in obtaining and retaining qualified staff.

C. OPTIONS TO ADDRESS RECRUITMENT/RETENTION CHALLENGES

1. No Build/Limited Collaboration - The first option is simply for each community to take the information in the survey and other information that may be developed, (see D.1, D.2 and D.3 below) and do the best it can, individually, to recruit and retain staff, knowing which positions will require extra effort.
2. Regional Approach - A second approach would be to develop a collaborative effort to comprehensively deal with the problem. Of course, one size will not fit all communities, but perhaps there are certain areas which can be looked at together.

D. AREAS OF POSSIBLE COLLABORATION.

1. Compensation survey – A place to start is undertaking a compensation survey which would provide salary and benefit information about the communities in Berkshire County, and in similar Massachusetts communities east of the Berkshires, such as Franklin, Hampden and Hampshire Counties. Also, it may be helpful to measure compensation against the local private sector for similar positions such as Accountant, Real Estate Appraiser and DPW staff.
2. Training – It may be helpful to outline the specific training requirements for positions that were found to be difficult to fill, with an eye towards coordinating training for specific positions such as Hoisting and CDL licensing for DPW employees. Berkshire Community College provides customized training to organizations through its Workforce Development and Community Education Program. (Note: the College presently offers a Certificate program from Crane's Safety Institute to prepare for the Massachusetts 2A Hydraulics Engineers' license exam. Recertification of CDL and Hoisting licenses must be completed on a periodic basis.) The Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts may also be able to develop specialized certificate programs for financial staff. For example, MCLA currently offers an on-line Certificate in Applied Accounting. The State's Division of Local Services in the Department of Revenue has recently launched an on-line training program for new finance officials. And the required introductory course for Assessors is offered on-line as well.

3. Recruitment – The days are long gone when simply posting a job vacancy in several general circulation newspapers would suffice to result in multiple applicants for a municipal job. In a recent (August 2023) article in the Berkshire Business Journal Heather Boulger, Executive Director of the Berkshire Regional Employment Board, described the Berkshires’ labor market. “The pandemic has just really changed the workforce across the Berkshires” with a significant decline of “2,000 people out of a workforce of 60,000”. The unemployment rate stands at just 2.9% and Berkshire companies are struggling to fill their ranks. “Job seekers know they have multiple options”. Recently, the Mass Municipal Association held several on-line webinar sessions on the subject. Presenters noted the following recruitment techniques are now important: Ease of application such that applicants can apply using their i-phones, being present at job fairs, posting in a variety of on-line venues, and using professional recruitment brochures. Even the atmosphere of the interview is important such that it should be a welcoming and friendly environment, with a tour of the facility. To that end, is recommended that: communities view the MMA webinars (there are three one hour sessions which could be viewed as part of the Berkshire Manager’s meetings available on-line) , jointly sponsor a job fair perhaps with the assistance of MassHire or BCC, develop a professional recruitment brochure touting employment in the Berkshires that could be customized by each community.

4. Multi-jurisdictional Employment - This would be especially helpful for smaller communities that cannot justify full-time employment. It may stabilize compensation in that smaller communities are not competing for the same talent and will improve benefits as employees are entitled to health and pension benefits once employment is for 20 hours or more collectively. Communities also share related costs. Multi-jurisdictional associations are authorized via multiple statutes for the difficult to fill positions:
 - Inter-municipal Agreements - Communities may elect to collaborate for up to 20 years for any municipal purpose through an inter-municipal agreement under Chapter 40, section 4A,
 - Joint Powers Agreements – Chapter 40 Sec. 40A ½ authorizes special purpose districts for almost any valid municipal purpose.
 - Regional Police Districts - Chapter 41 sec. 99B-K provides for regional police department among contiguous towns, not including those under Civil Service
 - Regional Water & Sewer Commissions – Chapter 40N, sec. 25 – provides for the creation of a regional water and sewer district, subject and subsequent to a positive recommendation of a specially appointed planning committee.
 - Joint Assessment Agreements– Chapter 41, sec. 30B provides for agreements between 2 or more cities and towns to form a cooperative arrangement, in the form and manner approved by the participants, for “joint and cooperative assessment” for a period of up to 25 years.

E. SUMMARY OF SUGGESTED ACTION STEPS

- Compensation - Undertake a Berkshire municipal compensation survey for the difficult to fill jobs.
- Training - Decide upon common training needs for difficult to fill positions and the optimal method for providing pre- and post-employment training.
- Recruitment - view the MMA webinars. There are three one-hour sessions which could be viewed as part of the Berkshire Manager's meetings and are available on-line. Jointly sponsor a job fair perhaps with the assistance of MassHire or BCC. Develop a template for a professional recruitment brochure touting employment in the Berkshires that could be customized by each community. Compile a list of sites/on-line venues for advertising certain jobs.
- Multi-Jurisdictional Employment – Create a sub-committee or task force of interested municipalities to further consider shared personnel and the optimal method for achieving that goal. BRPC to create a “Toolbox” item of template Inter-municipal Agreements on its website.
- Budget – Develop a budget for mutually agreed upon items and seek funding.

ATTACHMENT

1. Tabulated Analysis of Survey Data

BERKSHIRE COUNTY TOWNS SURVEY, DECEMBER 2022

COMMUNITIES RESPONDING = 23

<u>PAID POSITIONS</u>	<u>APPLIES</u>		<u>DIFFICULT TO FILL</u>	
Town Administrator/Manager	20	87%	11	55%
Administrative Assistant/Secretary	22	96%	8	36%
Accountant	22	96%	16	73%
Animal Control Officer	23	100%	10	43%
Ambulance Services	10	43%	6	60%
Assessor	23	100%	14	61%
Building Inspector	23	100%	13	57%
Assistant Building Inspector/staff	16	70%	8	50%
Cemetery Division	13	57%	1	8%
Clerk	22	96%	7	32%
Community Development Director	4	17%	3	75% *
Community Planning Staff	3	13%	1	33%
DPW Director/Superintendent	21	91%	9	43%
DPW Staff	20	87%	12	60%
Fire Chief	20	87%	7	35%
Fire Dept. staff	17	74%	11	65%
Health Inspector	18	78%	6	33%
Library staff	17	74%	2	12%
Police Chief	23	100%	3	13%
Police Officers/Constables	22	96%	15	68%

Seasonal staff/other	9	39%	5	56%
Sewer Director	6	26%	5	83%
Tax Collector*	22	96%	10	45%
Transfer Station/Recycling staff	18	78%	2	11%
Treasurer	23	100%	12	52%
Veterans Agent	12	52%	3	25%
Water Director	8	35%	8	100%
Wastewater staff	7	30%	5	71% *

NOTES:



= Position Applies to Majority of Communities and more than 50% reported as difficult to fill.
(Tax Collector included although difficult to fill was 45%)



= Position Applies to minority of Communities and more than 50% reported as difficult to fill.

* Count includes Land Use Director & Water Operator as difficult to fill in similar positions

BERKSHIRE COUNTY TOWNS SURVEY, DECEMBER 2022

COMMUNITIES RESPONDING = 23

<u>VOLUNTEER POSITIONS</u>	<u>APPLIES</u>		<u>DIFFICULT TO FILL</u>	
Agricultural Commission	14	61%	5	36%
Board of Assessors	21	91%	11	52% *
Board of Health	22	96%	7	32%
Select Board	22	96%	6	27% *
Cable Advisory Committee	11	48%	4	36%
Community Preservation Act Committee	7	30%	1	14%
Conservation Commission	23	100%	10	43%
Council on Aging	23	100%	3	13%
Cultural Council	18	78%	3	17%
Cultural District Steering Committee	1	4%	0	0%
Economic Development Committee	2	9%	0	0%
Finance Committee	22	96%	10	45% *
Historical Commission	20	87%	2	10%
Parks Commission	12	52%	3	25%
Planning Board	22	96%	8	36%
Recreation Committee	10	43%	3	30%
School Committee	19	83%	7	37%
Zoning Board of Appeals	22	96%	10	45%

NOTES:



= Position Applies to Majority of Communities and more than 50% reported as difficult to fill.



= Position Applies to Majority of Communities and more than 40% reported as difficult to fill.

* Towns in Massachusetts are required to have a Select Board, (unless a Town Council has been created by special act) a Finance or Appropriations Committee, and one, three or five Assessors. Selectmen act as Assessors in Towns that do not provide for them.

BERKSHIRE COUNTY TOWNS SURVEY, DECEMBER 2022

TOWN	2020 POP.	Full Time	Current Vacancies	+ 60 Days vacant	≥ 120 days to fill	Turnover- within past 3yrs.	Retire- within 5 yrs.
Lenox	5095	Over 95%	3-4	Yes	3-4	5 or more	5-10%
Richmond	1407	90%	0	No	0	3-4	5%
Sandisfield	989	30%	3-4	Yes	0	5 or more	50%
Adams	8,166	All except seasonal	3-4	No	1-2	5 or more	5-7 DPW
Stockbridge	2,018	75%	1-2	Yes	1-2	5 or more	0%, 75% , yrs. 6 - 10
Washington	494	20%	3-4	Yes	0	5 or more	12.5%
New Marlborough	1,528	50%	1-2	Yes	1-2	5 or more	10%
Dalton	6,330	85%	3-4	Yes	1-2	5 or more	3%
Sheffield	3,327		1-2	Yes	1-2	5 or more	4 Positions
Hancock	757		0	No	0	0	
Lee	5,788	90%	3-4	Yes	1-2	5 or more	5%
Lanesborough	3,038	79%	3-4	Yes	3-4	5 or more	5%
West Stockbridge	1,343	11 FT-PD, DPW, TA	0	No	0	1-2	1-2 people
Windsor	831	None	1-2	Yes	1-2	3-4	7%
Great Barrington	7,172	nearly 100%	3-4	Yes	1-2	5 or more	≤10%
New Ashford	250	none	0	No	0	3-4	
Williamstown	7,513		3-4	No	3-4	5 or more	10
Clarksburg	1,657		3-4	Yes	1-2	3-4	50%
Becket	1,931	80%	1-2	No	1-2	1-2	50%
Monterey	1,095		1-2	No	0	3-4	1
Hinsdale	1,919	40%, 13 FT	1-2	No	0	5 or more	40%
Egremont	1,372	95%	1-2	Yes	1-2	1-2	95%
Cheshire	3,258		1-2	Yes	1-2	3-4	3 Positions

Notes:	
% with Current Vacancies	87%
% 60+ Days Vacant	57%
% Taking 120 Days+ to fill	35%
Turnover 5+ last 3 yrs.	57%

BERKSHIRE COUNTY TOWNS SURVEY, DECEMBER 2022

TOWN	STAFFING CHALLENGES
Lenox	Intermediate term retention and succession planning. No clear path for recruiting a competent replacement .
Richmond	Finding staff with experience who want to work. Salaries here are not competitive .
Sandisfield	Education/training path , aging community, non-competitive wages
Adams	Recruitment is challenging because it is difficult to compete with the private sector in terms of benefits .
Stockbridge	Balancing life work relationship, jobs include overtime including night and weekend work.
Washington	Lack of labor force entering municipal service and inadequate or competitive compensation .
New Marlborough	Compensation , rural Town, lack understanding of benefits for F.T. positions, lack of benefits for P.T positions
Dalton	Getting knowledgeable or capable employees at reasonable wages/salary .
Sheffield	Salaries , response to ads, experience, knowledge
Hancock	
Lee	Positions that require licenses from the state
Lanesborough	Finding qualified candidates for EMS, Police and DPW is difficult. Many do not have the required licenses .
West Stockbridge	We have very little turn over and have had no issue filling any positions at this time.
Windsor	Police Department due to police reform.
Great Barrington	Department Heads with specific skillsets . Accountant/Treasurer-Collector/Building Insp/DPW Director.
New Ashford	Finding individuals that are willing to do the job whether paid or appointed/volunteer.
Williamstown	Attracting qualified staff for credentialed positions . Offering adequate compensation .
Clarksburg	The rich communities have the gold- so they get the employee. Poorer communities go begging .
Becket	Opportunities are great but people tend to shy away from positions that they can't get the training for easily .
Monterey	Finding qualified individuals for money appropriated . other towns offer more money & benefits.
Hinsdale	Rate of Pay; benefits; expectations
Egremont	Succession planning Town Hall staff 60 years old or older. There are not applicants for town positions.
Cheshire	

Notes:

Responses were edited for brevity

57% Of Communities responding noted salaries/benefits as a challenge to obtaining/retaining staff.

43% Of Communities responding noted skills/licenses/training as a challenge to obtaining/retaining staff.