

STATE OF THE COUNTY UPDATE

2024

This 2024 update builds on the Berkshire Benchmarks State of the County Report published in May 2022 and the State of the County Update update from 2023. This overview highlights notable changes in regional indicators. Note that these are not all of the indicators, which can be found online at BerkshireBenchmarks.org, but a selection that shows change. Berkshire Benchmarks updated all indicators on the website with the latest data as of April 2024. Readers are encouraged to visit the site to see the changes. www.berkshirebenchmarks.org

New to Berkshire Benchmarks this year is the addition of comparable counties. These comparable counties can serve as an aspirational benchmark to help determine how the county is doing compared to other regions. Berkshire County is unique, and no other county matches it exactly. Still, the chosen counties have an industry mix similar to the Berkshires, have a cultural and outdoor recreation focus, a similar density, and a large percentage of second homeowners. These counties also have name recognition, making them easy to visualize and understand. Over half of the indicators now include comparable counties.

Comparable Counties

Burlington, VT (Chittenden County)
Cape Cod, MA (Barnstable County)
Kingston, NY (Ulster County)
Portland, ME (Cumberland County)
Saratoga Springs, NY (Saratoga County)
Asheville, NC (Buncombe County)
Bend, OR (Deschutes County)
Boulder, CO (Boulder County)

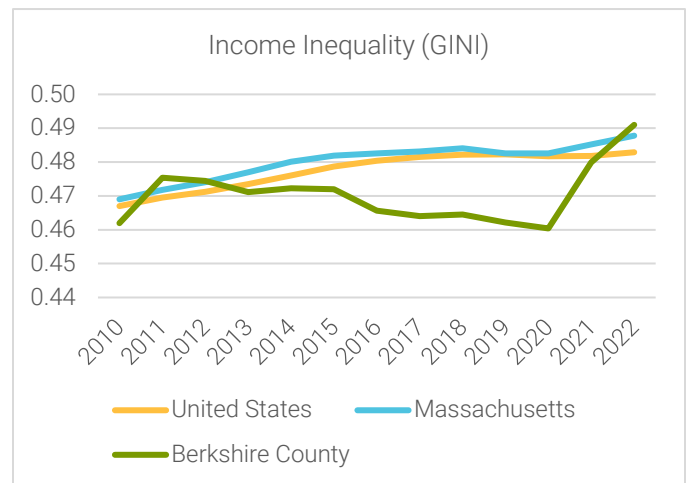
INDICATORS

Since the 2023 State of the County Update, most indicators have shown little change. However, the indicators that show noteworthy changes are below.

ECONOMY

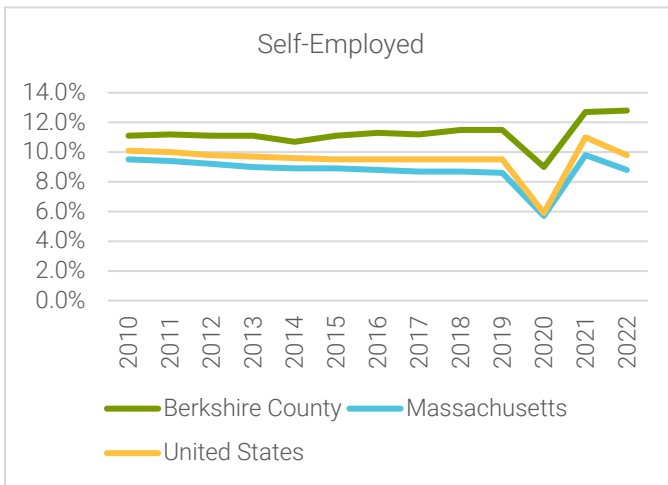
Income Inequality (2022)

Income inequality uses the GINI Coefficient, which is the idea of perfectly equal income distribution, where a 0 indicates equality and a 1 indicates perfect inequality. Income Inequality has continued to increase dramatically in Berkshire County. The region is above the state and nation, which are also experiencing increases but significantly less than the Berkshires. The Berkshires also have a higher degree of inequality than all of the comparable counties and have increased faster than them. This increase will need to be monitored over the next few years to see if it self-corrects or needs to be a focus of the region.



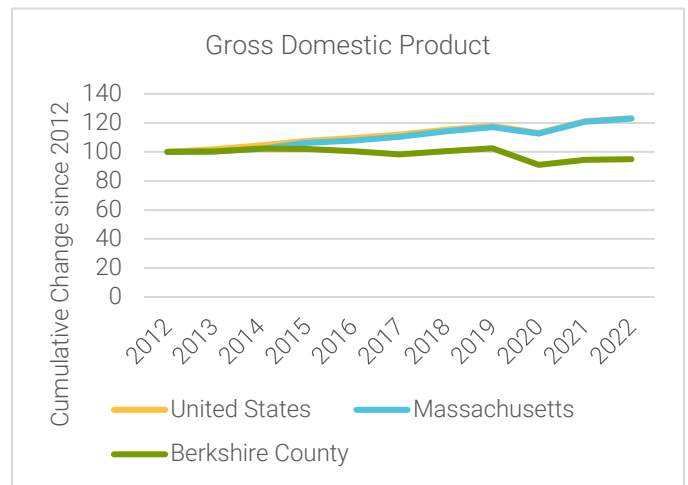
Self-Employed (2022)

Unlike the state and nation, which experienced a decline in self-employed, the Berkshires saw a slight increase in the last year and are now 3-4% higher than the state and nation. The county is in the middle of the pack of comparable counties, which mostly saw slight increases in the last year as well.



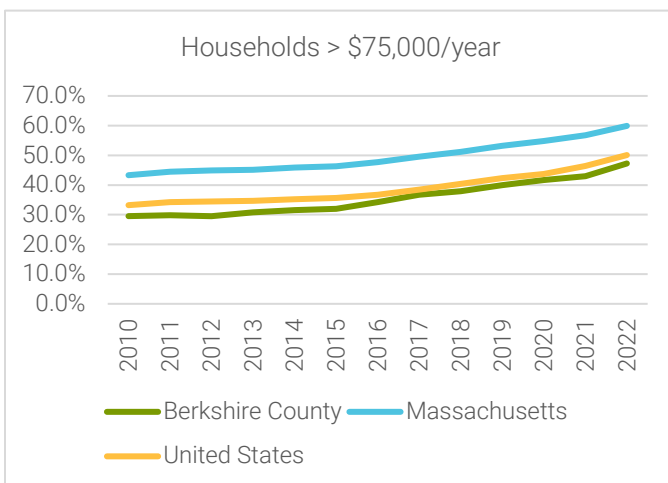
Gross Domestic Product (2022)

The gross domestic product for Berkshire County has continued to stay at its current level after declining since 2019. The GDP for the region today is equivalent to the GDP in 2006. All comparable counties have been experiencing GDP growth, ranging from 10% to 82% since 2012.



Households making greater than \$75,000/year (2022)

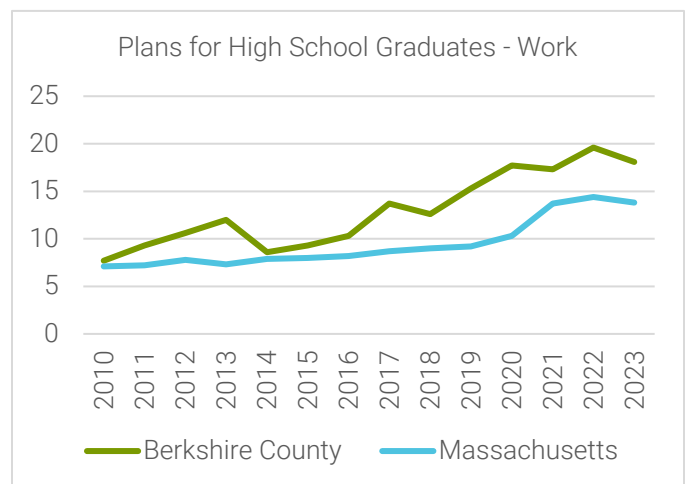
The percentage of households that make over \$75,000/year continues to increase in Berkshire County; however, the county remains below the state and nation. The county is also below most comparable counties, some of which are almost 15% higher than the Berkshires.



EDUCATION

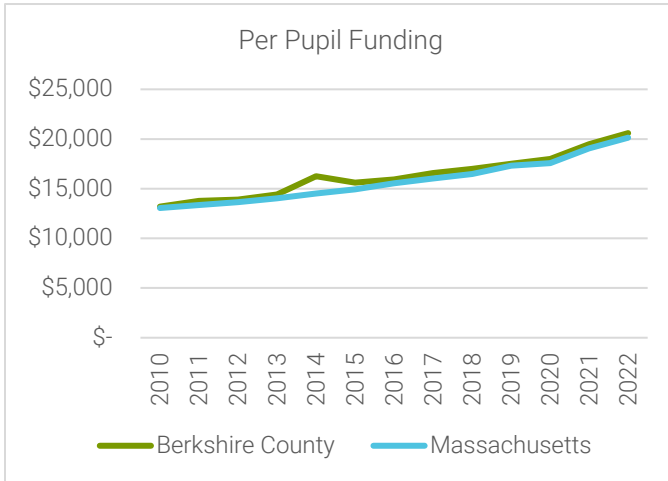
Plans for High School Graduates (2023)

The county continues to see an increase in the percentage of graduating high schoolers who plan to go to work instead of continuing their education, increasing by 10% in the last decade. Students planning to go to 2-year colleges continue to go down, dropping by over 10% in the last decade.



Per Pupil Funding (2022)

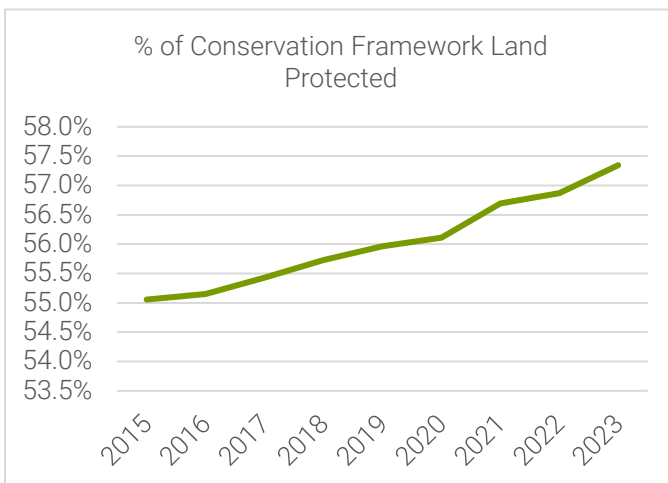
Per pupil spending has grown by 15% since 2000, or \$2,500, similar to the state's. Much of this increase is due to pandemic relief from the federal government, which expires for the 2025 academic year.



ENVIRONMENT

Conservation Framework Land Protected (2023)

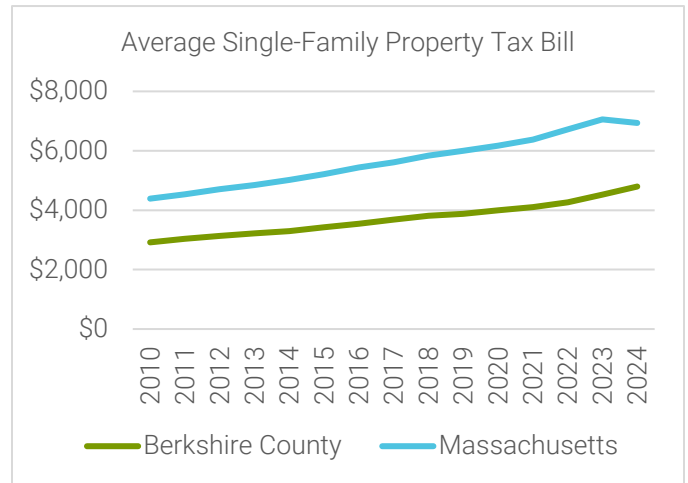
The conservation framework guides what land in the county should be protected based on attributes such as habitat and proximity to other protected land. Sustainable Berkshires, the Regional Plan for the Berkshires, developed the framework in 2014. The percentage of conservation framework land protected has increased, gaining over 1,200 acres in the last year. This increase shows the region's continued commitment to protecting ecologically sensitive land.



GOVERNMENT

Average Single-Family Tax Bill (2024)

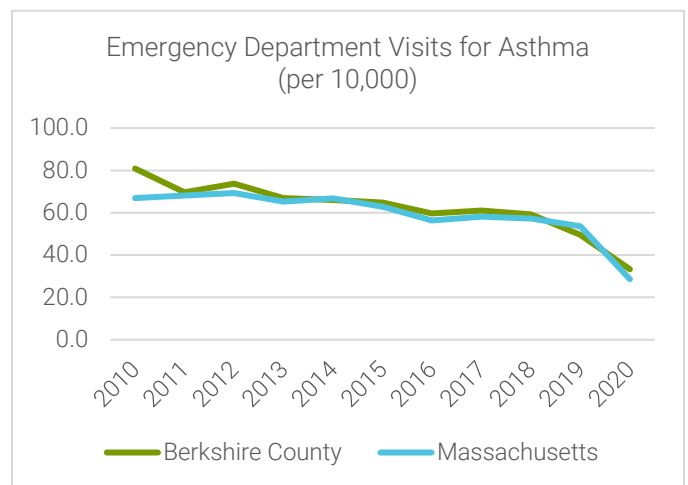
The average single-family tax bill in Berkshire County increased by \$270 last year, similar to the previous year. The increases have been partly due to increased costs due to inflation and home values since the pandemic.



HEALTH

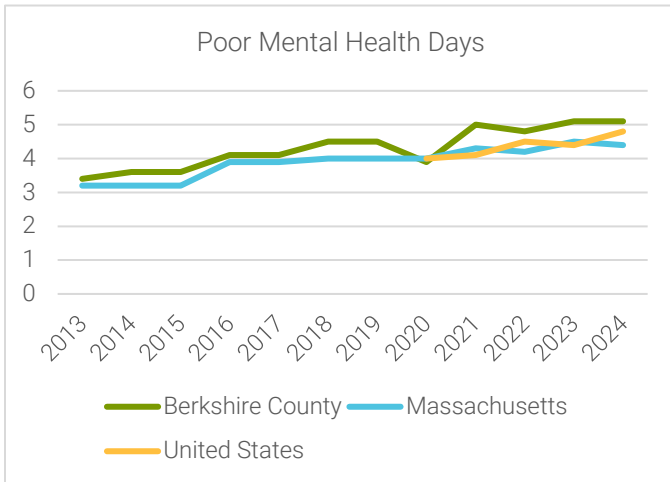
Asthma (2020)

Following state trends, asthma-related emergency department visits have declined steeply over the last two years. The latest year (2020) may be due to the pandemic, but the trend has declined over the last decade.



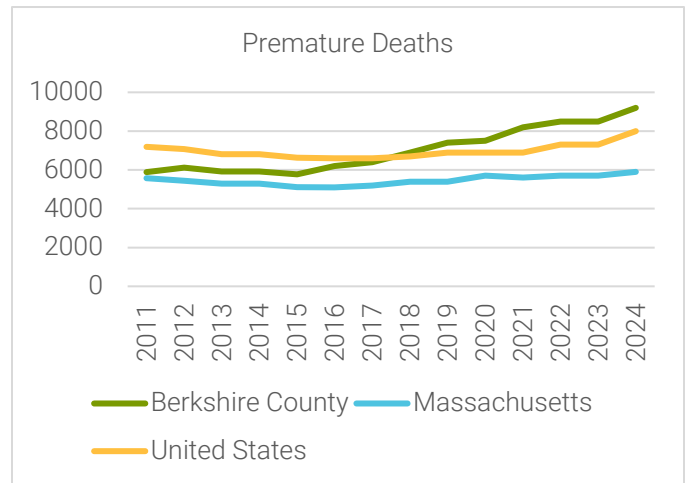
Poor Mental Health Days (2024)

The number of poor mental health days in Berkshire County continues to rise steadily to 5.1 days per month in 2024. The state and nation have also been rising, but not as fast, and are more than .5 days less than the Berkshires. The Berkshires also have more days than almost all of the comparable regions.



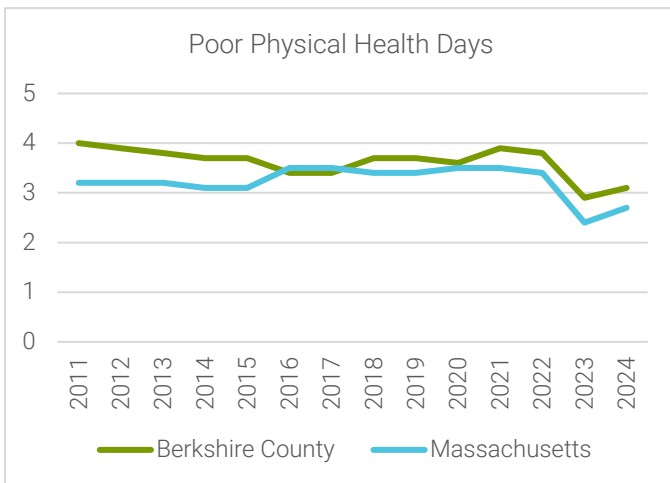
Premature Deaths (2024)

Premature deaths have continued to increase, increasing the gap between the county and the state. The county is higher than the comparable regions by almost 1,000 years lost before age 75 per 100,000 people. It is rising faster than any other comparable region.



Poor Physical Health Days (2024)

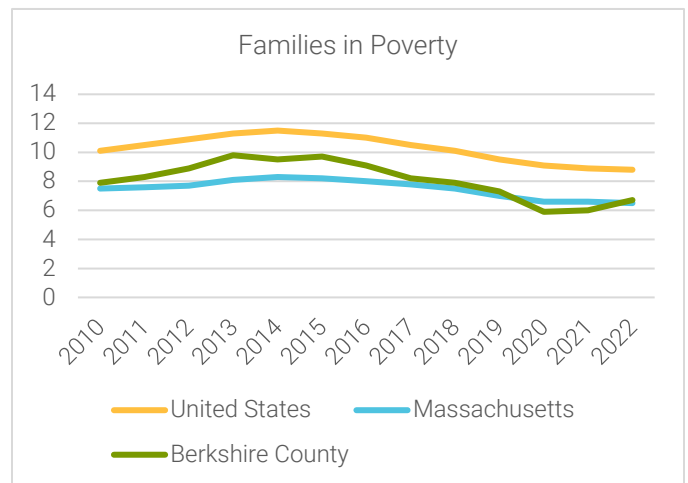
The number of poor physical health days rose slightly in 2024 from 2023 but is still much lower than in previous years. The county mirrors state and national trends but is higher than the state average.



SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

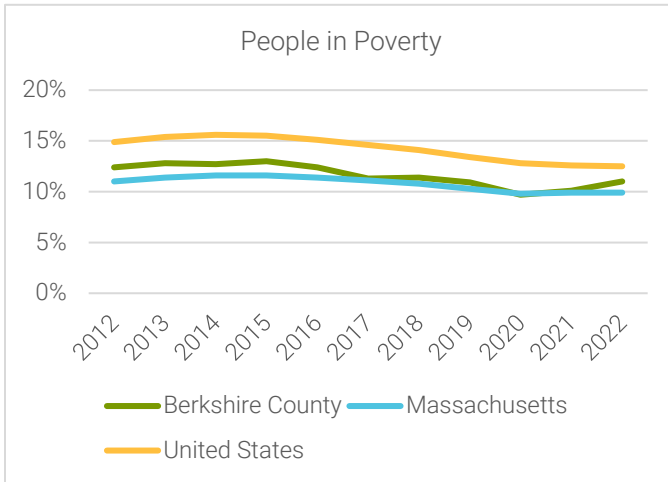
Families in Poverty (2022)

The percentage of families in poverty has increased over the last two years to be equal with the state. Both the state and county are substantially below the national average. Most comparable counties are significantly below the Berkshires, with a couple being about the same percentage.



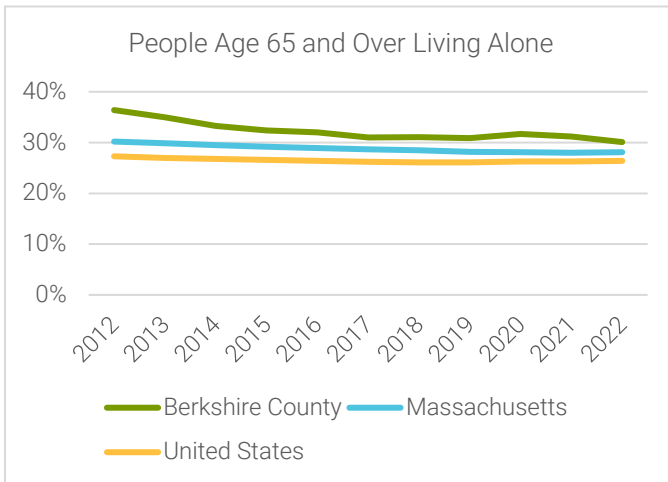
People in Poverty (2022)

The percentage of people in poverty has increased by 1.7% in the last two years. This increase contradicts the state and nation, which have seen slight declines or steady poverty rates.



People age 65+ living alone (2022)

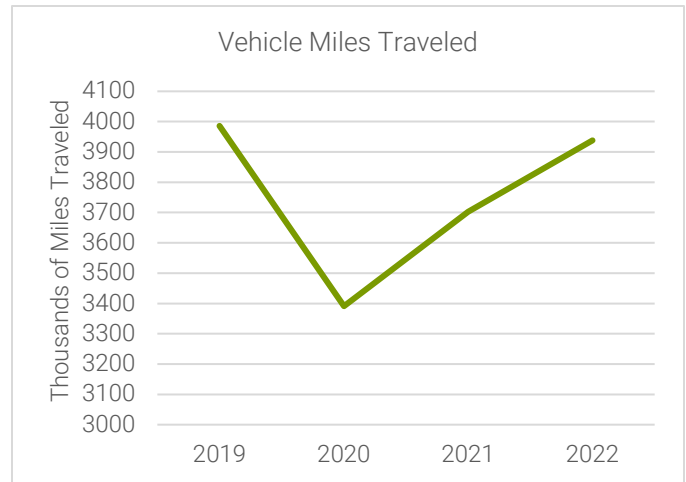
The percentage of people 65 and older living alone has been dropping steadily in Berkshire County (down 6.3% in the last ten years). The county continues to be higher than the state, nation, and almost all comparable counties.



TRANSPORTATION

Vehicle Miles Traveled (2022)

Vehicle miles traveled has continued to increase since it dropped at the beginning of the pandemic. In 2022, the mileage was almost back to 2019 miles. This increase is surprising given the high rate of workers who continue to work from home, at least partially.



THINGS TO WATCH

There are several more significant topics that the region and Berkshire Benchmarks will continue to monitor to see how they impact the region and its data. These items can have significant cross-cutting impacts on the region.

- Housing:* The pandemic caused a significant increase in housing prices. These prices seem to have stabilized; however, they continue to be higher than most working families can afford. With the high interest rates, these high prices have made the challenge for local households to buy a house even harder. In addition, many homes in the region have recently been converted to short-term rentals, further reducing the supply for residents.
- Population change:* The pandemic brought many people to the region, but this appears to have been a short-term impact. These households purchased new homes and converted second homes into primary ones. Still, it generally appears that these people are not staying in the Berkshires long-term.
- Mental Health:* Many of the indicators, especially in the health sector, are pointing to underlying mental health issues in the region. This problem then shows up in poor mental health days, increases in premature deaths, lower life expectancy, and others.

