

# STATE OF THE COUNTY UPDATE

2026

This 2026 update builds on the Berkshire Benchmarks State of the County Report published in May 2022 and subsequent annual updates. This overview highlights notable changes in selected regional indicators. Note that these are not all of the indicators; a full list can be found online. This report focuses only on indicators that show significant recent changes. All indicators are updated with the latest data as of April 2026. Readers are encouraged to visit the site at [www.berkshirebenchmarks.org](http://www.berkshirebenchmarks.org).

Over the last year, significant challenges have arisen in gathering updated data on the region. The federal government shutdown in October delayed the American Community Survey by several months. In addition, many environmental indicators are no longer being updated at the federal level. The County Health Rankings is also no longer updating its data due to funding cuts. Finally, several municipalities are significantly behind in reporting municipal finances to the state, resulting in incomplete data for the region.

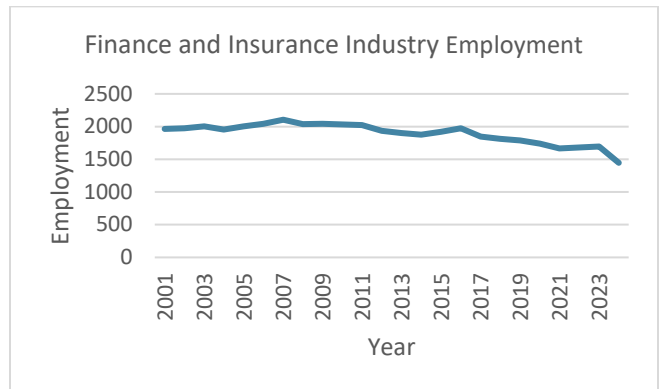
## INDICATORS

Since the 2025 State of the County Update, most indicators have shown little change. However, the indicators that show noteworthy changes are:

### ECONOMY

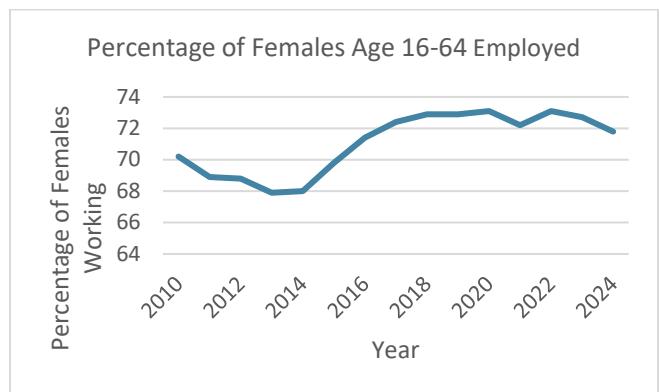
#### *Employment by Sector (2024)*

Berkshire County has seen an increase in health care and social assistance employment since 2020; however, we still lag behind 2019 employment levels. In addition, manufacturing has continued to decline over the last five years. A newly noticed trend is the decline in employment in the finance and insurance sectors. There have been several bank mergers, branch closures, and insurance company consolidations in the region, which are likely contributing to this decline.



#### *Females Age 16-64 that are employed (2024)*

Massachusetts and the United States both continue to show increased employment for females aged 16-64. Berkshire County, however, has been seeing a slight decline over the last two years and is now below the state percentage, after being above it for the last decade.



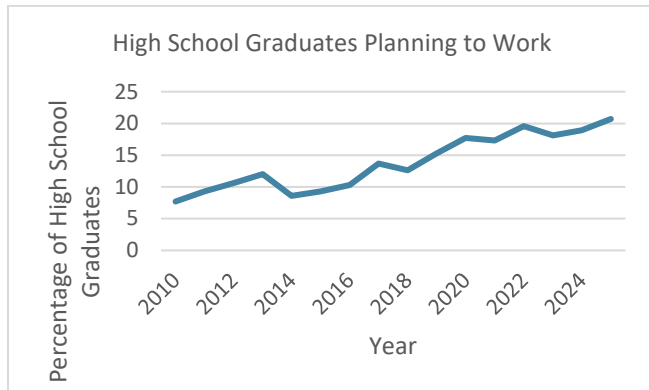
### EDUCATION

#### *Plans for High School Graduates (2025)*

Berkshire County continues to show an increase in the percentage of high school graduates planning to go directly to work rather than attend college. In addition, the number of students planning to attend a 2-year public college has increased over the last two years, after a decade of decline, most likely due to the state's free community college program. Both of these

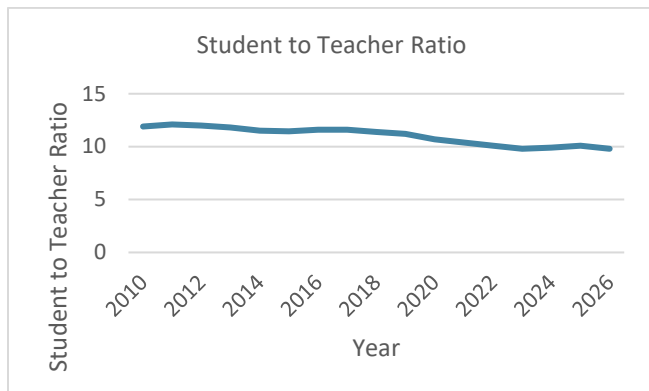
## BERKSHIRE BENCHMARKS

increases come at the expense of private four-year colleges, which have been seeing enrollment declines from county residents.



### *Student to Teacher Ratio (2026)*

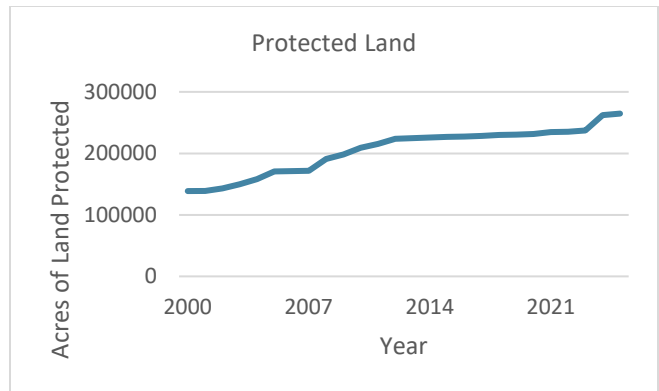
Berkshire County's student-to-teacher ratio continues to decline as total school enrollment declines. The ratio is almost 2 points lower than the state's, which has also been declining. Lower ratios tend to be a good thing for students; however, they come at a higher cost per student.



## ENVIRONMENT

### *Protected Land (2025)*

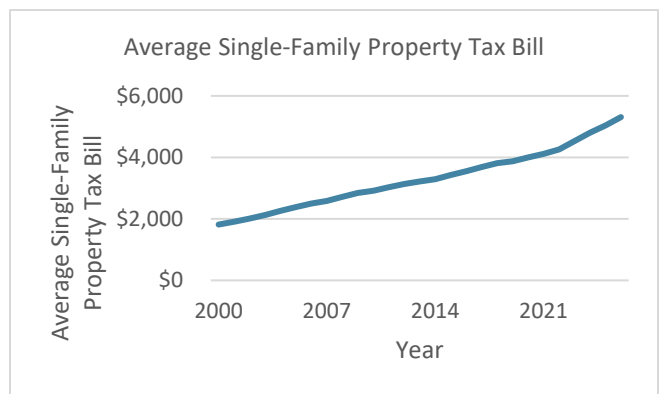
The number of acres of land protected in the county continues to increase and is now up to 44 percent of the county, almost 265,000 acres.



## GOVERNMENT

### *Average Single-Family Property Tax Bill (2026)*

The average single-family property tax bill continues to rise, now averaging over \$5,300. While Berkshire County's increase of almost \$300 in the last year is significant, the county's average bill is a lot less than the state average of over \$8,100 per year.



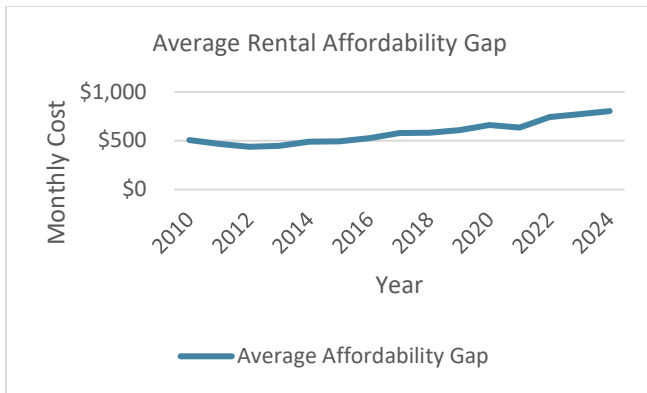
## HOUSING

### *Housing Affordability Gap (2024)*

The difference between what a household can afford and what the average rent or ownership price is, is called the affordability gap. The rental gap shows an increase in affordability: the average rent (currently being paid, not asked) is \$1,097, while the average household can afford \$1,900. This gap, however, can be misleading, as it is not the going rent rate nor does it separate renters' income.

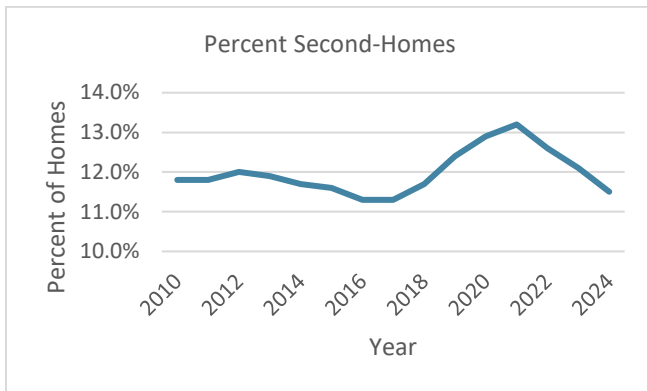
Similarly, homeowner affordability continues to increase, with the average home costing \$305,400 while the average household can afford \$392,923.

## BERKSHIRE BENCHMARKS



### *Second-Homes (2024)*

The percentage of second homes in the county has declined over the last few years and now stands at 11.5%. This is down from the 2021 high of 13.2%. The current percentage is around where the rate has historically been prior to the pandemic.



### *Foreclosures (2025)*

The number of foreclosures in the county has continued to decline, and in 2025, only 32 occurred. In addition, the Summary Processes in District Courts have declined to 238, only slightly above the 2021 number of 205 when a moratorium was in place.

## SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

### *Restraining Orders (2024)*

The number of restraining orders in Berkshire County has continued to increase to 1,211, the highest in at least the last 15 years. In 2015, there were 956 orders, and the county has seen a steady but significant increase since then.

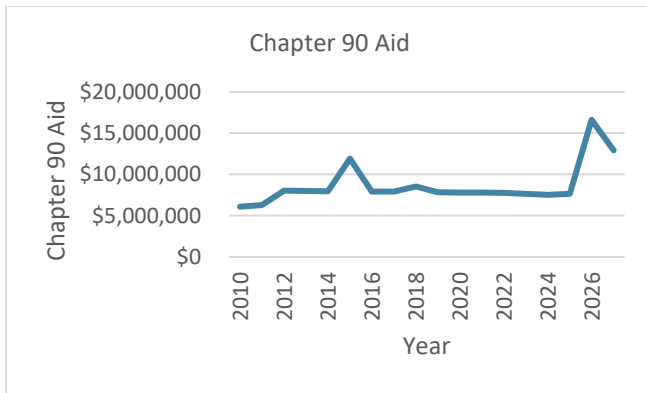


## TRANSPORTATION

### *Chapter 90 Aid (2026)*

Chapter 90 aid to communities increased significantly in 2026 due to additional state allocations and a supplemental allocation. The 2027 allocation does not include the additional amount, but it is still much higher than it was prior to 2026.

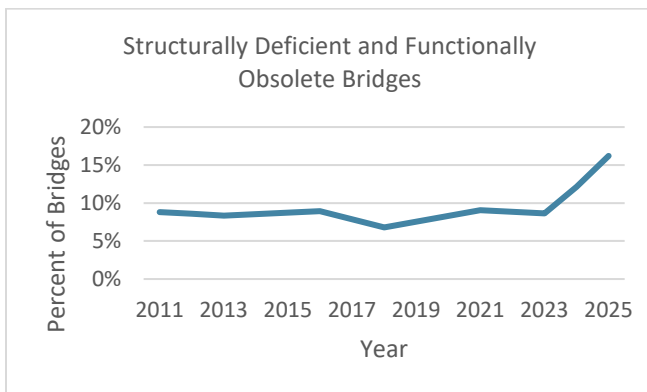
## BERKSHIRE BENCHMARKS



- *Politics:* We are already seeing the impact of cuts to federal data programs, impacting the data that Berkshire Benchmarks uses. In addition, there continues to be concern about how federal policies will impact the local region. It will take several years for data to come out to show the impact of funding and policy changes.

### ***Percent of Bridges Structurally Deficient or Functionally Obsolete (2025)***

The number of structurally deficient bridges has increased significantly over the last few years, reaching 16%. In 2023, the percentage was only 8.6%.



## 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:* Housing that is affordable to residents of the county continues to be a challenge. Prices seem to have stabilized; however, they remain higher than most working families can afford. With high interest rates, these high prices have made it even harder for local households to buy a house.