Closing the Digital Divide in High Fiber Communities

Becket | Otis | Washington | Windsor

May 16, 2025

BRPC
Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

MBI
MASSACHUSETTS BROADBAND INSTITUTE
at the MassTech Collaborative

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments

Becket

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- Library Executive Director: Nicole Schulze
- Head Librarian: Ellen Manley
- COA Director: Paula Bergeron
- First Congregational Church: Pastor Bill
- Becket Beat Editor: Ann Davet
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- MLP Broadband Manager: Larry Gould
- Library Director: Lois Hall
- COA Director: Karen Yvon
- COA Outreach Coordinator: Kendra Rybacki
- Principal, Farmington River Elementary: Laurie Flower
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- Cultural Council Director: Jeanne Randorf
- Otis Observer Publisher: Arlene Tolopko

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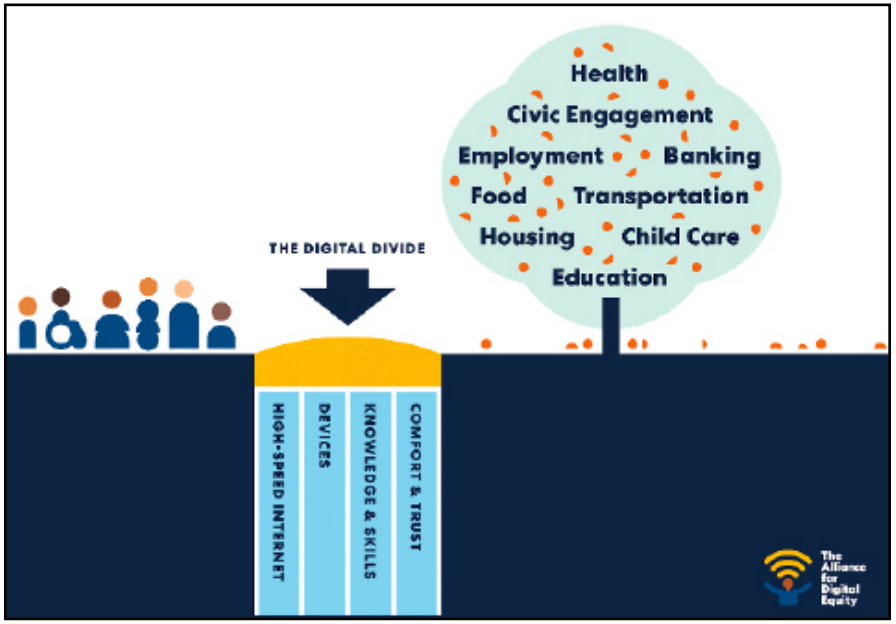
Executive Summary

In the summer of 2024, the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) began work on a digital equity plan for four towns in Berkshire County. These towns were small in size and rural in nature but notable in that they had done something more common to large, urban and suburban cities: secured for their residents fast and reliable fiber broadband.

The four towns — Becket, Otis, Washington, and Windsor — now boast some of the fastest and most affordable internet speeds in the Commonwealth, a feat they accomplished by successfully making the case that broadband would help current residents take advantage of the opportunities available in an increasingly technological world and attract new residents to ensure the towns' long-term growth. And when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, these towns were better prepared than most to weather the storm of a crisis that risked setting other communities back.

Yet in the years since municipal fiber became available in these towns, leaders have also seen that fiber alone does not guarantee everyone benefits equally. Some households cannot afford a fast connection and remain tethered to an outdated online experience characterized by delays, jitter, and interruptions. Others, fearful of the internet, have chosen to remain without service, thereby missing out on the internet's potential opportunities. Still others have service but lack up-to-date computer devices or the knowledge and skills needed to use the internet and computers to their fullest.

All of these situations are what a digital equity plan aims to address by helping residents, regardless of income, education, life experience, and more gain equal access to service, devices, and information.



Source: Alliance for Digital Equity

This digital equity plan is informed by quantitative data from sources such as the American Community Survey (ACS), Benton Institute for Broadband & Society, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), and MassTech/Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI), among others. Some data sources, however, are more reliable than others. Most notably, ACS data often contains significant margins of error due to small sample sizes and thus charts and tables citing ACS data should be interpreted with caution.

To counteract that reality, the plan is deeply guided by input from municipal leaders, directors of organizations that serve each town, among them Councils on Aging, libraries, schools, veteran's agents, and faith-based institutions and, most importantly, town residents who shared their stories and information in surveys and focus groups that ensure the plan is grounded in people's lived experiences. Reaching residents was a multi-pronged process involving extended conversations with town leaders, building residents' awareness of the plan through flyers, newspaper articles, and surveying at targeted sites (food pantries, libraries); engaging residents at town events; and facilitating focus groups to learn how people use the internet and computers to fulfill their personal and professional goals.

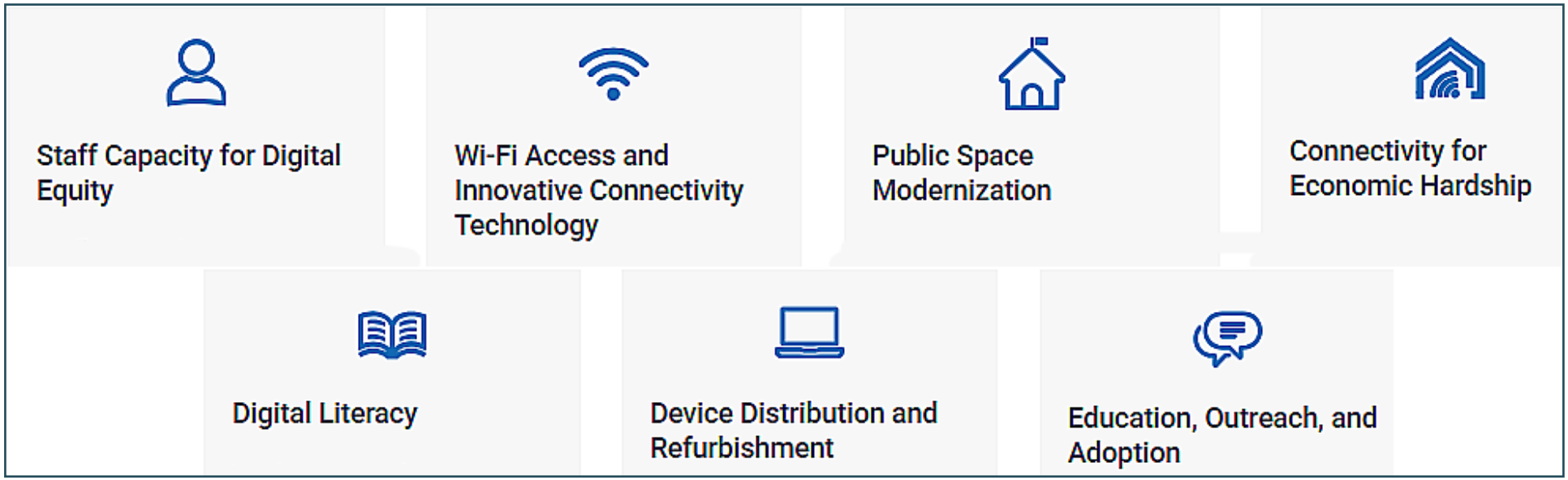
The key people who are the focus of the plan are those who fall within the Federal government's definition of a Covered Population. They include:

Rural residents | Older adults | Veterans | Low-income residents | People with disabilities | Incarcerated individuals
People who belong to historically marginalized racial or ethnic groups (BIPOC) | English language learners

Together, this includes all town residents.

Finally, the plan was funded by the Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI) at the MassTech Collaborative under the Municipal Digital Equity Planning Program supported by Massachusetts ARPA State Fiscal Recovery Funds. Following the completion of the plan, each town will have available to it implementation funds from MBI to enact key recommendations in the plan. The page that follows summarizes the Top 10 recommendations that emerged through the planning process with more detailed recommendations provided throughout the document. The categories available for funding through MBI are highlighted in the chart below.

MBI Digital Equity Implementation Funding Categories



Source: Massachusetts Broadband Institute, Digital Equity Implementation Program

TOP 10 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Encourage each town to create a digital resource page on its website** modeled after the BRPC Digital Resource Guide to help residents quickly and easily find computer and internet information. Update the page as classes and resources become available.

2. **Have town leaders partner with Berkshire Funding Focus** to jointly identify national, state, or charitable grants that can support the sustainability of implementation activities after MBI funding ends.

3. **Have towns and/or town partners together engage the services of a part-time digital navigator** to help people with tech questions and facilitate in-person and hybrid digital skills classes to build residents' and organization staff's confidence using the internet, computers, and cellphones. **In parallel, promote opportunities for residents to pursue self-directed digital skill classes** at-home using programs such as **AARP's Senior Planet/Older Adults Technology (OATS) Program, Northstar, and Tech Foundry.**

4. **Pilot in-person classes during peak tourist seasons to take advantage of the presence of second homeowners** who make up a large share of many town's population. **Engage returning teens or college students as teachers** using a model such as **Teens Teach Tech**.

5. **Find creative ways to reach less-engaged audiences** by increasing use of social media, promoting information in community newspapers, adding information to town-wide mailings, and hosting social events at sites not typically associated with digital skills such as restaurants/bars and faith-based organizations.

6. **Help high-need residents secure large-screen devices** by having town, social service, and faith-based organizations make requests on their behalf through the **Alliance for Digital Equity** and/or **Computers4People**.

7. **Identify new locations in each town that might be appropriate for public space Wi-Fi** to provide residents and visitors with a seamless connectivity experience.

8. **Create public-facing materials using language and designs accessible to a wide audience regardless of education or ability**. Consider engaging an ADA consultant to advise on ways to make materials user-friendly and bring in regional agencies able to provide assistive technologies with residents, especially those who are home bound.

9. **Advocate for DLCS content to start earlier in elementary schools serving Becket, Washington, and Windsor** using the Farmington River School District as a model. Increase female student participation in digital literacy and computer science curricula in schools serving Becket, Washington, and Windsor through after-school programs and clubs.

10. **Cover the upfront connection costs for broadband installation to allow more people to subscribe to municipal broadband in Becket, Washington, and Windsor.** Connection expenses are assumed to cost between $350 to $5000 depending on site conditions.

Existing Conditions

The plan begins with a comparison of the four towns in terms of their Covered Populations. Covered Populations are the people who are the foci of the federal government's Digital Equity Act. Knowing the number and percent of Covered Populations in each town helps leaders understand where and how to direct limited resources to have the greatest positive impact in terms of digital access (i.e., internet service), affordability (i.e., service and computer devices), and/or adoption (i.e., internet and computer skills). In the pages that follow, we examine population data using information from sources ranging from the U.S. Decennial Census to the 2019-2023 American Community Survey (ACS) Five-Year Estimate to local sources, such as town census and Councils on Aging annual reports. Because the four towns are small, we have included Margins of Error (MoE) numbers when reporting ACS data to show the degree of variability in the reported estimates.

Covered Population 1: People Who Live in Rural Areas

The Digital Equity Act defines a "rural area" as one that meets the following criteria:

- a city or town with a population less than 50,000 inhabitants;
- a non-urbanized area contiguous and adjacent to a city or town with a population less than 50,000 inhabitants;
- or a city, town, or incorporated area with a population less than 20,000 inhabitants.

All four towns meet the federal government's Rural Area definition. All residents in the fours towns qualify as a Covered Population.

Key Digital Equity Terminology

Digital Equity (devices): The condition in which individuals and communities have the information technology they need for full participation in U.S. society and its economy;

Digital Inclusion (access and affordability): The activities needed to ensure all people in the U.S. have access to and use of affordable information and communication technologies;

Digital Literacy (skills): The skills associated with using technology so people can find, evaluate, organize, create, and communicate information with one another.

National Digital Inclusion Alliance

Other Covered Populations

Becket - Top 3 Categories in Bold

Covered Populations	#	Margin of Error + / -	%
People Over Age 60 *	730	119	**37.8%**
Youth Under 18 *	305	93	15.8%
Non-White Population*	152	0	7.9%
People Age 25+ with < 9th Grade to Some College, No Degree (S1501)	788	308	**40.8%**
People Who Speak English Less Than Very Well / English-Language Learners (B16002)	1	3	0.1%
People in Poverty (S1701)	312	179	**16.2%**
People w/Disabilities (S1801)	253	98	13.1%
Veterans (S2101)	111	44	5.7%
People Formerly Incarcerated **	2	0	0.1%
Total Population	**1,931**		

* Data from 2020 Decennial Census

(Table) from the 2019-2023 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimate

** Data from Department of Corrections-Research

Otis - Top 3 Categories in Bold

Covered Populations	#	Margin of Error + / -	%
People Over Age 60 *	598	111	**36.6%**
Youth Under 18 *	223	91	**13.6%**
Non-White Population*	92	0	5.6%
People Age 25+ with < 9th Grade to Some College, No Degree (S1501)	761	18	**46.6%**
People who Speak English Less Than Very Well / English-Language Learners (B16002)	0	0	0.0%
People in Poverty (S1701)	40	27	2.4%
People w/Disabilities (S1801)	207	55	12.7%
Veterans (S2101)	116	47	7.1%
People Formerly Incarcerated**	0	0	0.0%
Total Population	**1,634**		

* Data from 2020 Decennial Census

(Table) from the 2019-2023 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimate

** Data from Department of Corrections-Research

Washington - Top 3 Categories in Bold

Covered Populations	#	Margin of Error + / -	%
People Over Age 60 *	251	52	**50.8%**
Youth Under 18 *	72	38	**14.6%**
Non-White Population*	31	5	6.3%
People Age 25+ with < 9th Grade to Some College, No Degree (S1501)	261	87	**52.8%**
People Who Speak English Less Than Very Well / English-Language Learners (B16002)	3	4	0.6%
People in Poverty (S1701)	31	21	6.3%
People w/Disabilities (S1801)	59	21	11.9%
Veterans (S2101)	66	32	13.4%
People Formerly Incarcerated**	2	0	0.4%
Total Population	**494**		

* Data from 2020 Decennial Census

(Table) from the 2019-2023 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimate

** Data from Department of Corrections-Research

Windsor - Top 3 Categories in Bold

Covered Populations	#	Margin of Error + / -	%
People Over Age 60 ***	357	0	**43.0%**
Youth Under 18 ***	32	0	3.9%
Non-White Population*	61	10	7.3%
People Age 25+ with < 9th Grade to Some College, No Degree (S1501)	361	109	**43.4%**
People Who Speak English Less Than Very Well / English-Language Learners (B16002)	0	0	0.0%
People in Poverty (S1701)	85	32	10.2%
People w/Disabilities (S1801)	135	44	**16.2%**
Veterans (S2101)	22	12	2.6%
People Formerly Incarcerated**	1	0	0.1%
Total Population	**831**		

* Data from 2020 Decennial Census

(Table) from the 2019-2023 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimate

** Data from Department of Corrections-Research

*** Data from Town Census

Summary of Covered Population Findings

Adults age 60 and older and those 25 and older who have not earned a college degree represent the largest sub-population groups in all four towns.

In **Becket**, the population without a college degree represents the largest sub-population, followed by older adults and people in poverty. Across the four towns, the percentage of residents in poverty is greatest in Becket. Although not a Covered Population, Becket also has the highest percentage of young people under 18 (15.9%). According to the **MA Healthy Aging Collaborative**, older adults in Becket score higher than their peers in other places in the Commonwealth on indicators such as hypertension, congestive heart failure, arthritis, glaucoma, and lung cancer. Older residents here also have fewer nursing home stays and home health visits - and take fewer monthly prescriptions. However, these residents score below the state average in terms of annual physical exams and mammogram screenings. As such, Becket's older residents would benefit from learning how to use healthcare technologies that let them connect with providers remotely to improve preventive care. Becket has been designated by the Commonwealth as an **Age-Friendly Community**,

Otis has the second highest percentage of residents who have not completed college (46.6%) and the second highest percentage of youth (13.6%). Older adults in Otis have higher rates of cataracts compared to their peers across the state, according to the MA Healthy Aging Collaborative. They are also less likely to have had physical check-ups, be screened for high cholesterol, or get regular mammograms. Otis is an Age-Friendly Community.

Washington, the smallest of the four towns in terms of overall population, has the highest percentage of adults age 60 and older (50.8%), the highest percentage of adults without a college degree (52.8%), and the highest percentage of veterans (13.4%) compared to the other three towns. It's youth population also represents a large percentage of its population. Older adults in Washington score better than those in other parts of the Commonwealth on health indicators such as obesity, high cholesterol, depression, Alzheimer's disease, hypertension, and congestive heart failure, but are less likely to have had a physical, mammogram, or cholesterol screening. Washington is a designated Age-Friendly Community.

Windsor has the highest percentage of residents with disabilities among the four towns (16.2%) and the smallest percentage of youth (3.9%). Compared to the state average, older residents in Windsor have lower rates of conditions such as depression, Alzheimer's disease, diabetes, stroke, ischemic heart disease, congestive heart failure, arthritis, lung cancer, glaucoma, cataract, and ulcers. However, older adults in Windsor are less likely to have had an annual physical, mammogram, or cholesterol screening. Windsor is a designated Age-Friendly Community.

Covered Population 2: Older Adults

As noted above, older adults represent the largest share of the population in all four towns and, from a digital equity perspective, according to research, are at high risk for internet fraud and social isolation. Older adults should therefore be prioritized for digital services and support. Yet the chart below from **Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 COA Annual Reports to the Mass. Executive Office of Elder Affairs (EEOA)** suggests older adults (with Windsor as an exception) are using COAs at a lower rate than is reflective of their population. Given that among the most popular services provided by COAs are home-delivered meals, general information, recreation and socialization, fitness/exercise, and outreach, it seems likely that sharing digital information during those activities would be worthwhile. Offering computer classes at COAs might also be a way to boost in-person participation. Reaching older adults through social media (e.g., Facebook) should be actively explored, as should piloting hybrid programming, which has proven successful elsewhere in Berkshire County. In Dalton, for example, the COA director expanded her engagement of older residents by offering live-virtual activities like bingo and yoga. A second priority for implementation could be improving the computer and internet skills of COA staff so they can better serve clients.

	Becket	Otis	Washington	Windsor
COA Clients Unduplicated*	13	36	47	206
COA Facebook Followers	No COA FB page	91	No COA FB page	No COA FB page
Availability of Computers for Clients	0	0	0	0
Availability of Wi-Fi Inside and Outside Building for Clients	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
# of Computer-Related Classes or Workshops Offered	0	0	0	0

Source: *Councils on Aging FY22 Statistical Reports*

* Unduplicated refers to the number of unique individuals who use the COA. Those who return multiple times are counted under Duplicated.

Based on conversations with COA staff and clients, the following recommendations could be explored within the funding categories allowed by **MBI's Digital Equity Implementation Program**.

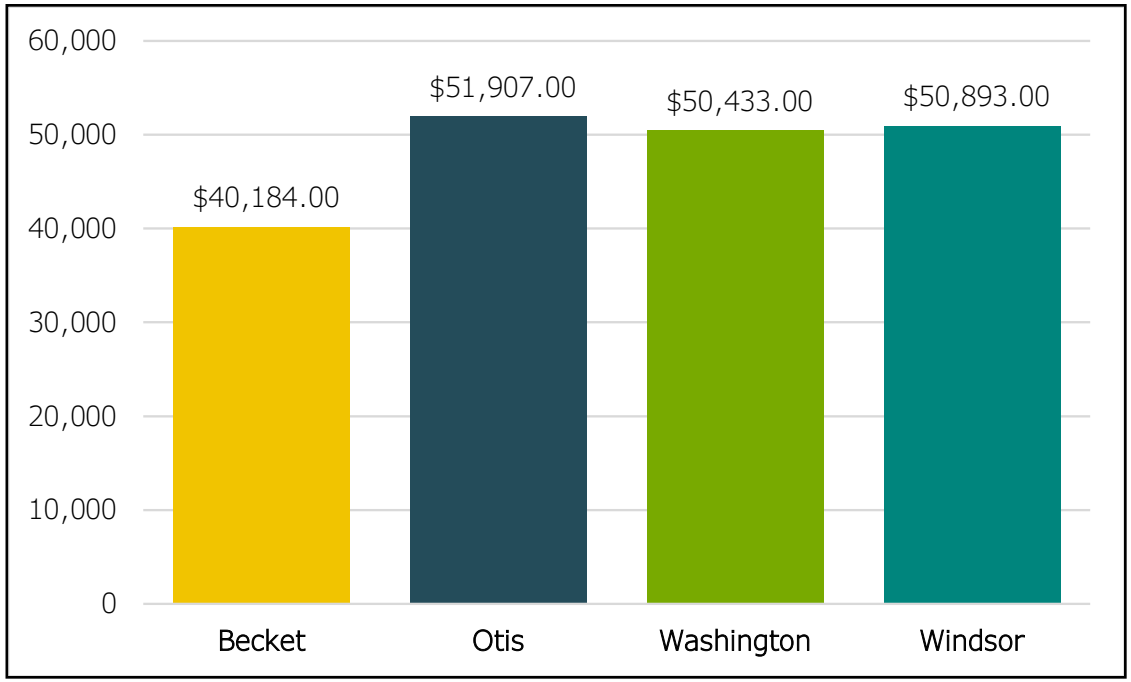
	Staff Capacity	Device Distribution	Digital Literacy	Public Space Modernization
Older Adult Recommendations: All COAs	Incorporate questions about digital equity (e.g., internet service, devices, skills) into COA intake forms to identify older adults in need of assistance. Incentivize the involvement of volunteers, especially youth and retired adults with IT experience, to address digital needs that staff cannot. Hire a digital navigator who can circulate among the four COAs to assist clients with digital needs. Rethink the branding of COAs to ensure more older adults take advantage of their services. This could mean increasing promotion on social media and redesigning newsletters to be more current in look and feel.	Secure **Claris tablets** or similar devices (e.g., Google Chromebooks) aimed at older adults who cannot afford their own. Have COAs sign-up with **Computers4People** and the **Alliance for Digital Equity** to secure new or refurbished devices to those in need.	Offer AARP's **Older Adults Technology Service** (OATS) curricula during monthly social activities and share OATS online learning opportunities more broadly with older adult residents. Encourage and promote having COA clients take digital assessments using the online self-directed platform called **NorthStar**. Based on results, schedule group classes focused on identified gaps. Bring in **Cyber-Seniors** to provide in-person support for older adults less inclined toward self-directed learning.	Offer a computer workstation or start a device-lending library at each COA. Obtain hotspots that can be borrowed by older adults who cannot afford broadband internet at home.

	Staff Capacity	Device Distribution	Digital Literacy	Public Space Modernization
All Towns		Include information about low-cost devices and self-directed digital literacy classes such as Senior Planet/OATS and Northstar in tax bills or other town mailings aimed at older adults.		
Becket	Work with editors of ***The Becket Beat*** to redesign the publication so it conforms to Web Accessibility standards and can be read by everyone, regardless of age or ability.		Share digital resource information, especially about staying safe online, in *The Becket Beat, Country Journal*, and on the town's website. Host informational digital skill conversations at senior gatherings.	Explore funding for hybrid technology to allow homebound older adults to connect with in-person activities such as Lunch & Bingo or Chair Yoga.
Otis	Share digital resource information in the ***Otis Observer***.	Purchase computer devices (iPad, laptop, Claris) that seniors who do not want to purchase their own can try at the COA to familiarize themselves with what they do and encourage later purchase or loans.	Piggyback on popular COA events (e.g., trips, steak dinner) to hand-out to clients digital resource information, especially about staying safe online.	
Washington			Incorporate information or invite speakers to talk about topics such as staying safe online at Monthly Potluck Dinners. Increase digital resource sharing by the Outreach Coordinator.	
Windsor	Support the Outreach Coordinator to do focused engagement with clients and recruit older adults for digital classes.		Invite digital equity speakers to the COA's monthly coffee hour. Share information in the ***Friends of Windsor*** newsletter and on **Windsor-related Facebook pages**.	

Covered Population 3: Individuals and Households Experiencing Poverty

The highest number and percentage of individuals in poverty across the four towns are located in Becket (312 people +/- 179; 16.2% of pop.) While Washington has the fewest (31 people +/- 21); as a percentage of the population, people in poverty are lowest in Otis (2.4%). Individuals in poverty may have difficulty affording home internet or the latest computer devices. Otis offers a single-tier plan that is less expensive than the other towns for equivalent speed (up to 1000 Mbps/1 Gigabit Upload and Download) at **$69.95**. Becket has a **$68 economy service**, as do **Washington** and **Windsor** ($59), but the speed is slower. The end of the **Affordable Connectivity Program** (ACP), which reduced low-income residents' internet bills by $30 a month, may one day affect internet affordability in some households, although thus far there is no data suggesting that is the case. Otis has continued to subsidize households formerly enrolled in ACP with a new program, the **Otis Connectivity Program (OCP),** and is working with Hilltown CDC to certify individuals' income. Other towns have expressed interest in instead covering the high connection costs experienced by some income-challenged households.

Median Household Income by Town

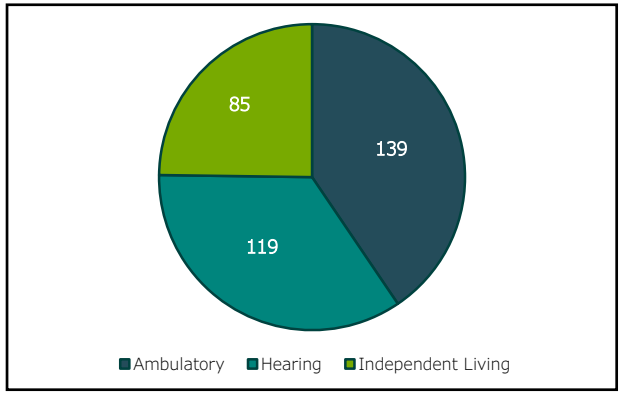


Source: U.S. Census Bureau. "Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S1701, 2022, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2022.S1701?q=S1701: Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months&g=040XX00US25_050XX00US25003,25003$1400000. Accessed on January 23, 2024.

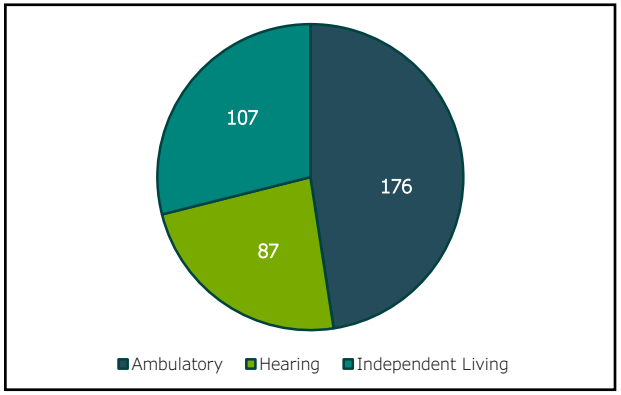
Covered Population 4: People with Disabilities

Among residents with disabilities, the major challenges faced, according to the Five-Year 2019-2023 American Community Survey, involve mobility (ambulatory); hearing; and independent living. These conditions can require accommodations and affect people's ability to fully participate in community life. Given that many individuals with disabilities are older adults, they would likely benefit from one-on-one support involving assistive technologies that reduce socioemotional and intellectual isolation and promote civic engagement (e.g., virtual Select Board meetings, etc.). If individuals with disabilities cannot access local digital supports, it may require reaching out to county or regional organizations such as **UCP of Western Mass.**, **Elder Services of Berkshire County** or the **Retired Senior Volunteer Program.** Additionally, town leaders and organizations may wish to explore creating an inter-community **Teens Teach Tech** program, in coordination with local high schools, to facilitate multi-generational engagement.

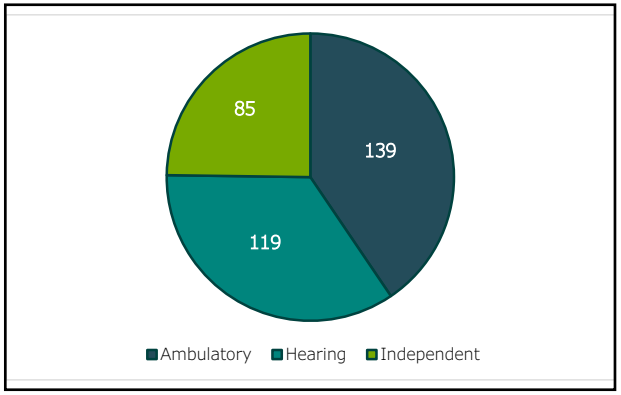
Becket



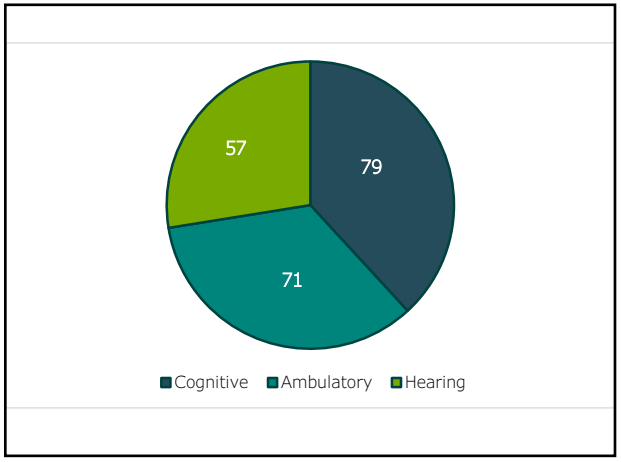
Otis



Washington



Windsor



	Staff Capacity	Device Distribution	Digital Literacy
People with Disabilities Recommendations	Connect town leaders likely to work with PWD with representatives from county-wide PWD-serving organizations to advise on ways to make current resources more PWD-friendly.	Invite representatives from PWD-serving organizations that lend assistive technologies (e.g., UCP) to present in-person or over Zoom at COAs and libraries to educate people about their services and resources.	Ensure all libraries provide patrons with access to disability-friendly materials such as **Choice Magazine Listening**.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. "Disability Characteristics." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S1810, 2023, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2022.S1810?g=040XX00US25_050XX00US25003,25003$1400000. Accessed on January 23, 2024.

Covered Population 5: Veterans

Veterans are a Covered Population communities often find challenging to reach with digital equity information. The following organizations serve veterans in the four towns:

- **Becket**: **Lee Veteran's Agent**
- **Otis**: **Egremont (Southern Berkshire) Veteran's Agent**
- **Washington and Windsor**: **City of Pittsfield Veteran's Agent**

The closest Veteran's of Foreign Wars (VFW) posts are in Canaan, NY (Becket and Otis); Lee (Becket); Dalton (Windsor and Washington); and Pittsfield (Washington). The lack of veterans agents or VFW posts in the towns themselves captures the difficulty engaging this audience. Veterans' agents, however, can and do provide referrals to essential services for vets, and their websites could be designed to better highlight computer and internet support available to clients through the federal Veteran's Administration (VA) such as **telehealth support** and **career reskilling**.

	Staff Capacity	Device Distribution	Digital Literacy	Public Space Modernization
Veterans Recommendations	Arrange to have digital navigators come to Veteran's Agents' offices once a month for 1:1 drop-ins with a focus on connecting vets to VA online services.	Encourage Veteran's Agents to register with **Computers4People** so veterans can request devices if they cannot access them through the VA. Survey veterans to find those who lack affordable internet or cellphones and connect them with opportunities to borrow hotspots at libraries or enroll in **Lifeline** for discounted cell service.	Include digital literacy information in notices regarding veteran's tax exemptions. Help working-age veterans connect with free and low-cost upskilling training at **Berkshire Community College** and **Tech Foundry**. Identify non-traditional locations in towns where veterans are likely to congregate and schedule digital skills session there, for example at Veteran's Nights at The Knox Trail Inn restaurant in Otis.	Advocate to have outdoor areas where veteran's agents offices are located wired with open Wi-Fi networks, if needed, and if determined that veterans lack broadband service at home.

Covered Populations 6 + 7: English Language Learners and Low Literacy Individuals

There are very few households in the four towns where people speak limited English or do not speak English at all. The American Community Survey, however, may lack information about recently arrived immigrants and thus may under-represent the extent of need for bilingual, especially Spanish-speaking, digital literacy support. Because the numbers for speakers of other languages and those who speak English less than very well has such large margins of error (MoE), that information is not reliable enough to be reported.

Town	Spanish Speakers (MoE)	Spanish Speakers (Speaks Eng. < Very Well)
Becket	21 (+/-23)	0 (+/- 14)
Otis	5 (+/- 5)	0 (+/- 14)
Washington	0 (+/1 14)	0 (+/- 14)
Windsor	2 (+/- 4)	0 (+/- 14)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. "Detailed Household Language by Household Limited English Speaking Status." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, Table B16002, 2023, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT5Y2023.B16002?q=B16002:+Detailed+Household+Language+by+Household+Limited+English+Speaking+Status&g=060XX00US2500304545,2500351580,2500373335,2500380685. Accessed on April 16, 2025.

Attempts to more accurately calculate the number of non-English speakers in the four towns involved seeking data from immigrant-serving organizations such as **Literacy Volunteers of Berkshire County**, **ViM Berkshires**, and the **English as a Second Language (ESOL) Program** at Berkshire Community College in Great Barrington. There too, data about the number of individuals needing help in languages other than English was limited, as evidenced by the chart below. **Recommendations**: To create a welcoming environment for people of all languages, towns can add a Google Translate option to their websites and provide a link to Berkshire Regional Planning Commission's **Digital Resource Guide,** which highlights resources available in other languages.

Berkshire Community College ESOL Students 2023-2024: Number and Town of Residence

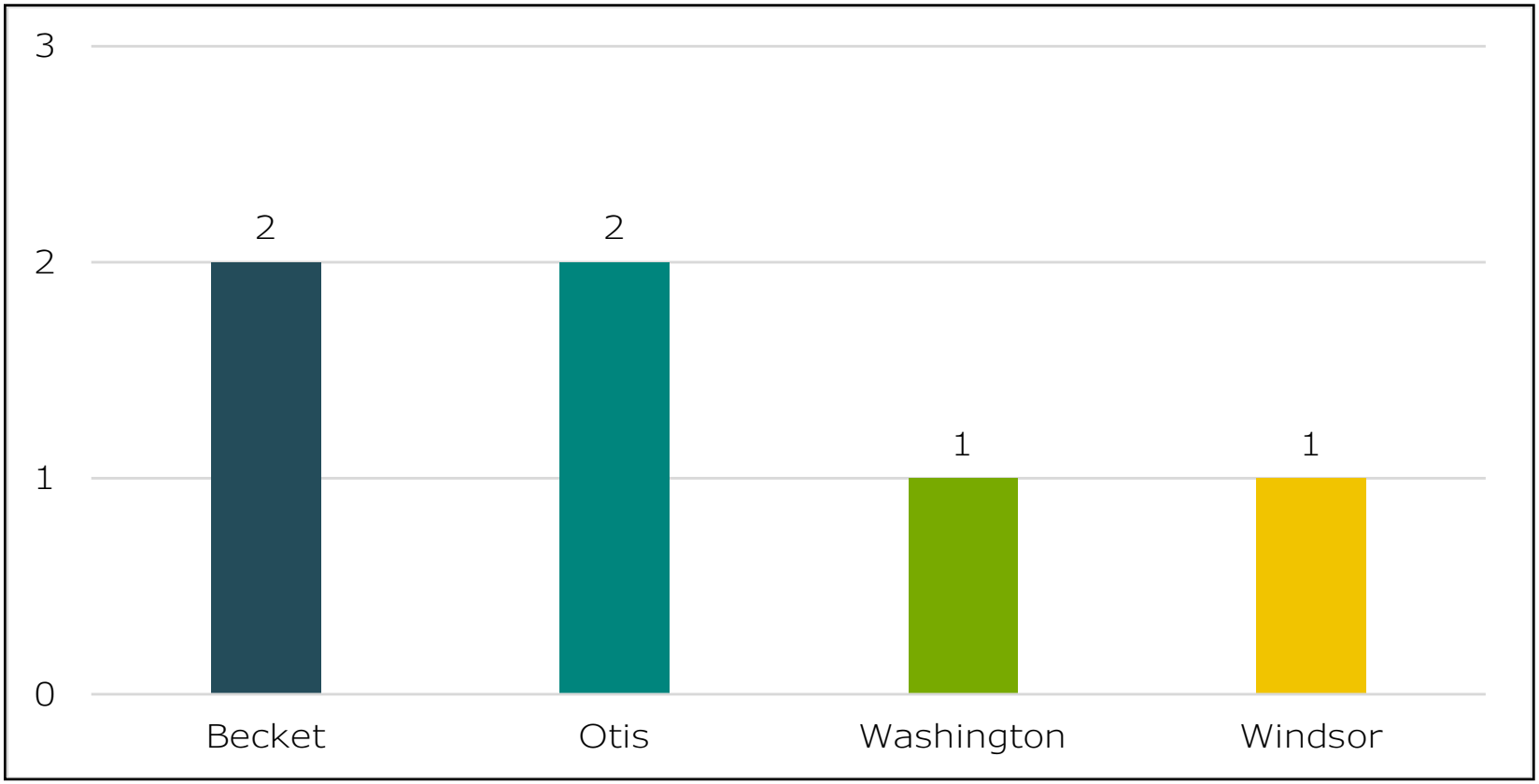
Town and Zip Code	# of ESOL Students* *Enrolled or Waitlisted
01223 (Becket and Washington)	0
01253 (Otis) | 01029 (East Otis) | 01245 (West Otis)	3
01270 (Windsor)	0

Source: Berkshire Community College, ESOL Program

Covered Population 8: Formerly Incarcerated Individuals

The Massachusetts Department of Corrections reported less than five individuals in each town in custody as of March 2025. The nonprofit **2nd Street, Second Chances,** based in Pittsfield, which works with formerly incarcerated individuals, reported one client from Windsor and one from East Otis whom the organization served between 2023 and 2024. While this Covered Population is extremely small, it is one that benefits from digital support during and after incarceration, with studies showing lower rates of re-offending for individuals provided with digital training in custody. **Recommendation**: Connect residents involved with the justice system to **The Berkshire Center for Justice,** which offers legal advocacy and occasionally runs computer classes at **The Guthrie Center** in Housatonic or to 2nd Street Second Chances in Pittsfield, if more convenient, where they can take free digital literacy classes.

Department of Corrections: Custody Pop. by Town: 3/5/2025



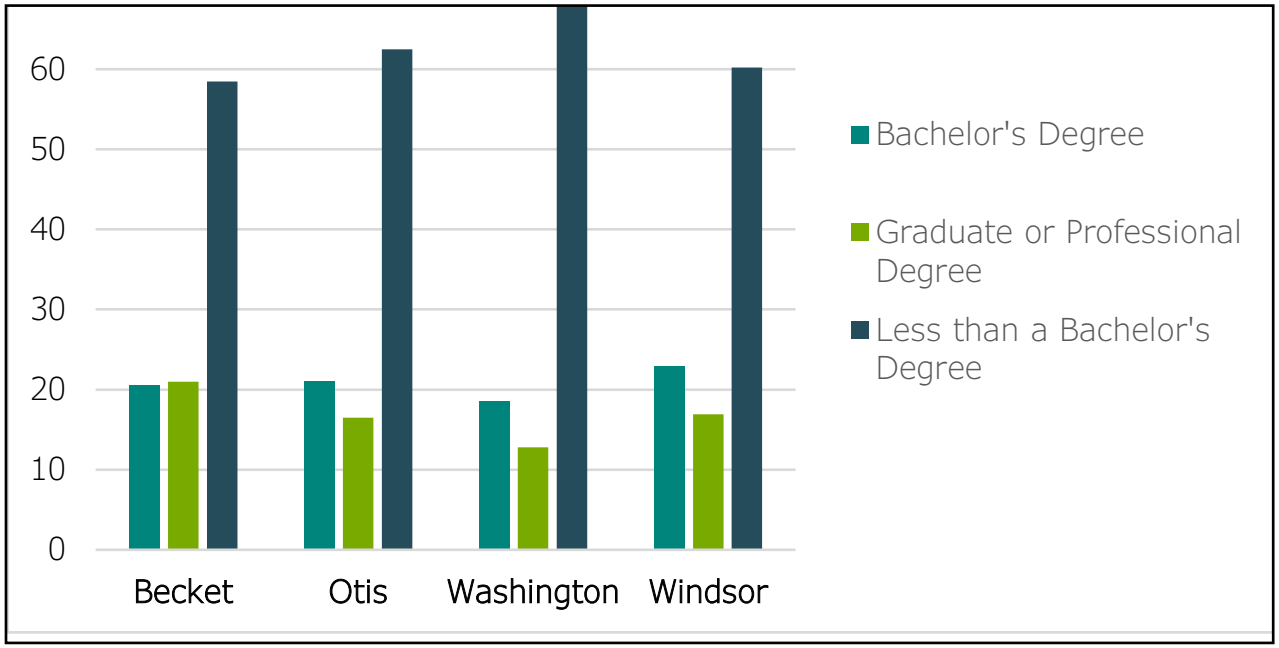
Source: Mass. Department of Corrections

Other Digital Equity Indicators

Educational Attainment

In addition to knowing how many people fall under the Covered Populations categories in each town, other factors can be considered when determining who in a town is most impacted by digital inequity. The highest grade a person has completed in school, for example, can suggest whether a person lacks facility with internet and computers; owns a large-screen device; or can afford internet service. In all four towns, a high percentage of residents age 25 and over have less than a bachelor's degree, suggesting potential digital inequity for this population. The percent of residents with less than a bachelor's degree is highest in Washington, most likely because residents are older and could pursue careers that did not require college degrees. Perhaps not surprisingly, Washington households without a broadband subscription (26, 6.7%) and those who do not own a computer (14, 3.6%) are highest in households with lower levels of education. **Recommendations**: For younger residents lacking a college degree, consider offering digital skill training in a non-academic setting, such as through hands-on internships, online classes, or shorter courses leading to micro-credentials. Models such as **Tech Foundry** in Springfield or **Senior Planet's OATS program**, are two potential options for younger and older residents, respectively. For older residents seeking hands-on support, models such as **Cyber-Seniors** or **Tech Goes Home** are both good options.

Educational Attainment by Town



Source: U.S. Census Bureau. "Selected Social Characteristics in the United States." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles, Table DP02, 2023, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDP5Y2022.DP02?q=DP02: Selected Social Characteristics in the United States&g=040XX00US25_050XX00US25003,25003$1400000. Accessed on January 23, 2024.

Environmental Justice Communities

Among the populations at high risk for digital inequity are those living in **Environmental Justice Communities**, which Massachusetts defines as a block group or census tract meeting one or more of the following criteria:

- Annual median household income 65 percent or less than the statewide annual median
- Minorities make up 40 percent or more of the population
- Twenty-five percent or more of households speak English less than "very well"
- Minorities make up 25 percent or more of the population and annual median household income does not exceed 150 percent of statewide annual median

One block group in the four towns meets EJ criteria: Block Group 2 Census Tract 9322 in Becket, which in 2020 had a population of 1,199 and a median household income of $50,270 — 60 percent of the Commonwealth's median household income (MHI). **Recommendation**: Prioritize households in Block Group 2, CT 9322 in Becket for digital equity implementation activities.

People in Affordable Housing and Second Homeowners

People who live in affordable housing, both public and private, are another group who may struggle with paying for internet service or large-screen devices. Across the four towns, there is one affordable housing property: Becket House, built by the nonprofit **Construct**. Becket House is a 1,344 square foot, three-bedroom, two-bath set on 2.9 acres. The home was sold via lottery to a first-time home buyer earning 80% or less of the area median income. The final sale price was $250,000.

Although there are no other affordable housing properties in the four towns, there are people who may live in sub-standard housing who should also be factored into town's assumptions about digital equity needs. This population is harder to identify, as people in lower-quality rather than "affordable" housing are not captured in a known database. Alternatively, towns can estimate those most likely to struggle with paying for internet service by noting the number of "rent-burdened" households, which is captured by the American Community Survey. A rent-burdened household is defined as one in which the owner pays more than 30 percent of their income toward their rent or mortgage. As seen in the chart below, that population is highest in Becket, potentially affecting 184 households.
A different population, those who live in seasonal and second homes, can affect the quality of internet service in a town in another way, by increasing the number of internet users during peak tourist seasons. These individuals may also be less inclined to contribute financially to municipal broadband due to their limited residency. Otis has the highest number of seasonal or second homeowners, followed closely by Becket.

Recommendations: Outreach to rent-burdened households to make them aware of ways to lower their internet or cellphone bills through programs such as Lifeline. For second homeowners, consider a different form of outreach to explain the benefits of contributing to municipal broadband to keep it solvent. Separately, schedule digital skills classes during peak tourist seasons to ensure strong attendance.

Housing Data by Town

Home Type	Becket		Otis		Washington		Windsor	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total Housing Units	1,067		1,657		288		544	
Owner-Occupied	899	95%	575	86.9%	208	91.2%	412	99.3%
Renter-Occupied	51	5%	87	13.1%	20	8.8%	3	0.70%
Rent-Burdened Homes	184	36%	19	3%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Second Homes Used for Seasonal, Recreational, or Occasional Use	862	46.2%	890	53.7%	33	11%	111	20.4%

Source: https://berkshirebenchmarks.org/

People in Need of Digital Skills for Employment

Knowing labor force participation rates in each town and average weekly wages in different occupations offer other windows into understanding residents' potential digital skill needs. Relatedly, knowing how many residents work from home provides information about how well the four towns are doing promoting themselves as locations with reliable and affordable high-speed internet for an increasingly remote and hybrid workforce. Becket and Otis have the largest number of working adults. Unemployment has risen most in Otis and Washington. **Recommendations**: Consider hosting digital skills/ workforce training in Becket and Otis in partnership with local employers targeted to on-the-job skills. Continue promoting the towns to outside audiences as well-suited for remote work.

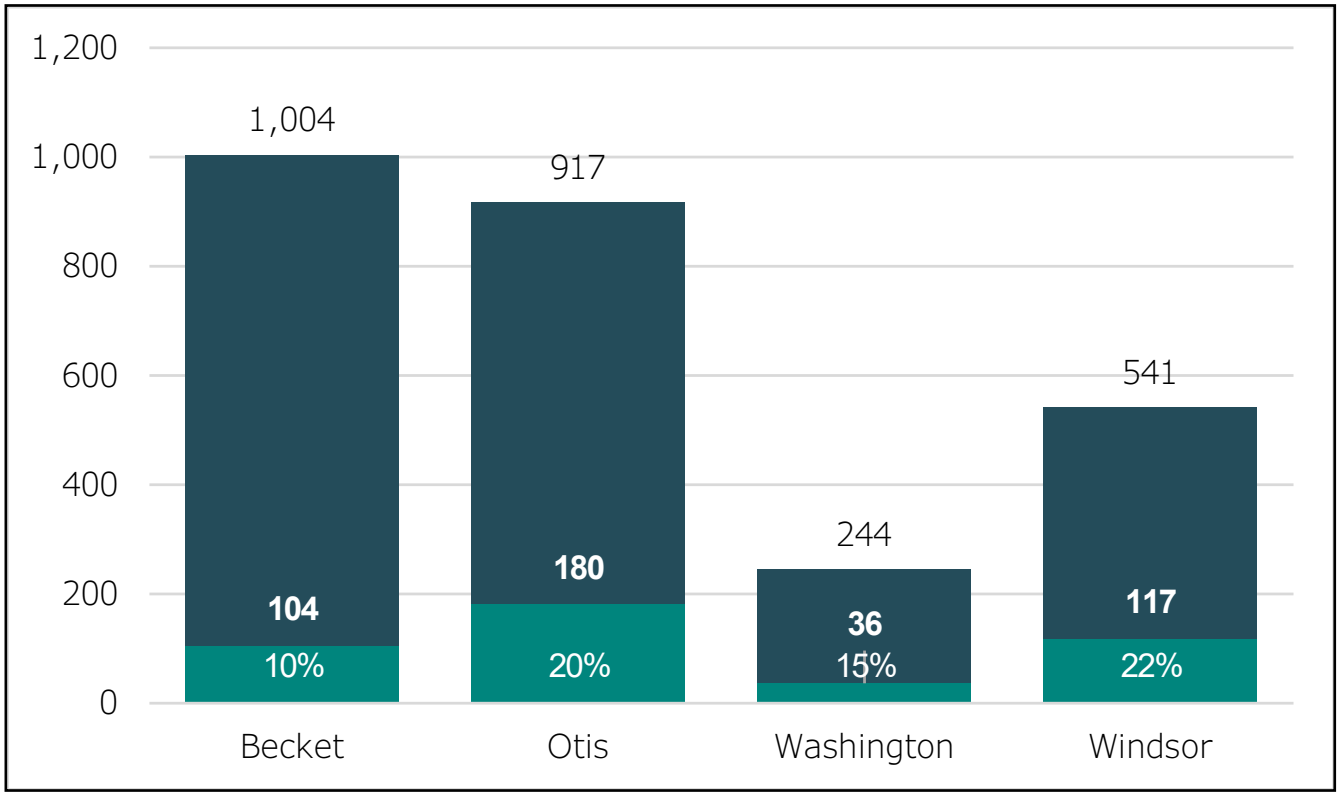
Labor Force Participation: Employment, Unemployment, and Unemployment Rate by Town

Town	Labor Force #			Employment #		
	Dec-24	Nov-24	Dec-23	Dec-24	Nov-24	Dec-23
Becket	903	895	881	873	863	850
Otis	785	767	750	746	737	728
Washington	324	316	308	308	305	300
Windsor	500	492	487	481	476	469

Town	Unemployment #			Unemployment Rate %		
	Dec-24	Nov-24	Dec-23	Dec-24	Nov-24	Dec-23
Becket	30	32	31	3.3%	3.6%	3.5%
Otis	39	30	22	5%	3.9%	2.9%
Washington	16	11	8	4.9%	3.5%	2.6%
Windsor	19	16	18	3.8%	3.3%	3.7%

Source: Unemployment Rates for Regions, Cities/Towns in MA: https://www.mass.gov/info-details/unemployment-rates-in-massachusetts#unemployment-rates-for-regions,-counties,-and-cities/towns-in-ma-

Work from Home by Town 2019-2023



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. "Sex of Workers by Means of Transportation to Work." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, Table B08006, 2023, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT5Y2023.

People Lacking Broadband and Computer Access

Most residents in the four towns have fiber internet and own a computer. The town with the highest percentage of residents lacking a computer or internet is Becket. The main device residents use to connect to the internet is a smartphone rather than a desktop, laptop, or tablet. **Recommendation**: Conduct an annual survey and/or provide information at town halls to identify residents who want but cannot afford a new computer device and connect them with nonprofits able to secure new or refurbished devices for those who income qualify, such as **Computers4People**.

Broadband and Computer Ownership by Household and Town

	Becket	Otis	Washington	Windsor
Households (HH) with a computer **WITH internet**	87.4%	89.2%	91.6%	94.3%
HH with a computer **WITHOUT internet**	**8.8%**	8.3%	5.4%	3.2%
HH **WITHOUT a computer**	**3.7%**	2.4%	3%	2.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. "Types of Internet Subscriptions by Selected Characteristics." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S2802, 2023, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2023.S2802?q=S2802:+Types+of+Internet+Subscriptions+by+Selected+Characteristics&g=060XX00US2500304545,2500351580,2500373335,2500380685. Accessed on March 2, 2025.

Types of Computers and Internet Service by Town

	Becket		Otis		Washington		Windsor	
Type of Computer Device(s)	**Total**	**%**	**Total**	**%**	**Total**	**%**	**Total**	**%**
Has one or more types of computing devices	870	**93.6%**	716	**95.3%**	255	**94.8%**	403	**98.3%**
Desktop or laptop with no other type of computing device	40	4.3%	14	1.9%	9	3.3%	13	3.2%
Smartphone with no other type of computing device	70	**7.5%**	39	**5.2%**	15	**5.6%**	21	**5.1%**
Tablet or other portable wireless computer with no other type of computing device	0	0.0%	9	1.2%	4	1.5%	0	0.0%
No computing device	59	6.4%	35	4.7%	14	5.2%	7	1.7%
Type of Internet Service								
Cellular data plan with no other type of Internet subscription	215	23.1%	135	18.0%	22	8.2%	36	8.8%
Broadband such as cable, fiber optic or DSL	372	**70%***	494	**65.8%**	201	**74.7%**	313	**76.3%**
Satellite internet service	237	25.5%	43	5.7%	21	7.8%	23	5.6%
Without an internet subscription	109	**11.7%**	84	11.2%	26	9.7%	23	5.6%

U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. "Types of Computers and Internet Subscriptions." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S2801, 2023, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2023.S2801?q=S2801:+Types+of+Computers+and+Internet+Subscriptions&g=060XX00US2500304545,2500351580,2500373335,2500380685. Accessed on March 2, 2025.

**The American Community Survey reports 40% under "Type of Internet Service" for "Broadband" in Becket, but the MLP reports that the correct number is 70%. The MLP also notes that only fiber optic is available in Becket. There is no cable or DSL.*

Wired West Cooperative: Fiber Internet Provider

Fiber service in three of the four towns is provided by the Wired West Cooperative, for which Becket, Washington, and Windsor's Municipal Light Plants are charter members. A coop model lets the towns operate the network collectively and by consolidating overhead and expenses, reduces the administrative burden, cost, and risk to all.

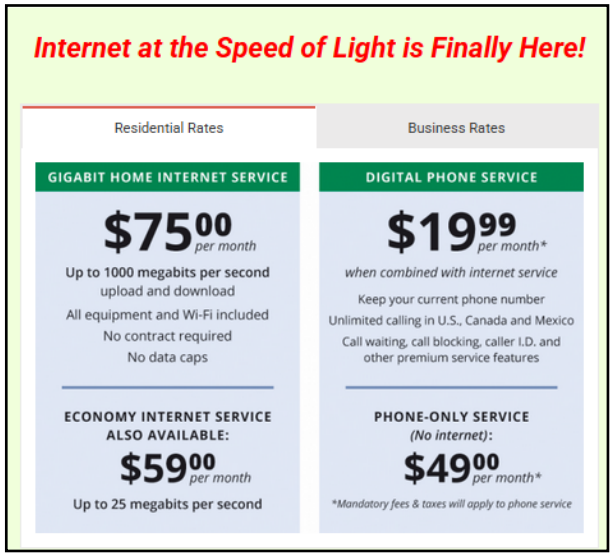
Wired West currently contracts with Whip City Fiber, a municipal entity in Westfield, to serve as the ISP/NO for member towns. Whip City Fiber delivers high-speed fiber optic broadband over its networks and provides customer service and tech support.

Wired West's standard home internet service provides internet speeds of 1000/1000 Mbps, while the economy level provides internet speeds of 25/25 Mbps. The towns of Washington and Windsor's standard service costs $75 a month, while the economy costs $59. The town of Becket offers similar service but adds a $9/month MLP fee. The cost of digital landline phone service, when combined with internet, adds $19 a month, while phone-only service (without an internet subscription) is $49.

With both service options, all equipment is included, no contracts exist, and residents can cancel anytime without penalties. Second homeowners, who may cancel service for part of the year, are not charged to resubscribe if done within 12 months.

Wired West also offers internet packages for small, medium, and large businesses.

WiredWest
Life in the Fiber Lane™



Provider Name	Technology	Max Advertised Download (Mbps)	Max Advertised Upload (Mbps)	# BSLs w/ Service Available	% BSLs w/ Service Available
Westfield Gas City Electric (dba Whip City Fiber)	Fiber	1000	1000	311	89.7%

Source: This data is extracted from the Massachusetts Broadband Map, developed by the Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI). The data is current as of at least February 22, 2024.

Customers who sign up for internet service are billed for the full installation amount on their first invoice. The town of Becket offers a $750 subsidy toward installation, which averages about $1,100 for above ground service to $3,350 for underground with Wired West going to each home to perform a consultation before work begins. Washington offers a $625 subsidy; in Windsor the subsidy is $300. The subsidy is automatically deducted from a customer's first bill. Across the three towns, a $99 Wired West Activation Fee is charged to new subscribers and previous customers disconnected for more than 12 months.

Becket completed construction of its fiber build out network in the summer of 2023. The town achieved an over 70 percent subscription rate shortly thereafter. The network was designed to allow 98 percent of homes to be connected. The town has a Broadband Ad Hoc Committee to oversee construction and help residents with service. Becket continues to add new subscribers when homes are built or sold. Many seasonal residents keep their service all year to monitor their home. During Covid-19, the town saw an increase in full-time residents, many of whom could work remotely from home.

During May 2020, Washington residents, businesses, municipal buildings, and town park were connected to high fiber broadband internet. The Washington MLP reports that, post-COVID, the town saw several seasonal homeowners become full-time residents due to the upgraded internet service. Town officials also took notice that having high-speed internet increased the resale value of homes. In July 2024, the Washington MLP reported 203 active Wired West subscribers and 68 locations that did not subscribe but where fiber was available. Nearly 170 households subscribed to the standard home service and 32 to economy. Washington has on average seven seasonal subscribers who use the standard service package.

Before fiber-optic broadband was introduced in Windsor, service options included hotpots or DSL. Spectrum, one of the few broadband service providers in Berkshire County, did not service the town. Since the installation of fiber broadband, the town has seen a shift in its real estate market, as several younger families have moved to the town. A Windsor resident who is a local real estate agent reported that homes that were once on the market for years are now selling within a month of being listed. According to reports from The Massachusetts Department of Health, the number of Windsor preschool children rose from nine in 2016 to 38 in 2022. In the same period, the number of births in town increased from zero to seven.

Wired-West's internet packages for small, medium, and large businesses include 1 Gigabit symmetrical upload and download speeds. The only difference is the price and number of users allowed on each network. The small business package allows five users for $100/month, medium 25 users for $150/month, and large up to 50 users for $250/month.

Former Affordable Connectivity Program Participants

The federal government launched the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) on December 31, 2021 under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. The program provided discount internet service to low-income Americans; over 100 households in the four towns were enrolled until it ended on June 1, 2024, when Congress failed to reauthorize funding. Residents formerly enrolled in ACP may now be struggling to pay their monthly internet bills and downgrade service from standard to economy packages, disrupting their ability to participate in daily activities that require faster connectivity. For residents who face rent and utility burdens, the impact of ACP ending will be harder, although in the towns thus far, residents appear to be maintaining their existing service.

In Otis, which works with Whip City Fiber, the town reactivated a subsidy in January 2025 by starting the Otis Connectivity Program (OCP) using Connect America Funds (CAF) II to cover the expense. The town was able to work with Hilltown CDC to vet applicants, a strategy the other three towns may wish to consider in future years should enrollment decline. For now, the other three towns are most interested in subsidizing instead the high cost of making an initial curb-to-house connection.

The information in the chart below comes from the **Benton Institute for Broadband & Society** and includes a rating of "how well the area is performing," in terms of the difference between predicted and actual ACP enrollment and a Risk Score that captures on a scale of 0 to 100, with 100 being highest, the likelihood of residents disconnecting service in light of ACP ending. Even in zip codes receiving "Well Performing" scores, there are still notable discrepancies between predicted and actual enrollment, suggesting communities may need to work harder to re-enroll households, if ACP is reinstated. The risk of downgrading service appears to be greatest in Otis (East Otis, specifically). Direct reports from MLP managers however shows disenrollment, thus far, being extremely low or non-existent.

Recommendations: Assuming the three towns (Becket, Washington, and Windsor) can use MBI Digital Equity Implementation funds to subsidize a higher share of the connection cost for households in need — or those with higher than average connection costs — they may wish, in future years, to create an internet assistance program for low-income customers modeled after the Westfield Warm Fund, which helps reduce gas and electricity bill burdens for households due to factors such as job loss, illness, death in family, or economic hardship. As with the recently launched Otis Affordability Program, Hilltown CDC could be enlisted to review applications to verify income. An intake form could include: Name, Address, Account, and "Comment of Situation." Applicants would need to annually renew or reapply to reconfirm eligibility.

Benton Institute for Broadband: Affordable Connectivity Program Data by Zip Code

Town | Zip Code	ACP Risk Score	Eligible Households	Predicted Enrollment	Actual Enrollment	% Rent-Burdened Households	Benton Institute Performance Score
Becket + Washington | 01223	62	418	105	96	1%	Medium
Otis - All Zip Codes | 01253-01029-01245	198	217	63	29	6%	Medium
Windsor | 01270	No Data from Benton Institute: https://www.benton.org/acp_tool?zip=01270					

Source: https://www.benton.org/acp_tool

Current Internet Subscription Information from Town Municipal Light Plants (MLPs)

Subscriber Data	Becket	Otis	Washington	Windsor
Active Subscribers	1,352	1,342	203	382
# Households Connected to Fiber Not Subscribing to Service	137*	0	68	128
# Standard Home Service Subscribers (1000/1000 Mbps)	1092	1,342	168	322
# Economy Service Subscribers (25/25 Mbps)	232	0	32	58
Installation Subsidy	$750	Free overhead and in-conduit	$625	$300
# of Households that Canceled or Downgraded Service After ACP Ended	1	0	0	0

* The town of Becket's MLP Manager notes that those not subscribing to service are most likely seasonal homeowners.

People in Locations Lacking Full Broadband Service

There may be a small number of locations in each town that are Unserved or Underserved by broadband (see definitions below) due to geographic encumbrances (e.g., long driveway, mountainous terrain, limited utility connections) and/or excessive costs associated with connecting difficult locations. In a few cases, service is available, but the owner is uninterested and has chosen to go without. The charts below show the number of locations in each town identified by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to be Unserved or Underserved by 100/20 Mbps broadband due to real-world constraints. These locations were reviewed during the recently completed Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Challenge and reflect those deemed eligible to receive federal funding for broadband connection monies. As of April 2025, however, town leaders dispute these findings and believe there are far fewer Unserved or Underserved locations than emerged during BEAD. Confirming an accurate count of these broadband serviceable locations (BSLs) remains difficult.

Post-BEAD Challenge Status

Town	Post-BEAD Service Status
Becket	
Underserved	8
Unserved	66
Otis	
Underserved	20
Unserved	37
Washington	
Underserved	2
Unserved	14
Windsor	
Underserved	1
Unserved	14
Total	**162**

Town	Post-BEAD Eligibility Status
Becket	
Eligible	37
Provisionally Ineligible	37
Otis	
Eligible	38
Provisionally Ineligible	19
Washington	
Eligible	9
Provisionally Ineligible	7
Windsor	
Eligible	10
Provisionally Ineligible	5
Total	**162**

Source: Federal Communications Commission | Massachusetts Broadband Institute

- **Unserved** – Defined as service that is not Low-Latency or is less than 25/3 Mbps, including all Geostationary Satellite, Non-Geostationary Satellite, Unlicensed Terrestrial Fixed Wireless, and Other forms of service.
- **Underserved** – Defined as Low-latency Fiber, Cable, Copper, or Terrestrial Licensed Fixed Wireless service offering speeds less than 100/20 Mbps, but greater than or equal to 25/3 Mbps.
- **Served** – Defined as Low-latency Fiber, Cable, Copper, or Licensed Terrestrial Fixed Wireless offering speeds greater than or equal to 100/20 Mbps.

Source: https://www.esri.com/arcgis-blog/products/arcgis-living-atlas/announcements/fcc-broadband-data-collection-june-2023-update-in-arcgis-living-atlas/

People Not Receiving Adequate Broadband Speed or Poor Quality Service

Even for those who have broadband, it is possible that the speeds they receive do not match what they pay for. Between December 2021 and November 2022, MBI conducted **Ookla** speed tests across the state to determine the reliability of internet service across the Commonwealth. Although the information was not gathered through random sampling, it still provides useful comparative data about whether residents receive service that meets the FCC's definition of high-speed broadband (i.e., 100/20 Mbps). The results suggest that, in some cases, they may not. While many factors can contribute to slower speeds, higher latency, or jitter — from distance between a router and computer to the age of a user's device — the evidence suggests service in Becket may be slightly less likely to meet the 100/20 Mbps benchmark. **Recommendation**: Consider using Ookla to re-test Becket speeds to verify customers are getting the service they are paying for and, if not, look for other explanations such as distance from the router or older devices to explain discrepancies.

Speed, Latency, and Jitter Data by Town

	Becket	Otis	Washington	Windsor
Total Tests	2,279	1,593	1,131	369
Unique ID Tests	266	297	132	71
Jitter > 50 ms	190	132	43	34
Latency > 100 ms	53	3	3	2
Latency > 500 ms	50	3	1	1
Speeds < 25/3 Mbps	120	23	9	2
Speeds < 50/10 Mbps	202	68	24	6
Speeds < 100/20 Mbps	293	146	41	15
Speeds at least 25/3 Mbps	1,925	1,455	977	340
Speeds at least 50/10 Mbps	1,702	1,261	932	317
Speeds at least 100/20 Mbps	1,248	910	806	230
Speeds at least 100/100 Mbps	1,175	758	742	186
Percent of Tests at least 100/20	54%	57%	71%	62%

Source: Massachusetts Broadband Institute

Community Assets

In addition to understanding factors that contribute to digital inequity, MBI also required communities to identify local, regional, and state programs, organizations, plans, and individuals working to enhance digital equity and inclusion. **MBI's Statewide Digital Equity Plan (SDEP)** found 100 assets serving Berkshire County, a small handful of which are specific to the four towns. BRPC later identified others, such as senior centers, housing authorities, veterans organizations, and nonprofits, that further expand each town's digital equity ecosystem. Assets highlight communities' digital equity strengths while pointing out gaps that may hinder Covered Populations' ability to obtain services. Because libraries and senior centers are key assets, ensuring they have the staff and resources to fulfill on their missions is central to digital equity. Details about representative assets are in the Appendix. **The complete Massachusetts Digital Equity Asset Inventory can be found at this link**. **Recommendation:** Ensure residents are made aware of the assets in their towns and the resources available in each.

Organization	Services	Town	Covered Populations	Digital Equity and Broadband Foci
Becket Athenaeum	Public library general services.	Becket, Washington	Low-Income Households (<150% federal poverty level), Individuals with Disabilities, Members of Racial/Ethnic Minority Groups, Residents of Rural Areas, Women, Youth, LGBTQIA+ Individuals, Aging Individuals (60 and older), Individuals with a Language Barrier (English learners or low-literacy), Veterans, Members of Religious Minority Groups, Immigrants/Refugees	Affordability & Availability
Berkshire Regional Planning Commission	A pre-qualified consultant providing services to municipalities participating in MBI's Municipal Digital Equity Planning Program. BRPC is the Berkshire liaison for MBI's Digital Equity Partnerships Program, which will implement digital equity projects that meet the goals outlined in the Commonwealth's ARPA COVID recovery legislation that created a $50 million fund to bridge the digital divide.	All Towns	Residents of Rural Areas, Aging Individuals (60 and older)	Accessibility of Public Resources & Services, Affordability & Availability, Digital Literacy

CanCode Communities	Delivers computer coding education and training to support the region's aspirations. Works closely with educational partner Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts and community partners Berkshire Innovation Center and 1Berkshire, BerkshiresCanCode offers programs designed to build beginner digital skills and upskill residents for tech career opportunities while assisting employers develop a pool of skilled workers for the digital economy of the region. CanCode is also providing digital skills training to the Alliance for Digital Equity in Western MA's partners and networks, including the library network.	Becket	Low-Income Households (<150% federal poverty level), Aging Individuals (60 and older), Veterans, Individuals with a Language Barrier (English learners or low-literacy), Residents of Rural Areas, Members of Racial/Ethnic Minority Groups, Women, Youth, Immigrants/Refugees, Individuals with Disabilities, General - All Covered Populations	Digital Literacy, Devices & Device Support, Privacy & Cybersecurity, Affordability & Availability
Hillcrest Educational Foundations	Behavioral school services.	Becket	Low-Income Households (<150% federal poverty level), Youth, Individuals with Disabilities	Digital Literacy,Affordability & Availability
MOLARI Employment and Healthcare Services	An employment agency serving everyone; an EEOE that does not target any specific group; and a homecare agency serving the elderly population throughout the county. Applications need to be completed online, annual trainings need to be done online, and safety assessments, timekeeping etc. are all done online, requiring that people have an internet connection as well as a suitable device. MOLARI provides this for those who do not have access.	Becket, Windsor	Aging Individuals (60 and older)	Devices & Device Support, Accessibility of Public Resources & Services, Digital Literacy

Source: MBI State Digital Equity Plan Asset Map Inventory

Community Anchor Institutions

Like Community Assets, Community Anchor Institutions (CAIs) support broadband access and availability in towns by providing 1 Gigabit upload and download symmetrical service to the communities they serve, either internally (e.g., organization staff) or to the general public. As part of the Federal Communication Commission's (FCC) recent **Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment (BEAD) Challenge**, each town reviewed FCC information about the CAIs in their towns to determine if information was correct and whether more CAIs could be added to the FCC's national map. A number of communities found errors, including missing and incorrect CAI addresses; misrepresentation of locations as lacking broadband that have it; and broadband speeds that failed to meet the 1 Gbps symmetrical criteria. The chart below shows the CAIs in each town. One of the challenges facing CAIs is the cost of service. For example, with funding from the federal Broadband Technology Opportunities Program and investment from the state, MBI installed a fiber network across central and western Massachusetts (See Middle Mile and Last Mile Programs) to connect Otis' CAIs and expand public access to high-speed internet from locations considered critical to community activities and public safety, education, health, and commerce. A recent search by Local Linx, the company that built the fiber network backbone, however, found that, in all four towns, only a handful of CAIs were taking service from MB123 due to the high cost, requiring them to migrate to more affordable enterprise-grade ISPs instead.

CAIs by Town

Becket	Otis	Washington	Windsor
Becket Town Hall Becket Board of Health Becket Council on Aging Becket Fire Station #2	Otis Board of Health Otis Council on Aging Otis Center Fire Department Otis Library and Museum Farmington River Elementary	Washington Town Hall	Windsor Board of Health Windsor Town Hall Windsor Fire/Ambulance Dept

Source: Local Linx

Libraries

Libraries are key community assets when it comes to digital equity but are often under-staffed and under-funded. Few have devices to lend to patrons, even though the need exists, as was recently learned when BRPC staff volunteered at the Becket Food Pantry and found in less than three hours 10 people who needed computers who eventually received them through donations from **Computers4People**. The narratives below, and the chart that follows, summarize the state of digital equity at the three libraries serving the four towns and suggest opportunities where they would benefit from more support.

The **Becket-Washington Athenaeum** is an active and well-programmed library that serves Becket and Washington and is visited annually by more than 10,000 people. An open Wi-Fi network is available 24/7 from the building and parking lot and was especially important during the pandemic shutdown and prior to widely-available high-speed internet. The library encourages patrons to use their tablets, smartphones, or computers to enjoy digital content (e.g., e-books, e-audiobooks, and e-magazines) through the CW MARS network on Libby as well as seven additional collections from networks across Massachusetts. In partnership with other libraries in the state and New Hampshire, the library has presented virtual programs on topics such as history, nature, and career exploration. The library publishes an online monthly newsletter in which it shares information about its diverse events and resources. Staff make a special effort to engage children, families, and teens with in-person activities that range from a baby and toddler play group to a new craft program for teens. A monthly in-person book club accommodates virtual participation by providing access to e-books and the opportunity to join the conversation remotely. Patrons can also access online resources such as Ompractice, a health and wellness platform, as well as more than 50 online learning and research tools such as archives of *The Boston Globe* and *Springfield Republican*, Transparent Language, Heritage Quest, and Peterson's Test Prep. The library maintains active Facebook and Instagram pages (500+ followers on both) and a less used YouTube page featuring videos of past author talks and related content.

The **Otis Public Library** serves 1,634 patrons annually. It has five public-use internet computers with an average of 13 users per week. The library offers free Wi-Fi on-site and through its website access to a single database, Ancestry DNA. There is a tab on the library's website through which patrons can access an online catalog (powered by CW Mars) of e-books and media. The library does not offer digital devices for check-out. Hotspots were available during COVID-19 but have since been discontinued. Computer classes were offered in previous years but were stopped due to dwindling participation. The library used to have loaner iPads but no longer does because no one borrowed them. According to the executive librarian, the lack of patronage in the past few years coincides with the introduction of fiber broadband in town. The library is a recent recipient of a "Small Population Grant," which it intends to use to fund a percentage of a new library building. The Otis Library has a Facebook page (548 followers) but it is not regularly updated. In person, the library is actively programmed with events such as a cookbook club, book club, and book bingo.

The **Windsor Public Library** shares a building with the town office and police station and averages 13 patron visits per week. The library has a free open Wi-Fi network offering symmetrical 1 gigabit speed for upload and download. It is a member of the CW MARS Library System, allowing residents to access materials such as books, DVDs, and CDs from libraries across the Commonwealth. Children can access Britannica Library and Britannica School, which include a World Atlas, articles, and biographies for elementary, middle, and high school students. The library has a small, dedicated computer space where patrons can use a laptop computer and color printer. The library has a dedicated page on the town's website where it shares resources and an events calendar. The library presents two programs for children: arts and crafts and story time. The library has an active Facebook page (240 followers) that features a Pajama Bedtime Story video series. The library is run entirely by volunteers.

Recommendations: Hire a part-time digital navigator who can circulate among the three libraries to help people one-on-one with tech questions and secure more computers for patrons, if needed. Explore interest in hybrid library programming for those who cannot easily travel to on-site events.

Library Digital Equity Data by Town

	Becket/Washington	Otis	Windsor
Municipal population	2,425	1,634	831
# of desktop computers patrons can use on-site	2	3	1
# of laptops, Google Chromebooks, tablets patrons can use on-site	6	0	1
# of printers patrons can use on-site	1	1 + 3D printer	1
# of laptops, Google Chromebooks, tablets patrons can borrow	0	0	0
# of hotspots patrons can borrow	0	0	0
Did the library offer patrons computer classes in 2024	No	No	No
# of meeting rooms + capacity	0 / 1 - Study Room	1 / 1 - Study Room	0 / 0 - Study Room

Source: Self-reported librarian data and https://mblc.state.ma.us/programs-and-support/library-statistics/index.php

Councils on Aging

As noted previously, the senior center in each town is an important community asset and, as data from FY22 Council on Aging reports show, these centers often function with minimal staff and volunteers, suggesting an opportunity to partner with high schools and colleges to provide additional help, especially around digital skill-building.

Some senior centers offer one-on-one computer support or classes, but it is often ad hoc (once a month) and volunteers are uncompensated. Reviews of senior center websites and social media accounts show a similar "mixed-bag" in terms of accessibility, with online assets not always following best practices for readability and universal design (e.g., colors, fonts, legibility, use of explanatory text on jpgs) for older users.

Recommendations: Pilot a summer **Teens Teach Tech** program like the one that has been successfully led by Little Brothers, Friends of the Elderly in Boston. The program enlists college students to offer classes on topics such as email, Zoom, Google Maps, AI, G-Suite, and Microsoft Office to adults age 62 and older. Classes take place once a week from Monday to Friday and last an hour. Each class accommodates 10 to 15 participants who receive a free laptop after completing the course. If a regular class is not possible, consider hosting monthly informal Tech Cafés where older adults can go for one-on-one assistance with phones and laptops. If a teen or college student is unavailable, consider employing a retired tech professional.

Senior Center Utilization and Staffing by Town

Town	Unduplicated Clients	Paid Staff	Annual Hours: Interns (Paid & Unpaid)
Becket	13	1	0
Otis	36	0	0
Washington	47	0	0
Windsor	206	1	0

Source: Council on Aging Annual Reports FY22 to Executive Office of Elder Affairs

Meals on Wheels Data by Town

Town	Meals on Wheels Recipients (FY23)
Becket	26
Otis	5
Washington	7
Windsor	8

Source: RSVP Meals on Wheels FY23

Public Schools

Students in the four towns are served by four school districts, some of which are in or near each town and others that are farther away and require students to "choice into" for enrollment. The districts and schools include:

- **Becket*, Washington, Windsor**: Becket-Washington Elementary; Craneville Elementary (Windsor); Nessacus Middle; Wahconah High - **Central Berkshire Regional School District**

- **Otis**: Farmington River Elementary - **Farmington River Regional School District**; W.E.B. DuBois Middle; Monument Mt. High - **Berkshire Hills Regional School District**; Lee Middle/High - **Lee School District**

Ensuring schools prepare students for not only current digital skill realities but also future ones such as artificial intelligence and robotics is critical for workforce readiness. The charts and narratives that follow compare the school districts in terms of current performance on digital literacy and computer science (DLCS) taking by students. Detailed charts by school and demographic group can be found in the Appendix. The Mass. Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) provides curricula standards for digital literacy and computer science that schools can implement at their discretion. In some, DLCS content is offered through discrete courses while in others it is integrated into mainstream subjects such as English, math, and social studies.

The data broadly suggest that, at a district level:

Berkshire Hills Regional School District (Otis)
- Male students take more DLCS classes than female students.
- The district excels at reaching Hispanic/Latino and multiracial students with DLCS content.
- The district excels at reaching high need, low-income, and students with disabilities with DLCS content.

Central Berkshire Regional School District (Becket, Washington, Windsor)
- Male students take more DLCS classes than female students.
- The district excels at reaching high need, low-income, and students with disabilities with DLCS content.

Farmington River Regional School District (Otis)
- Female students take more DLCS classes than male students.
- The district excels at reaching high need, low-income, and students with disabilities with DLCS content.
- The district has a harder time reaching Hispanic/Latino and English-Language Learners, who represent a small percentage of the total student body, with DCLS classes.

Lee School District (Otis)
- Male students take more DLCS classes than female students.
- The district has a harder time reaching Hispanic/Latino, English-Language Learners, and students with disabilities with DLCS content.

Berkshire Hills Regional School District	
Student Group	**All Grades %**
All Students	50.4
Female	42.9
Male	58.2
Low Income	55.4
High Needs	54.2
LEP English Language Learner	45.5
Students with Disabilities	59.9
Asian	46.4
African American/Black	42.3
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic or Latino	61.3
White	50.1
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0
Hispanic or Latino	50.5

Central Berkshire Regional School District	
Student Group	**All Grades %**
All Students	26.8
Female	23.1
Male	30.5
Low Income	27.4
High Needs	28
LEP English Language Learner	8.3
Students with Disabilities	29.2
Asian	36.4
African American/Black	33.3
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic or Latino	25.8
White	26.8
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	N/A
Hispanic or Latino	25.6

Source: https://www.doe.mass.edu/ccte/cvte/cte-families/default.html // Source: DLCS Course-Taking Results - https://reportcards.doe.mass.edu/

Farmington River Regional School District	
Student Group	**All Grades %**
All Students	100
Female	100
Male	100
Low Income	100
High Needs	100
LEP English Language Learner	N/A
Students with Disabilities	100
Asian	N/A
African American/Black	N/A
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic or Latino	N/A
White	100
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	N/A
Hispanic or Latino	N/A

Lee School District	
Student Group	**All Grades %**
All Students	20.7
Female	16.9
Male	24.3
Low Income	23.3
High Needs	22.5
LEP English Language Learner	4.9
Students with Disabilities	17.6
Asian	15.8
African American/Black	16.7
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic or Latino	21.1
White	20.8
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	N/A
Hispanic or Latino	22.2

Source: https://www.doe.mass.edu/ccte/cvte/cte-families/default.html // Source: DLCS Course-Taking Results - https://reportcards.doe.mass.edu/

Recommendations: District-level data suggest parents whose children attend the Central Berkshire and Lee School Districts may wish to advocate for earlier exposure to DLCS content to be on par with Berkshire Hills and Farmington River. To increase participation by under-represented groups, especially girls, schools may wish to start an after-school **Girls Who Code** club or a similar playful and creative way in to computer topics.

Elementary School Narratives

Becket-Washington Elementary (PK-5: 91 enrolled)

Becket-Washington students first encounter digital skills material in first and second grade when teachers request to use Chromebook carts or sign-up for computer lab time. Starting in 2018, the district also assigned Chromebooks to students in grades three to five that they can use during the school day. Students begin learning digital skills using programs like ST Math and Code.org and online visual educational programs geared toward K-8 students focused on math and coding. The district replaces Chromebooks every five years. Within the next few years, CBRSD hopes to create and deploy a digital citizen curriculum using Common Sense Ed. starting in elementary school. The curriculum will continue into middle school, where eighth-grade graduates will participate in a digital literacy course upon receiving a Chromebook for high school.

Craneville Elementary (K-5; 458 enrolled)

Craneville Elementary School students get exposure to digital skills in first and second grade when teachers request to use Chromebook carts or computer lab time. By the end of first grade, students can log in, use their clever badge (CBRSD platform), and manipulate the online world. As of 2018, CBRSD provided students in grades three through five with Chromebooks assigned to them that they leave at school. Students begin gaining digital skills using programs like ST Math and Code.org and online visual educational programs geared toward K-8 students specializing in math and coding.

Farmington River Elementary (PK-6: 129 enrolled)

Farmington River aims to have all students become proficient in using technology to enhance independent and collaborative learning. Staff receive training and equipment to facilitate that goal, and the school offers training to parents and guardians to promote technology education at home. The school stresses the importance of technology education for academic development, noting that "if students do not receive equitable and high-quality technology training at school, as well as the application and experience using the technological skills they learn at school, they will not be on a level playing field when they move on to middle school in other communities that are more suburban." Technology classes cover keyboard instruction, online safety, digital media, word processing, Google Suite applications, and programming through MIT Scratch, Hour of Code, and Turtle Programming. Classes are based on the Massachusetts Framework for Technology Instruction. Outside of class, students can participate in after-school robotics programs, Minecraft, and coding clubs.

The school's technology team includes faculty, staff, students, and community members who meet regularly. The principal is also a key player, serving not only in a leadership role but also as the school's Technology Director. She is supported by a Technology Assistant who handles day-to-day operations. Teachers receive professional development on acceptable technology use policy, Google Suite programs, Interread curriculum, and instruction and assessment programs such as AIMS and Read Live. The district conducts an annual needs assessment to determine if new products or services are warranted to improve student outcomes. The entire school community gathers input and researches potential software acquisitions. Each one is then analyzed by a software subgroup. The PTA is heavily involved in technology education and recently spearheaded a Ready Tech Go event for students and families. Funding for technology purchases such as internet and phone service are done through E-rate. The district also has a separate technology budget.

Over half the student body at Farmington River come from low-income households where computer access is often limited. If a parent or guardian contacts the school to express difficulty with computer access, the school will loan them a device. The school replaces computer devices every 4 to 5 years to stay current. Hotspots were available during COVID-19 but since the end of the pandemic are no longer offered.

The school has a computer lab for teachers and students, and there are two carts of tablets teachers can borrow for classroom use. Classrooms from first grade onward have large-screen monitors to project media and materials during in-class assignments. Monitors are linked to tablets teachers can use to interact with on-screen media.

Middle School Narratives

Nessacus Regional Middle School (Grades 6-8; 353 enrolled)

Students at Nessacus are each assigned a Chromebook for the school year and are responsible for them during class hours. Students are not permitted to take Chromebooks home, due to high rates of damage in the past. Students can explore digital skills programming with courses such as engineering, which uses computer-aided design (CAD), or music tech, which involves specialized software on iPads. CBRSD replaces Chromebooks for Nessacus students every four years.

W.E.B. DuBois Middle School (Grades 5-8; 344 enrolled)

Beginning in seventh grade, every student at W.E.B. DuBois who does not have a personal computing device is automatically issued a Chromebook. Students can take a technology class or, as part of two periods of "Exploratory Arts" they receive each day, choose to have one of them be technology-focused.

High School Narratives

Lee Middle and High School (Grades 7-12; 308 enrolled)

Lee Middle and High School primarily serves the towns of Lee and Tyringham. However, students from other towns such as Otis can enroll in Lee Public Schools through the School Choice Program if space is available in their desired grade of entry. Lee Middle and High School follow the Integrate International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) standards across all curricular areas to ensure students can employ skills and resources to meet with success. The high school does its best to embed technology standards in all "Professional Development" activities involving faculty and staff training.

Source: Lee Public Schools

The District Strategic Plan states that professional development is key to the successful implementation of the technological curriculum and its instruction. Before 2025, the district plans to assemble a team to examine annual professional development needs, provide a calendar and schedule of professional development opportunities, and leverage school and county-wide experts to lead professional development. The district has "invested in technology to provide a virtual 1:1 environment for students." Many of the district's devices were acquired during COVID-19 with the help of federal grant funding. Many of the district devices are set to expire in 2024 and 2025, so this district is planning to replace 150 student devices annually to make sure that students have access to the most up to date devices. The district notes that the absence of a Technology Coordinator has been incredibly challenging, and that having someone to work in this role would "encourage fair and equitable access, distribution, and application of technology resources.

The district has committed to updating and maintaining faculty and staff digital devices including projectors, document cameras, desktop computers, etc. A future goal for the district is to "include annual funding for device replacement and upgrading in the district budget." The district would especially like to prioritize funding for the updating of the district network backbone, switches, and wireless access points, as well as acquiring budgets for the replacements of student and staff devices and the renewal and replacement of classroom technologies.

Monument Mountain Reg. High School (Grades 9-12; 431 enrolled)

Monument Mountain is the sole high school for the Berkshire Hills Regional School District. The district primarily serves Great Barrington, Stockbridge, and West Stockbridge, but the school also has a contract with the Farmington River School District in Otis, and many students attending Farmington River go on to Monument Mountain for junior and senior high school. The school is not a Title I school.

Monument Mountain's technology education curriculum focuses on "recognizing the native potential for reasoning and problem solving" that many students have. The technology plan "develops content and learning experiences to contribute to this growth and development" and deems technology education "a basic and fundamental study for all persons, regardless of their educational or career goals." The school offers a wide range of technology courses once students reach 9th grade and most require no prerequisites, making them accessible to students of all academic backgrounds.

Chromebooks are provided for all students and there is a **Help page** where students can learn how to use their devices more fully. Students are issued Chromebooks at the start of the school year and sign an electronic contract that details sites they have access to as well as restricted sites. Every student makes a $25 deposit on their Chromebook in case of damage or loss. Students are allowed to take Chromebooks home. Students at Monument are not allowed to use cellphones during class, but personal laptops can be used in class for assignments. Devices can be used for research and study during study halls and as teachers designate during their classes.

Outside of school, students can take classes through Khan Academy. The school is notable for its Career Vocational & Technical Education (CVTE) that aims to educate and prepare students for employment and continuing academic and occupational preparation through classroom instruction, supportive services, and occupational experiences that develop life-long skills. The school offers Career Pathways in fields such as Computer Science and Advanced Manufacturing and internships with local employers, including firms working in IT and computer graphics.

Source: Monument Mountain Regional High School

Among the programs the school offers are: **Chapter 74**: Auto Technology; **Non-Chapter 74**: Information Support Services & Networking; **Career Vocational Technology Education (CVTE)**: Art & Design; Auto. Technology; Computer Science; Engineering-Advanced Manufacturing; **Innovation Pathways**: Business & Finance; Healthcare & Social Assistance; and Manufacturing.

Wahconah Reg. High School (Grades 9-12; 450 enrolled)

In 2018, Wahconah Regional High School deployed a Chromebook distribution program for students in grades nine through 12 that they could use at school or at home, ensuring equal access to information and educational software and reducing the "digital divide" and achievement gap, according to school officials. The school district's Information Technology (IT) director oversees Chromebook refurbishing. The district buys extra laptops to replace those that break. The IT director maintains a cache of devices whose parts he uses to refurbish damaged devices. Each Wahconah student gets a new Chromebook as a first-year student. The district gives devices it can no longer use to **RBD Electronics**, located in the Stationary Factory in Dalton. RBD specializes in refurbishing and repurposing end-of-use computer assets to prevent their premature disposal and reduce electronic waste. Resources policy governs all practices and decisions regarding student use of electronic devices. The use of electronic information resources is a privilege, not a right. Inappropriate use of resources results in severe consequences to students.

Community Survey

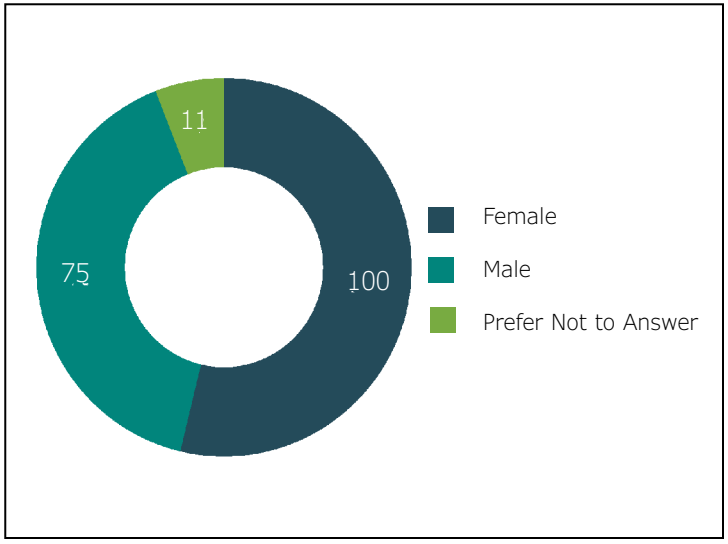
After gathering *quantitative* data about the Covered Populations in the four towns from objective, external sources, the digital equity planning process requires consultants to gather ***qualitative*** information about how people use the internet and computers to improve their lives and the challenges they face in doing so. Between December 2023 and August 2024, 211 residents in the four communities completed MBI's *Internet for All* Survey and provided answers to those questions. Key results are summarized on the pages that follow.

Town	Survey Respondents
Becket	95
Otis	36
Washington	44
Windsor	36

Survey Respondents: Age * **Does Not Include Those Who Left Blank*

Age	Becket	Otis	Washington	Windsor	Total
25 to 34	1	1	1	4	7
35 to 44	5	2	2	6	15
45 to 59	14	6	4	6	30
60 to 74	43	15	20	9	87
75 and older	11	9	14	10	44
Prefer not to answer		1	3		4
Total	**74**	**34**	**44**	**35**	**187**

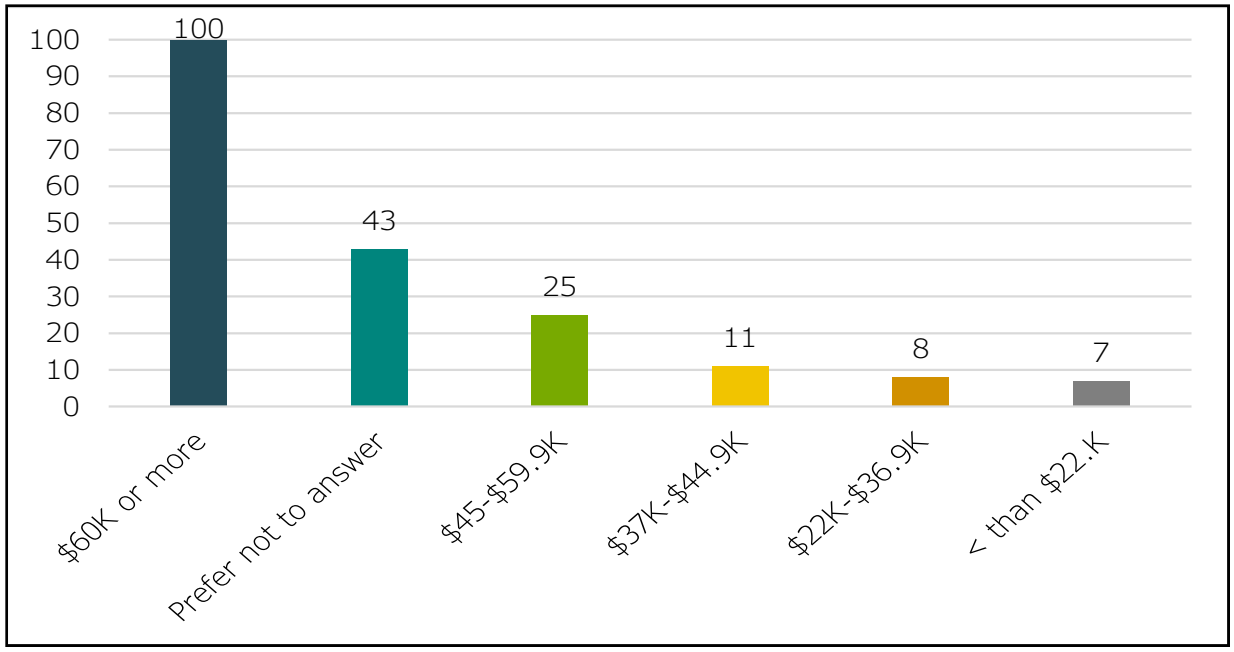
Survey Respondents: Gender



Survey Respondents: Race - Ethnicity - Sexual Orientation

	Becket	Otis	Washington	Windsor	Total
LGBTQIA	2	1	1	3	**7**
White + Another Race	2			1	**3**
Black/African-American	1		1		**2**
Hispanic/Latino	1			1	**2**
Asian/Asian-American		1	1		**2**
Native American/ American Indian/ Alaska Native				1	**1**
Total	**6**	**2**	**3**	**6**	**17**

Survey Respondents: Household Income



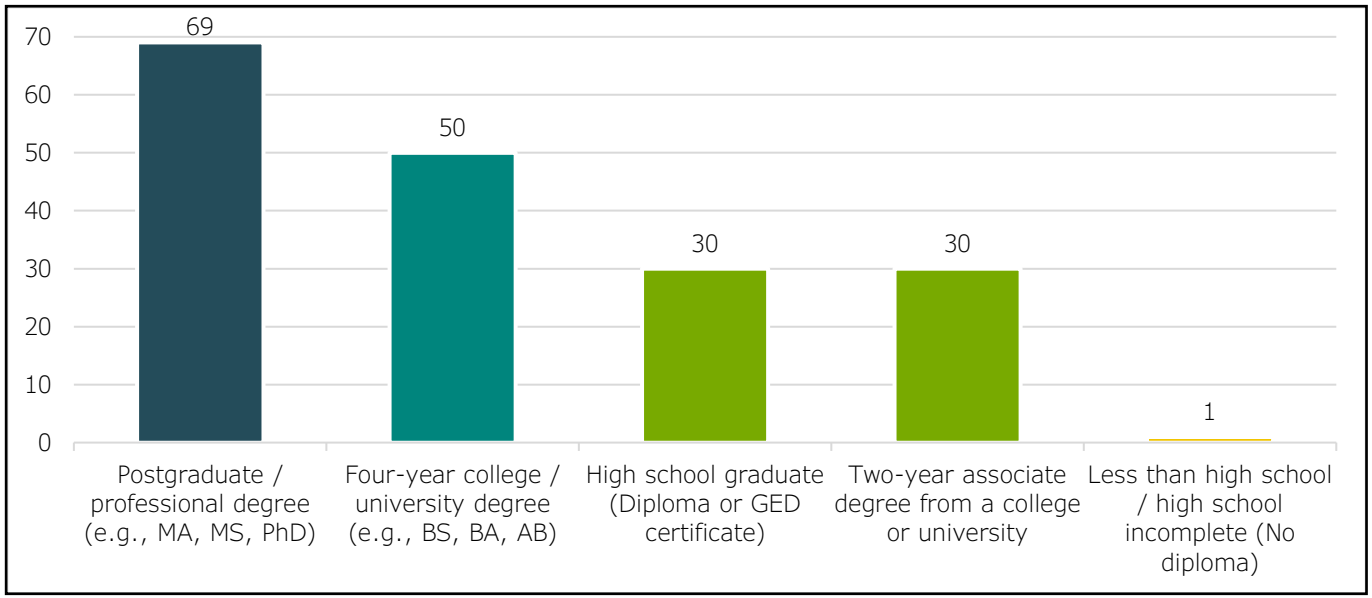
Most survey respondents identified as white or Caucasian. Less than 10 identified as belonging to another racial or ethnic (Hispanic/Latino) group. At least one person in each town chose lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer as their sexual orientation.

The majority of respondents reported total household incomes of $60,000 or more. This is slightly higher than the median household income reported by the American Community Survey and should be taken into consideration when interpreting results.

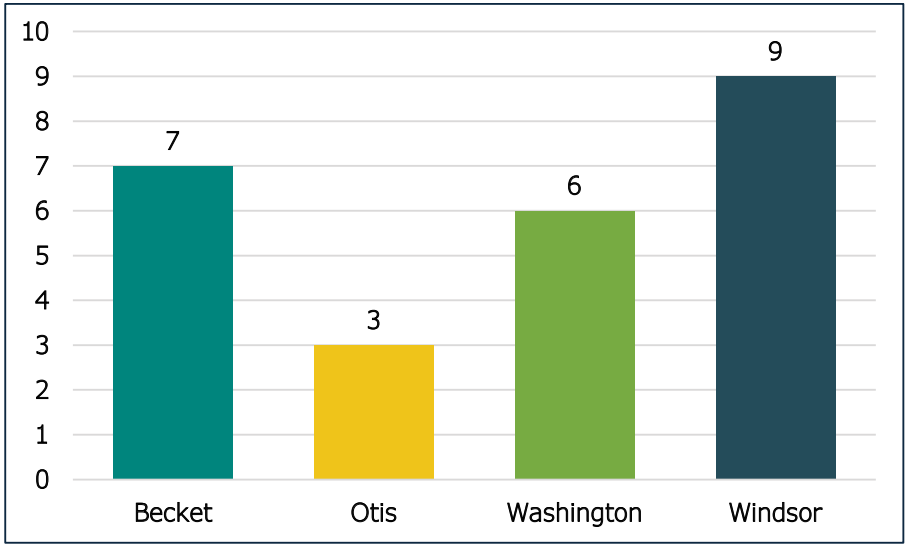
Most respondents had a postgraduate or professional degree (69) or four-year college/university degree (50), which similarly runs counter to the ACS data about educational attainment in the four towns. A smaller number of respondents had only a high school education or two-year associates degree (30). Only one reported having less than a high school education.

- 28 respondents live in households with children under 18. Most live in Windsor or Becket.
- 20 respondents identified as having a disability. The three most frequently reported disabilities involved sight, hearing, and mobility. A smaller number of people noted difficulties with cognition, communication, or self-care.
- 16 respondents had served in the Armed Forces.
- Only one respondent reported living in affordable housing. This is consistent with data showing that only one of the four towns offers affordable housing.

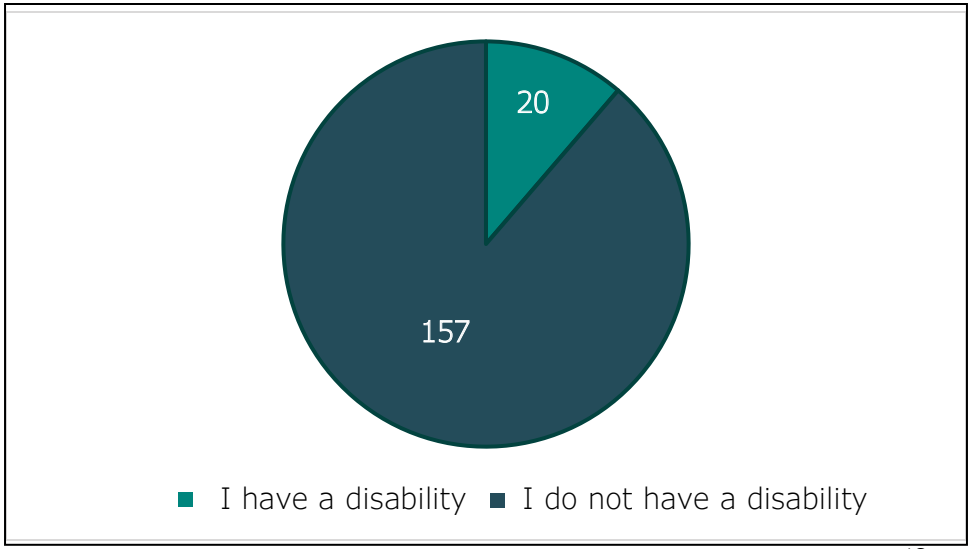
Survey Respondents: Highest Level of School Completed



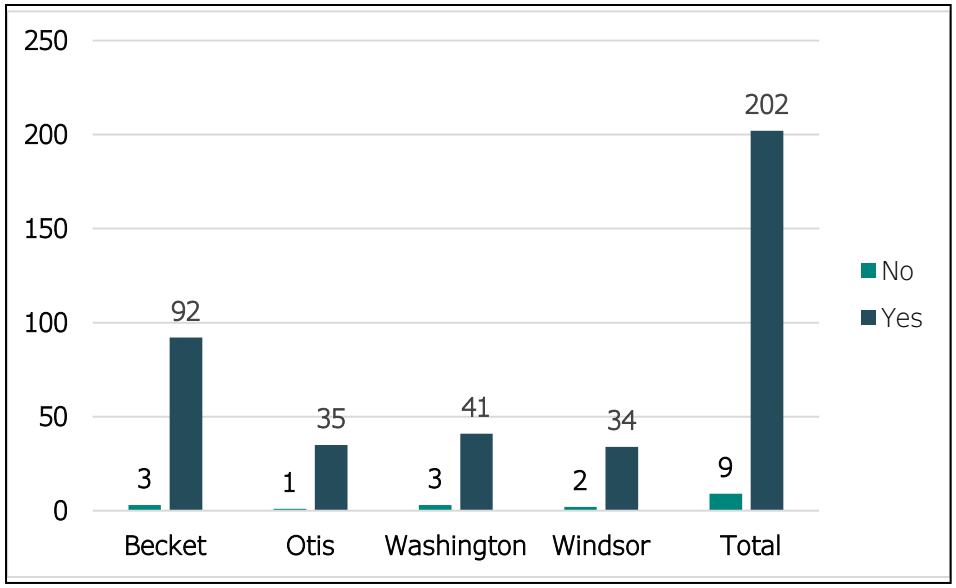
Survey Respondents: Households with Children



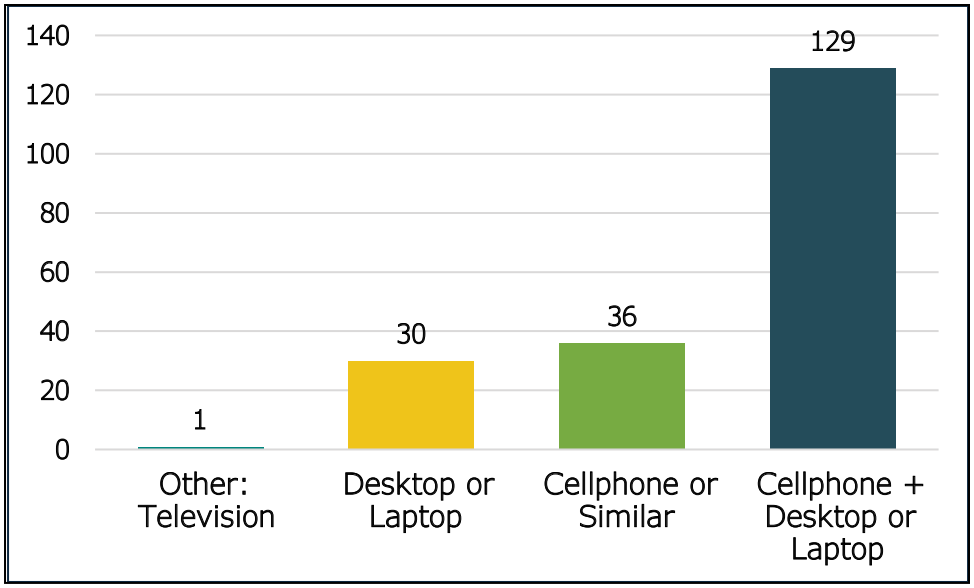
Survey Respondents: Disability Status



Survey Respondents: Percent with Internet Service



Survey Respondents: Devices Used to Connect to the Internet



Almost all respondents have internet at home, with a small percentage (less than 10% in each town) lacking service. The majority of survey respondents (170; 81%) reported Whip City Fiber as their provider, while 14 (7%) use another provider and 10 (5%) subscribe to Verizon.

- 95% of respondents stated their home internet service was good enough to meet their household's needs.
- The average price paid for internet service by the 137 who responded was $81.65.
- The percent of respondents saying it was *Somewhat or Very Hard* for them to pay their internet bill included 24% Becket; 23% Windsor; 18% Otis; and 14% Washington.
- For those who lack service, the reason cited most frequently was expense (less than five people in each town).
- Those who lack service use the internet at libraries, community centers, local businesses, or workplaces.
- Respondents who lack service would most likely use the internet for telehealth, general research, or searching or applying for jobs and benefits.
- The majority of respondents own a cellphone and large-screen computer, an indicator of financial security and of their potential ability to navigate the internet skillfully, although ownership does not guarantee facility with a device.

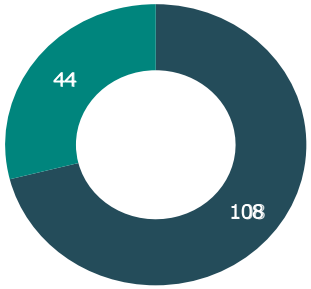
Survey Respondents: Ability to Afford a New Computer

	Becket	Otis	Washington	Windsor
More than $1,000	24	11	11	11
$500-1,000	18	9	3	2
$250-500	15	4	17	11
$100-250	15	4	4	6
$0-100	9	6	1	5
Total $500 and Under	*39*	*14*	*22*	*22*
Percent Who Can Only Afford $500 or Less	**48%**	**41%**	**61%**	**63%**

If respondents need a new computer, most appear able to afford it. A typical Chromebook costs between $150 and $350 while a new Apple iPad costs between $540 and $800. A larger Microsoft laptop can be as low as $329 or as high as $1,000-plus depending on speed, memory capacity, and other factors.

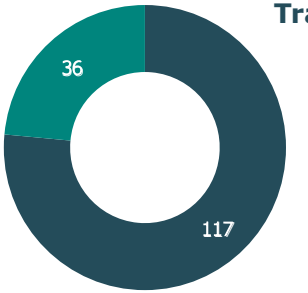
Survey Respondents: Skills and Abilities

Most respondents felt confident with basic internet searching (95%). For specific activities, reported difficulty ranged from 14% for participating in the local community to 28% for searching and applying for benefits



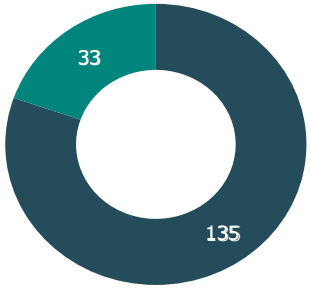
Searching / Applying for Benefits

- Easy
- Not Easy or Hard



Transportation

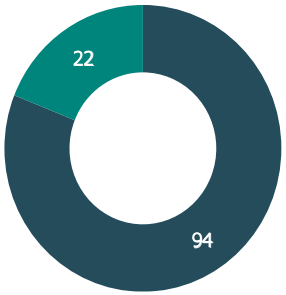
- Easy
- Not Easy or Hard



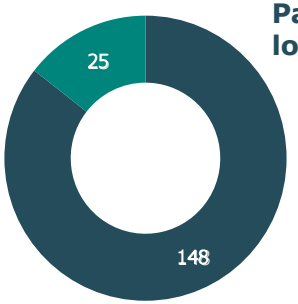
Telehealth

- Easy
- Not Easy or Hard

Searching / Applying for a Job



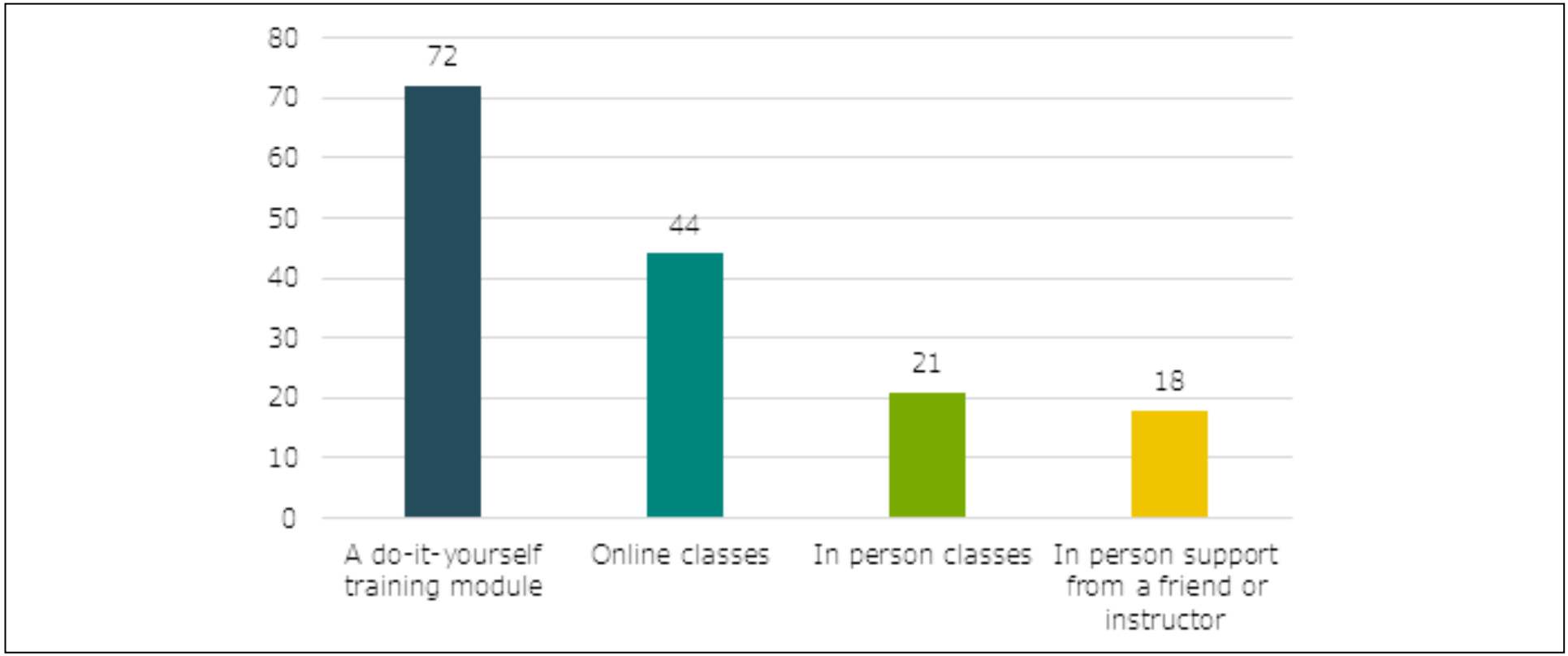
- Easy
- Not Easy or Hard



Participating in local community

- Easy
- Not Easy or Hard

Survey Respondents: Preferred Digital Skill Support



Respondents said they would prefer a do-it-yourself method or online classes to improve their digital skills. This suggests sharing programs residents can do at home at their own pace such as **Northstar** and **Senior Planet/Older Adult Technology Services (OATS)** from the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP). Additionally, towns could share on their websites and through town libraries BRPC's **Digital Resource Guide**, which provides information about self-directed learning as well as in-person and virtual digital skill programs. Even though 68 percent of respondents said they had the tools and resources to address online hacks and scams, nearly 95 percent still reported being *Very or Somewhat Concerned* about internet safety. This suggests the need for education and awareness-about cybersecurity, starting with vulnerable audiences like older adults and people with disabilities. Because a significant percentage of all respondents also rated most government websites as *Very or Somewhat Accessible*, towns may wish to leverage their trusted platforms to highlight these cybersecurity information and resources.

Recommendations: Offer residents self-directed, online learning opportunities, with the understanding that the content may be most appropriate to those with a bachelor's or graduate degree. Focus digital skill training on helping residents learn ways to stay safe online. Explore with local partners creating region-specific curricula around topics such as using cellphones or laptops to find transportation information, apply for benefits, and conduct telehealth sessions using the Berkshire Medical Center's patient portal.

Focus Groups and Outreach

Meeting people where they live was key to creating the Municipal Digital Equity Plan for the four towns. BRPC's engagement strategy involved a multi-tiered approach involving repeated conversations with town leaders as well as calls and visits with social service and faith-based providers to gain their perspective on client priorities. This section discusses the approach taken to outreach and presents key takeaways from focus groups conducted in each community that deepen understanding of how digital equity presents in people's lives.

Town Leaders

Representatives from each town's Municipal Light Plant convened with BRPC staff via Zoom in August 2023 and again in February and June 2024 to discuss their goals as well as concerns about the difficulty collecting data and engaging participation in small communities. Leaders agreed that they wanted to go beyond infrastructure to address issues of knowledge, education, and access, especially for low-income residents and second homeowners, both of whom may have been less engaged with the fiber installation process.

Town leaders helped identify local outlets such as town newsletters that were instrumental to gathering community input and helped put key events on BRPC staff's radar at which tabling for surveys could occur. Leaders also explained the positive impact broadband had on their communities' economies, sharing stories about new people relocating to their towns when they learned high-speed fiber was available and houses that had gone unsold suddenly being in demand.

Among the priorities and questions MLP leaders raised in these conversations were the following:

- In households where people have forgone internet service, is it due to lack of interest, affordability challenges, or lack of awareness?
- Given that many households now have service, what is the state of play around devices? Leaders believe many people may lack newer large-screen computer devices.
- How can the towns help families about to lose their Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) benefit so that they continue service?
- How can the town better engage young people to support older residents with digital skills and what platforms are best-suited to learning?
- How can the town use the information from the plan to apply for grants as a consortium rather than individually? As small towns this is a constant challenge.

Community Members

Conversations with community members occurred in many ways and locations from tabling at town events (Washington Family Day) to handing out surveys and talking to people at the Becket Farmer's Market. BRPC staff also took the time to travel and sit-in on activities (Otis Senior Center) and reached out to niche groups to learn of their unique needs (Windsor artists). Recognizing the difficulty of engaging people who live in single family homes in rural areas, staff used the next best option to share information en masse: community newspapers, newsletters, and posters. These methods, along with word-of-mouth conveyed by town leaders, helped staff build as broad awareness as possible of the plan and its potential positive impact on quality of life.

Finally, BRPC staff conducted four focus groups with members of Covered Populations between August 2024 and October 2024 at the following organizations:

- Becket & Washington Community Library (Athenaeum)
- Washington Council on Aging
- Otis Council on Aging
- Windsor Town Hall/Council on Aging

In the section below, we summarize key takeaways from these conversations that town stakeholders may wish to consider when decoding on implementation priorities.

Becket & Washington Community Library (Athenaeum)

A focus group with Becket and Washington residents took place on August 19th, 2024 at the Becket & Washington Community Library. Six participants attended; two were from Washington and four from Becket. Most said their internet service was good enough or exceptional. Residents were happy with the service provided by Whip City Fiber, as well as the prices they pay. Participants previously using DSL voiced that their fiber service is rarely interrupted during storms and speeds are never slow or lagging, which was not the case previously. The few residents not connected to municipal fiber voiced not knowing about the town subsidies or the value of being connected to high-speed broadband (i.e. to increase the resale value of their home, being connected to emergency services) but were still not moved to sign-up.

"If you don't have the ability to use the internet, you're one of those left behind people." **- Focus Group Participant, Becket & Washington Community Library**

Two participants had smartphones and large screen devices like laptops and tablets. One, a Wired West customer receiving the economy package (25/25), said speeds were good enough to meet his household's needs. The other resident moved to a property not hooked up to the her town's high fiber, per the previous owner's decision. This resident was using a hotspot to connect and expressed that it was good enough to meet her household's needs, but service was sometimes interrupted during poor weather. This same resident mentioned that the cost for hotpot service was equal, if not more expensive, than the economy service offered by Wired West. After hearing her neighbors' positive experiences with Wired West, and comparing costs, she reached out to the town's MLP after the focus group to learn about installation costs. This resident runs an organic pick-your-own blueberry farm along the Appalachian Trail. Having high fiber on the property would allow visitors to connect with family, friends, and resources and leave a positive impression about the town.

Both residents mentioned using the internet and their devices for email, general research, reading, social media, and video streaming. Participants had concerns about internet safety and cybersecurity, explaining they were uncomfortable using the web for online bills and banking. Although hesitant, residents wanted more digital literacy workshops about cybersecurity.

The major takeaways from the focus group were that rural and low-income residents need user-specific, hands-on digital skills classes and would benefit from information about installation subsidies. Older adults and people with disabilities want hands-on digital skills and literacy classes at the library. Older participants need workshops related to cybersecurity and navigating the Berkshire Health Systems patient portal.

Washington Council on Aging

On October 18th, 2024, 13 Washington COA clients gathered after a monthly potluck dinner hosted to learn about the town's Digital Equity Plan. Many participants were connected to Wired West and received 1G/1G Mbps service. Similar to the previous focus group, residents were happy with their speeds and customer service interactions with the ISP. Group members appreciated the faster speeds, saying the dial-up they had before was awful.

Only two members lacked internet service and were uninterested in getting it, despite their age and physical disabilities. Even with encouragement from their focus group peers, and being told about assistive technologies, neither was interested in establishing service. Another focus group member still used DSL because she was worried about fiber installation costs. She was unaware of the $625 subsidy provided by the town.

Ten participants had smartphones while three did not. The same number had other devices like tablets, laptops, desktops, and Kindles. Attendees reported using the internet to stream TV, send email, conduct FaceTime calls, buy on Amazon, conduct telehealth sessions, perform general research, engage with government websites (RMV), and read books online. One woman mentioned using the internet every day and loves being able to connect with family and friends. Few group members use the internet for online banking due to lack of confidence and concerns around cybersecurity.

> *"I think a lot of older people who do not use the internet don't know what they are missing."* - **Focus Group Participant, Washington Council on Aging**

One group member shared a story about one of the benefits of online banking. She mentioned receiving a notification from her bank about a fraud alert and, after calling to confirm if it was real, canceled her debit card and was reimbursed for the transaction. She mentioned that if she did not sign-up for online banking and online notifications, it would have been over a month until she received something in the mail. Being able to receive notifications by email allowed her to act before more money and information were stolen.

Younger group members more fluent in technology mentioned wanting digital skills classes on topics such as how to take better pictures, send pictures in a text, iCloud/phone storage, and location sharing. Older adults wanted digital literacy classes on navigating the BHS patient portal, cybersecurity, online banking, and internet and phone basics. The group wanted to see digital literacy classes offered at the Becket & Washington Library, along with more workshops and talks after monthly potluck dinners.

Otis Council on Aging

BRPC facilitated a focus group with 13 people at the Otis Council on Aging on December 9, 2024; the group included two COA staff. The experience revealed important insights into the state of digital equity among the town's older residents. COA members praised the high speed and affordability of local broadband internet service (due to senior discounts). However, many members also expressed difficulties regarding navigating digital devices.

Attendees additionally found government websites and healthcare portals difficult to access and navigate, posing problems for those who need to regularly schedule doctor's appointments online, attend telehealth appointments, or access government assistance programs; privacy and security concerns were repeatedly mentioned. Members also discussed how the advanced age of many of their digital devices reduced their speed and reliability, making simple tasks on the internet cumbersome. When the potential for a local digital skills class was mentioned, many attendees expressed interest, highlighting a desire to increase their confidence navigating the digital world.

Windsor Town Hall/Council on Aging

Eight older adults, four women and two men, including two veterans, attended the focus group at the Windsor Town Hall that took place on July 24, 2024. Six of the eight had internet at home. Two subscribed to DSL because they could not afford the price of fiber installation. They only pay $23 a month and feel the service meets their needs. Another group member did not have internet and only relied on her cellphone. The older population in Windsor is generally not connected to high-speed internet due to the installation expense or lack of interest altogether. Several older adults installed high-speed internet for home resale value but chose not to subscribe to services. Residents in the group mentioned using large-screen devices at home, like tablets, laptops, and desktops. One group member has internet and a desktop but is uninterested in learning how to use either.

While most participants said their current service was sufficient for their needs, focus group members desired more in-person, hands-on digital skills classes from friends or community members to help them navigate the internet to its fullest potential.

"The internet is here but the problem is knowing how to access it."
- Focus Group Participant, Windsor Council on Aging

Participants use the internet to check email, connect with family and friends who live elsewhere, watch entertainment, conduct general Google searches, and learn via YouTube videos. One group member has a medical device that measures his insulin through a Wi-Fi connection. Another mentioned that his propane tank is hooked up to Wi-Fi and he has technology that communicates with the propane company. Some group members use Amazon for shopping. Others voiced that learning how to use app-based delivery services is interesting and would help tremendously, given how far Windsor is from a shopping center.

The Windsor COA outreach coordinator mentioned that many older adults choose to talk to her through Facebook Messenger instead of calling or texting. She also mentioned that the COA and other town organizations, such as the library, rely on the town's Facebook page to communicate with residents. There was a consensus that navigating the internet is frustrating for people, and the group agreed they would love to see more resources and classes offered through the Council on Aging.

Future Funding

To accomplish any of the recommendations in this plan, towns need money. This section discusses potential sources for that money, beyond the **MBI Digital Equity Implementation** funds towns already have reserved on their behalf. The chart below offers examples of national, state, and charitable sources the town as well as local and regional partners can pursue to support the sustainability of implementation activities. These grants are not exhaustive, and some deadlines may have passed for the current fiscal year. As such, town leaders are advised to stay apprised of BRPC's **Berkshire Funding Focus** website for notifications of upcoming grant opportunities and use the **Berkshire Funding Resource Center** at the Berkshire Athenaeum to search for future grants.

NATIONAL		
Program	**Description**	**Potential Applicant(s)**
Rural Healthcare Connect Program	This program seeks to improve the quality of healthcare available to patients in rural communities by ensuring eligible healthcare providers have access to telecommunications and broadband.	Berkshire Medical Center ** ***Supports all town residents*
AARP 2025 Community Challenge Grants	AARP Community Challenge grants change every year in their foci. For March 2025, the grant can be used to support: • Capacity-building microgrants paired with additional resources, such as one-on-one coaching from national nonprofit organizations, webinars, cohort learning opportunities, and more for, among other topics, disaster preparedness training, which could have a digital component. • Demonstration grants that fund projects that encourage replication of exemplary local efforts. This year's digital equity focus is on expanding high-speed internet access and adoption with funding support from Microsoft. • Flagship grants support projects that improve public places, digital connections, and community resilience.	Town government

STATE		
Program	**Description**	**Potential Applicant(s)**
Community Compact IT Grant Program	A competitive grant program focused on driving innovation and transformation at the local level via investments in technology. Grants of up to $200,000 support the implementation of innovative IT projects by funding related one-time capital needs such as technology infrastructure or software. Incidental or one-time costs related to the capital purchase such as planning, design, installation, implementation and initial training are eligible.	Town Leaders
Community One-Stop for Growth	Programs within the One Stop include funding that spurs housing and economic development by investing in public infrastructure, preparing sites and cleaning up brownfields to prepare them for development, and supporting vibrant downtowns. Programs like the Rural Development Fund can be used to support infrastructure improvements and community planning efforts related to public space Wi-Fi.	Town Leaders
DESE – Computer Science Engage Grant	This continuation grant aims to establish and promote rigorous, engaging, and standards-aligned digital literacy and computer science (DLCS) education in public schools for kindergarten through grade 12. This grant supports the creation of new programs and/or expansion of existing programs to serve more students who are the most underserved (including but not limited to students designated as economically disadvantaged, English language learners, special education, underrepresented minorities, underrepresented females, and those living in rural areas).	Public Schools
DESE - Middle School Career Connected Learning Partnership Grant	This competitive grant aims to assist school districts in planning and developing a career-connected learning model for middle school students. Activities and projects will be developed to support students as they discover their personal interests, skills, talents, and passions, explore careers that align with those attributes, and engage in meaningful experiences to deepen their learning. The model will help students see the relevance of their academic learning as they begin exploring careers and understand all the potential learning opportunities and pathway options that will be available when they transition to high school.	Public Schools

STATE		
Program	**Description**	**Potential Applicant(s)**
MassBoard of Library Commissioners (MBLC)	The program allows applicants to apply new methods to solve problems, build programs, and conduct their library's mission and plan. It encourages creative program development and rewards librarians willing to engage in a higher level of effort and take risks.	Town Libraries
Massachusetts Councils on Aging Grant & Funding Resources	The Massachusetts Councils on Aging (MCOA) champions policies and programs that enhance the well-being of older adults and strengthen the capacity of local Councils on Aging. Through advocacy, collaboration, and resource sharing, MCOA ensures that older adults have access to the services and support they need to thrive in their communities.	Councils on Aging
Mass Cyber Center Cyber Resilient Massachusetts Grant Program	Municipalities in Massachusetts are eligible to receive a one-time grant of up to $25,000 to support cybersecurity improvements based on a vulnerability assessment conducted by a qualified provider. Respondents may apply grant funding toward the cost of vendors to implement the cybersecurity improvements or IT-related staff costs of the municipality performing the services in lieu of using a vendor.	Town Leaders/MLP
MassLINKS — Adult Education Virtual School (DESE)	Recruits, intakes, orients, enrolls, instructs, assesses, advises, offers supportive services to, and posts exit follow-up for, adult learners not served by programs currently funded by Adult and Community Learning Services (ACLS) and/or whose need for services is not met by programs currently funded by ACLS. All services must be delivered virtually. This grant could be accessed to address the needs of out-of-school adult learners.	Local educational agencies; Community organizations and/or faith-based organizations; Volunteer literacy organizations; Institutions of higher education; nonprofits serving the four towns
Municipal Fiber Grant Program	A competitive grant to support the closing of critical gaps that exist in municipal networks. The provision of fiber in communities allows for centralized management of IT infrastructure, including an enterprise approach to network monitoring, cybersecurity, records management, and backup and recovery. A key provision is that fiber must be owned by the municipality.	MLPs

CHARITABLE		
Program	**Description**	**Potential Applicant(s)**
Amelia Peabody Charitable Fund Trust	This Mass-based foundation has made grants to 221 organizations, nearly all in the state, since 2018. Among their foci are health, human services, and public safety. They have made no grants in the Berkshires but 12 in neighboring counties totaling over $1.7M.	Community Organizations
Berkshire Bank Foundation Inc.	The foundation supports organizations involved with arts and culture, environmental education, employment, housing, mentoring, human services, immigrant advocacy, military and veterans, and economically disadvantaged people. Special emphasis is directed toward programs designed to promote education and community economic development.	Community Organizations
Corporation for Public Broadcasting	CPB provides funding for the development of public media television, radio, and digital content as well as multi-platform projects that reflect public media's mission to educate, inform and inspire the American public by providing stories through diverse perspectives, genres, styles and technologies.	Community TV stations serving the four towns
Donald C McGraw Foundation, Inc. *__No website__	This funder has awarded 36 grants in Berkshire County since 2018, including to Hillcrest Educational Centers, Berkshire Education and Correction Services, and Berkshire Medical Center. They can be approached for telehealth grants.	Berkshire Medical Center
Feigenbaum Foundation	Based in Pittsfield, they have awarded 303 grants in Berkshire County since 2018, including to The Berkshire Museum, Berkshire Taconic Foundation, and Community Access to the Arts. Among their foci are education, arts, and human services. This funder could support youth digital literacy through the arts.	Community Organizations
Fidelity Investments Charitable Gift Fund	A Boston-based philanthropy that has awarded 321 grants in the Berkshires since 2018, including to 18 Degrees, Berkshire United Way, and Berkshire Taconic. Among their foci are education and human services, which dovetail into digital equity.	Community Organizations
Greylock Federal Charitable Giving	Provides support through grants and sponsorships to 501(c)(3)s and schools in communities in which Greylock has a physical location or large concentration of members. Foci related to digital equity include education, financial literacy, health, human services, and economic development.	Community Organizations/Schools

CHARITABLE		
Program	**Description**	**Potential Applicant(s)**
Jane and Jack Fitzpatrick Trust	The Jane & Jack Fitzpatrick Trust makes capital grants and project grants that are important to the mission of the applying non-profit. The Trust will consider matching challenge grants where appropriate. The Fitzpatrick Trust is particularly interested in offering support to projects that deliver positive economic results to the community.	Community TV, Community Organizations
Mountain One Community Dividend Grants	Funding preference is given to organizations or specific not-for-profit programs that support small businesses or low- to moderate-income individuals and families. Qualified 501(c)3 organizations may apply once annually for funding from Mountain One in support of programs and projects that directly impact our local communities and customers.	Community Organizations
Pittsfield Co-op Charitable Donations	Since 1889, Pittsfield Cooperative Bank has been committed to enhancing the economic vitality and social welfare of the communities we serve through charitable donations. A major focus of their charitable giving is directed towards education, youth programs, and community development.	Community Organizations
Point32Health Foundation	Point32Health Foundation supports work to advance equity in aging—prioritizing efforts that address systemic inequities. We invest in nonprofit organizations centering community-led solutions that address systemic inequities. We give grants in Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Rhode Island.	Councils on Aging
Spectrum Digital Education Grant	Spectrum Digital Education grants support nonprofits whose work includes digital skills training, professional advancement opportunities, and technology and resources needed for education.	Community Organizations
Vanguard Charitable Philanthropic Impact Fund	The Philanthropic Impact Fund (PIF) issues grants to nonprofits through a competitive RFP process ranging from $30,000-$50,000. Requests can be for full or partial funding.	Community Organizations

Appendices

Appendix I: Digital Literacy and Computer Science (DLCS) Course-Taking by School

Appendix II: DLCS Course Offerings

Appendix III: Occupation Projections

Appendix IV: Detailed Community Assets

Appendix I: Digital Literacy and Computer Science Course-Taking by School

Becket-Washington	
Student Group	**% of Students**
All Students	0
Female	0
Male	0
Low Income	0
High Needs	0
Students with disabilities	0
Multi-race, non-Hispanic or Latino	0
White	0
LEP English language learner	0

Craneville	
Student Group	**% of Students**
All Students	0
Male	0
Female	0
Low Income	0
High Needs	0
LEP English language learner	0
Students with disabilities	0
African American/Black	0
Multi-race, non-Hispanic or Latino	0
White	0
Hispanic or Latino	0
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0
Asian	0

Farmington River	
Student Group	**% of Students**
All Students	100
Male	100
Female	100
Low Income	100
High Needs	100
Students with disabilities	100
White	100
LEP English language learner	0
Hispanic or Latino	0

Nessacus	
Student Group	**% of Students**
Students with disabilities	100
Multi-race, non-Hispanic or Latino	100
Hispanic or Latino	100
Female	99.5
High Needs	99.5
All Students	99.4
Male	99.4
Low Income	99.4
White	99.4
LEP English language learner	0
Asian	0
African American/ Black	0

W.E.B DuBois	
Student Group	**% of Students**
Male	64.4
Students with disabilities	57.1
High Needs	51.6
Low Income	51.3
Hispanic or Latino	48.1
White	47.1
All Students	45.9
Multi-race, non-Hispanic or Latino	42.1
LEP English language learner	40
Female	29.8
African American/Black	28.6
Asian	14.3

Lee Middle School/High School	
Student Group	**% of Students**
White	44.5
Male	41.9
All Students	41
Female	39.6
Low Income	39.4
High Needs	39.2
Students with disabilities	31.9
Hispanic or Latino	27
Multi-race, non-Hispanic or Latino	25
Asian	22.2
LEP English language learner	18.2
African American/Black	0
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0

Wahconah	
Student Group	**% of Students**
Male	34.5
Multi-race, non-Hispanic or Latino	33.3
Low Income	28.2
High Needs	25.7
Hispanic or Latino	25
All Students	22.7
White	21.9
Students with disabilities	18.6
Female	9
LEP English language learner	0
Asian	0
African American/Black	0

Appendix II: DLCS and Related Courses Offered by School Districts/Schools

Berkshire Hills School District

Monument Mountain:
- Wood Technology I & II
- Building Technology
- House Design with Green Technology
- Communications
- Web Page Design
- Metal Working
- Exploring Technology

Central Berkshire School District

Nessacus:
- Engineering (CAD)
- Music Technology

Wahconah:
- Accounting
- Marketing
- Computer Programming
- Video Game Design
- Computer Graphic Design
- Computer Building And Repair
- Music Production
- Engineering
- Computer-aided drafting and 3D-Printing
- Video Game Club

Farmington River School District

After-school programs:
- Coding club
- Minecraft club
- Robotics

Lee School District

Lee Middle and High School:
- Concurrent enrollment with Berkshire Community College – Bridge to College Program and Southern New Hampshire University
- Grade 8 quarterly rotation of exploratory elective in computer technology,
- Robotics Team
- TEC150 - AP Computer Science A
- TEC140 – Coding: Computer Science
- TEC300 – Design with CAD
- TEC105 – Digital Arts
- TEC500/505/600/606 – Video Production I-IV
- TEC135 – Virtual Business

Appendix III: Occupation Projections: Berkshire County 2022-2032

Occupation	Employment 2020	Employment 2030	% Change	Typical Education for Entry	2022 Mean Annual Wage	Estimated Digital Skills
Home Health and Personal Care Aides	2,646	3,040	14.89%	High school diploma or equiv.	$36,591	Low
Retail Salespersons	1,727	2,248	30.16%	No formal educational credential	$36,396	Low
Fast Food and Counter Workers	1,305	1,936	48.35%	Less than high school	$32,837	Low
General and Operations Managers	**1,478**	**1,894**	**28.14%**	**Bachelor's degree**	**$113,430**	**Medium-High**
Registered Nurses	**1,421**	**1,469**	**3.37%**	**Bachelor's degree**	**$94,794**	**Medium**
Cashiers	1,366	1,326	-2.92%	No formal educational credential	$32,704	Low
Cooks, Restaurant	556	1,108	99.28%	No formal educational credential	$39,259	Low
Waiters and Waitresses	676	1,086	60.65%	No formal educational credential	$37,531	Low
Landscaping and Groundskeeping Wrkr	732	1,045	42.75%	No formal educational credential	$42,586	Low
Nursing Assistants	929	957	3.01%	Postsecondary non-degree award	$38,621	Low-Medium
Office Clerks, General	869	924	6.32%	High school diploma or equiv.	$43,401	Low-Medium
First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales	808	888	9.90%	High school diploma or equiv.	$52,575	Low-Medium
Janitors and Cleaners, Except Maids and Housekeeping Cleaner	719	883	22.80%	No formal educational credential	$38,562	Low
Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners	642	874	36.13%	No formal educational credential	$36,828	Low
Bookkeeping, Accounting, & Auditing Clerks	788	854	8.37%	Some college, no degree	$50,081	Medium
Customer Service Representatives	770	837	8.70%	High school diploma or equiv.	$42,049	Low
Construction Laborers	619	795	28.43%	No formal educational credential	$53,874	Low
Maintenance and Repair Wrkrs	588	763	29.76%	High school diploma or equiv.	$50,268	Low
Stockers and Order Fillers	635	713	12.28%	Less than high school	$36,869	Low-Medium
First-Line Supervisors of Office and Administrative Support	631	695	10.14%	High school diploma or equiv.	$62,965	Low-Medium
Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education	**679**	**687**	**1.17%**	**Bachelor's degree**	**$68,930**	**Medium**
Teaching Assistants, Except Postsecondary	644	649	0.77%	Some college, no degree	$38,097	Low-Medium

Source: https://lmi.dua.eol.mass.gov/LMI/LongTermOccupationProjections/LTOPResult?A=15&GA=000001&Cmd=Go&Type=long&Dopt=TEXT

Appendix IV: Detailed Community Assets

Becket and Washington

Becket Athenaeum (Becket & Washington Community Library)

The Becket & Washington Community Library, located in Becket, serves both Becket and Washington residents. The library has an active Facebook page where staff regularly post about upcoming programs and community events. The library is connected to high-speed fiber and has free open-network Wi-Fi available 24/7 from the library grounds and parking lot. Library staff reports regular Wi-Fi users who use their own devices to access Wi-Fi from the parking lot. The library has 2 desktop computers available to patrons, access to a color printer, faxing services, and six tablets for residents to utilize onsite. Library staff reports that the number of weekly internet users has declined significantly since the fiber was installed. From July 2023 to June 2024, the library reported 52 uses of its public computers, averaging one public computer user a week. For the same period, there were 44 instances of someone using the Wi-Fi from their device inside the building. One patron regularly comes in looking for technology assistance from library staff. Through the library's shared Library of Things catalog, patrons can check out a library of things from games to technology equipment. Technology equipment available to patrons included a VHS and DVD recorder. Other equipment patrons can take out includes musical equipment, science and engineering kits, and STEAM adventure chests for kids.

The library offers after school and year-round programs for Becket Washington youth. Programs include:

- **ACE - Academic Enrichment**: Students and dedicated volunteers are paired for homework help, mentoring, and one-on-one guidance for up to 12 students, grades 2-8 (possibly 9-12, depending on available tutors), each school year. The program offers enrichment activities on several topics to inspire learning and academic exploration.
- **Kids Club:** This traditional fee-based after-school program is funded by the Athenaeum through yearly grants, administered by the Dalton CRA, and held at the Becket Washington School. It includes educational learning activities and homework help, including tutoring for elementary school students through the ACE program.
- **Youth Enrichment**: A year-round family and child programming open to all in the Becket-Washington community. Workshops and presentations will be posted on our Events page, as well as on Facebook and Instagram. Diverse topics include nature, gardening, crafts, storytelling, jewelry making, cooking, beekeeping, and more.

Becket Arts Center

The Becket Arts Center's mission is to ensure creative expression is a vital and vibrant part of the everyday lives of the regional community. The center puts on monthly events reaching a broad audience from youth to seniors. The majority of classes are arts-related or tap into interest in physical wellness (yoga). As a result, the center could serve as a location for digital skills classes, particularly ones focused on arts skills such as drawing with iPads, digital photography, and landscape design using online software programs. The center's welcoming environment makes it ideally suited to reach learners who may not see themselves as candidates for COAs and is particularly well-positioned to engage youth.

First Congregational Church (Becket Food Pantry)

The First CC hosts a food pantry on the first and third Saturday of each month for Becket, Washington, and the surrounding Hilltowns. The church also offers a free pasta dinner the first Friday of each month. The church helped pilot outreach to low-income residents to assess interest in acquiring free computer devices through a partnership with Computers4People. In a single morning, the center helped identify 10 applicants who attended the food pantry; there are likely many more people who need the service. BRPC staff also provided guidance to food pantry staff to move from paper-based reporting to an online shared Google document. Training staff at social service and faith-based organizations was frequently noted in the planning process.

Washington Town Park

The Washington Town Park has abundant open space, a small gravel walking path, which surrounds a picnic area with grills, a gazebo, picnic tables, a large playground equipped with a swing set, slides, balancing features, several climbing structures, and a full court with two basketball hoops. The town of Washington holds an annual family day at the park consisting of food trucks, musical entertainment, touch-a-truck, and more. Another event regularly held at the town park is the summer music in the park series which takes place every Sunday evening running from July through August. Despite the town being connected the high fiber the Washington Town Park is not connected to the towns fiber optic broadband services.

Otis

Otis Library

The Otis Public Library receives a total of 1,634 patrons annually. The library has five public-use Internet computers, and the average number of computer users at the library every week is 13. The Otis Library also has wireless Internet access available for public use. The library has a Facebook page with 536 followers. The library Facebook page has not been updated in a year, but it was once used to spread awareness about community events taking place at the library.

The Otis Library website is updated more often than the Facebook page. Graphically, the website is sparse, but it is relatively easy to navigate. Community events are listed on the front page as well as in the "Library News" tab. The library does not currently hold any formal training sessions in the use of the Internet or other digital skills, their events mostly consist of book club meetings. There is also a tab on the library website through which an online catalog of all library books and media can be accessed, this is powered by CW Mars.

The Otis Library has a limited number of databases available for public use: Ancestry DNA is the only database currently available. There are also no digital devices currently available for loans. Hotspots were once available for patron loans during COVID-19. Computer classes were also offered in previous years at the library and covered basic topics such as using Windows or setting up email accounts, but they have not been offered in a few years due to dwindling patron numbers. According to Executive Librarian Lois Hall, the lack of patronage at the Otis Library in the past few years can be attributed to the introduction of fiber broadband internet in town: according to the Otis Library staff, many patrons with DSL and dial-up would come to the library to access high-speed internet, but now since many in town have fiber broadband, there is less of a need to frequent the library for better internet access.

The library currently has 6,383 books, 503 audio recordings, 2,686 videos, and 13 periodicals. The Otis Library advertises events consistently on their website and through Constant Contact, an email marketing platform. Advertisements for library events are often posted in public spaces throughout Otis, and the Otis Observer frequently runs the same advertisements. Otis Librarian Lois Hall remarked that the Otis Observer is the library's strongest advertising platform due to its extensive local readership.

The Otis Library is a recent recipient of a "Small Population Grant" which it hopes to use to fix the disrepair of its second floor and further expand their media inventory. The library also hopes to use the grant money to create a "makers space" for children to use with a 3D-printer and updated desktop computers.

Otis Council on Aging

The Otis Council on Aging reports 693 duplicated people served, and 36 unduplicated people served, meaning the same 36 residents were served a combined total of 693 times. The Council has a Facebook page with 91 members where information regarding board meetings, potlucks, and other community events are posted. The council frequently organizes group trips geared towards older residents. Sign-ups for these trips can be accessed through the Council on Aging page located on the Otis town website.

The Otis Observer

The Otis Observer is a popular local newspaper with high readership that is published 11 times per year. The Observer has its own website where a small digital archive of past publications is housed. The Observer is frequently used to spread information about town events. The Observer is always available for pickup in print at the Otis Library

Otis Cultural Council

The Otis Cultural Council seeks to provide access and education in the arts, humanities, and interpretive sciences for community members. The Council frequently showcases artisans, educators, lecturers, and performers from around Massachusetts. The Council has its own web page on the Massachusetts Cultural Council website.

Otis Fire Department

The Otis Fire Department is composed of 29 volunteer firefighters. The Otis Fire Department also provides local EMS services. The Fire Department runs an active Facebook page with over 3,000 followers where local events, EMT training programs, permit reminders, and road closures are posted. Posts garner frequent engagement from followers through likes and comments.

Otis Police Department

The Otis Police Department runs an active Facebook page with over 1,000 followers where local events, missing dogs, and road closures are posted. Posts garner frequent engagement from followers through likes and comments.

Windsor

Windsor Public Library

The library shares a building with the town office and police station and averages 13 weekly patron visits. The library has a free open Wi-Fi network providing speeds of 1G/1G and is part of the CW MARS Library System, allowing residents to access books, DVDs, and CDs from other libraries in the Commonwealth. Children have access to Britannica Library and Britannica School, a reference center that includes a world atlas, articles, and biographies for elementary, middle, and high school students. The library has a small, dedicated computer space where patrons can access a laptop and color printer. The library has a dedicated page on the town's website displaying resources and an events calendar. The library has two programs dedicated to children, including a weekly arts and crafts and story-time program.

Windsor Council on Aging

A seven-member board and outreach coordinator run the Windsor COA whose mission is to provide opportunities and resources that advance Windsor's older adults' quality of life. Programs take place in the town hall, a shared space with Windsor boards and committees. Programs include weekly coffee hours and movement classes. The COA holds monthly events like breakfast and bingo when the COA board doesn't meet during July and August. The coordinator communicates through the town's Facebook page and calls residents on their cellphones or landlines. In 2018, the COA sent a survey to older adult residents to understand their thinking about aging in town. When asked how important it was to remain in their community as they age, 224 answered extremely or somewhat important. When asked how important it was to live independently in their own homes as they age, 251 answered it was extremely or somewhat important. When asked about a service that helps seniors find and access health and support services, 166 answered it was extremely or very important. Finally, when asked about fitness activities, including health and wellness programs, 120 answered it was extremely or very important.

Windsor Town Park

This five-acre park includes a baseball field, soccer net, pavilion, seating, acres of open space, and a wooden playground available to use for recreational athletic games, sports leagues, or individuals. People can reserve the pavilion for birthday parties. The volunteer-led Windsor Parks and Recreation Committee monitors the park and organizes events such as movie nights, kickball games, and ice skating. The park is equipped with a hotspot allowing for a free open Wi-Fi network experience with 1 GB symmetrical upload/download speeds.

Glossary

Bandwidth
The rate at which a network can transmit information. Higher bandwidth is typically more desirable. The amount of bandwidth available can determine whether a user can download a photo in two seconds or two minutes.

Broadband Equity
A condition in which all people and communities can access and use affordable, high-speed, reliable internet that meets their needs. Broadband can be delivered over wire (i.e., fiber or cable) or wirelessly (i.e., cellular). The FCC recently set the new speed of high-speed broadband at 1100 Mbps download and 20 Mbps upload. Some fiber providers have proposed even higher speeds of 100/100 symmetrical Mbps.

Digital Divide
The gap between those who have affordable access, skills, and support to effectively engage online and those who do not. As technology evolves, the digital divide prevents equal participation and opportunity in all parts of life, disproportionately affecting people of color, Indigenous people, low-income households, people with disabilities, people in rural areas, and older adults.

Digital Equity
A condition in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy, and economy. Digital equity is necessary for civic and cultural participation, employment, life-long learning, and access to essential services. Equity acknowledges the systemic barriers that must be dismantled before achieving equality for all.

Digital Inclusion
Refers to the activities necessary to ensure all individuals and communities, including the most disadvantaged, have access to and use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) including five elements: 1) affordable, robust broadband internet service; 2) internet-enabled devices that meet the needs of the user; 3) access to digital literacy training; 4) quality technical support; and 5) applications and online content designed to enable and encourage self-sufficiency, participation, and collaboration. Digital Inclusion must evolve as technology advances. Digital Inclusion requires intentional strategies and investments to reduce and eliminate historical, institutional, and structural barriers to technology access and use.

Digital Inclusion Ecosystem
A combination of programs and policies that meet a geographic community's unique and diverse needs. Coordinating entities work together in an ecosystem to address all aspects of the digital divide, including affordable broadband, devices, and skills.

Digital Literacy
The ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information requires both cognitive and technical skills.

Digital Navigator
Trusted guides who assist community members around internet adoption and use of computing devices. Digital navigation services include ongoing assistance with affordable internet access, device acquisition, technical skills, and application support.

Digital Redlining
Discrimination by internet service providers in the deployment, maintenance, or upgrade of infrastructure or delivery of services based on income, race, or ethnicity.

Digital Subscriber Line (DSL)
The technology used to provide high-speed internet using telephone networks.

Fiber Optic
A system that uses glass or plastic to carry light that is used to transmit information. Typically, each side of a fiber strand is attached to a laser that sends light signals. When the connection reaches capacity, the lasers can be upgraded to send more information along the same strand. Fiber technology has been used for decades and will remain the dominant method of transmitting information for the near future.

Fixed Wireless
A connectivity model that uses stationary wireless technology to bridge the "last mile" between the internet backbone and subscriber.

Hotspot
A physical location that offers internet access over a wireless local area network (LAN) through use of a router connected to an internet service provider.

Gap Network
A network — usually fixed wireless or Long-Term Evolution (LTE) — deployed quickly and at comparatively low cost to address immediate connectivity in a small area. Many gap networks were launched at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Internet Service Provider (ISP)
An Internet Service Provider is a company that provides services to access and use the internet.

Last Mile
The final leg of a connection between an internet service provider and the customer. In DSL and cable systems, this is the most frequent bottleneck and most expensive to resolve. An ISP may run a faster fiber- optic network into the neighborhood but deliver the last mile (which may be far away) with a phone line that cannot sustain fast speeds.

Megabits (Mbps)
A measure of speed in which 8 Mbps means that 8 million bits of information are transferred each second. Using an 8 Mbps connection, it would take one second to transfer a 1 Mbps file such as a photo. More Mbps are faster. One Kbps (Kilobits) is less than 1 Mbps, which is less than 1 Gbps (Gigabits).

Middle Mile
The network connection between the last mile and the broader internet. For instance, in a rural area, the middle mile connects the town's network to a larger metropolitan area where it connects with major carriers.

Wi-Fi
Networking technology that allows computers and other devices to access the internet using a wireless signal.