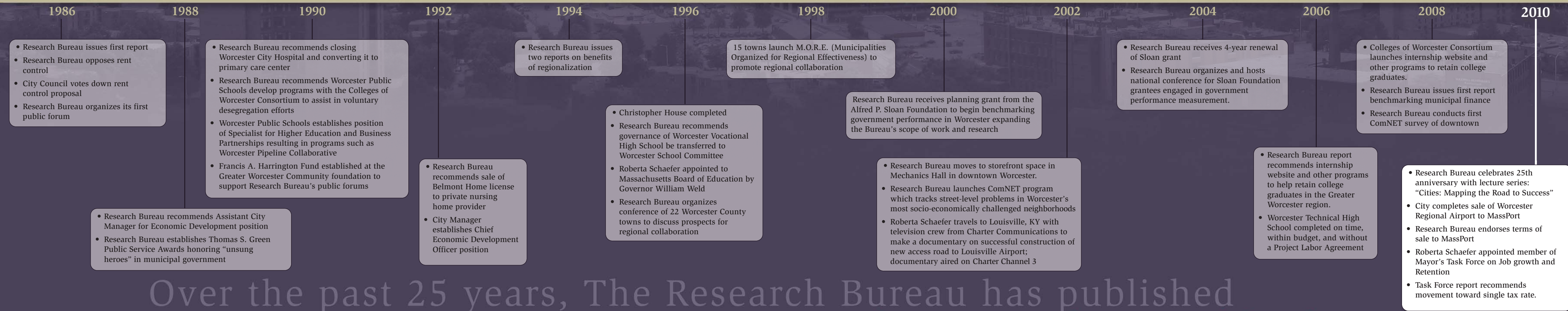
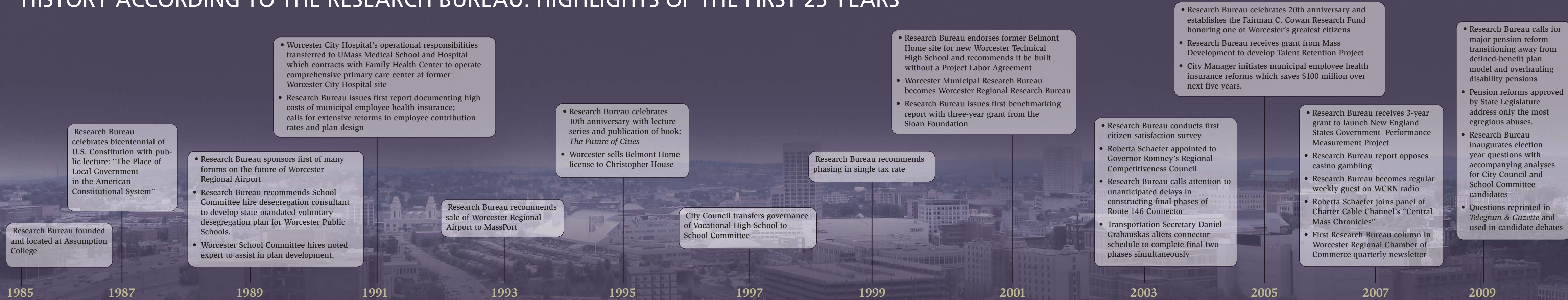


# HISTORY ACCORDING TO THE RESEARCH BUREAU: HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FIRST 25 YEARS



Over the past 25 years, The Research Bureau has published 210 reports and organized 160 public forums.

When the Worcester Municipal Research Bureau was formed in the spring of 1985, no one could have predicted its longevity and success - least of all members of a group of business and civic leaders that raised \$40,000 to launch the endeavor during a series of informal breakfast meetings. Nor could anyone anticipate its huge impact on the community - not even the person who has led the organization throughout a quarter of a century: Roberta R. Schaefer.

This year The Research Bureau is celebrating 25 years of providing high-quality, independent research and analysis of public policy issues in the city and the region. To commemorate that formidable milestone, it is presenting five breakfast forums, featuring prominent scholars or public policy experts, with the overall theme of "Cities: Mapping the Road to Success."

"A silver anniversary is always noteworthy," says Ms. Schaefer, president and CEO. "The special lecture series is our way of thanking our supporters while offering something that might be beneficial to public officials and residents." The anniversary lectures will replace the regular forums the bureau has been presenting.

Ms. Schaefer and her associates needed a lot of patience and perseverance in the early years when skeptics questioned the bureau's relevance and later resented its growing influence. But as time went by, the agency has gained respect for integrity, professionalism, credibility and hard work. "We've come from a baby organization to a mature and influential organization," Ms. Schaefer acknowledges. Because the bureau deals with sensitive political issues, City Hall tried to ignore it.

As a private nonprofit entity, the bureau cannot actively advocate policy. But, gradually, decision-makers have learned to pay attention to its findings. Among other accomplishments, unrelenting research by the bureau has played a key role in adjusting public employee contributions to health insurance premiums,

thus saving the city about \$50 million over the last three years. Nowadays, surveys are even being requested by the city manager or city councilors.

The bureau had a humble beginning, and still has only four employees - a remarkable feat considering the volume of work it puts out each year. Since its inception, it published close to 200 reports, noted for their clarity and accuracy, on a wide variety of issues, ranging from public safety and economic development to the cost of government structure and the academic achievement of students in public schools. It has presented 175 free public forums, with expert speakers and panels. Those events are now posted on the city's Web site. Bureau staff members maintain regular contact with public officials, presenting testimony before the City Council and its committees, state legislative bodies, civic boards and community groups.

Since 1983, The Research Bureau's annual Thomas S. Green Awards have honored public workers for contributions beyond the call of duty. Thus far, 84 municipal and school employees from Worcester and neighboring towns were rewarded for outstanding performance. The bureau's board of directors has 85 members, and there is a 13-member executive committee. Sandra Dunn, general manager of the DCU Center, is chairman of the board. Financial support comes from local foundations, corporations and individuals. There's no government subsidy.

The \$40,000 the founders raised in 1985 constituted the first annual budget. Now it is about \$500,000. That sum includes the cost of a "benchmarking" project that was funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation from 2001 to 2007. The bureau's first home was a former storage space made available by Assumption College rent-free. In 2002 it moved to spacious new quarters at Mechanics Hall. Through the Sloan grant, the Center of Community Performance Measurement was established in 2001 to do in-depth research,

using state-of-the art computer technology, on selected aspects of community life, highlighting areas where the city is doing well along with those in which improvement is needed. The indicators, known as benchmarks, also provide comparison with other cities of similar size.

"One of our significant contributions is seeking out 'best practices' from other communities for study, discussion and possible implementation in Central Massachusetts," Ms. Schaefer explains. The anniversary lecture series reflects that effort. Among the featured lecturers are Howard Husock of the Manhattan Institute's Social Entrepreneurship Initiative (Feb. 25); Edward Glaeser, professor of economics at Harvard University (April 28); Alan Ehrenhalt, executive editor of *Governing* magazine (May 18); Sandra Stotsky of the Department of Education Reform at the University of Arkansas and former associate commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Education (Oct. 27); and Jason Riley, an editorial writer with *The Wall Street Journal* (Dec. 7). An appearance of the candidates for governor is expected to highlight the annual meeting in late September.

Ms. Schaefer is pleased by the acceptance and influence the bureau has earned, although she admits a "thick skin" is helpful in her position. "My husband tells me if I'm going to get upset (by setbacks or criticism) I don't belong in this job." She has learned to live with the slow pace of progress, frustrating as it may be. "It's the nature of democracy, and I don't see that changing," she says. "What we need is patience."

*Patience, perseverance and sustained commitment have paid off big time. I cannot think of an organization that has made a greater impact on the community in the last 25 years than The Research Bureau.*

## FORUMS & BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETINGS

### Forums

**October 26, 2009**  
*Diagnosing Health Care Reform: What's the Right Prescription for You?* • Co-sponsored by Fallon Community Health Care and Benefit Development Group, held at the Beechwood Hotel

**December 11, 2009**  
*Worcester's Business Climate: Hot or Cold?* • Sponsored by Polar Beverages and held at Clark University

**February 25, 2010**  
*Top Ideas for Revitalizing Cities* • Sponsored by Unum and held at Mass College of Pharmacy & Health Sciences

**April 28, 2010**  
*Investing in Urban Resurgence: Transportation and Infrastructure* • Sponsored by MassPort and held at Mass College of Pharmacy & Health Sciences

**May 18, 2010**  
*Demographic Transformation of American Cities* • Sponsored by Rand-Whitney and held at Mass College of Pharmacy & Health Sciences

### Board of Directors Meetings

**September 30, 2009**  
Featured Speaker • Dr. Melinda Boone, Superintendent of Worcester Public Schools

**February 3, 2010**  
Featured Speaker • Thomas Kinton, CEO and Executive Director of MassPort

**June 10, 2010**  
Featured Speaker • Jeffrey Mullan, Massachusetts Secretary of Transportation



*"As the new owner of Worcester Regional Airport, MassPort is lucky to have such a skilled and accomplished partner as the Worcester Regional Research Bureau in our corner, which for 25 years has been helping the citizens, businesses, and government leaders of the Worcester area build a better community for all of us through its insights, detailed inquiries, and recommendations for a brighter and more prosperous future."*

Thomas J. Kinton, Jr., CEO & Executive Director MassPort

## OTHER PROJECTS

### Municipal Elections in Worcester 2009: Questions for the Candidates

For the first time, The Research Bureau issued a series of questions for City Council and School Committee candidates during the campaign of 2009. The questions covered the major issues that need to be addressed by those bodies during the next two years. These questions and the accompanying policy analysis we provided for background were intended both to canvass the candidates' views and educate the public on the issues. The *Telegram & Gazette* reprinted the questions and analyses during the weeks prior to the election. The Research Bureau's president served as a panelist for all the candidate debates sponsored by the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce. This initiative was well-received by the public at-large and our supporters, and we expect to continue it for future municipal elections.

### New England States Performance Measurement Project

The Research Bureau is now in the final year of a 3-year pilot program working with several New England communities to collect and analyze timely, accurate, and reliable data on selected government services. This project provides municipal officials with data to inform their decision-making, and its regional nature enables them to share views on best practices. Through regular meetings, municipal officials have the opportunity to learn about what is working well in other communities and thus how to enhance service delivery in their own community. The town governments have thus far measured fire, dispatch, and rescue services, and snow and ice removal services using templates developed by The Research Bureau. They have also administered a citizen satisfaction survey developed and analyzed by The Research Bureau, which will be administered again this fall. The next part of the project will be to collect and analyze data on the various fees charged by participating towns for services, licenses, and inspections. This project is supported by the New England States Government Finance Officers Association, the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, and the participating towns.

*"The Worcester Regional Research Bureau is the catalyst for critical public discourse in Worcester. The Bureau's efforts to quantify and analyze matters of municipal governance frame the discussion within the broader context of urban trends. Working cooperatively, the City and the Bureau are able to identify needs, explore best practices, and target resources."*

Timothy J. McGourthy, Director of Economic Development  
City of Worcester