



## The Research Bureau

### Ring in the new year right!

The “ringing in of the New Year” often symbolizes a time of renewal, resolve, and the buzzword of this election season, hope. At the recent inauguration of Worcester’s Mayor, City Council, and School Committee, Mayor Lukes spoke of renewing her commitment and that of her colleagues to serve the public interest, and resolving to make progress on a number of much-discussed issues such as Worcester Regional Airport, CitySquare, and commuter rail in the hope of providing a brighter future for the citizens of Worcester.

To Mayor Lukes’s list, I would like to add several resolutions for our public officials to consider:

- ❖ Put the focus on providing quality core services, that is, public safety, public education and public infrastructure. We have already gotten an indication from Superintendent James Caradonio that the Worcester Public Schools will face a \$5.7 million deficit in FY09 because contractually agreed-upon salaries and benefits will outstrip new revenues. One way of generating more revenue is for the City to divest itself of non-core services by selling some assets which require taxpayer subsidies and privatizing others. Examples include the following:

<b>Facility</b>	<b>Taxpayer Subsidy (FY07)</b>
1. Worcester Regional Airport	\$700,000
2. Union Station	\$775,000
3. Senior Center	\$915,000
4. Hope Cemetery	\$1,000,000
5. Worcester Memorial Auditorium	\$120,000
6. DCU Center	\$400,000
7. Green Hill Golf Course	\$150,000

The total savings to the taxpayer would be \$4.7 million plus whatever revenues are raised from the sale of these assets.

- ❖ Privatize services that are appropriate to do so. For example, if the City and the Worcester Public Schools contracted out the custodial services of 175 employees now performing these jobs at a much higher wage than other custodians are paid in the Worcester Metropolitan Statistical Area and nationwide, Worcester taxpayers could have saved almost \$2 million in FY07.
- ❖ Develop and execute a plan to improve streets and sidewalks. Each year, since 2000, The Research Bureau’s neighborhood surveys have shown that Worcester residents

identify the deplorable condition of Worcester's streets and sidewalks as the most serious problem affecting their quality of life. Maintaining the City's infrastructure is a core service affecting all residents. In addition, the status of a municipality's infrastructure will now be included in the judgment of its bond rating, and lack of maintenance will increase the cost of borrowing.

- ❖ Develop a plan to change the dual tax rate to a single one within three to five years. Having a commercial/industrial tax rate that is double that of the residential one does not promote a welcoming climate for businesses considering locating in Worcester, or for those already here. Having a single tax rate is beneficial to both businesses and homeowners since expansion of the commercial/industrial tax base will reduce the long-term tax burden on homeowners.
- ❖ Support and expand the work of MORE (Municipalities Organized for Regional Effectiveness), the 22-town regional collaborative that The Research Bureau was instrumental in founding. MORE is currently working on the joint purchase of goods and services to reduce costs for member towns, expanding the towns' governing capacity, and preparing a legislative agenda for the region.

Implementing those resolutions will lead to a healthier and more prosperous 2008.  
Happy New Year!

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