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Center for  
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Measurement



WORCESTER  
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BUREAU

# Benchmarking Municipal and Neighborhood Services

## in Worcester: 2005

CCPM-05-03

# Welcome

## Benchmarking Municipal and Neighborhood Services in Worcester

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Dear Citizen,

This is the fourth annual *Benchmarking Municipal and Neighborhood Services in Worcester* report prepared by the Research Bureau's Center for Community Performance Measurement (CCPM). The CCPM was established in 2001 with support from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation to measure and benchmark municipal and community performance in the areas of economic development, public education, municipal and neighborhood services, public safety, and youth services.

This report is designed to:

- **Provide an assessment of how well the City is meeting the neighborhood services goals described in its strategic plan;**
- **Inform City leaders, policymakers, businesses, nonprofit organizations, funders, and residents about municipal and neighborhood services issues; and**
- **Serve as a catalyst for setting priorities and promoting action to make Worcester an even more attractive and satisfying place to live and work.**

The indicators in this report describe the performance of several municipal departments, including the Department of Public Works and Parks, the Department of Code Enforcement, the Worcester Public Library, as well as measuring residents' civic engagement. We measure performance by asking, "What has changed since last year, what have we accomplished, and what challenges are still before us?"

Performance measures come in many different forms, including inputs (such as financial resources), outputs (the number of customers served), and outcomes (the quantifiable results of the program). Regardless of their form, performance measures should relate to a particular initiative or strategy of an organization, and as noted above, the measures presented in this report directly relate to the goals contained in the City's strategic plan.

We caution the reader that the performance measurement data in this report do not explain why a particular measure improved or declined. It is not our purpose in this report to provide recommendations for action. Rather, we are presenting the data to stimulate discussion about options for improving Worcester's performance, and it is important that the data presented here be used in conjunction with other information to develop sound public policies.

We would also emphasize that municipal departments are not the only entities responsible for improving the measures set forth in this report. For example, the physical condition of neighborhoods is dependent on property owners maintaining their properties. Similarly, neighborhood organizations and agencies can encourage voter registration and voter turnout.

It is important to bear in mind that no single indicator should be considered in isolation. In other words, context is important, and the indicators discussed in this report are interrelated. For example, improvements noted in **Indicator 3: Physical Condition of Neighborhoods** may lead to increased citizen satisfaction as reported in **Indicator 4: Citizen Satisfaction with Delivery of Services**. Furthermore, the indicators in this report may also influence those in other CCPM reports. For example, improvements in the physical condition of neighborhoods (discussed in this report) may lead to reductions in the crime rates discussed in CCPM's *Benchmarking Public Safety* in Worcester reports.

We wish to thank the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation for its continued support of the CCPM, as well as the Greater Worcester Community Foundation and the Hoche-Scofield Foundation for their sponsorship of this report. We hope that this report will encourage widespread discussion of municipal service delivery issues, serve as a basis for sound priority-setting and decision-making, and promote greater adoption of performance measurement practices at the municipal level.

Sincerely,

Eric H. Schultz - President

Roberta R. Schaefer, Ph.D. - Executive Director

Kimberly A. Hood, MPA - Manager, CCPM

## 1

# Effectiveness of Municipal Services

## Why is it important?

Citizens expect their municipal government to provide services in the most effective and efficient manner possible. The kinds of services and the quality of their delivery vary from one community to another, depending in part on the financial and human resources available. The City of Worcester is a “full-service” city: it provides a broad range of services, including municipal water and sewer, snow removal, refuse collection, and a regional public library. In many neighboring communities, residents must hire their own refuse collection service, or travel to Worcester for extensive library services. The quantity and quality of services delivered can ultimately affect the “quality of life” of those who live in, work in, or visit a city. Because of the recent nationwide economic downturn and continued reductions in local aid from the state, Worcester, like many other communities across the country, is faced with the challenge of continuing to provide quality services to its residents while facing significant fiscal constraints.

## How does Worcester perform?

### Department of Public Works<sup>1</sup>

The Department of Public Works (DPW) tax levy divisions provide for street and highway maintenance, solid waste collection and disposal, equipment services, street lighting, and engineering services. As shown in **Table 1.1**, the DPW’s budget was \$18.6 million in FY05, the budget year coinciding with the most current performance data available. In FY05, the DPW budget supported 200 positions, 39 (16%) fewer than it had just three years earlier in FY02. Salary expenditures during this same period declined by only 5.5%, indicating that a substantial portion of savings derived from personnel reductions was consumed by contractually obligated salary increases for the remaining staff.

<sup>1</sup> In July 2005, under the City Manager’s plan to reorganize City government’s administrative structure, the Department of Public Works became part of the larger Department of Public Works and Parks. Because the performance data included in this report are primarily from the period prior to the reorganization, we will use the Department names as they existed prior to July 2005.

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**Table 1.1: Department of Public Works (Non-Enterprise Divisions)**

|   | FY02         | FY03         | FY04         | FY05         | % Change FY02-FY05 |
|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------------|
| Total Expenditures*                         | \$18,699,167 | \$19,551,381 | \$18,297,919 | \$18,647,007 | -0.3%              |
| Expenditures per Capita**                   | \$107        | \$111        | \$104        | \$106        | -0.7%              |
| Salaries                                    | \$8,577,208  | \$9,383,669  | \$8,247,457  | \$8,102,995  | -5.5%              |
| Overtime                                    | \$644,405    | \$760,865    | \$650,865    | \$679,565    | 5.5%               |
| Number of Positions (Funded)                | 239          | 231          | 200          | 200          | -16.3%             |
| Ordinary Maintenance                        | \$5,859,874  | \$5,848,747  | \$5,670,497  | \$6,166,447  | 5.2%               |
| Street Lights                               | \$2,446,680  | \$2,387,100  | \$2,558,100  | \$2,527,000  | 3.3%               |
| Snow Removal (Budgeted)                     | \$1,171,000  | \$1,171,000  | \$1,171,000  | \$1,171,000  | 0.0%               |
| Snow Removal (Actual)                       | \$1,389,000  | \$4,275,000  | \$2,442,000  | \$5,367,000  | 286.4              |
| Refuse collection and disposal expenditures | \$2,891,307  | \$2,845,856  | \$2,600,375  | \$2,544,941  | -12.0%             |
| Tons of refuse collected                    | 29,301       | 27,721       | 27,833       | 27,079       | -7.6%              |
| Refuse expenditures per ton                 | \$99         | \$103        | \$93         | \$94         | -4.8%              |
| Curbside recycling expenditures             | \$1,026,000  | \$1,061,000  | \$1,148,000  | \$1,365,000  | 33.0%              |
| Tons of recycling collected                 | 9,542        | 9,617        | 10,065       | 9,802        | 2.7%               |
| Recycling expenditures per ton              | \$108        | \$110        | \$114        | \$139        | 29.5%              |
| Abandoned Vehicle Removal                   | na           | na           | \$41,050     | \$56,000     | na                 |
| Vehicles Tagged and Removed                 | na           | na           | 2,000+       | 1,400+       | na                 |
|   | CY01         | CY02         | CY03         | CY04         | % Change CY01-CY04 |
| Number of street miles resurfaced           | 6.94         | 7.40         | 8.38         | 14.03        | 102.2%             |
| Number of sidewalk miles repaired           | 6.11         | 10.76        | 5.73         | 8.15         | 33.4%              |

Source: City of Worcester Annual Budgets, FY02 - FY06; City of Worcester Comprehensive Annual Financial Reports (2002-2004); Expenditures rounded to the nearest dollar.

\* Total expenditures do not include fringe benefits \*\*Expenditures per Capita are based on Census Bureau Population Estimates

## 1

# Effectiveness of Municipal Services (Cont.)

During FY05, DPW was responsible for maintaining 1,274 street lane miles as well as 483 sidewalk miles. From calendar year 2003 to 2004, spending on street resurfacing increased by 64%, from \$2.36 million to more than \$3.87 million, allowing for a significant (58%) increase in the number of miles of street resurfaced (from 8.38 miles in 2003 to 14.03 miles in 2004). Spending on sidewalk repairs has also increased substantially in recent years, from \$450,000 in 2002 to more than \$572,000 in 2004 (a 27% increase). In 2004, more than 8 miles of sidewalks were repaired in the City, up from 6.11 miles in 2001 (a 33% increase). The FY06 budget includes an additional \$1.85 million allocated for the repair of City streets and sidewalks.

In FY05, the City of Worcester collected and disposed of more than 27,000 tons of refuse, at a cost of \$94 per ton. From FY02 to FY05, the amount of refuse collected annually decreased by 7.6%. The City's curbside recycling budget increased 33% from FY02 to FY05, with further increases budgeted in FY06. Recycling costs per ton of material collected increased from \$108 in FY02 to \$139 in FY05 (a 29.5% increase). While annual recycling collections increased by more than 500 tons from FY02 to FY04, in FY05, about 200 fewer tons were collected compared to FY04.

Expenditures for snow and ice removal vary from year-to-year based on total snowfall and the number of days during which snow and ice clearing efforts must be undertaken.<sup>2</sup> From FY02 through FY05, snow removal funding remained constant at \$1.17 million. Each year, however, expenditures exceeded the budgeted allocation. In FY05, for example, snow removal costs exceeded the budget by more than \$4 million. When a deficit occurs, DPW will seek a supplemental appropriation to eliminate the deficit at year end, and any portion of the deficit that is not eliminated by year end will be carried into the next fiscal year.

<sup>2</sup> In addition to the total amount of snowfall, length of lane miles to be cleared, and number of days requiring snow removal efforts, the depth of snow cover, length of storms, temperature fluctuations and other factors will also impact the cost-effectiveness of snow and ice control.

<sup>3</sup> While DPW is not necessarily responsible for responding to each of the complaints, the call center does allow for a more streamlined and user-friendly approach, with service requests forwarded to the appropriate department (e.g., Code or the Worcester Police Department). The system also allows for tracking of outstanding or unresolved work orders.

<sup>4</sup> While the majority of requests or inquiries are received by telephone, the Center is also open to the public for walk-in requests (serving more than 900 walk-ins in FY05), and DPW is working to enhance an on-line component to allow citizens to submit requests using the Internet and email.

<sup>5</sup> Source: Department of Public Works, Keep Worcester Clean Summary Sheet for the Month of December and Year to Date Totals for 2004.

The City's Abandoned Vehicle Removal Program consists of tagging, and if necessary, towing abandoned vehicles, and issuing fines to vehicle owners. In FY05, more than 1,400 vehicles were tagged and removed (either towed or moved by the owner), and since DPW became responsible for the program in April of 2003, more than 4,300 vehicles have been tagged. The revenues collected from fines issued have exceeded the towing and storage costs incurred by the Department, allowing the program to be self-sufficient.

The City has established a centralized reporting system to receive, process, and track the outcomes of citizen requests for service and/or reports of problem conditions. The Customer Service Center, managed by DPW, began operations in October 2002, and its computerized service request/work order system logs and tracks all citizen requests and inquiries.<sup>3,4</sup> In October 2003, the Center began taking abandoned vehicle complaint calls, and in October 2004, calls to the City Manager's Line were directed to the Center. During FY05, the call center answered more than 110,000 calls in total (including informational requests), with 27,000 calls resulting in work orders.

The Keep Worcester Clean Program (KWC) is the result of a partnership between the Departments of Public Works, Health, Code, and numerous neighborhood associations to better coordinate existing City services aimed at improving the overall cleanliness of the City, including street and sidewalk sweeping, graffiti removal, and the City's response to litter and illegal dumping. The combined efforts of those involved in KWC resulted in the removal of more than 311 tons of trash and debris during calendar year 2004 (up from 221 tons in 2003). DPW reported that 3,302 bags of litter and miscellaneous debris were accumulated during clean-ups, 108 shopping carts and 875 tires were removed from various locations, 193 sites were cleared of graffiti and stickers, and 174 illegal dumping citations and 76 failure-to-maintain property citations were issued.<sup>5</sup>



# Benchmarking Municipal and Neighborhood Services in Worcester: 2005



## Department of Parks, Recreation and Cemetery<sup>6</sup>

The Department of Parks, Recreation and Cemetery is responsible for maintaining the City's 53 parks and playgrounds, Hope Cemetery, and the trees that line City streets. As shown in **Table 1.2**, the Department's budget in FY05 was \$3.3 million, which represents a 4.9% decrease since FY02. Since FY02, staffing levels have also declined by 23% (16 positions), from 70 to 54. Budgeted maintenance expenditures for parks and recreation services, not including the golf course, totaled \$1.3 million in FY05, or about \$1,087 per acre of park land.<sup>7</sup>

## Department of Code Enforcement<sup>8</sup>

The Department of Code Enforcement's Housing Division performs housing and sanitary code inspections and enforcement services for dirty/unsanitary yards or property, illegal dumping, rodent control services; the City's trash bag program; the abandoned building program; and overgrowth of weeds and vegetation

from private property onto public ways. The activities described above are supported as needed by inspectors from DCE's Construction Inspectional Division (building, plumbing/gas, and electrical inspectors), who ensure compliance with state housing, sanitary, and building codes.

Inspections occur following receipt of a complaint (including complaints made to the Customer Service Center) or as part of the systematic inspectional program, and are funded by a combination of local (tax levy) and Federal (Community Development Block Grant) funds. As is shown in **Table 1.3** below, the FY05 departmental budget of \$2.8 million was about .3% higher than the FY02 budget. The Department's staffing levels have declined from 72 in FY02 to 56 in FY05, and further declined in FY06 when, as part of the City Manager's consolidation efforts, staff from Code were moved to other departments.

Continued on next page ←

**Table 1.2: Department of Parks, Recreation, and Hope Cemetery**

|                              | FY02        | FY03        | FY04        | FY05        | % Change FY02-FY05 |
|------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------------|
| Total Expenditures*          | \$3,518,748 | \$3,735,152 | \$2,962,315 | \$3,347,211 | -4.9%              |
| Expenditures per Capita**    | \$20        | \$21        | \$17        | \$19        | -5.9%              |
| Salaries                     | \$2,554,873 | \$2,782,557 | \$2,347,440 | \$2,638,961 | 3.3%               |
| Overtime                     | \$205,000   | \$208,600   | \$162,600   | \$191,625   | -6.5%              |
| Number of Positions (Funded) | 70          | 67          | 54          | 54          | -22.9%             |

Source: City of Worcester Annual Budgets, FY02 - FY06 \* Total expenditures do not include fringe benefits \*\*Expenditures per Capita are based on Census Bureau Population Estimates

**Table 1.3: Department of Code Enforcement**

|                              | FY02        | FY03        | FY04        | FY05        | % Change FY02-FY05 |
|------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------------|
| Total Expenditures*          | \$2,827,076 | \$3,226,491 | \$2,796,041 | \$2,834,555 | 0.3%               |
| Expenditures per Capita**    | \$16        | \$18        | \$16        | \$16        | 0.0%               |
| Salaries                     | \$2,684,581 | \$3,081,380 | \$2,599,200 | \$2,624,363 | -2.2%              |
| Overtime                     | \$30,745    | \$33,360    | \$39,510    | \$49,510    | 61.0%              |
| Number of Positions (Funded) | 72          | 71          | 56          | 56          | -22.2%             |
| Ordinary Maintenance         | \$111,750   | \$111,750   | \$154,815   | \$158,176   | 41.5%              |

Source: City of Worcester Annual Budgets, FY02 - FY06 \* Total expenditures do not include fringe benefits \*\*Expenditures per Capita are based on Census Bureau Population Estimates

<sup>6</sup> Under the City Manager's reorganization plan implemented in July 2005, The Department of Parks, Recreation, and Cemetery became part of the larger Department of Public Works and Parks.

<sup>7</sup> Maintenance expenditures include salaries and ordinary maintenance expenses of the Maintenance Division, which is the Division responsible for the upkeep of the more than 1,215 acres of parks and playgrounds.

<sup>8</sup> Under the City Manager's reorganization of city government's administrative structure, Code Enforcement became a Division within the Department of Health and Human Services.

## 1

# Effectiveness of Municipal Services (Cont.)

As shown in **Table 1.4**, the 21,648 initial housing inspections that have occurred following complaints or as part of the systematic inspectional program from FY01 through FY05 have resulted in the identification of 29,009 violations.<sup>9</sup> Orders to abate or remediate the violations were issued for 95% of them. In FY05, Code inspectors completed 4,257 initial inspections; slightly more than half (53%) of these inspections were in response to housing complaints (e.g., complaints about lack of heat, electricity, or water, or non-working smoke detectors), while 47% were in response to failure to maintain a property (e.g., trash and litter complaints, unregistered vehicle complaints, and illegal dumping). These inspections yielded 4,122 violations.

Code Enforcement is also responsible for issuing building, electrical, gas, and plumbing permits for all construction work completed within the City. A substantial number of permit

requests are in response to housing inspectors citing violations during inspections, but at this time we are unable to separate these permit requests from the totals detailed in **Table 1.5** below. Overall, the number of permits issued has increased in each of the last five years. Permit fees collected by the City have also increased from \$1.7 million in FY01 to \$2.4 million in FY05. The construction value of permits has also increased significantly, and in FY05, the more than 10,000 permits issued had a construction value of \$227 million.

<sup>9</sup> These data reflect initial inspections only; Code staff indicated that most complaints require the inspector to complete several follow-up inspections. Therefore, these data reflect only a portion of the inspectional staff's workload in any given year.

**Table 1.4: Code Enforcement Housing Inspections**

|                 | Total Inspections | Total Violations | Orders Issued |            | Housing     |            | Trash/Yard  |            |
|-----------------|-------------------|------------------|---------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|
|                 |                   |                  | Inspections   | Violations | Inspections | Violations | Inspections | Violations |
| FY01            | 4,269             | 7,526            | 2,462         | 6,946      | 2,398       | 6,702      | 1,871       | 824        |
| FY02            | 4,822             | 6,997            | 2,467         | 6,513      | 6,513       | 6,179      | 2,230       | 818        |
| FY03            | 4,030             | 5,771            | 2,015         | 5,496      | 2,274       | 5,353      | 1,756       | 418        |
| FY04            | 4,270             | 4,593            | 2,068         | 4,469      | 2,685       | 4,166      | 1,585       | 427        |
| FY05            | 4,257             | 4,122            | 2,497         | 4,089      | 2,258       | 3,333      | 1,999       | 789        |
| <b>% Change</b> |                   |                  |               |            |             |            |             |            |
| FY01-FY05       | -0.3%             | -45.2%           | 1.4%          | -41.1%     | -5.8%       | -50.3%     | 6.8%        | -4.2%      |

Source: Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Code Enforcement

**Table 1.5: Permits Issued**

|                               | FY01          | FY02          | FY03          | FY04          | FY05          | % Change<br>FY01-FY05 |
|-------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------------|
| Permits Issued                | 9,234         | 9,914         | 10,156        | 10,341        | 10,485        | 13.5%                 |
| Permit Fees                   | \$1,734,427   | \$1,689,086   | \$2,266,878   | \$2,357,913   | \$2,462,593   | 42.0%                 |
| Construction Value of Permits | \$178,834,662 | \$122,495,255 | \$213,488,805 | \$179,704,807 | \$227,314,780 | 27.1%                 |

Source: Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Code Enforcement



## What does this mean for Worcester?

Many of the data for each of the three Departments discussed above, - DPW, Parks, and Code- are input data, and it is important that these data be considered in light of other indicators in this report, such as **Indicator 3: Physical Condition of Neighborhoods** and **Indicator 4: Citizen Satisfaction with Service Delivery**.

It is important to measure whether increased spending in some categories, such as road rehabilitation and fleet maintenance, corresponds to improved conditions in the City. Have declining staffing levels in other areas, such as Parks and Recreation, had a negative effect on the condition of the City's parks and playgrounds? How satisfied are residents with the delivery of services? Obtaining direct feedback from residents is one means of measuring the City's performance in these and other areas, and enables City leaders to set priorities, particularly during tight fiscal times, when increasing spending in one service area could potentially require reduced spending in another area. The extent to which residents are satisfied with services provided by DPW, Parks, and Code will be gauged by the CCPM's latest citizen survey, administered in July 2005. The results of this survey will be published later this year.

The Research Bureau's neighborhood surveys (ComNET) which began in 2001 have provided specific documentation of the need for extensive street and sidewalk repair. These data contributed to the City's increase in spending on these repairs during the last several years. (See **Indicator 3: Physical Condition of Neighborhoods**.)

In FY05, DPW reported tagging fewer "new" abandoned vehicles than in FY04 (1,400+ vs. 2,000+, respectively). The program's success in significantly reducing the volume of abandoned vehicles on Worcester's streets (more than 4,300 vehicles have been removed since April of 2003) has been attributed to increased awareness of the citations/fines issued to the owners of these vehicles.

The data pertaining to Code Enforcement's housing inspection program reveal another success story. From FY01 to FY05, staffing levels within the Department were shrinking; however, the number of initial housing inspections performed remained fairly constant from

year-to-year, suggesting that the Department was able to achieve greater efficiency, despite reductions in staff. Additionally, the construction value of permits issued by Code Enforcement has increased by 27% from \$178.8 million in FY01 to \$227.3 million in FY05.

In September 2004, the City Manager presented a plan to reorganize the structure and operations of municipal government in an effort to achieve greater efficiencies within departments and enhance the effectiveness of municipal operations. The foundation of the plan is the realignment and consolidation of divisions with integrated functions and complementary areas of responsibility, reducing the number of departments reporting directly to the City Manager from 23 to just eight.<sup>10</sup> Full implementation of the plan occurred on July 1, 2005 (coinciding with the start of FY06). In the next edition of this report, it will be important to review the performance of the departments under the new organizational structure of Worcester City Government. Have the new departments set performance benchmarks and are they collecting data to measure performance? Are there opportunities for the City to save money by contracting for services? For further discussion of opportunities to reduce expenditures and/or increase productivity, see the Research Bureau's Report No. 05-02, *The FY06 Budget: Are Increasing Taxes and Reducing Services the Only Options?*, and Report No. 04-05, *Respect for the Dead and Relief for the Budget: Can Privatization Improve Hope Cemetery?*<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> The newly created Departments include: Executive Office of the City Manager, Administration and Finance, Health and Human Services, Public Works and Parks, Communications, Police, Fire, and Law. For more information on the reorganization, visit [www.ci.worcester.ma.us](http://www.ci.worcester.ma.us)

<sup>11</sup> Both of these reports are available online at [www.wrrb.org](http://www.wrrb.org)



# 2 Library Services

## Why is it important?

Free and widespread access to information is vital to our knowledge-based economy and democratic society. Public libraries in this country have a long tradition of providing individuals with access to information and services that promote life-long learning and personal enrichment. The Worcester Public Library (WPL)- through its main library located in downtown Worcester and two branch libraries (Frances Perkins Branch in Greendale and the Great Brook Valley Branch)- affords users access to books, journals, videos, music CDs and other media; in-person and online reference services; and computers which provide access to the Internet, computerized databases, and other electronic information sources. Library patrons are able to search the library's database from home or work via the Internet, take advantage of inter-library loan services and programming that includes children's story time, computer skills classes, teen-led programs, and language and literacy support classes. Additionally, library facilities are often used for cultural and civic events, and in Worcester, the library's public meeting rooms are regularly used by a variety of local organizations.

Efforts to measure the performance of public libraries can lead to the identification of ways to strengthen them and their contributions to the communities that they serve.

<sup>1</sup> The Public Library Data Service's annual *Statistical Report* provides financial information, annual use figures, technology-related statistics, library resources, and more. The most recent data collected (in the Spring of 2005) are for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Since July 2004, Springfield has been under a financial control board because of fiscal insolvency. As the Board continues to work to ensure the long-term financial health of the City, there could be additional reductions in library services.

## How does Worcester perform?

**Table 2.1** shows input and performance data for the WPL and the public libraries in Hartford, Providence, and Springfield.<sup>1</sup> From FY00 to FY04, service hours per week declined for each of the four library systems shown in **Table 2.1**; however, WPL experienced the greatest reduction in hours with a 25% decline (from 129 to 97 hours) during this period. In FY04, Worcester's staffing and service hours were below those of each of the three comparison library systems. It is worth noting that the higher staffing levels and service hours in the comparison cities are likely a function of these cities operating more branch libraries than Worcester. While Worcester operated two branch libraries in FY04, Hartford, Providence, and Springfield each operated nine branch libraries. However, Worcester's staff-to-service-hours ratio was higher than (at least double) each of the other cities, suggesting that during any given service hour, Worcester libraries had more staff on duty than the other libraries.

Despite the reductions in service hours and staffing levels described above, during the past five years, WPL's annual circulation has increased by 47% (from 476,956 to 698,787), and annual reference transactions increased by more than a third, from 102,158 in FY00 to 138,501 in FY04. While Providence and Hartford also experienced increases in annual circulation during the same period, the magnitude of growth was much less, at 12.9% and 7.3% respectively. Springfield was the only city listed in **Table 2.1** to report substantial declines in each of the categories examined. Since FY00, the Springfield library system has experienced a 20% reduction in total operating expenditures (from \$6.2 to \$4.9 million), a 34% reduction in staffing, a 19% reduction in weekly service hours, and annual circulation has declined by 23%.<sup>2</sup>

The WPL spends less on materials than any of the other libraries, and its materials expenditures of \$2.84 per resident are well below Hartford's (\$5.09), Providence's (\$4.66), and Springfield's (\$4.01).

**Table 2.2** details sources of funding for each of the four library systems in FY04. About 80% (\$3.6 million) of the Worcester Public Library's funding is derived from local tax levy dollars. The remainder of funding comes from state, Federal, and other sources, with state funding comprising the largest component (more than \$731,000, or about 16% of total funding). Similarly, Hartford receives 82% of its funding from local sources and Springfield receives a slightly higher percentage, 87%, from local tax dollars. The greatest share of Providence's funding (41%) came from other sources (e.g. gifts, donations, fines, fees, etc.), followed by local funding (34%) and the state (23%).

# Benchmarking Municipal and Neighborhood Services in Worcester: 2005



**Table 2.1: Library Performance Data**

|                                     |      | Worcester   | Providence <sup>(1), (2)</sup> | Hartford    | Springfield <sup>(3)</sup> | National Average<br>for all jurisdictions<br>100,000-249,999 |
|-------------------------------------|------|-------------|--------------------------------|-------------|----------------------------|--|
| Number of FTE Library Staff         | FY00 | 88.0        | 159.0                          | 134.0       | 123.0                      | 72.0   |
|                                     | FY01 | 80.0        | 155.4                          | 147.0       | 126.0                      | 73.6   |
|                                     | FY02 | 81.0        | 158.6                          | 112.6       | 101.0                      | 76.8   |
|                                     | FY03 | 77.0        | 152.5                          | 110.3       | 70.0                       | 76.3   |
|                                     | FY04 | 77.0        | 143.0                          | 119.0       | 81.5                       | -  |
| Service Hours Per Week              | FY00 | 129.0       | 437.0                          | 417.0       | 340.0                      | 286.2  |
|                                     | FY01 | 129.0       | 435.5                          | 417.0       | 340.0                      | 298.0  |
|                                     | FY02 | 129.0       | 435.5                          | 472.0       | 337.0                      | 291.5  |
|                                     | FY03 | 98.0        | 435.5                          | 428.0       | 276.0                      | 282.7  |
|                                     | FY04 | 97.0        | 418.5                          | 377.0       | 276.0                      | -  |
| Annual Circulation                  | FY00 | 476,956     | 793,693                        | 521,982     | 755,385                    | 1,028,614  |
|                                     | FY01 | 611,837     | 815,544                        | 471,495     | 848,191                    | 1,054,733  |
|                                     | FY02 | 687,451     | 883,979                        | 539,849     | 783,374                    | 1,133,207  |
|                                     | FY03 | 662,704     | 819,982                        | 557,646     | 579,795                    | 1,186,475  |
|                                     | FY04 | 698,787     | 896,214                        | 559,887     | 585,087                    | -  |
| Annual Reference Transactions       | FY00 | 102,158     | 177,314                        | 276,186     | 145,832                    | 163,194  |
|                                     | FY01 | 106,606     | 170,853                        | 341,392     | 155,590                    | 164,968  |
|                                     | FY02 | 151,335     | 178,385                        | 436,761     | 155,921                    | 168,686  |
|                                     | FY03 | 177,273     | 171,798                        | 371,983     | 105,614                    | 169,678  |
|                                     | FY04 | 138,501     | 182,097                        | 573,513     | 136,922                    | -  |
| Total Operating Expenditures        | FY00 | \$4,136,307 | \$7,876,198                    | \$5,830,100 | \$6,200,538                | \$3,887,427  |
|                                     | FY01 | \$4,225,715 | \$8,396,726                    | \$5,998,229 | \$7,122,616                | \$4,093,336  |
|                                     | FY02 | \$4,813,053 | \$8,396,726                    | \$6,590,877 | \$7,139,127                | \$4,399,648  |
|                                     | FY03 | \$4,782,116 | \$8,859,392                    | \$6,564,005 | \$6,151,246                | \$4,748,434  |
|                                     | FY04 | \$4,301,896 | \$9,842,685                    | \$6,278,472 | \$4,988,252                | -  |
| Total Expenditures per Resident     | FY00 | \$23.91     | \$45.32                        | \$46.95     | \$40.79                    | \$25.10  |
|                                     | FY01 | \$24.27     | \$48.07                        | \$48.26     | \$47.03                    | \$26.20  |
|                                     | FY02 | \$27.48     | \$47.78                        | \$53.02     | \$47.00                    | \$28.14  |
|                                     | FY03 | \$27.22     | \$50.23                        | \$52.77     | \$40.43                    | \$30.14  |
|                                     | FY04 | \$24.48     | \$55.81                        | \$50.48     | \$32.78                    | -  |
| Expenditures for Materials          | FY00 | \$565,954   | \$835,257                      | \$585,380   | \$723,608                  | \$584,238  |
|                                     | FY01 | \$612,167   | \$1,130,371                    | \$555,400   | \$679,183                  | \$595,708  |
|                                     | FY02 | \$555,247   | \$1,130,371                    | \$657,175   | \$649,142                  | \$612,299  |
|                                     | FY03 | \$629,236   | \$794,233                      | \$669,010   | \$624,406                  | \$629,989  |
|                                     | FY04 | \$498,653   | \$821,551                      | \$633,098   | \$609,830                  | -  |
| Materials Expenditures per Resident | FY00 | \$3.27      | \$4.81                         | \$4.71      | \$4.76                     | \$3.77   |
|                                     | FY01 | \$3.52      | \$6.47                         | \$4.47      | \$4.48                     | \$3.81   |
|                                     | FY02 | \$3.17      | \$6.43                         | \$5.29      | \$4.27                     | \$3.92   |
|                                     | FY03 | \$3.58      | \$4.50                         | \$5.38      | \$4.10                     | \$4.00   |
|                                     | FY04 | \$2.84      | \$4.66                         | \$5.09      | \$4.01                     | -  |

**Table 2.2: FY04 Sources of Funding**

|              | Worcester          | Providence         | Hartford           | Springfield        |
|--------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Local        | \$3,600,306        | \$3,350,000        | \$5,135,707        | \$4,335,000        |
| State        | \$731,763          | \$2,272,801        | \$20,891           | \$438,947          |
| Federal      | \$16,285           | \$241,618          | \$300,459          | \$10,280           |
| Other        | \$130,659          | \$4,070,947        | \$821,415          | \$204,475          |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>\$4,479,013</b> | <b>\$9,935,366</b> | <b>\$6,278,472</b> | <b>\$4,988,702</b> |

Other: Gifts, donations, interest income, fines, fees, and anything else that does not fall into the other three categories. Source: Public Library Data Service survey for FY04.

Source: Public Library Data Service surveys for FY00-FY04.

(1) The legal jurisdiction of the Providence Public Library is the entire state; for comparison purposes, however, the figures for the City of Providence are used. (2) Expenditure statistics for Providence were reported exactly the same in FY02 as in FY01. (3) Springfield's Main Library was closed for renovations during 2003. While its collection was available through the branch libraries, it is not counted in the "Number of Service Points." Three additional branches were completely closed and the remaining branches were open only one day per week.

Continued on next page ←

# 2 Library Services (Cont.)

## What does this mean for Worcester?

*In FY04, there were over 701,000 visitors to the Worcester Public Library, and attendance at WPL-sponsored programs was nearly 13,000. More than 475,000 items were viewed using the WPL's subscription services, and more than 31,000 items were loaned to other libraries in the region. While Worcester residents are afforded fewer points of service as well as fewer service hours compared to Springfield, Hartford, and Providence residents, it appears that they are increasingly utilizing the services that are available. After decreasing from FY02 to FY03, Worcester's annual circulation increased from FY03 to FY04, and in FY04, it reached its highest level in five years.*

*In FY04, WPL expenditures per resident were substantially below the expenditure levels in the three comparison cities. Table 2.1 also shows that Worcester's per capita total expenditures have consistently been below the national average for all libraries in similarly-sized jurisdictions with populations of 100,000 – 249,999. In FY04, WPL's total operating expenditures were \$4.3 million, or about \$500,000 less than in FY02.*

*As a result of the approval of funding increases for the WPL in the City's FY06 budget, the WPL will be able to expand its hours of operation at its branches, and the main library will open 17 Sundays during the fiscal year (though it will remain closed on Mondays). However, it might be important for the City to consider the longer-term effects of using additional funding to expand hours of operation rather than making a substantial investment in materials since WPL's per capita materials expenditures are well below those of the comparison cities. The circulation and reference transaction data suggest that despite a decline in weekly service hours, patrons are in fact getting to and making use of library services.*

*In addition to the input and output measures described here, direct feedback of library patrons is also an important aspect of measuring library performance. The extent to which users are satisfied with the services provided at the WPL will be gauged through the CCPM's annual citizen satisfaction survey. The latest survey, administered in July 2005, asked Worcester residents how often they used library services, as well as how satisfied they were with the hours of operation, selection of materials, assistance provided by staff, children's programs, and computer resources/online services. The results of this survey will be published later this year.*



## 3

## Physical Condition of Neighborhoods

**Why is it important?**

The physical condition of a neighborhood affects both the quality of life of residents as well as the neighborhood's overall vitality. Signs of physical decay such as litter-strewn yards, illegal dumping, abandoned vehicles, boarded and/or vacant buildings, overgrown vegetation, and crumbling streets or sidewalks can result in a diminished sense of community, decreased property values, lost tax revenue, and increased crime rates. As noted in the City's Strategic Plan, "Quality of life for all Worcester residents is most impacted by the condition of the neighborhoods wherein they reside. Increased municipal resources that improve and enhance Worcester's residential areas will ultimately benefit the entire community."<sup>1</sup>

A number of municipal departments are responsible for addressing the physical condition of Worcester's neighborhoods: the Department of Public Works and Parks paves streets, fills potholes, repairs sidewalks, cleans catchbasins, collects refuse, removes abandoned vehicles on streets, maintains over 1,215 acres of land in over fifty parks and playgrounds, cares for the trees that line city streets, and maintains and repairs public buildings. The Division of Code Enforcement provides inspectional and enforcement services to ensure compliance with building and sanitary codes. In 2001, the CCPM initiated the ComNET program (Computerized Neighborhood Environment Tracking) to gauge the City's effectiveness in responding to many of the physical problems found in neighborhoods throughout the City.<sup>2</sup> ComNET is a tool to help residents and city leaders identify and document problem areas- ranging from potholes in streets, to faded crosswalk lines, abandoned vehicles, sidewalk trip hazards, and dumping- and determine which municipal agencies or other organizations are responsible for resolving the problems.

Since the spring of 2001, the CCPM has partnered with more than 100 residents in 12 neighborhoods throughout the City (comprising 180 miles of sidewalks and about one-third of the City's population) to conduct 41 ComNET surveys. The survey allows residents, who are trained to use handheld computers and digital cameras, to systematically record various problems and assets in their neighborhoods. The data collected are then transmitted to the appropriate agency for remedial action. This process helps City departments and neighborhoods identify problems they can address, highlights improvements that have been made, and holds government and neighborhoods accountable for results.

<sup>1</sup> Benchmarking Worcester's Future: 2001-2006 Strategic Plan, Worcester City Manager's Office.

<sup>2</sup> ComNET was developed by the Fund for the City of New York's Center on Municipal Government Performance, and adapted to Worcester with the Fund's assistance.



## 3

## Physical Condition of Neighborhoods (Cont.)

## How does Worcester perform?

Each of the participating neighborhoods is surveyed about once every 18 months. During follow-up surveys, residents document the status of previously recorded problems as well as identify any new conditions that have occurred, thus tracking the status of problems over time. **Table 3.1** shows, by neighborhood, the number of newly-documented problems recorded each year (“na” indicates that the neighborhood was not surveyed during that year; 2005 data reflect only the neighborhoods surveyed during the spring). The 41 surveys conducted since ComNET began in 2001 have resulted in the documentation of 9,803 problem conditions overall. In addition to noting what’s wrong, residents are now recording the assets found in their neighborhoods as well (such as schools, churches, community centers, playgrounds, etc.), and 417 assets have been recorded to date. The purpose of noting assets is to identify potential partners City and neighborhood leaders can turn to for assistance in addressing the problems.

Among all problems identified since 2001, about one-quarter of conditions identified have been street-related problems (pot holes, uneven pavement, dirt/sand, faded crosswalks, missing curb cuts, clogged catch basins, etc.). Litter has been the most frequently recorded problem, and has been documented in more than 1,500 locations (on both public and private spaces). The 1,420 sidewalk

trip hazards that have been recorded represent the second-most frequently recorded problem, followed by overgrown weeds and vegetation (1,175 problems identified on both private properties and park lands).

As shown in **Table 3.2**, the greatest proportion of problems identified are problems that are the responsibility of the Department of Public Works and Parks because that department is responsible for the City’s infrastructure. Overall, 56.5% of problems ever identified are the responsibility of DPW, and as **Table 3.2** reveals, at the neighborhood level, this proportion ranges from 47.5% to 73%. In each of the 12 neighborhoods, problems that fall outside the scope of municipal agencies and are the responsibility of neighborhood residents- so called “community problems” - (e.g., overgrown vegetation, peeling paint, or litter on residential properties; broken fences, windows, and porches), represent the second highest percentage, ranging from 12.3% to 30.2% , or, on average, about one out of four problems identified. These are followed by problems that are the responsibility of the Department of Code Enforcement (12.2% of all problems identified).

Citywide, 64.7% of the problems identified through ComNET have been resolved. Almost three-quarters of the 3,310 problems identified in 2001 have been resolved, about two-thirds of the 2,071 problems identified in 2002 have been resolved, and 46% of the problems identified in 2003 have been resolved.<sup>3</sup>

As shown in **Table 3.3**, the resolution rate for all neighborhoods for community problems is 73.7%, and 68.8% of the problems for which Code Enforcement is responsible have been resolved.

Text Continues on Page 13

**Table 3.1: Problems Identified, 2001-2005**

|                      | 2001         | 2002         | 2003         | 2004         | 2005       | Total        |
|----------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------|--------------|
| Bell Hill            | 756          | 141          | 197          | na           | 289        | 1,383        |
| Brittan Square       | 633          | 155          | 35           | 245          | na         | 1,068        |
| College Hill         | na           | na           | 81           | na           | 219        | 300          |
| Columbus Park        | na           | 326          | 113          | 142          | na         | 581          |
| Crown Hill           | 202          | 66           | 62           | 107          | na         | 437          |
| Crystal Park         | na           | na           | 549          | 179          | na         | 728          |
| Elm Park             | 371          | 8            | 4            | 115          | na         | 498          |
| Green Island         | 740          | 133          | 84           | 172          | na         | 1,129        |
| Main Middle          | 608          | 421          | 6            | 250          | na         | 1,285        |
| Quinsigamond Village | na           | 194          | 92           | na           | 433        | 719          |
| South Worcester      | na           | na           | 289          | 282          | na         | 571          |
| Union Hill           | na           | 627          | 160          | 317          | na         | 1,104        |
| <b>Total</b>         | <b>3,310</b> | <b>2,071</b> | <b>1,672</b> | <b>1,809</b> | <b>941</b> | <b>9,803</b> |

Source: WRRB, ComNET Surveys

<sup>3</sup> We do not yet know the resolution rates for problems identified during surveys conducted in 2004 and the spring of 2005. Given that a neighborhood is typically surveyed about every 18 months, follow-up surveys in these neighborhoods have not yet taken place.

<sup>4</sup> The resolution rate for abandoned vehicles are based on data as of last spring, but the actual resolution rate may be higher. According to the DPW Commissioner, currently, there is no backlog of abandoned vehicle complaints.



**Table 3.2: Distribution of Problem Conditions by Responsible Agency**

| Neighborhood         | Total Problems Identified | Public Works | Community*   | Code Enforcement | Graffiti Clean Up | Mass Electric | Parks      | Various    |
|----------------------|---------------------------|--------------|--------------|------------------|-------------------|---------------|------------|------------|
| Bell Hill            | 1,383                     | 672          | 417          | 207              | 32                | 10            | 32         | 13         |
| Brittan Square       | 1,068                     | 692          | 255          | 51               | 20                | 1             | 25         | 23         |
| College Hill         | 300                       | 219          | 37           | 30               | 1                 | 0             | 9          | 3          |
| Columbus Park        | 581                       | 332          | 126          | 57               | 13                | 2             | 38         | 13         |
| Crown Hill           | 437                       | 215          | 130          | 55               | 14                | 3             | 14         | 5          |
| Crystal Park         | 728                       | 346          | 210          | 134              | 8                 | 6             | 21         | 3          |
| Elm Park             | 498                       | 299          | 111          | 26               | 42                | 7             | 1          | 12         |
| Green Island         | 1,129                     | 635          | 308          | 105              | 36                | 17            | 11         | 13         |
| Main Middle          | 1,285                     | 736          | 270          | 179              | 37                | 7             | 35         | 18         |
| Quinsigamond Village | 719                       | 521          | 96           | 64               | 1                 | 1             | 23         | 13         |
| South Worcester      | 571                       | 295          | 137          | 103              | 13                | 5             | 9          | 9          |
| Union Hill           | 1,104                     | 581          | 232          | 189              | 35                | 13            | 29         | 22         |
| <b>Total</b>         | <b>9,803</b>              | <b>5,543</b> | <b>2,329</b> | <b>1,200</b>     | <b>252</b>        | <b>72</b>     | <b>247</b> | <b>147</b> |

\* "Community" includes conditions that are the responsibility of private owners, such as peeling paint on buildings, broken or missing porches, litter, and overgrown vegetation.

Source: WRRB, ComNET Surveys

**Table 3.3: Problem Resolution Rates by Neighborhood and Responsible Agency**

|                      | Public Works | Community*   | Code Enforcement | Graffiti Clean Up | Mass Electric | Parks        | Various      | Verizon      | WRTA          |
|----------------------|--------------|--------------|------------------|-------------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| Bell Hill            | 53.8%        | 77.4%        | 74.1%            | 65.6%             | 66.7%         | 69.6%        | 80.0%        | na           | na            |
| Brittan Square       | 60.1%        | 85.5%        | 83.8%            | 75.0%             | na            | 62.5%        | 57.1%        | na           | na            |
| College Hill         | 21.8%        | 71.4%        | 62.5%            | na                | na            | 50.0%        | na           | na           | na            |
| Columbus Park        | 46.4%        | 64.0%        | 73.3%            | 90.0%             | 100.0%        | 54.5%        | 72.7%        | na           | na            |
| Crown Hill           | 54.5%        | 75.2%        | 59.0%            | 61.5%             | 100.0%        | 71.4%        | 0.0%         | 100.0%       | na            |
| Crystal Park         | 46.9%        | 57.5%        | 47.3%            | 28.6%             | 83.3%         | 33.3%        | 0.0%         | na           | na            |
| Elm Park             | 49.1%        | 86.3%        | 88.2%            | 96.3%             | 100.0%        | na           | 83.3%        | na           | na            |
| Green Island         | 75.8%        | 72.4%        | 79.5%            | 93.3%             | 87.5%         | 100.0%       | 100.0%       | 100.0%       | na            |
| Main Middle          | 75.2%        | 86.8%        | 72.2%            | 85.3%             | 100.0%        | 60.0%        | 66.7%        | na           | 100.0%        |
| Quinsigamond Village | 46.8%        | 83.6%        | 80.0%            | 0.0%              | na            | 0.0%         | 100.0%       | na           | na            |
| South Worcester      | 36.9%        | 46.7%        | 42.6%            | 16.7%             | 80.0%         | 20.0%        | na           | na           | na            |
| Union Hill           | 50.8%        | 62.1%        | 72.6%            | 66.7%             | 100.0%        | 72.7%        | 85.7%        | 50.0%        | na            |
| <b>Total</b>         | <b>58.3%</b> | <b>73.7%</b> | <b>68.8%</b>     | <b>82.0%</b>      | <b>88.1%</b>  | <b>54.7%</b> | <b>73.1%</b> | <b>83.3%</b> | <b>100.0%</b> |

\* "Community" includes conditions that are the responsibility of private owners, such as peeling paint on buildings, broken or missing porches, litter, and overgrown vegetation.

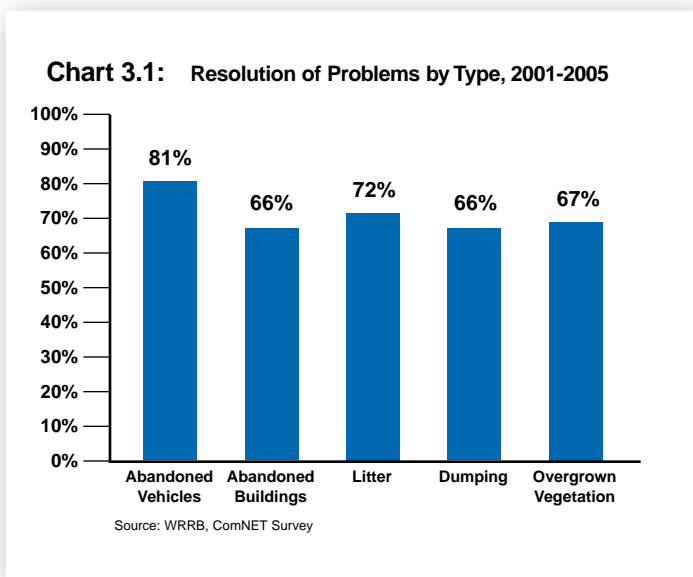
Source: WRRB, ComNET Surveys

## 3

## Physical Condition of Neighborhoods (Cont.)

While the Department of Public Works' resolution rate is lower than those of other agencies, DPW, as noted above, is responsible for much of the City's infrastructure. Additionally, a number of the problems reported to DPW require substantial capital investment (e.g., repaving entire streets), and therefore take much longer to be resolved.

When looking at resolution rates by problem type, 58% of street problems have been resolved, 57.3% of sidewalk problems have been resolved, and 70.1% of problems with catch basins and sewers have been resolved. **Chart 3.1** shows resolution rates for several other key problem categories.<sup>4</sup>



### What does this mean for Worcester?

*The resolution rates of problems identified that are described above continue to demonstrate ComNET's success as a tool to improve the physical conditions and overall quality of life in Worcester's neighborhoods. Each time a follow-up survey is conducted in one of the twelve participating neighborhoods, the number of previously documented unresolved problems declines. However, each survey also presents an opportunity to identify problems that did not previously exist or were not previously documented, and as a result, the survey provides neighborhood residents with timely monitoring and the ability to track a neighborhood's condition over time.*

*In addition to the physical improvements described above, a number of neighborhood associations are incorporating ComNET data into their grant applications, and these data have allowed the organizations to quantify the extent of certain problems in their neighborhoods. The City's Planning Office is also using ComNET data as it develops neighborhood plans. Since ComNET began, the City has established an abandoned vehicle hotline, and responsibility for abandoned vehicles now rests with one department rather than two. The ComNET project has clearly contributed to citizen engagement in neighborhood improvement efforts – 73.7% of community issues identified since the project began have been resolved, and the Research Bureau has worked with neighborhoods to identify ways to increase those resolution rates.*

*The ComNET project has been a catalyst for improvements in the provision of municipal services. According to the Commissioner of Public Works, DPW uses the data collected by neighborhood residents by fitting the problems identified into the Department's maintenance obligations and funding. The data are also being used to prioritize capital improvements, and in FY06, an additional \$1.85 million was allocated for street and sidewalk repair throughout the City.*

## 4

# Citizen Satisfaction with Service Delivery

## Why is it important?

Citizen surveys are one way to measure government performance. They provide residents with an opportunity to share their perceptions of whether municipal government is doing a good job providing services such as street maintenance, snow removal, trash collection, and public safety. Such surveys allow the City administration and municipal departments to identify strengths and weaknesses in the provision of services, and survey findings can be used to inform decision-making and increase the level and quality of services citizens receive.

In 2004, for the third consecutive year, the Research Bureau conducted its survey of citizen satisfaction with municipal services in Worcester, which measures residents' satisfaction with services provided by a number of City Departments, including Public Works, Code Enforcement, Police, Fire, and Worcester Public Schools.<sup>1</sup> A total of 1,434 telephone surveys, conducted by Spanish- and English-speaking interviewers, were completed during May and June of 2004. Survey participants were fairly evenly distributed across the four quadrants of the City.



<sup>1</sup> For complete survey results, see *Citizen Satisfaction with Municipal Services: 2004 Survey* (report no. CCPM-04-08) at our web site: <http://www.wrrb.org>.

<sup>2</sup> Some survey questions asked respondents to rate a service or condition as *excellent, good, fair, or poor*. Responses of excellent and good were considered a positive rating. Questions regarding road surfaces, street lighting, abandoned buildings, and neighborhood cleanliness utilized scales specific to each topic.

<sup>3</sup> 30% of respondents did not indicate their level of satisfaction with library services, and presumably many of these individuals did not do so because they had not used library services. The Research Bureau modified this question for its 2005 survey, and first asked respondents if they used the Public Library, and if yes, then respondents were asked how satisfied they were with a number of services.

## How does Worcester perform?

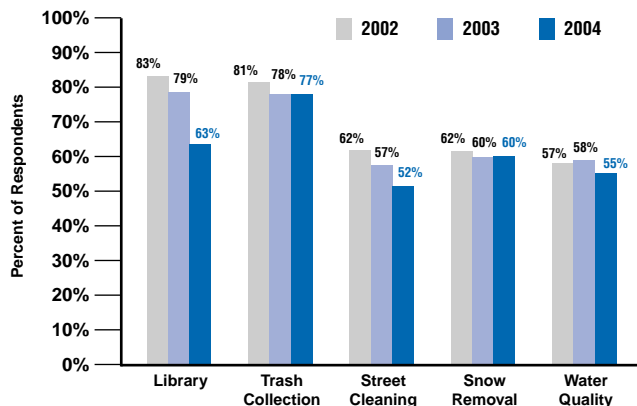
Overall, residents citywide were satisfied with municipal services. Although the proportion of citizens expressing satisfaction with several of the services investigated in this survey declined from previous years, all services still received a positive rating from more than 50% of respondents.<sup>2</sup> **Chart 4.1** summarizes respondents' satisfaction with various services over the last three years. Sixty-three percent of respondents rated Worcester's public library services as "excellent" or "good".<sup>3</sup> Satisfaction with trash collection services declined slightly from 81% in 2002 to 77% in 2004. Satisfaction with snow removal service remained almost steady; 62% of respondents said snow removal was "excellent" or "good" in 2002 and 60% offered the same rating in 2004. Satisfaction with street cleaning services has declined, from 62% in 2002 to 52% in 2004.

In addition to being asked about services provided to the entire City, survey respondents were asked about the prevalence of, or their satisfaction with, conditions in their own neighborhoods, including the condition of street and road surfaces, the amount of street lighting, sidewalk conditions, the presence of abandoned buildings, and litter. These data are presented in **Chart 4.2**. Neighborhood cleanliness continues to have a high satisfaction rating among respondents citywide; 84% said that their neighborhoods were "very clean" or "fairly clean". About one in five respondents reported that there were "a few" or "many" abandoned buildings in their neighborhood (a slight increase compared to 2003). About three-quarters of respondents (74%) said that street lighting was "about right" in their neighborhood, which is up from 70% in 2003. The percentage of respondents who said that their neighborhood sidewalks are in good condition has been fairly steady for each of the last three years at around 55%. The percentage of respondents citywide stating that their streets and roads are in "good condition" declined from 37% in 2002 to 32% in 2004 (less than one in three respondents). The same proportion, 32%, rated the streets and roads in their neighborhood as "very rough" compared to 21% offering this rating just two years earlier.

# 4

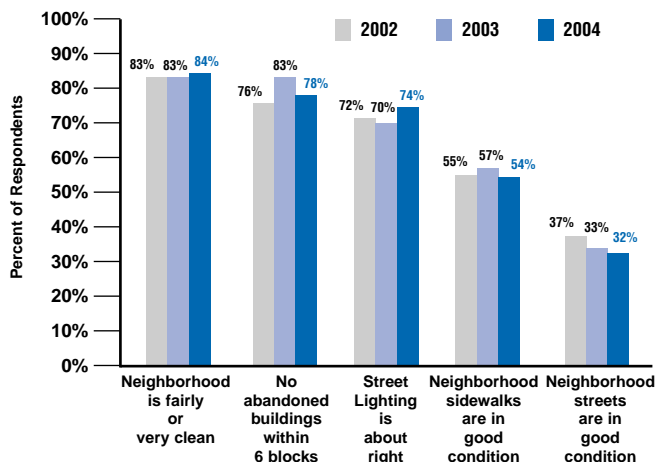
## Citizen Satisfaction with Service Delivery (Cont.)

**Chart 4.1: Satisfaction with Municipal Services (2002-2004)**



Source: Worcester Regional Research Bureau

**Chart 4.2: Satisfaction with Neighborhood Conditions (2002-2004)**



Source: Worcester Regional Research Bureau

### What does this mean for Worcester?

A majority of residents surveyed in 2004 indicated satisfaction with library services, trash collection, street cleaning, snow removal, and the drinking water. Residents are generally less satisfied with the condition of their streets and sidewalks, and the number of residents reporting abandoned buildings in their neighborhoods increased slightly from 2003 to 2004. The existence of these problems is also reflected in the data presented in **Indicator 3: Physical Condition of Neighborhoods**. Based on the survey questions asked in the recent surveys, we know whether satisfaction with a particular service has improved or declined from year to year, but we don't know *why* residents are more or less satisfied.

Dissatisfaction with street and sidewalk conditions is primarily a result of inadequate investments being made over time to maintain them in satisfactory condition. Many residents complain that they cannot walk on the sidewalks because of trip hazards and erosion of cement, and they complain about the wear on their vehicles from pitted, pock-marked, and uneven streets and roadways. According to a memorandum issued by the DPW Commissioner, the City of Worcester has chronically underfunded street and sidewalk repair for the past two decades. From FY02 to FY04, \$13.5 million was allocated to street and sidewalk improvement/betterment programs throughout the City. According to DPW estimates, however, in order to perform necessary maintenance and improvements during this period, expenditures ideally should have exceeded \$33 million. As a result of the City's failure to meet annual maintenance standards, the street and sidewalk infrastructure has deteriorated at a compounded rate and now requires a substantial input of funds to remediate.<sup>4</sup> The City has identified street and sidewalk repair as a priority, and has allocated additional funds (\$1.85 million in FY06) for street and sidewalk repairs. Therefore, over time, we would expect street and sidewalk ratings to improve.

During the summer of 2005, the Center for Community Performance Measurement conducted its fourth annual survey of citizen satisfaction with municipal services. The survey format was changed from a telephone survey to a mail-out/mail-back survey, and a number of questions were revised or added. More than 2,100 residents completed the survey, and the results of this extensive survey will be available on our website ([www.wrrb.org](http://www.wrrb.org)) later this year.

<sup>4</sup> Memorandum dated March 3, 2004, to Thomas R. Hoover, City Manager, from Robert L. Moylan, Commissioner of Public Works in response to City Council requests for "options available to address the backlog of all street/sidewalk reconstruction requests" and "how much money would be needed to repair our streets and sidewalks." Available as an attachment to item #68 from the Calendar of the City Council for June 8, 2004.

# 5 Citizen Involvement

## Why is it important?

One way that residents can influence the delivery of municipal services is by serving on municipal boards and commissions, voting in municipal and general elections, attending public hearings, and participating in civic activities such as neighborhood associations and crime watch groups. These activities provide residents with an opportunity to voice their views about municipal service delivery as well as an opportunity to affect change that will improve the quality of life in the communities they represent.

Voting behavior is a key measure of how engaged members of a community are in the democratic process. Voter turnout reflects the commitment that people have to the political system, and the extent to which various segments of society participate in key decision-making. It is also a measure of citizen confidence in our social and political institutions and may indicate the degree to which voters believe their opinion makes a difference.

In recent years, numerous authors have cited concern about the decline of civic participation in the United States. In his book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam argued that a decline in civic engagement has occurred in this country as social capital, or the networks of people and organizations that existed in the past, has slowly eroded.<sup>1</sup> For municipal government and community institutions to be most responsive to residents' needs and concerns, citizens should be involved in a variety of capacities.

<sup>1</sup> Robert D. Putnam. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> This procedure was established by the Home Rule municipal charter approved by the voters of Worcester in 1985.

<sup>3</sup> While some boards must legally require candidates to possess certain expertise, most appointments do not have unusual educational or vocational pre-requisites. The only universal requirements are that candidates be bona fide Worcester residents, registered voters, and not be employed by the City.

<sup>4</sup> A description of each of the 27 Boards and Commission is available on the City's website at [www.ci.worcester.ma.us](http://www.ci.worcester.ma.us).

## How does Worcester perform?

In 2004, there were 27 municipal boards or commissions in Worcester whose members were nominated for appointment by the City Manager upon recommendation of the Citizen Advisory Council.<sup>2</sup> Membership on these boards and commissions totals 222, with the number of members appointed to each board or commission ranging from 3 to 15.<sup>3</sup> Vacancies may occur at various points throughout the year due to a member resigning or a member completing a term of appointment (the length of appointment varies by board or commission). Boards and commissions that are classified as advisory or regulatory (e.g., the License Commission and the Planning Board are both regulatory, while the Community Development Advisory Committee and the Commission on Disability are both advisory in nature) are required to have representation from each of the five districts in the City, while district representation is not required for those that are classified as Executive (e.g., the Airport Commission and the Board of Health).<sup>4</sup> Residents who are interested in serving on a board or commission are required to file an application that is screened by the Citizen Advisory Council, whose function is to assist the City Manager in selecting candidates for appointment.

From January to December 2004, there were a total of 20 vacancies on boards or commissions that do not require district representation. The Citizen Advisory Council considered 116 applicants for these positions, or a ratio of 5.9 applicants per available position. **Table 5.1** shows the distribution of candidates by district. Although applicants from any district were eligible for these positions, district 5 had the most applicants (31), and district 4 had the fewest (12).

Continued on next page →

**Table 5.1: Board and Commission Vacancies, 2004**

| <b>Total Board and Commission Vacancies</b> ..... | 75  |            |  |            |
|---|---|------------|--|------------|
| <b>Total Applicants for Positions:</b> .....      | 174   |            |  |            |
|   | Vacancies Requiring District Representation |            | Vacancies Not Requiring Representation |            |
|   | Vacancies                                   | Applicants | Vacancies                              | Applicants |
| <b>Total</b>                                      | 55  | 58         | 20                                     | 116        |
| <b>District 1</b>                                 | 6   | 13         | na                                     | 22         |
| <b>District 2</b>                                 | 9   | 13         | na                                     | 26         |
| <b>District 3</b>                                 | 8   | 12         | na                                     | 25         |
| <b>District 4</b>                                 | 12  | 7          | na                                     | 12         |
| <b>District 5</b>                                 | 5   | 13         | na                                     | 31         |
| <b>Various*</b>                                   | 15  | na         | na                                     | na         |

\*Candidates from more than one district were eligible to apply for the vacant position  
Source: City of Worcester Executive Office of Human Resources

# 5 Citizen Involvement

The number of vacancies requiring district representation totaled 55 during the 2004 calendar year. There were 58 applicants for these positions, averaging 1.1 applicants per available position. Not only was the ratio of applicants to positions lower for positions requiring representation from a specific district compared to those that did not require district representation (a lower ratio indicates that fewer people applied for the position), but several vacancies could not be filled due to a lack of applicants from the district experiencing the vacancy.

**Charts 5.1 and 5.2** show that regardless of board or commission type, Districts 1 and 5 (in the western and northern part of the City) have historically produced the highest numbers of applicants. District 4, which covers much of the Main South and South Worcester neighborhoods, has generally produced the fewest applicants. Additionally, these charts reveal that in each of the past four years, there have consistently been more applicants for positions on the executive boards and commissions compared to the advisory and regulatory boards and commissions, despite there being fewer vacancies on the executive boards and commissions relative to the advisory and regulatory boards.

From 2000 to 2004, the number of individuals in Worcester who were *registered to vote* increased 8% from 92,269 to 99,649. However, in the 2004 presidential election, only 57% of Worcester's registered voters actually cast a ballot. As shown in **Chart 5.3**, voter turnout (the percentage of registered voters who actually voted) in 2004 was substantially higher- between two and four times greater- than it had been during 2003's municipal election. While citywide voter turnout was greater during the 2004 presidential election than it had been in either the 2002 gubernatorial election or the 2003 municipal election, voter turnout declined

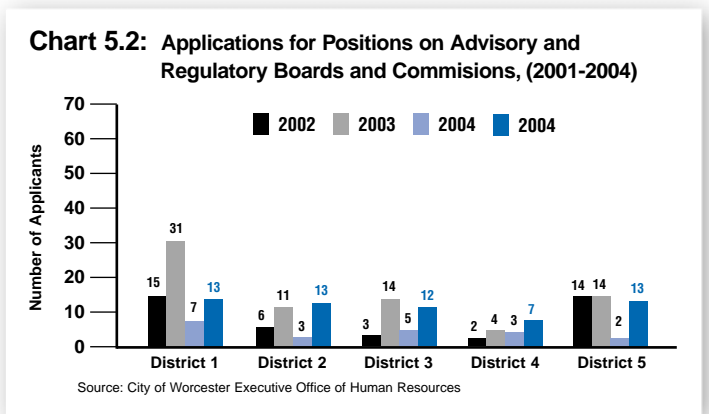
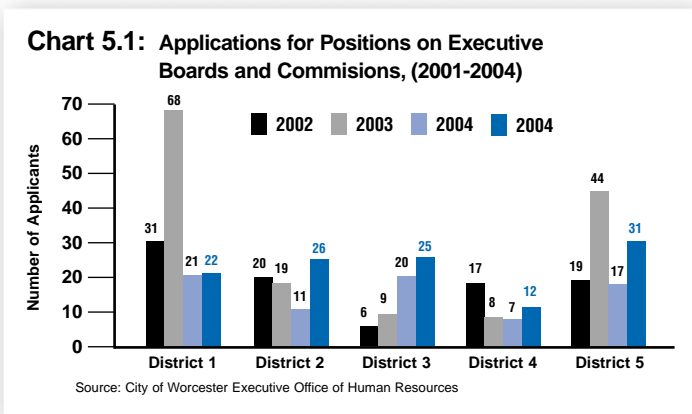
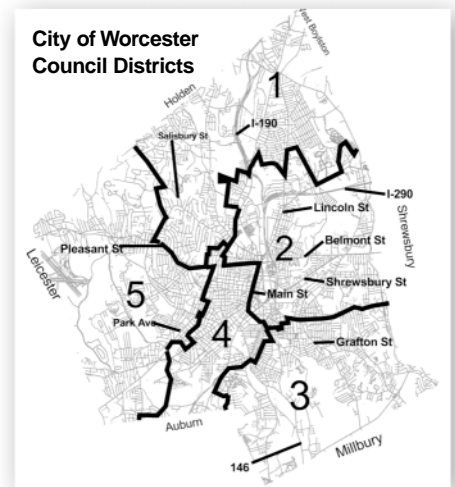
<sup>5</sup> Typically voter turnout rates are much higher during presidential and gubernatorial election years since interest in those elections tends to be greater than interest in municipal elections.

from the 2000 to the 2004 presidential election (from 59% to 57%) even though, according to the US Census Bureau, turnout nationwide in 2004 was 64%, up from 60% in 2000.<sup>5</sup>

**Chart 5.3** also allows us to compare voter turnout rates in 2000 and 2004 by District. Districts 1 and 5 both saw declining turnout from the 2000 presidential election to the 2004 presidential election, with rates declining by ten percentage points and nine percentage points respectively. Voter turnout in District 3 was five percentage points lower in 2004 than it had been in 2000. Both Districts 2 and 4 saw rising voter turnout rates, with District 4 experiencing the greatest gain, from 42% in 2000 to 58% in 2004.

In 2004, approximately 76% of Worcester's *voting age population* was registered to vote, and approximately 43% of the voting age population actually voted. **Table 5.2** shows by age, the percentage of the population that is registered to vote, and of those registered, the percentage that voted in 2004. Voter registration rates are lowest among 18 and 19 year olds in the City, with fewer than one in three registered to vote, and of those, slightly more than half- 56%- actually voted.

In comparison, 98.7% of the City's 55-59 year olds are registered to vote, and 70% of these registered individuals voted in 2004. Voter turnout in 2004 was highest among 65-74 year olds (76%), and lowest among 25-29 year olds (39%).



# Benchmarking Municipal and Neighborhood Services in Worcester: 2005



## What does this mean for Worcester?

The uneven distribution of applicants for board and commission positions is problematic. There is again evidence that board and commission vacancies requiring district representation cannot be filled due to a lack of candidates from the district in which the vacancy occurs. Further efforts by the City, neighborhood groups, and community leaders ought to be undertaken to encourage residents to serve on boards and commissions. If this problem continues, the City Council and the voters should consider amending the Charter to return to the pre-1985 arrangement where district representation was not required.

Efforts to increase voter registration appear to have been successful, as voter registration rates have increased, but little progress has been made in increasing the proportion of these individuals who cast their vote on Election Day. Voter turnout in Worcester in both the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections was below national turnout rates. Voter registration rates are lowest among 18 and 19 year olds, and voter turnout is poorest among 25 to 29 year olds in the City. Younger residents may be less likely to vote if they think they don't have a stake in the outcome of election, e.g. they may not own property and may not have children in school. To increase the levels of civic engagement in the future, we need to reach out to youth and identify effective ways to involve them in civic activities at an earlier age.

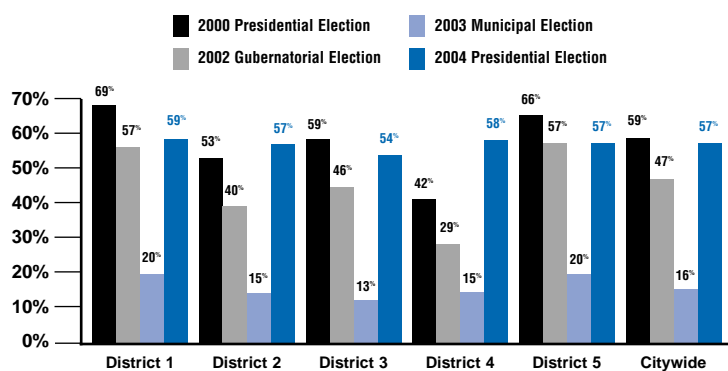
The 2004 edition of this report included a discussion of voting trends for at-large councilors. Since there have been no new data following the last publication of this report (the next municipal election will be held in November, 2005), this measure is not included in the current edition. However, a recently released

Research Bureau report titled *City Council Salaries and the Competitiveness of Elections: A Survey, (Report No. 05-03)* examines the decline in the competitiveness of City Council elections in Worcester over the past two decades.<sup>6</sup> Our research identified the 1985 change in the City Charter from nine councilors elected at-large to six at-large and five from districts as a significant contributing factor in the declining competitiveness of council elections in recent decades. It may be more difficult to unseat incumbent district councilors who are running on a record of what they did to benefit a geographic constituency. In addition, by reducing the number of at-large seats from nine to six, we've reduced the number of seats for which there is greater competition.

Finally, the indicators presented here do not adequately describe the degree to which Worcester's citizens are involved in civic activities. Other forms of community involvement, such as attending neighborhood association meetings, participating in crime watch groups, or serving on boards of local nonprofit organizations are all activities which are difficult to quantify. About 100 residents participate annually in the Research Bureau's ComNET surveys of the physical problems in twelve of Worcester's neighborhoods. Currently, there are more than 50 neighborhood groups meeting throughout the City of Worcester on a monthly basis, suggesting that citizen involvement in Worcester may be quite high. Staff from City Departments, including Code and the Worcester Police Department, regularly attend these meetings. We would encourage the City to begin tracking participation levels and the types and number of issues raised, as well as the response to these issues.

<sup>6</sup> The full text of the report is available online at [www.wrrb.org](http://www.wrrb.org).

**Chart 5.3: Voter Turnout in Worcester, 2000 - 2004**



Source: Massachusetts Election Division Prepared by: Worcester Regional Research Bureau

**Table 5.2: Characteristics of Worcester's Voting Age Population and Voters, 2004**

| Age          | % of Population Registered to Vote | 2004 Voter Turnout (% of Registered Voters Casting Votes) | % of Voting Age Population Casting Votes in 2004 |
|--------------|------------------------------------|---|--|
| 18-19        | 28.2%                              | 56.4%   | 15.9%  |
| 20-24        | 54.8%                              | 41.4%   | 22.7%  |
| 25-29        | 75.2%                              | 38.9%   | 29.3%  |
| 30-34        | 78.2%                              | 43.9%   | 34.3%  |
| 35-39        | 74.8%                              | 48.3%   | 36.1%  |
| 40-44        | 77.7%                              | 56.1%   | 43.5%  |
| 45-49        | 90.1%                              | 63.2%   | 57.0%  |
| 50-54        | 91.8%                              | 67.4%   | 61.9%  |
| 55-59        | 98.7%                              | 70.1%   | 69.2%  |
| 60-64        | 90.9%                              | 70.2%   | 63.8%  |
| 65-74        | 72.4%                              | 75.8%   | 54.8%  |
| 75-84        | 79.7%                              | 72.8%   | 58.0%  |
| 85+          | 93.8%                              | 48.4%   | 45.4%  |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>75.5%</b>                       | <b>56.9%</b>  | <b>43.0%</b>                                     |

Prepared by Worcester Regional Research Bureau

Data Sources: US Census Bureau and Massachusetts Election Division

# MISSION STATEMENT

*The Worcester Regional Research Bureau is a private, non-profit organization dedicated to conducting independent, non-partisan research on financial, administrative, management and community issues facing Worcester's municipal government and the surrounding region.*



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