



Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 121B, provides for the establishment of urban renewal agencies with unique tools to address “substandard, decadent, or blighted” conditions and generate local economic activity. What is the Worcester Redevelopment Authority and how does it operate?

Urban renewal is one of the most powerful, and possibly controversial, local public initiatives. Urban renewal empowers government to act when and where the private marketplace fails. According to the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), the state agency charged with overseeing urban renewal, the program is designed to “...help municipalities revitalize deteriorated areas by providing the economic environment needed to attract and support the private investment needed to achieve a balanced mix of housing, business, and industry.” Originating in the 1949 Federal Housing Act’s authorities for slum clearance and the construction of public housing, the urban renewal program reached its apex in the 1960s and 1970s bolstered by significant Federal funding. In the early 1970s, the Federal government delegated responsibility for urban renewal to the individual states. Ultimately, however, urban renewal is a local program in which local urban renewal agencies—like the Worcester Redevelopment Authority—craft a vision and land use plan, propose needed infrastructure improvements, identify redevelopment opportunities, and work with public and private partners to assemble land and implement improvements.

The Worcester Redevelopment Authority

The Worcester Redevelopment Authority (WRA) is an independent agency operating under Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 121B. The WRA is run by a five-member board, four of whom are appointed by the City Manager with the approval of the City Council, and one of whom is appointed by the Director of DHCD. As a result of an agreement between the City of Worcester and the WRA, the City’s Chief Development Officer serves as the Chief Executive Officer of the WRA and coordinates a staff composed of representatives of the Executive Office of Economic Development, the City Solicitor’s Office, and the Budget Office. The WRA may not appoint its own staff without the written consent of the Worcester City Manager.

Worcester’s Urban Renewal Projects

- Area D Urban Renewal Project, Mass. R-15: Eliminated blighted buildings and assisted in the development of Worcester Center, precursor to CitySquare, for commercial activity and parking. This plan has expired.
- Elm Park Urban Renewal Project, Mass. R-57: Provided for new and renovated housing and constructed a new road network and improved water and sewer infrastructure. Assisted in the construction of the Elm Park Community School. This plan has expired.
- Expressway Urban Renewal Project, Mass. R-16: Eliminated blighted buildings and provided land for commercial and industrial development in the Downtown and areas adjacent to Interstate 290. Also assisted in the development of Worcester Center, precursor to CitySquare. This plan has expired.
- New Salem Urban Renewal Project, Mass. R-5-1: Eliminated blighted buildings, implemented a new street layout, provided land for commercial activity and parking, and assisted in the development of the Worcester Public Library. This plan has expired.
- Medical City Urban Renewal Project (formerly East Central Project, Mass. R-88): Eliminated blighted structures and assembled land for the creation of the Saint Vincent Hospital complex and associated parking.
- Union Station Urban Revitalization Plan: Renovated Union Station into an intermodal transportation center and provides for the development of underutilized parcels of land adjacent to Washington Square.

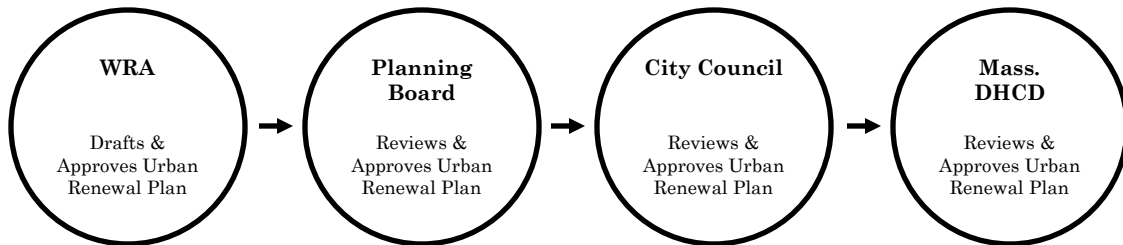
Eligible Activities under Urban Renewal

- Planning
- Establishment of design and rehabilitation standards
- Acquisition of land, including by eminent domain
- Assembly of land into developable parcels / disposition for private development
- Relocation of businesses and residential occupants
- Demolition or rehabilitation of structures
- Improvements to infrastructure
- Issuance of bonds and borrowing of money
- Receipt of grants and loans

Key Definitions:

- **Urban Renewal Project:** A program for the redevelopment of a targeted area for a public purpose. In Massachusetts, the elimination of “blighted,” “decadent,” or “substandard” areas is considered a public purpose.
- **Urban Renewal Plan:** A plan for public and private initiatives within an urban renewal project. A plan must include: a map of the area targeted; proof of blight, decadence, or substandard conditions; an overview of objectives and proposed public and private improvements; a budget and financial plan; a relocation plan; evidence of local approvals (including public funding); and a report on citizen participation.
- **Eminent Domain:** The authority of government to acquire (or “take”) private property without the consent of the owner for a public use or purpose. Eminent domain requires payment of “just compensation,” which is generally the market value of the property as determined by the governmental entity or, if challenged, the courts. Cities and towns may take property for a public use—a new public school, a new road, a new park. Only a redevelopment authority may take property for the public purpose of economic development—property that can be transferred to a private interest for redevelopment purposes.
- **Pro Tanto Payment:** In the eminent domain process, the government’s “just compensation” payment that a private owner may accept without prejudice to his or her right to challenge the amount of the payment in court.
- **Relocation Plan:** A plan for the fair and equitable relocation of residents, businesses, and other interests in property acquired permanently or temporarily by eminent domain.
- **Urban Revitalization Development Grant (URDG):** State grant program that provides a 50% match to project costs not covered by the redevelopment of property. The URDG program currently has no capacity for new grants without legislative action.

The Approval Process:



Questions for Policymakers:

- What is the vision for the targeted area?
- Will private enterprise accomplish the vision or is government involvement warranted?
- Are there blighted, decadent, or substandard conditions in the targeted area qualifying it for urban renewal?
- Is the acquisition of private property necessary to accomplish the goals of the urban renewal plan?
- Are sufficient public and private resources available to effect the redevelopment of the urban renewal area?

For Additional Information:

- “Urban Renewal Program,” Massachusetts Executive Office of Economic Development, Department of Housing and Community Development, <http://www.mass.gov/hed/community/planning/urban-renewal-ur.html>, as of July 1, 2014.
- Worcester Redevelopment Authority, <http://www.worcestermass.org/land-development-in-worcester/worcester-redevelopment-authority>, as of July 1, 2014.

Bureau Brief

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