



The Research Bureau

## Benchmarking Municipal and Neighborhood Services in Worcester: 2006

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Center for Community Performance Measurement



# The Research Bureau

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Dear Citizen,

This is the fifth 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 agencies, including the Department of Public Works and Parks, the Division of Code Enforcement and 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?"

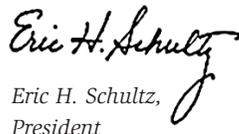
Performance measures come in many different forms, including inputs (such as financial resources), outputs (the number of customers served), and outcomes (the quantifiable results of the program). Regardless of their form, performance measures should relate to a particular initiative or strategy of an 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.

We wish to thank the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation for its continued support of the CCPM, as well as the Greater Worcester Community Foundation for its 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, PhD,  
Executive Director

  
Kimberly A. Hood, MPA,  
Manager, CCPM

## Cost and Performance of the Department of Public Works and Parks and the Division of Code Enforcement

### Why is it important?

Citizens expect their municipal government to provide services in the most effective and efficient manner possible. The kinds of services provided and the quality of their delivery is dependent in part on a municipality's financial and human resources. The City of Worcester has a "full-service" government, providing 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 affect residents' and visitors' perceptions of the quality of life experienced by those who live and work in a city. Worcester, like many other communities across the country, is faced with the challenge of providing quality services to its residents while operating under significant fiscal constraints.

### How does Worcester perform?

#### *Department of Public Works and Parks*

The Department of Public Works and Parks (DPWP) services supported with tax-levy funds maintain the City's streets and highways, parks and recreation areas, buildings, and cemetery, as well as provide solid waste collection and disposal, equipment services, and traffic and civil engineering.<sup>1</sup> As shown in **Table 1.1**, the DPWP's budget was \$19.7 million in FY06, the budget year coinciding with the most current performance data available.<sup>2</sup> In FY06, the DPWP budget supported 214 tax-levy positions.

During FY06, DPWP was responsible for maintaining 1,274 street-lane miles as well as 483 sidewalk miles. From calendar year 2004 to 2005, spending on street resurfacing decreased by about 15%, from \$3.9 million to \$3.3 million, and the number of miles of street resurfaced decreased by 17% (from 14.03 miles in 2004 to 11.67 miles in 2005). Spending on sidewalk repairs has increased substantially in

recent years, from \$450,000 in 2002 to \$1.9 million in 2005, which has led to a 70% increase since 2002 in sidewalk miles repaired. The extent to which street and sidewalks are still in need of repair is further documented in *Indicator 3: Physical Condition of Neighborhoods*.

In FY06, the City of Worcester collected and disposed of more than 26,000 tons of refuse, at a total cost (i.e., labor and disposal fees) of about \$79 per ton.<sup>3</sup> The number of tons of curbside recycling collected has increased by only 1.4% since 2002, but the cost of recycling per ton has risen substantially, from \$108 per ton in FY02 to \$164 per ton in FY06, (a 53% increase). The curbside recycling budget has increased by 50% since FY02, and further increases are budgeted in FY07.

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>4</sup> From FY02 through FY05, appropriations for snow removal remained constant at \$1.17 million. However, in FY05, snow-removal costs exceeded the budget by more than \$4 million. In FY06, snow removal funding was increased to \$1.3 million, but even with this budget increase, actual snow-removal costs in FY06 exceeded \$3 million. When a deficit occurs, the City must seek surpluses that exist in other accounts to eliminate the deficit at year end. The Commonwealth allows any portion of the snow-removal deficit that is not eliminated by year end to be carried into the next fiscal year.

The Keep Worcester Clean (KWC) initiative is an interdepartmental effort to improve the overall cleanliness of the City.<sup>5</sup> The combined efforts of City staff and members of neighborhood associations throughout the City resulted in the removal of more than 178 tons of trash and debris during calendar year 2005. DPW reported that 3,668 bags of litter and miscellaneous debris were accumulated during clean-ups, while 46 shopping carts and 621 tires were removed from various locations.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In July 2005, the Department of Public Works and Parks was established under the City Manager's plan to reorganize City government's administrative structure. The new department is composed of the following four divisions: administration and finance, operations, engineering and architectural services, and parks. The functions of these divisions are further described in the *City of Worcester Fiscal 2006 Annual Budget*, available at [www.ci.worcester.ma.us](http://www.ci.worcester.ma.us).

<sup>2</sup> The Fiscal 2006 budget reflects the consolidation and reorganization of the Department of Public Works to include Parks, and the Project and Construction Management Division of Code Enforcement. Therefore, the Department's FY06 budget is not directly comparable to prior years' budgets.

<sup>3</sup> See The Research Bureau's Report 06-02, *How Can Worcester Insure its Fiscal Health in FY07 and Beyond*, pp.8-9 (available at <http://www.wrrb.org/reports/06-02budget.pdf>) for further discussion of Worcester's current waste disposal system and expected future cost increases associated with this service.

<sup>4</sup> In addition to the total amount of snowfall, length of lane miles to be cleared, number of days requiring snow removal efforts, the depth of snow cover, length of storms, temperature fluctuations and other factors also impact the cost of snow and ice control.

<sup>5</sup> The Departments of Public Works and Parks, Health and Human Services (Code and Health Divisions), Police, Fire, and the Treasurer's Office have combined resources and developed a coordinated approach to dealing with litter, illegal dumping, and graffiti throughout the City.

<sup>6</sup> Source: Department of Public Works and Parks.



**Cost and Performance of the Department of Public Works and Parks and the Division of Code Enforcement (continued)**

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

	FY02	FY03	FY04	FY05	FY06
Total Expenditures*	\$18,699,167	\$19,551,381	\$18,297,919	\$18,647,007	\$19,746,691
Expenditures per Capita**	\$107	\$111	\$104	\$106	\$112
Salaries	\$8,577,208	\$9,383,669	\$8,247,457	\$8,102,995	\$8,878,196
Overtime	\$644,405	\$760,865	\$650,865	\$679,565	\$711,065
Number of Positions (Funded)	239	231	200	200	214
Ordinary Maintenance	\$5,859,874	\$5,848,747	\$5,670,497	\$6,166,447	\$6,364,730
Street Lights	\$2,446,680	\$2,387,100	\$2,558,100	\$2,527,000	\$2,492,700
Snow Removal (Budgeted)	\$1,171,000	\$1,171,000	\$1,171,000	\$1,171,000	\$1,300,000
Snow Removal (Actual)	\$1,389,000	\$4,275,000	\$2,442,000	\$5,380,000	\$3,107,000
Refuse collection and disposal expenditures	\$2,891,307	\$2,845,856	\$2,600,375	\$2,544,941	\$2,110,308
Tons of refuse collected	29,301	27,721	27,833	27,079	26,723
Refuse expenditures per ton	\$99	\$103	\$93	\$94	\$79
Curbside recycling expenditures	\$1,026,000	\$1,061,000	\$1,148,000	\$1,365,000	\$1,586,000
Tons of recycling collected	9,542	9,617	10,065	9,802	9,671
Recycling expenditures per ton	\$108	\$110	\$114	\$139	\$164
Abandoned Vehicle Removal	na	na	\$41,050	\$56,000	\$56,000
Vehicles Tagged and Removed	na	na	2,000+	1,400+	1,300+
	<b>CY01</b>	<b>CY02</b>	<b>CY03</b>	<b>CY04</b>	<b>CY05</b>
Number of street miles resurfaced	6.94	7.40	8.38	14.03	11.67
Number of sidewalk miles repaired	6.11	10.76	5.73	8.15	10.42

*Source: City of Worcester Annual Budgets, FY02 - FY07; City of Worcester Comprehensive Annual Financial Reports (2002-2005)*  
 \* Total expenditures do not include fringe benefits      \*\*Expenditures per Capita are based on Census Bureau Population Estimates

As part of the City’s Keep Worcester Clean campaign, DPWP’s Abandoned Vehicle Removal Program consists of tagging and towing vehicles that have been abandoned on City streets.<sup>7</sup> In FY06, more than 1,300 vehicles were tagged and removed (either towed or moved by the owner). From April 2003 (when DPWP became responsible for the program) through June 2006, more than 5,000 vehicles have been tagged. The revenues collected from fines issued to the owners of towed vehicles have exceeded the towing and storage costs incurred by the Department, enabling the program to be self-sufficient and a revenue generator for the City.

The City has established a centralized reporting mechanism to receive, process, and track the outcomes of citizen requests for service and/or reports of problem conditions. The Customer Service Center (508-929-1300),

managed by DPWP, began operations in October 2002. Its computerized service request/work order system logs and tracks all citizen requests and inquiries.<sup>8</sup> In October 2003, the Center began taking abandoned-vehicle complaint calls and in October 2004, calls to the City Manager’s office were directed to the Center. During FY06, the call center answered about 105,000 calls in total (including informational requests), with over 31,000 calls resulting in work orders.

The Parks Division of DPWP is responsible for maintaining the City’s 53 parks and playgrounds, Hope Cemetery, City pools and beaches, and the trees that line City streets. As shown in **Table 1.2**, the Division’s budget in FY06 was \$3.47 million, which represents a 1.4% decrease since FY02. Since FY02, staffing levels have also declined by 23% (16 positions), from 70 to 54.

<sup>7</sup> Additional information about the City’s Abandoned Vehicle Removal Program may be found on the City’s website at [www.ci.worcester.ma.us](http://www.ci.worcester.ma.us).

<sup>8</sup> While DPW is not responsible for responding to all of the complaints, the Customer Service Center facilitates the direction of all service requests to the appropriate department (e.g., Code or the Worcester Police Department). The system also allows for tracking of outstanding or unresolved work orders.



**Cost and Performance of the Department of Public Works and Parks and the Division of Code Enforcement (continued)**

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

	FY02	FY03	FY04	FY05	FY06
Total Expenditures*	\$3,518,748	\$3,735,152	\$2,962,315	\$3,347,211	\$3,468,330
Expenditures per Capita**	\$20	\$21	\$17	\$19	\$20
Salaries	\$2,554,873	\$2,782,557	\$2,347,440	\$2,638,961	\$2,681,680
Overtime	\$205,000	\$208,600	\$162,600	\$191,625	\$195,025
Number of Positions (Funded)	70	67	54	54	54

*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

The Parks Division also has administrative oversight of Green Hill Municipal Golf Course. Although the golf course is an enterprise account, under which revenues generated from user fees fund its operations, in recent years the golf course has been unable to generate sufficient revenues to cover expenditures. In FY06, the golf course ended the fiscal year with a deficit of \$167,000, one of the largest deficits it has seen in recent years, which resulted in transfers from the City’s tax-levy budget to cover the loss.

*Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Code Enforcement*

Code Enforcement’s Housing Division performs housing and sanitary-code inspections and enforcement services for violations such as dirty/unsanitary yards or property and illegal dumping; enforces the City’s trash-bag program; manages the abandoned building program; and addresses overgrowth of weeds and vegetation from private property onto public ways. The activities described above are supported as needed by inspectors from Code Enforcement’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 to the Division (including complaints received through the DPWP 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**, the Division’s FY06 budget was \$1.87 million.<sup>9</sup>

In FY06, Code inspectors completed 2,424 initial inspections.<sup>10</sup> The data in **Table 1.4** show that more than half (54%) of these inspections were in response to housing complaints (e.g., complaints about lack of heat, electricity, or water, and about non-working smoke detectors), while 46% were in response to reported failures to maintain a property (e.g., trash and litter complaints, unregistered vehicle complaints, and illegal dumping). These inspections yielded 5,290 violations. Staff in the Division of Code Enforcement attribute the substantial decline in initial inspections in FY06 (2,424 compared to 4,257 in FY05) to several factors, including a reduction in the number of inspector positions and a resulting decrease in systematic inspections, overall improvements in the physical condition of Worcester’s neighborhoods resulting in fewer complaint-driven inspections, and a reduction in the number of duplicate complaints recorded in the database.

**Table 1.4** also shows that the 24,072 initial housing inspections that have occurred following complaints or as part of the systematic inspectional program during the six-year period from FY01 through FY06 have resulted in the identification of 34,299 violations. Orders to abate or remedy the violation were issued for 95% of these violations.

<sup>9</sup> The City Manager’s reorganization of city government’s administrative structure, implemented in FY06, consolidated seven former Departments, including Code Enforcement, into a single Department of Health and Human Services. As part of this effort, staff from Code were moved to other departments, and due to this restructuring, the Division of Code Enforcement’s FY06 budget is not directly comparable to prior year’s budgets.

<sup>10</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.



**Cost and Performance of the Department of Public Works and Parks and the Division of Code Enforcement (continued)**

As discussed earlier in this section, DPWP is responsible for removing vehicles that are abandoned on City streets. Responsibility for responding to violations of the City’s unregistered vehicle ordinance falls to Inspectors within the Division of Code Enforcement. During FY06, Code staff conducted 480 inspections in response to complaints about unregistered vehicles on private property.

The Division of Code Enforcement also issues building, electrical, gas, and plumbing permits for all construction work completed within the City. Overall, the number of permits issued has increased in each of the last five years.

A substantial number of permits are issued for construction work intended to remedy violations cited during housing inspections, but at this time we are unable to separate these permit requests from the totals detailed in **Table 1.5**. Permit fees collected by the City have also increased from \$1.7 million in FY01 to almost \$2.7 million in FY06. The construction value of permits has also increased significantly; in FY06, the more than 10,000 permits issued had a construction value exceeding \$222 million.

**Table 1.3: Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Code Enforcement**

	FY02	FY03	FY04	FY05	FY06
Total Expenditures*	\$2,827,076	\$3,226,491	\$2,796,041	\$2,834,555	\$1,867,192
Expenditures per Capita**	\$16	\$18	\$16	\$16	\$11
Salaries	\$2,684,581	\$3,081,380	\$2,599,200	\$2,624,363	\$1,773,049
Overtime	\$30,745	\$33,360	\$39,510	\$49,510	\$39,510
Number of Positions (Funded)	72	71	56	56	39
Ordinary Maintenance	\$111,750	\$111,750	\$154,815	\$158,176	\$52,127

*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 1.4: Code Enforcement Housing Division Inspections**

	Total		Orders Issued		Housing		Trash/Yard	
	Inspections	Violations	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
FY06	2,424	5,290	2,220	5,187	1,316	4,239	1,108	1,051
% Change FY01-FY06	-43.2%	-29.7%	-9.8%	-25.3%	-45.1%	-36.8%	-40.8%	27.5%

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



**Cost and Performance of the Department of Public Works and Parks and the Division of Code Enforcement (continued)**

**Table 1.5: Construction Permits Issued**

	Permits Issued	Permit Fees Collected	Construction Value of Permits
<b>FY01</b>	9,234	\$1,734,427	\$178,834,662
<b>FY02</b>	9,914	\$1,689,086	\$122,495,255
<b>FY03</b>	10,156	\$2,266,878	\$213,488,805
<b>FY04</b>	10,341	\$2,357,913	\$179,704,807
<b>FY05</b>	10,485	\$2,462,593	\$227,314,780
<b>FY06</b>	10,238	\$2,687,973	\$222,278,560

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

**What does this mean for Worcester?**

Much of the data discussed above are input data, which must 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 increases or decreases in spending in some categories, such as road rehabilitation and fleet maintenance, and/or increases or decreases in staffing levels (such as housing inspectors) correspond to improved or worsening conditions in the City. Obtaining direct feedback from residents regarding their level of satisfaction with the cost, amount, and type of services provided by municipal government is one means of measuring the City’s performance and enables City leaders to set priorities, particularly during tight fiscal times, when increased spending in one area could potentially require reduced spending in another area.

The extent of the abandoned vehicle problem was documented by residents during the ComNET neighborhood surveys. As noted earlier, DPWP developed a program to address this problem. In FY06, DPWP reported tagging fewer “new” abandoned vehicles than in FY05. The program’s success in significantly reducing the volume of abandoned vehicles on Worcester’s streets has been attributed to increased awareness of the citations/fines issued to the owners of these vehicles.

The deficit at the Green Hill Municipal Golf Course raises the question of whether tax levy funds should subsidize a non-essential government service; or whether the golf course should be privatized so those funds can be used for essential municipal services such as public safety and public education.

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 Manger from 23 to just eight.<sup>11</sup> Full implementation of the plan occurred on July 1, 2005 (coinciding with the start of the 2006 fiscal year). The data presented here provide a baseline against which to measure departmental performance under the new organization structure, and against which progress will be tracked in future reports.



<sup>11</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)



### Why is it important?

Public libraries in the United States have a long tradition of providing all citizens with free access to information and services to promote life-long learning and an educated citizenry. The Worcester Public Library- through its main library located in downtown Worcester and two branch libraries (Frances Perkins Branch in Greendale and the Great Brook Valley Branch)- offers 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 databases from home or work via the Internet, and take advantage of inter-library loan services as well as programming such as children's story time, computer skills classes, and language and literacy support classes. Additionally, library facilities are often used for cultural and civic events, and the library's public meeting rooms are regularly used by a variety of local organizations.

### How does Worcester perform?

**Table 2.1** shows comparative input and performance data for the Worcester Public Library (WPL) and the public libraries in Hartford, Providence, and Springfield.<sup>12</sup> From FY01 to FY05, the service hours per week declined for each of the four library systems shown in **Table 2.1**, and the WPL experienced the greatest reduction in hours with a 25% decline (from 129 to 97 hours) during this period. In FY05, Worcester's staffing and service hours were below those of each of the three comparison library systems. However, the higher staffing levels and service hours in the comparison cities are likely a function of these cities operating more branch libraries than Worcester does. While Worcester operated two branch libraries in FY05, Hartford, Providence, and Springfield each operated nine branches. However, Worcester's staff-to-service-hours ratio was substantially higher (more than double) than each of the other cities, suggesting that Worcester libraries had more staff on duty than the other libraries.

Although the WPL's circulation declined from FY04 to FY05, FY05 circulation levels reflect a 5.2% increase over FY01 levels. Its annual reference transactions have increased by almost one-quarter, from 106,606 in FY01 to 132,837 in FY05. Over the same five-year period,

Providence and Hartford saw circulation levels increase by 12.2% and 32.1% respectively. The WPL spends less on materials than any of the other libraries, and its materials expenditures of \$2.96 per resident in FY05 are well below Hartford's (\$5.13), Providence's (\$4.08), and Springfield's (\$4.09).

Springfield was the only city listed in **Table 2.1** to report substantial declines in each of the categories examined. Since FY01, the Springfield library system has experienced over a 25% reduction in total operating expenditures (from \$7.1 to \$5.3 million), a 29% reduction in staffing, a 19% reduction in weekly service hours, and a 29% decrease in annual circulation.<sup>13</sup>

**Table 2.2** details sources of funding for each of the four library systems in FY05. About 80% (\$3.67 million) of the Worcester Public Library's funding is derived from local tax levy dollars. The remainder comes from state, Federal, and other sources, with state funding comprising the largest share (\$780,030). Similarly, Hartford receives 77% of its funding from local sources, and Springfield receives a slightly higher percentage, 84%, from local tax dollars. The greatest share of Providence's funding (45%) came from other sources (e.g. gifts, donations, fines, fees), followed by local funding (30%) and the state (22%). Federal funding levels are substantially higher in the comparison cities (around 4% of total funding, on average) compared to Worcester, where Federal dollars comprise a mere .2% of its total.

During the summer of 2005, the CCPM mailed its annual survey of citizen satisfaction with municipal services and quality of life to 10,000 randomly selected Worcester households.<sup>14</sup> Respondents were asked approximately how often they or other members of their household had used the Worcester Public Library during the previous 12-month period. Nearly one in ten respondents reported that they, or someone in their household, had used the WPL at least once per week; 14.5% had used it about once a month; and about 31% had used its services less frequently, but at least a few times during the prior year. On the other hand, 45.2% of respondents indicated that neither they nor other household members had used the WPL during the past 12 months. Respondents between the ages of 55 and 64 used the library with the greatest frequency; 31.9% of these individuals reported that they (or someone in their household) used the WPL "at least once a week" or "about once a month."

<sup>12</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 are for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2005.

<sup>13</sup> Prior to FY03, the Springfield Public Library was under the jurisdiction of a non-profit Library and Museum Board, and a substantial amount of the library's budget was allocated to support administrative overhead associated with the Board, as distinguished from expenditures directly related to Library operations. Therefore, caution is urged when comparing budget figures prior to July 2003 with later data.

<sup>14</sup> The survey response rate was approximately 21%, with analyses based on 2,128 completed surveys. For a complete discussion of the survey findings, see CCPM publication 06-02, *Citizen Satisfaction with Municipal Services and Quality of Life in Worcester: 2005*, available at [www.wrrb.org](http://www.wrrb.org).



## Library Services (continued)

Table 2.1: Comparative Performance Data

		Worcester	Providence	Hartford	Springfield <sup>(1)</sup>	National Average for all jurisdictions 100,000 - 249,999
Number of FTE Library Staff	FY01	95.0	155.4	147.0	126.0	73.6
	FY02	96.0	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	76.5
	FY05	80.0	139.8	133.5	89.0	na
Service Hours Per Week <sup>(2)</sup>	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	271.4
	FY05	97.0	367.0	361.0	276.0	na
Annual Circulation	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	1,190,539
	FY05	643,512	914,984	622,939	606,627	na
Annual Reference Transactions	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	178,852
	FY05	132,837	163,291	499,239	124,006	na
Total Operating Expenditures	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	\$4,857,907
	FY05	\$4,477,028	\$9,199,436	\$6,368,083	\$5,297,295	na
Total Expenditures per Resident	FY01	\$24.27	\$48.06	\$48.25	\$47.01	\$26.20
	FY02	\$27.49	\$47.72	\$52.98	\$46.97	\$28.14
	FY03	\$27.25	\$50.15	\$52.68	\$40.42	\$30.14
	FY04	\$24.47	\$55.26	\$50.40	\$32.82	\$30.73
	FY05	\$25.45	\$52.01	\$51.19	\$34.91	na
Expenditures for Materials	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	\$628,947
	FY05	\$521,027	\$721,369	\$638,244	\$620,016	na
Materials Expenditures per Resident	FY01	\$3.52	\$6.47	\$4.47	\$4.48	\$3.81
	FY02	\$3.17	\$6.42	\$5.28	\$4.27	\$3.92
	FY03	\$3.59	\$4.50	\$5.37	\$4.10	\$4.00
	FY04	\$2.84	\$4.61	\$5.08	\$4.01	\$3.96
	FY05	\$2.96	\$4.08	\$5.13	\$4.09	na

Source: Public Library Data Service and Worcester Public Library.

(1) 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.

(2) Service hours reflect the total public service hours for all service outlets (i.e., central branch, branches, and bookmobiles).



*Library Services (continued)*

**Table 2.2: FY05 Sources of Funding**

	Worcester	Providence	Hartford	Springfield
Local	\$3,665,156	\$3,000,000	\$5,015,670	\$4,448,904
State	\$780,030	\$2,262,806	\$205,178	\$370,133
Federal	\$10,164	\$324,000	\$280,317	\$201,500
Other	\$152,990	\$4,584,210	\$1,041,946	\$276,758
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$4,608,340</b>	<b>\$10,171,016</b>	<b>\$6,543,111</b>	<b>\$5,297,295</b>

*Source: Public Library Data Service surveys for FY05.*

Other: Gifts, donations, interest income, fines, fees, and anything else that does not fall into the other three categories.

Overwhelmingly, respondents were satisfied with the assistance provided by the library staff (97.4% satisfaction), children’s programs (94.2%), the selection of library materials (94.2%), and the WPL’s computer resources/online services (92.8%). Users of the WPL expressed the greatest level of dissatisfaction with the branch libraries’ hours (about one in four were either “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied” with this aspect of the WPL).<sup>15</sup> In comparison, 17.7% of respondents expressed their dissatisfaction with the Main Library’s hours of operation.

As the WPL engages in a strategic planning process, it needs to consider whether there has been a change in how patrons use the library. For example, are materials expenditures (which are substantially lower than comparison systems) adequately meeting the needs of all users- those who want online resources as well as those who are interested in printed materials? Are the service hours and staffing levels appropriate for evolving patron needs?

**What does this mean for Worcester?**

In FY05, there were over 685,000 visitors to the Worcester Public Library, and attendance at WPL-sponsored programs was more than 14,000. More than 472,000 items were viewed using the WPL’s subscription services, and more than 40,000 items were lent 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 residents are utilizing the services that are available to a higher degree. The circulation and reference transaction data suggest that despite a decline in weekly service hours, patrons do not seem to be experiencing major obstacles in accessing the library as a result of the decrease in hours of service.

In FY05, 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.



<sup>15</sup> Currently, the WPL operates two branch libraries, the Francis Perkins branch in Greendale (open a total of 45 hours Monday through Friday), and the Great Brook Valley branch, which is open 2pm – 5pm Monday through Friday, primarily to service students after school.



### Why is it important?

The physical condition of a neighborhood affects the quality of life experienced by 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.

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 catch basins, 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, and responds to violations of the City's unregistered vehicle ordinances. Neighborhood residents themselves are responsible for remediation of certain conditions including deficient maintenance of residential buildings (e.g., peeling paint, broken porches and windows) and litter and overgrown vegetation on private lots.

Initiated in 2001, ComNET (Computerized Neighborhood Environment Tracking) is a tool to help residents and City leaders identify and document more than 275 specific problems affecting residents' quality of life, ranging from potholes to faded crosswalk markings, abandoned and unregistered vehicles, illegal dumping, and overgrown vegetation in neighborhoods throughout Worcester.<sup>16</sup>

Neighborhood volunteers and college students who participate in the ComNET surveys are trained to systematically observe and record the location of problems and assets using a handheld computer and digital camera, while following a prescribed route through a neighborhood. Data are uploaded to a database and analyzed, then shared with neighborhood associations which develop and communicate priorities to residents and municipal government. City departments receive a detailed electronic listing of location and type of problems for which they are responsible for addressing. This process not only helps City departments and neighborhoods to identify problems but is also a tool to highlight improvements that have been made and to help citizens hold municipal government accountable for results.

### How does Worcester perform?

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; 2006 data are preliminary). Fifty-one surveys have been conducted in the 13 participating neighborhoods since ComNET began in 2001, and have resulted in the documentation of more than 11,800 problem conditions overall. In addition to noting what's wrong, residents record the assets found in their neighborhoods (such as schools, churches, community centers etc.). 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 have been street-related (pot holes, uneven pavement, dirt/sand, faded crosswalks, missing curb cuts, clogged catch basins, etc.). Litter has been documented in more than 1,700 locations (on both public and private spaces). Over 1,400 sidewalk trip-hazards have been recorded, and overgrown weeds and vegetation have been documented almost 1,300 times (on both private properties and park lands).

Several municipal agencies are responsible for addressing the different types of documented problems, with some agencies accountable for a larger percentage of all problems than others. The Department of Public Works and Parks (DPWP) is responsible for the largest proportion of all identified problems, around 57%, because of the extent of its responsibilities. On average among the 13 neighborhoods, about one-quarter of the problems identified are the responsibility of neighborhood residents themselves, or the "community." These "community" problems include overgrown vegetation and litter on private property and peeling paint and broken fences, windows, and porches on residential buildings. The Division of Code Enforcement is responsible for remediation of about 12.5% of all problems identified, including abandoned buildings and unregistered vehicles on properties.

Citywide, more than two-thirds of the problems identified through ComNET have been resolved. Breaking down resolution rates by survey year, more than three-quarters (79%) of the 3,310 problems identified in 2001 have been resolved, about three-fourths (74%) of the 2,071 problems identified in 2002 were resolved, 61.1% of the problems

<sup>16</sup> ComNET was developed by the Fund for the City of New York's Center on Municipal Government Performance and adapted for use in Worcester.



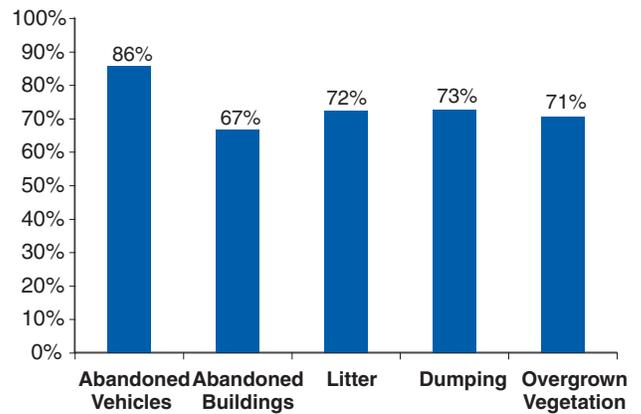
*Physical Condition of Neighborhoods (continued)*

identified in 2003 were resolved, and 40.2% of the problems identified in 2004 were resolved.<sup>17</sup> The resolution rate for “community problems” (such as overgrown vegetation on private properties, peeling paint, and broken windows) is 73.3%, while 73.7% of problems that fall under Code Enforcement’s responsibility have been resolved. While the resolution rate for problems that are the responsibility of DPWP is lower than those of other agencies, (62.2%), we must note that DPWP routinely deals with substantially more problem conditions than the other agencies. Additionally, a number of the problems reported to DPWP require substantial capital investment (e.g., repaving entire streets) and therefore may not be subject to immediate resolution.<sup>18</sup>

When looking at resolution rates by problem type, 63.3% of street problems (i.e. potholes, faded crosswalks) have been resolved, 62% of sidewalk problems (i.e. trip hazards, construction) have been resolved, and 70% of problems with catch basins and sewers have been resolved.

**Chart 3.1** shows resolution rates for several other key problem categories including litter, dumping, and abandoned vehicles.

*Chart 3.1: Resolution Rates by Category, 2001-2006*



Source: The Research Bureau, ComNET Surveys

*Table 3.1: Number of New Problems Documented by Neighborhood, 2001-2006*

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	Total
Bell Hill	756	141	197	na	289	351	1,734
Brittan Square	633	155	35	245	98	na	1,166
Brown Square	na	na	na	na	na	181	181
College Hill	na	na	81	na	219	na	300
Columbus Park	na	326	113	142	na	99	680
Crown Hill	202	66	62	107	89	na	526
Crystal Park	na	na	549	179	na	161	889
Elm Park	371	8	4	115	80	na	578
Green Island	740	133	84	172	na	264	1,393
Main Middle	608	421	6	250	na	96	1,381
Quinsigamond Village	na	194	92	na	433	212	931
South Worcester	na	na	289	282	145	na	716
Union Hill	na	627	160	317	282	na	1,386
Total	3,310	2,071	1,672	1,809	1,635	1,364	11,861

Source: The Research Bureau, ComNET Surveys

<sup>17</sup> We do not yet know the resolution rates for problems identified during surveys conducted in 2005 and 2006. Given that each neighborhood is typically surveyed about every 18 months, follow-up surveys in these neighborhoods have not yet taken place.

<sup>18</sup> See The Research Bureau’s Report 06-02, *How Can Worcester Insure its Fiscal Health in FY07 and Beyond*, pp.7-8 (available at <http://www.wrrb.org/reports/06-02budget.pdf>) for further discussion of the estimated costs of eliminating the City’s street and sidewalk repair backlog.



### What does this mean for Worcester?

We believe that the problem resolution rates described above demonstrate ComNET's success as a tool to improve the physical conditions and overall quality of life in Worcester's neighborhoods. 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 his April 2006 article on Worcester's ComNET program in *Governing*, author Jonathan Walters notes that "As data accumulates from year-to-year, neighborhoods get a clearer picture of specific areas of need, along with a gauge of whether they're dealing effectively with documented problems."<sup>19</sup>

ComNET has led to a better understanding of who is responsible for what when it comes to addressing neighborhood problems. As noted above, a substantial portion (about 23%) of identified problems are not municipal government's responsibility. Instead, they are issues requiring resident action. Residents and City officials have used ComNET data to improve their response and to identify new strategies for resolving issues as illustrated by the following: Residents now regularly organize cleanups and share tools to assist neighbors whose physical or financial condition prevent them from maintaining their property. ComNET data provided quantifiable evidence of an increasing problem of abandoned vehicles on City streets. The problem was a major frustration for residents who complained that the City's response had been ineffective. Using ComNET data which documented the extent of the problem, the City's DPWP assumed control of the abandoned vehicle removal program in 2003.

As the City analyzes the data collected and develops strategies in response to identified problems, it should consider establishing performance targets against which departments and public officials may be held accountable.



<sup>19</sup> Walters, Jonathan. "Tracking Team," *Governing*, April 2006, pp 76-78.

### Why is it important?

Surveys can be an effective means of obtaining residents' opinions about the quality of life in their neighborhoods and the level and quality of services provided by municipal government such as street maintenance, snow removal, refuse collection, public education, and public safety. The findings from such surveys, in conjunction with other performance measurement data, can be used by municipal leaders to identify opportunities and initiatives to improve the quality of City services.

The findings described below are based on a mail survey sent to 10,000 randomly selected Worcester households in July of 2005. Respondents were asked to rate the quality of life in the City, the community's amenities, and local government service delivery.<sup>20</sup> A total of 2,128 surveys were completed and returned, for a response rate of 21%. Survey respondents were fairly evenly distributed across the four quadrants of the City.

### How does Worcester perform?

The results of the 2005 City of Worcester Citizen Satisfaction Survey reveal that the majority of respondents are satisfied with Worcester as a place to live, the services the City provides, and the quality of life in their immediate neighborhoods. Residential trash collection services received the highest rating, with an "excellent" or "good" rating given by 82% of respondents. More than two-thirds of respondents (67.6%) expressed satisfaction with Worcester as a place to rear children. Among the 318 households in the survey sample that reported having one or more children enrolled in the Worcester Public Schools during the 2004-05 school year, parents or guardians of 80% of the students in these households indicated that they were pleased with their children's academic progress.

As noted in *Indicator 2*, respondents who reported using the Worcester Public Library (WPL) were overwhelmingly satisfied with the services offered by the WPL.

Among all neighborhood conditions and city services included in the survey, the condition of streets and sidewalks had the poorest ratings. Only one in four respondents gave street and road-surface conditions a

rating of either "excellent" or "good." A "poor" or "very poor" rating of street conditions was given by 41% of respondents. The feedback on sidewalk conditions was even more negative; only about one in five participants gave sidewalk conditions an "excellent" or "good" rating, while 46% rated them "poor" or "very poor." Additionally, fewer than half (42%) of respondents gave a positive rating for the cleanliness of streets and sidewalks in their own neighborhood.

More than one-third of respondents stated that they had contacted the City with a question, service request, or complaint during the previous 12-month period. As shown in **Table 4.1**, for the most part, the proportion of respondents satisfied with the service they received when contacting the City exceeded the proportion who were dissatisfied. On the other hand, it should be noted that close to half of the respondents were dissatisfied with the service they received from several departments.

Respondents were also asked about their perceptions of neighborhood safety. One in eight (12.5%) respondents reported that they or a member of their household had been a victim of crime during the previous 12-month period. Citywide, slightly more than three-quarters of these victims said they had reported the crime to police.

Almost one-third of respondents (31%) indicated a belief that crime in their neighborhood had increased in the past year, and one-half of these respondents also reported a decline in the overall quality of life in their neighborhood during the past five years. Respondents, not surprisingly, felt safest when walking alone in their own neighborhood and during the daytime (93.9% stated they felt very or somewhat safe), while 84.2% of respondents stated that they felt very or somewhat unsafe in downtown Worcester at nighttime.

<sup>20</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the survey results, see *Citizen Satisfaction with Municipal Services and Quality of Life in Worcester: 2005 Survey* (report no. CCPM-06-02) at <http://www.wrrb.org>.

Table 4.1: Satisfaction with Services Received from Municipal Departments

<b>“Have you contacted the City with a question, service request, or a complaint during the past 12 months?”</b>			
	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>	
Yes	771	38%	
No	1,256	62%	
<b>If yes: Offices/Departments Respondents Contacted</b>			
	<b>Number of Respondents Having Contact with Department</b>	<b>Percent Satisfied</b>	<b>Percent Dissatisfied</b>
Public Works and Parks	448	58.5%	41.5%
Police Department	242	65.3%	34.7%
City Clerk	155	82.6%	17.4%
Code Enforcement	143	59.5%	40.6%
City Manager’s Office	129	52.0%	48.1%
City Treasurer	109	81.6%	18.3%
City Council	101	48.5%	51.4%
Health Department	98	59.2%	40.8%
Mayor’s Office	97	57.8%	42.2%
Fire Department	86	93.1%	7.0%

Source: The Research Bureau, 2005 Citizen Satisfaction Survey

**What does this mean for Worcester?**

Residents surveyed in 2005 indicated their overall satisfaction with a number of municipal services provided by City government, including library services, trash collection, and snow removal. Residents are generally less satisfied with the condition and cleanliness of their streets and sidewalks. The existence of these problems is also reflected in the data presented in *Indicator 3: Physical Condition of Neighborhoods*.

While generally satisfied with the *provision* of services, less than half (48.1%) of all respondents expressed satisfaction with the *value* of services received for their tax dollars, and residents overwhelmingly opposed service expansion if it meant raising taxes to pay for the expansion.

We can only surmise that the expression of dissatisfaction with value received, in contrast with high degree of satisfaction with services themselves reflects concern about whether the City is using its resources in the most economical manner-- reflecting widespread concern about increasing property taxes.

During the summer of 2006, the Center for Community Performance Measurement conducted its fifth annual survey of citizen satisfaction with municipal services. A number of questions were revised or added to further explore and better understand residents’ views about spending priorities and the distribution of resources. The results of this survey will be available on our website ([www.wrrb.org](http://www.wrrb.org)) later this year and included in this report next year.



**Why is this important?**

Measures of civic engagement include the number of citizens 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 improvements in the quality of life in the communities they represent.

Voting rates are a key measure of how engaged members of a community are in the democratic process. They may reflect the degree of citizen confidence in our social and political institutions and the extent to which voters believe their opinion makes a difference.

**How does Worcester perform?**

Worcester’s City Charter establishes 31 municipal boards or commissions, members of which are nominated for appointment by the City Manager upon the recommendation of the Citizen Advisory Council which publicizes vacancies and recruits and screens applicants.<sup>21</sup> There are a total of 212 positions available on these boards and commissions, with the number of members appointed to each board or commission ranging from 3 to 15.<sup>22</sup> Vacancies may occur at various points throughout the year due to resignations or the expiration of a member’s term (the length of appointment varies by board or commission). Regulatory boards (for instance, the Election Commission and the Planning Board) and advisory commissions (e.g., Worcester Public Library Board and the Commission on Disability) are required to have representation from each of the City’s five council districts, while district representation is not required for those that are classified as executive (e.g., the Airport Commission and the Board of Health).<sup>23</sup>

The number of vacancies requiring district representation totaled 54 during the 2005 calendar year. There were only 25 applicants for these positions. **Table 5.1** shows the distribution of candidates by district. The ratio of applicants to positions was so low for positions requiring district representation that more than half of the vacancies went unfilled due to a lack of applicants.

*Table 5.1: Board and Commission Vacancies, 2005*

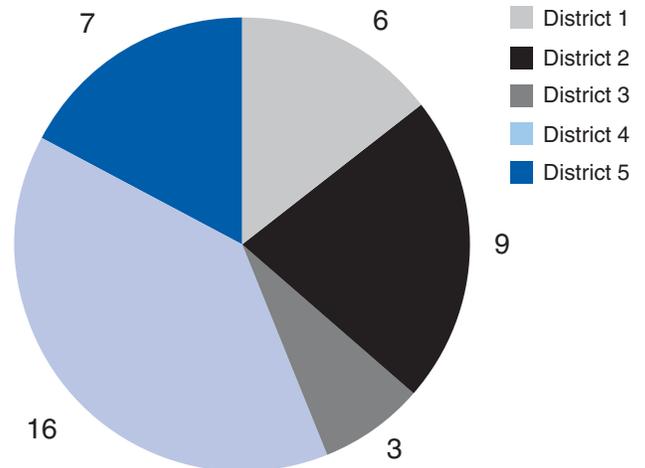
<b>Total Board and Commission Vacancies</b>	<b>66</b>	
Vacancies Requiring Representation	54	
Vacancies Not Requiring Representation	12	
<b>Vacancies Requiring District Representation</b>		
	Vacancies	Applicants
Total	54	25
District 1	7	3
District 2	9	4
District 3	13	1
District 4	20	9
District 5	4	8
Various*	1	na

\*Candidates from more than one district were eligible to apply for the vacant position

Source: City of Worcester Executive Office of Human Resources

During calendar year 2005, there were a total of 12 vacancies on boards or commissions that did not require district representation. The Citizen Advisory Council considered 41 applicants for these positions, or a ratio of 3.4 applicants per available position. **Chart 5.1** shows the distribution of candidates by district. The greatest number of applicants came from District 4 (16), while District 3 had the fewest (3).

*Chart 5.1: Applicants for Positions Not Requiring Representation, 2005 (41 total)*



Source: City of Worcester Executive Office of Human Resources

<sup>21</sup> This procedure was established by the Home Rule municipal charter approved by the voters of Worcester in 1986.

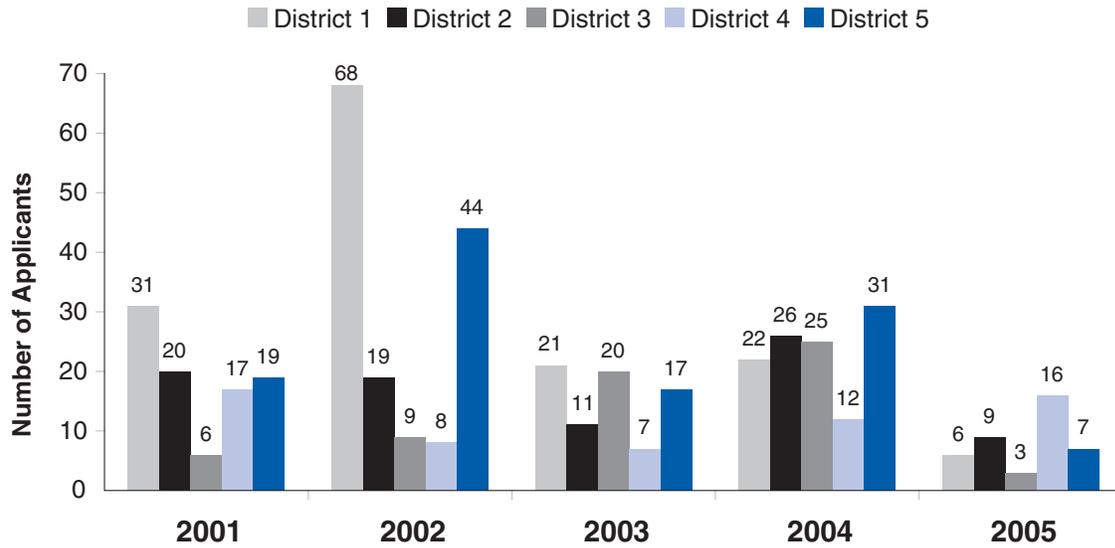
<sup>22</sup> While some boards must legally require candidates to possess certain expertise, most appointments do not have unusual educational or vocational pre-requisites. The only universal requirements are that candidates be bona fide Worcester residents, registered voters, and not be employed by the City.

<sup>23</sup> A description of each of the 31 Boards and Commission is available on the City’s website at [www.ci.worcester.ma.us](http://www.ci.worcester.ma.us).



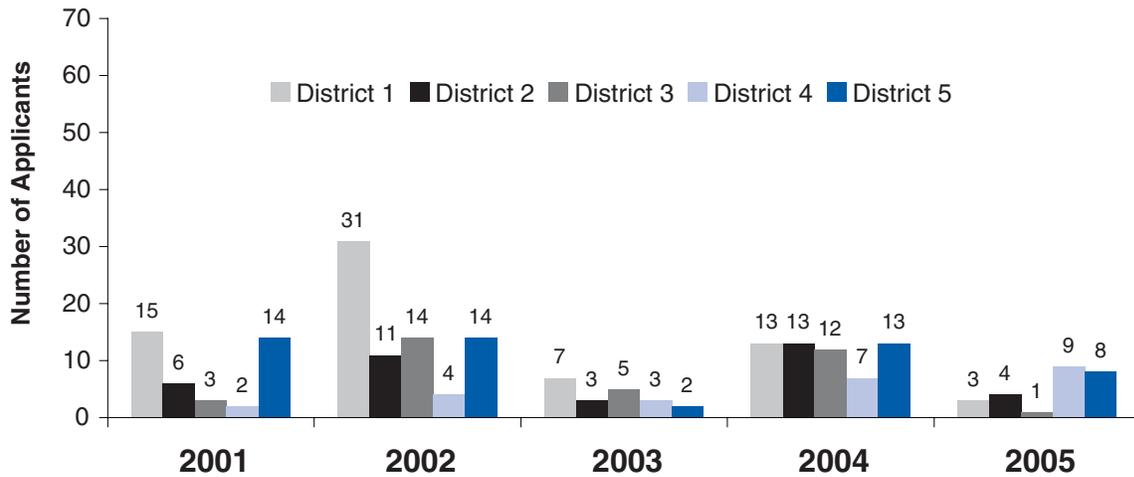
Citizen Involvement (continued)

Chart 5.2: Applications for Positions on Executive Boards and Commissions, (2001-2005)



Source: City of Worcester Executive Office of Human Resources

Chart 5.3: Applications for Positions on Advisory and Regulatory Boards and Commissions, (2001-2005)



Charts 5.2 and 5.3 show that until 2005, Districts 1 and 5 (in the western and northern parts of the City) produced the highest numbers of applicants, regardless of board or commission type. However, in 2005, District 4, which covers much of the Main South and South Worcester neighborhoods, produced more applicants than any other

district. Applicant data also show a consistently higher number of applicants for positions on executive boards and commissions compared with advisory and regulatory boards and commissions, despite the greater number of vacancies occurring on the latter pair.



*Voting in Worcester*

From 2000 to 2005, the number of registered voters in Worcester decreased by 3%, from 92,269 to 89,249. Only 22.1% of those who were registered actually voted in Worcester's 2005 municipal election, whereas 57% of registered voters participated in the 2004 presidential election.<sup>24, 25</sup> As shown in **Chart 5.4**, voter turnout (the percentage of registered voters who actually voted) in 2005 was six percentage points higher than it had been during the previous municipal election held in 2003 (22% vs. 16%, respectively).

**Chart 5.4** also shows that with the exception of District 4, every District in the City experienced higher voter turnout in the 2005 municipal election compared to 2003, with District 1 experiencing the largest percentage point increase (8 percentage points). However, when comparing the 2005 municipal election to the 2004 presidential election, voter turnout rates declined sharply in each of the 5 districts (with decreases ranging from 25 to 40 percentage points).

In 2005, approximately three-quarters of Worcester's voting age population was registered to vote, while approximately 17% of the voting age population actually voted. **Table 5.2** breaks down by age, the percentage of the population registered to vote, and the percentage of registered voters who actually voted in 2005. Voter registration rates were lowest among 18- and 19-year olds, with a little more than one-third registered to vote, and turnout among those registered in this age group was about 7%. While 73% of all 20-24 year olds were registered to vote, only 5.6% of these individuals cast a ballot in 2005 resulting in the lowest turnout among any age group. The 65-74 year old group had both the highest percentage of registered voters casting a ballot (43%) and the highest percentage of the total age population casting votes (39%). These voting patterns occur nationwide.

**What does this mean for Worcester?**

Citywide efforts to increase citizen participation on boards and commissions have resulted in improvements in certain districts and less well-represented groups. The City is actively engaged in focused outreach and recruitment strategies, presentations and promotions to community groups, religious, cultural, and non-profit establishments, as well as increased media coverage. An on-going collective effort including the City, neighborhood groups, and community leaders to encourage residents to apply and serve on boards and commissions is commendable. If, however, seats on regulatory and advisory boards and commissions continue to be left vacant due to a lack of candidates from the district in which the vacancy occurs, the current board and commission structure may need to be changed. Re-structuring by eliminating district requirements for these boards and commissions would require changes to the City Charter.

While voter registration rates have increased in the City, little progress has been made in increasing the proportion of these individuals who then actually vote. In Worcester's most recent municipal election, slightly more than one in five registered voters participated in choosing the City's 6 at-large and 5 district councilors.

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. There is ample evidence that these are national trends because younger residents are less likely to think that they have a stake in the outcome of an election. They may not own property and may not have children in school, and as a result, may feel that many of the campaign issues do not directly affect their lives.

Furthermore, the decline in voter turnout in Worcester's municipal elections, as discussed in The Research Bureau's Report 05-03, *City Council Salaries and the Competitiveness of Elections: A Survey*, coincided with the 1985 City Charter revisions.<sup>26</sup> Decreasing the number of at-large council seats from nine to six reduced the number of opportunities to win a seat. In all likelihood, this has resulted in fewer candidates challenging at-large incumbents. In addition, city council district races, like congressional races, favor incumbents. These factors may well influence voters' decisions to participate in the electoral process.

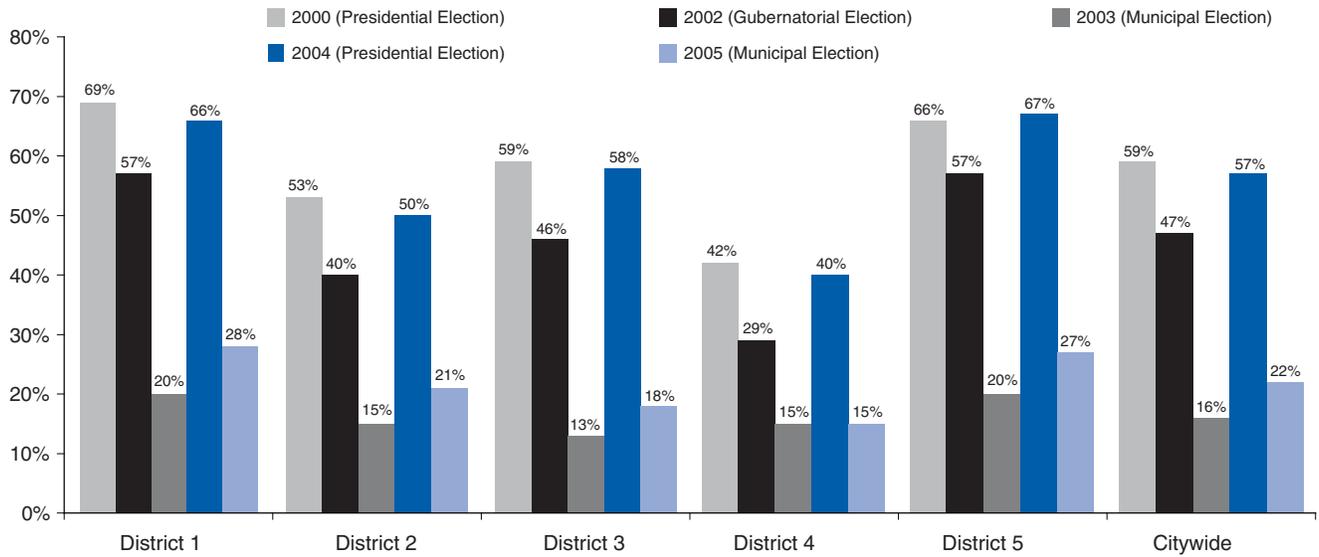
<sup>24</sup> Typically voter turnout rates are much higher during presidential and gubernatorial election years since interest in those elections tends to be greater than interest in municipal elections.

<sup>25</sup> According to the US Census Bureau, voter turnout nationwide in 2004 was 64%, up from 60% in 2000.

<sup>26</sup> Report 05-03 is available at <http://www.wrrb.org/reports/05-03elections.pdf>.



Chart 5.4: Voter Turnout in Worcester, 2000-2005



Prepared by The Research Bureau  
Data Sources: US Census Bureau and Massachusetts Election Division

Table 5.2: Characteristics of Worcester's Voting Age Population and Voters, 2005

Age	% of Population Registered to Vote	2005 Voter Turnout (% of Registered Voters Casting Votes)	% of Voting Age Population Casting Votes in 2005
18-19	36.6%	6.9%	2.5%
20-24	73.3%	5.6%	4.1%
25-29	59.1%	6.2%	3.6%
30-34	65.7%	8.9%	5.8%
35-39	90.6%	13.9%	12.6%
40-44	76.2%	18.3%	13.9%
45-49	80.7%	24.3%	19.6%
50-54	72.0%	28.2%	20.3%
55-59	82.0%	31.3%	25.7%
60-64	84.4%	35.0%	29.5%
65-74	90.1%	43.4%	39.1%
75-84	77.4%	42.9%	33.2%
85+	93.7%	27.0%	25.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>74.7%</b>	<b>22.1%</b>	<b>16.5%</b>

Prepared by The Research Bureau  
Data Sources: US Census Bureau and Massachusetts Election Division



*Mission Statement:*

*The Research Bureau serves the public interest of the Greater Worcester region by conducting independent, non-partisan research and analysis of public policy issues to promote informed public debate and decision-making.*



## The Research Bureau

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