



The Research Bureau

Benchmarking Municipal and Neighborhood Services in Worcester: 2010

Report 10-01
March 29, 2010

Dear Citizen,

This is the seventh Benchmarking Municipal and Neighborhood Services in Worcester report prepared by The Research Bureau. 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 Department of Inspectional Services, 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?"

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 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,



Sandra Dunn, Chairman of the Board



Roberta R. Schaefer, Ph.D., President & CEO



Laura M. Swanson, Project Manager

INDICATOR 1: DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS AND PARKS AND DEPARTMENT OF INSPECTIONAL SERVICES

Why is it important?

Citizens expect municipal government to provide services in the most effective and efficient manner possible. The kinds of services provided and the quality of their delivery are dependent in part on a municipality's financial and human resources. The City of Worcester is a "full-service" government, providing a broad range of services, including municipal water and sewer, snow removal, refuse collection, leaf collection, a regional public library, and a municipal golf course. 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 experiencing significant fiscal constraints.

How does Worcester perform?

Department of Public Works and Parks

Department of Public Works and Parks (DPWP) services that are supported with tax-levy funds maintain the City's streets and highways, parks and recreation areas, public buildings, and cemetery, and provide solid waste collection and disposal, equipment services, and traffic

and civil engineering. (Water and sewer operations are supported by user fees.) As shown in **Table 1.1** and **Table 1.2**, in FY09 (the budget year coinciding with the most current performance data available) the Department's budget for public works and parks operations was about \$28 million, and supported 272 tax-levy positions.¹

During FY09, DPWP was responsible for maintaining 1,277 street-lane miles as well as 483 sidewalk miles. From calendar year 2008 to 2009, spending on resurfacing for streets increased by about 9%, from \$4.91 million to \$5.36 million. However, as shown in **Table 1.1**, this funding increase resulted in a 20% decrease in the number of street miles resurfaced (from 14.3 to 11.48 miles). Spending on sidewalk maintenance rose slightly from 2008 to 2009, from \$2.64 million to \$2.88 million, although there was a 4.3% decrease in City sidewalk miles repaired during this same period (from 13.66 to 13.07). The extent to which street and sidewalks are still in need of repair is documented in **Indicator 3: Physical Condition of Neighborhoods**.

In FY09, the City of Worcester collected and disposed of more than 22,000 tons of refuse at a total cost (i.e., labor and disposal fees) of about \$144 per ton. While the tons of refuse collected have been decreasing since FY05, costs have been

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Table 1.1: Department of Public Works and Parks (Non-Enterprise Divisions)						
	FY05	FY06	FY07	FY08	FY09	% Change FY05-FY09
Total Expenditures*	\$21,216,183	\$20,208,029	\$20,764,066	\$22,486,919	\$23,968,313	13.0%
Expenditures per Capita**	\$121	\$115	\$119	\$128	\$137	13.5%
Salaries	\$6,914,876	\$7,867,850	\$8,785,221	\$9,418,855	\$9,974,975	44.3%
Overtime	\$1,037,327	\$872,550	\$961,568	\$593,200	\$615,038	-40.7%
Number of Positions (Funded)	200	213	213	214	216	8.0%
Ordinary Maintenance	\$5,239,430	\$6,364,730	\$5,930,868	\$7,275,150	\$7,803,822	48.9%
Street Lights	\$2,497,386	\$2,492,700	\$2,557,700	\$2,997,618	\$3,087,828	23.6%
Snow Removal (Budgeted)	\$1,171,000	\$1,300,000	\$1,600,000	\$2,048,000	\$2,259,114	92.9%
Snow Removal (Actual)	\$5,380,000	\$3,107,000	\$2,224,942	\$5,053,489	\$6,101,018	13.4%
Snow Removal Deficit	-\$4,209,000	-\$1,807,000	-\$624,942	-\$3,005,489	-\$3,841,904	-8.7%
Refuse collection and disposal expenditures	\$2,544,941	\$2,500,050	\$2,730,730	\$2,933,787	\$3,220,871	26.6%
Tons of refuse collected	27,079	26,723	26,079	23,889	22,397	-17.3%
Refuse expenditures per ton	\$94	\$94	\$105	\$123	\$144	53.0%
Curbside recycling expenditures	\$1,365,000	\$1,586,000	\$1,660,000	\$1,688,000	\$1,738,640	27.4%
Tons of recycling collected	9,802	9,671	9,040	9,380	9,579	-2.3%
Recycling expenditures per ton	\$139	\$164	\$184	\$180	\$182	30.3%
Abandoned Vehicle Removal	\$56,000	\$56,000	\$4145***	\$5,000	\$0	
Vehicles Tagged and Removed	1,400+	1,300+	900+	605	403	
	CY05	CY06	CY07	CY08	CY09	% Change CY05-CY09
Number of street miles resurfaced	11.67	15.13	14.97	14.31	11.48	-1.6%
Number of sidewalk miles repaired	10.42	17.91	11.90	13.66	13.07	25.4%

Source: City of Worcester Annual Budgets, FY05 - FY10; City of Worcester Comprehensive Annual Financial Reports (2005-2008)

* Total expenditures do not include fringe benefits

**Expenditures per Capita are based on Census Bureau Population Estimates

***The reduction in the cost of this program is due to the awarding of a new contract in October 2006 which changed the cost of the program from paying the contractor \$39.99 to remove a vehicle to no cost for towing and the City receiving \$66.75 for each towed vehicle.

rising, from \$2.5 million in FY06 to \$3.2 million in FY09, a 26.6% increase. The number of tons of curbside recycling collected increased from FY07 to FY09 by 6%, while the cost of recycling per ton remained steady over this period.

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.² From FY05 through FY09, annual appropriations for snow removal have been increasing, from \$1.17 million in FY05 to \$1.93 million in FY09. This increase is included in the City Manager’s Five

Point Plan, which will increase the snow removal budget each year until it is adequately funded. But even with these budget increases, actual snow-removal costs have exceeded the budgeted amount in each of the last five years.^{3,4} In FY09, snow-removal expenditures exceeded the budget by almost \$4 million, one major cause being the December, 2008 ice storm. However, the City received a reimbursement from FEMA exceeding \$780,000 to cover expenses connected with that storm.

The Keep Worcester Clean (KWC) initiative is an interdepartmental effort to

improve the overall cleanliness of the City. The Departments of Public Works and Parks, Inspectional Services, Police and 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. As part of this program, DPWP reported that from 2006 to 2009, over 900 shopping carts were removed and recycled from various locations.⁵

Also, as part of the Keep Worcester Clean campaign, DPWP's Abandoned Vehicle Removal Program tags and tows vehicles that have been abandoned on City streets. From April 2003 (when DPWP became responsible for the program) through June 2009, almost 7,800 vehicles were 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 to generate revenue for the City. Since the program's inception, the City has collected more than \$485,000, with \$61,366 of this generated in FY09.

The City has established a centralized reporting mechanism to log and track citizen requests for service and/or reports of problem conditions such as potholes, litter, unplowed streets, and non-working street lights. The Customer Service Center (508-929-1300), managed by DPWP, began operations in October, 2002. Its computerized service request/work order

system tracks all citizen requests and inquiries.⁶ 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 FY09, call center staff received 66,853 calls (including informational requests). While the number of calls seems to be decreasing, the number of complaints submitted online has been increasing. More than 1,300 complaints were submitted online in FY09, more than three times as many as were received in FY07 (390). The calls and online submissions resulted in the generation of more than 43,900 work orders in FY09.

The Parks Division of DPWP is responsible for maintaining the City's 60 parks and playgrounds, including City pools and beaches, Hope Cemetery, the City's grass medians, islands, and squares, and the trees that line City streets, as well as the coordination/set-up of some City events. As shown in **Table 1.2**, the Division's budget in FY09 was \$4.07 million, which represents a 22.5% increase since FY05. Since FY05, the Division's staffing levels have remained steady, with 54 positions in FY05 and 56 in FY09.

The Parks Division also has administrative oversight of Green Hill Municipal Golf Course. It is run as an enterprise account, under which revenues generated from user fees fund its operations. The FY10 budget for the golf course is \$1,214,880, which will be fully funded by revenues generated at the course.

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

	FY05	FY06	FY07	FY08	FY09	% Change FY05-FY09
Total Expenditures*	\$3,323,105	\$3,452,864	\$3,452,864	\$3,749,267	\$4,070,952	22.5%
Expenditures per Capita**	\$19	\$20	\$20	\$21	\$23	23.1%
Salaries	\$2,473,428	\$2,435,738	\$2,435,739	\$2,690,479	\$2,882,479	16.5%
Overtime	\$282,785	\$331,237	\$331,237	\$343,830	\$356,977	26.2%
Number of Positions (Funded)	54	56	57	57	56	3.7%

Source: City of Worcester Annual Budgets, FY05 - FY10
 * Total expenditures do not include fringe benefits
 **Expenditures per Capita are based on Census Bureau Population Estimates

**Department of Inspectional Services,
Divisions of Building & Zoning and
Housing & Health**

The Department of Inspectional Services, which was created on July 1, 2008 as a result of the City Manager’s reorganization, is made up of two divisions: Building & Zoning and Housing/Health. All building construction, plumbing, gas, and electrical permitting go through the Department. Other functions and responsibilities include zoning, weights and measures, air and water quality, hazardous materials, housing enforcement, lead paint poisoning prevention, and food protection. Inspections occur following receipt of a complaint to the Department (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 FY09 department budget was \$4.28 million.

In FY09, housing inspectors completed 4,203 initial inspections, a large increase from previous years when about 2,400 inspections took place annually. Several reasons account for this increase in inspections: new housing computer software, the use of laptops by inspectors when out in the field, work done by the neighborhoods themselves, and the introduction of a Nuisance Team. The data in **Table 1.4** show that almost half (46%) of these inspections were made in response to housing complaints, while 54% responded to reported failures to maintain a property (e.g., trash and litter complaints, unregistered vehicle complaints, and illegal dumping). These inspections resulted in citing 6,916 violations.

Table 1.3: Department of Inspectional Services, Building & Zoning and Housing/Health Divisions Budget*

	FY05	FY06	FY07	FY08	FY09
Total Expenditures**	\$2,057,482	\$1,455,274	\$1,524,576	\$4,024,020	\$4,279,085
Expenditures per Capita***	\$12	\$8	\$9	\$23	\$24
Salaries	\$1,871,632	\$1,337,734	\$1,437,210	\$3,532,405	\$3,810,714
Overtime	\$49,121	\$47,512	\$43,807	\$83,473	\$86,433
Number of Positions (Funded)	41	37	37	71	72
Ordinary Maintenance	\$136,729	\$70,028	\$43,559	\$324,520	\$338,214

Source: City of Worcester Annual Budgets, FY05 - FY09
 * The Department of Inspectional Services was created on 7/1/08. Prior to that, this information came from the Department of Health and Human Services, Divisions of Code Enforcement and Housing.
 **Total Expenditures include fringe benefits for FY08 and FY09
 ***Expenditures per Capita are based on Census Bureau Population Estimates

	Total Inspections	Total Violations	Orders Issued		Housing		Trash/Yard	
			Inspections	Violations	Inspections	Violations	Inspections	Violations
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
FY07	2,426	5,452	2,380	5,349	1,292	4,233	1,134	1,219
FY08	2,485	6,464	2,485	6,464	1,525	5,079	960	1,385
FY09	4,203	6,916	4,203	6,916	1,930	4,976	2,273	1,940
% Change FY05-FY09	-1.3%	67.8%	68.3%	69.1%	-14.5%	49.3%	13.7%	145.9%

Source: Department of Inspectional Services - Housing/Health Inspections Division

Table 1.4 also shows that the 15,795 initial housing inspections that have occurred following complaints or as part of the systematic inspectional program during the five-year period from FY05 through FY09 resulted in the identification of 28,244 violations.⁷

The Division of Building & Zoning issues building, electrical, gas, and plumbing permits for all construction work completed within the City. Overall, the number of permits issued had been decreasing from FY05 to FY08 (from 10,485 to 9,106, respectively), but experienced an increase from FY08 to FY09 (9,106 to 9,795). A substantial number of permits are issued for construction work intended to remedy violations cited during housing inspections, but we are currently unable to separate these permit requests from the totals detailed in **Table 1.5** below. Annual permit-fee collections by the City increased from \$2.46 million in FY05 to \$2.8 million in FY08, but then decreased to about \$2.1

million in FY09. The construction value of permits decreased from FY05 and FY08 by more than \$63 million (from \$227 million to \$164 million), but then increased in FY09 to \$207 million.

What does this mean for Worcester?

Much of the data discussed above are input data, and 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 require reduced spending in another. The

	Permits Issued	Permit Fees Collected	Construction Value of Permits
FY05	10,485	\$2,462,593	\$227,314,780
FY06	10,238	\$2,687,973	\$222,278,560
FY07	9,892	\$2,600,778	\$175,033,594
FY08	9,106	\$2,811,031	\$163,896,721
FY09	9,795	\$2,078,529	\$207,078,529

Source: Department of Inspectional Services-Building/Zoning Division

Research Bureau suggests that the City gather this information through an online citizen satisfaction survey.

While Inspectional Services handles health-related inspections (such as for food and tattoo parlors) under its Housing/Health Division, the Division of Public Health has been moved under the City Manager and has been reduced considerably due to budget restraints. The Division of Public Health is responsible for infectious disease surveillance, response to public health emergencies, enforcement of various health regulations, and other functions related to the community's health. Due to budget cuts, the City has partnered with UMass Memorial Health Care and UMass Medical School in order to keep these efforts fully-functioning. UMass Memorial Health Care and UMass Medical School have committed to

providing both financial and in-kind support for these efforts.

In June 2009, the City Manager convened a task force in order to develop a focused mission for the City's Division of Public Health. Some of the recommendations presented by the task force in January 2010 included: reconstitute the Board of Health; reorganize the administration of this division, which includes changing the current part-time position of Commissioner of Public Health into a full-time position; utilize data to identify community health priorities, or a "data-driven" approach; and to work with and coordinate more closely with area health service providers, including pursuing regionalization with area towns.

INDICATOR 2: LIBRARY SERVICES

The Worcester Public Library's Mission Statement is as follows:

The Worcester Public Library serves as a gathering place that actively promotes the free exchange of ideas in our democratic society. The Library makes information and services available to all people while fostering intellectual freedom, protecting privacy, encouraging personal growth and enrichment, and celebrating our diverse community heritage.⁸

Why is it important?

Public libraries in the United States have a long tradition of providing citizens with free access to information and services to promote life-long learning and personal enrichment. 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 (over 90 computer workstations are available to the public at the main library as well as wireless internet). Library patrons can 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, CT; Providence, RI; and Springfield, MA.⁹ Service hours per week have remained steady in the last couple of years in Worcester, Hartford and Springfield, while Providence experienced a 7% decrease in service hours from FY07 to FY08. From FY05 to FY06, the number of library service hours per week increased in Worcester as hours were increased at its two branches in FY06. The Francis Perkins branch expanded its weekly hours by 13, and the Great Brook Valley Branch was open an additional three hours per week. Nevertheless, in FY08, Worcester's service hours were below those of each of the three comparison library systems, and Worcester's staffing levels ranked ahead only of Springfield. 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 has two branch libraries, Hartford, Providence, and Springfield each operate nine.

Table 2.1: Comparative Performance Data

		Worcester	Providence	Hartford	Springfield	National Average for all jurisdictions 100,000-249,999
Number of FTE Library Staff	FY04	77.0	143.0	119.0	81.5	76.5
	FY05	80.0	139.8	133.5	89.0	79.0
	FY06	80.0	158.4	104.5	77.0	76.8
	FY07	81.5	126.4	102.8	87.0	82.0
	FY08	91.0	107.6	113.1	89.0	na
Service Hours Per Week*	FY04	97.0	418.5	377.0	276.0	271.4
	FY05	97.0	367.0	361.0	276.0	284.0
	FY06	113.0	355.5	420.0	277.0	283.2
	FY07	113.0	356.0	420.0	277.0	281.8
	FY08	113.0	331.0	420.0	277.0	na
Annual Circulation	FY04	698,787	896,214	559,887	585,087	1,190,539
	FY05	643,512	914,984	622,939	606,627	1,387,761
	FY06	675,603	861,496	512,832	611,521	1,201,423
	FY07	688,579	814,253	528,057	635,188	1,299,817
	FY08	698,662	854,579	555,137	647,913	na
Annual Reference Transactions	FY04	138,501	182,097	573,513	136,922	178,852
	FY05	132,837	163,291	499,239	124,006	174,375
	FY06	114,483	143,765	310,713	109,090	175,074
	FY07	127,953	128,143	460,984	115,386	170,046
	FY08	101,650	134,056	521,175	113,695	na
Total Operating Expenditures	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	\$5,170,692
	FY06	\$5,049,971	\$9,067,807	\$7,545,959	\$5,482,887	\$5,262,200
	FY07	\$5,343,195	\$8,785,319	\$8,987,487	\$5,790,356	\$5,928,548
	FY08	\$5,685,419	\$8,396,187	\$9,591,757	\$6,503,117	na
Total Expenditures per Resident	FY04	\$24.47	\$55.26	\$50.40	\$32.82	\$30.73
	FY05	\$25.50	\$52.09	\$51.21	\$34.97	\$32.01
	FY06	\$28.78	\$51.74	\$60.60	\$36.27	\$33.05
	FY07	\$30.52	\$51.11	\$72.35	\$38.37	\$37.44
	FY08	\$32.49	\$48.94	\$77.31	\$43.17	na
Expenditures for Materials	FY04	\$498,653	\$821,551	\$633,098	\$609,830	\$628,947
	FY05	\$521,027	\$721,369	\$638,244	\$620,016	\$660,648
	FY06	\$566,959	\$648,095	\$705,062	\$609,363	\$667,773
	FY07	\$662,869	\$762,587	\$792,455	\$629,391	\$749,961
	FY08	\$627,632	\$651,065	\$803,265	\$643,088	na
Materials Expenditures per Resident	FY04	\$2.84	\$4.61	\$5.08	\$4.01	\$3.96
	FY05	\$2.97	\$4.08	\$5.13	\$4.09	\$4.06
	FY06	\$3.23	\$3.70	\$5.66	\$4.03	\$4.22
	FY07	\$3.79	\$4.44	\$6.38	\$4.17	\$4.68
	FY08	\$3.59	\$3.80	\$6.47	\$4.27	na

Source: Public Library Data Service and Worcester Public Library.

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

Circulation of WPL materials has been increasing since FY05, with an overall increase of 8.6% from FY05 to FY08. **Table 2.1** also reveals a steady and significant decline in annual reference transactions in recent years in the communities examined with the exception of Hartford, which has seen increases since FY06. The decline in reference transactions (i.e. patrons using the assistance of a reference librarian) is likely a function of libraries expanding their subscriptions to - and promoting patron access to - a wide variety of authoritative resources available online

(many of which patrons are able to access via the Internet without physically visiting a library).

Expenditures

The WPL spends less on materials than any of the other three library systems, and its materials expenditures of \$3.59 per resident in FY08 are well below Hartford’s (\$6.47), Springfield’s (\$4.27), and Providence’s (\$3.80).

Table 2.2 details sources of funding for each of the four library systems in FY08.

	Worcester	Providence	Hartford	Springfield
Local	\$4,596,705	\$3,300,000	\$8,441,580	\$5,612,536
State	\$938,581	\$2,298,317	\$161,053	\$438,411
Federal	\$5,000	\$302,975	\$45,435	\$219,793
Other*	\$212,584	\$2,595,211	\$1,021,365	\$232,377
Total	\$5,752,870	\$8,496,503	\$9,669,433	\$6,503,117
* Other: Gifts, donations, interest income, fines, fees, and anything else that does not fall into the other three categories.				
Source: <i>Public Library Data Service surveys for FY08.</i>				

About 80% (\$4.6 million) of the Worcester Public Library’s funding is derived from local tax-levy dollars. The remainder comes from Federal, state, and other sources, with state funding comprising the largest component after local (\$938,581, or about 16% of total funding). Similarly, Springfield receives 86% of its funding from local sources, while Hartford receives about 87%. The greatest share of Providence’s funding is also local but at a much smaller percentage (39%) followed by other sources (e.g. gifts, donations, fines, fees) at 31%. Federal funding levels are higher in the comparison cities than in Worcester, where Federal dollars comprise a mere .1% of its total.

What does this mean for Worcester?

The City is home to the largest public library system in Central Massachusetts. In FY08, there were over 820,000 visitors to the library, attendance at WPL-sponsored

programs was more than 12,700, and more than 58,000 items were lent to other libraries in the region. While Worcester residents are afforded fewer points of service as well as fewer service hours than residents of Springfield, Hartford, and Providence, it appears that Worcester residents are utilizing the services that are available to a higher degree.

In FY08, 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).

INDICATOR 3: PHYSICAL CONDITION OF NEIGHBORHOODS

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. Besides its responsibility for street and sidewalk maintenance, the Department of Public Works and Parks cleans catch basins, collects refuse, removes abandoned vehicles on streets, maintains over 1,300 acres of land in sixty parks and playgrounds, cares for the trees that line city streets, and maintains and repairs public buildings. The Department of Inspectional Services provides inspectional and enforcement services to ensure compliance with building and sanitary codes. 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 by The Research Bureau 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 14 of the most socio-economically-challenged neighborhoods in Worcester.¹⁰ In 2008, The Research Bureau added the Downtown neighborhood and included volunteers who work and live in that area in the survey. We added new problems to this survey to reflect the different appearance and infrastructure of a downtown area (including alleyways, awnings and building signage, and vacant storefronts).

Neighborhood volunteers, students from the College of the Holy Cross, and high school students from South High Community School's Academy for Education, Service, and Government, 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 the location and type of problems 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 total problems recorded, plus the number of surveys that have taken place in each neighborhood. The number of surveys completed in each neighborhood depends on when the neighborhood was added to the program, and also the degree of interest of neighborhood residents in conducting the survey. Sixty-two surveys have been conducted in the 14 participating neighborhoods since ComNET began in 2001; they have resulted in the documentation of more than 13,500 problem conditions overall.¹¹ In addition to recording neighborhood problems, residents also list community assets such as schools, churches, community centers, etc. The purpose of noting assets is to identify potential partners to which City and neighborhood leaders can turn for assistance in addressing problems.

Among all problems identified since 2001, about 18% have been street-related (potholes, uneven pavement, dirt/sand,

Table 3.1: Total Problems by Neighborhood, 2001-2009

Neighborhood	Total Problems	# of Surveys
Bell Hill	1864	7
Brittan Square	1297	6
Brown Square	181	1
College Hill	300	2
Columbus Park	680	4
Crown Hill	526	5
Crystal Park	1253	4
Downtown	251	1
Elm Park	578	5
Green Island	1392	5
Main Middle	1381	5
Quinsigamond Village	930	4
South Worcester	935	4
Union Hill	1963	6
<i>Total</i>	13,532	62

Source: The Research Bureau, ComNET Surveys

faded crosswalks, missing curb cuts, clogged catch basins, etc.). Litter has been documented in more than 2,200 locations (on both public and private spaces). Over 1,800 sidewalk trip-hazards have been recorded, and overgrown weeds and vegetation have been documented more than 1,550 times (on both private properties and park lands).

Several municipal agencies are responsible for resolving the documented problems, with some agencies accountable for a larger percentage than others. The Department of Public Works and Parks (DPWP) is responsible for the largest proportion of identified problems, around 58%. On average among the 14 neighborhoods, almost one-quarter (23%) of the problems identified are the responsibility of neighborhood residents themselves (e.g. overgrown vegetation and litter on private property, and peeling paint and broken fences, windows, and porches on residential buildings). The

Department of Inspectional Services is responsible for remediation of about 13% of all problems identified, including abandoned buildings and unregistered vehicles on properties.

Citywide, seven out of ten problems (70.2%) identified through ComNET have been resolved by City agencies or neighborhood residents and property owners. The resolution rate for “community problems” (such as overgrown vegetation on private properties, peeling paint, and broken windows) is about 80%, while 76% of problems that fall under the responsibility of the Department of Inspectional Services have been resolved. While the resolution rate for problems that are the responsibility of DPWP is lower than the rate for other agencies (64.5%), DPWP, as noted, routinely deals with substantially more problem conditions than the other agencies. Additionally, a number of the problems reported to DPWP require

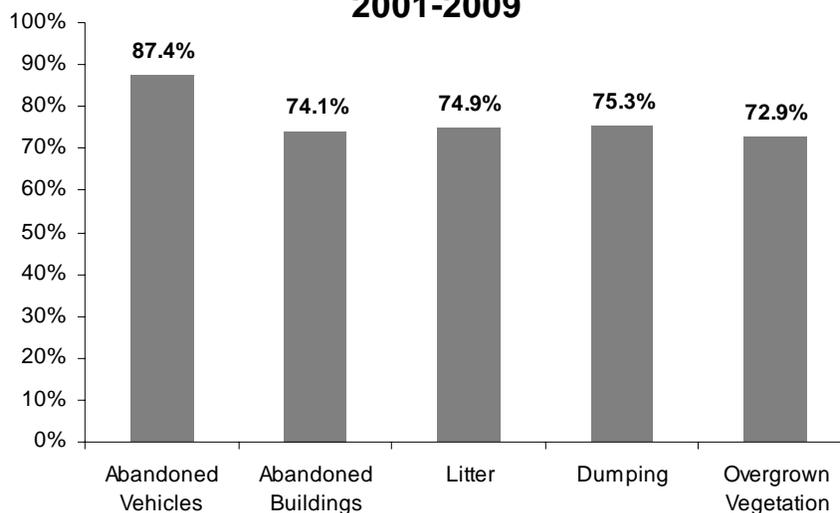
substantial capital investment (e.g., repaving entire streets) and therefore may not be subject to immediate resolution.

When looking at resolution rates by problem type, we find that 66.4% of street problems (i.e. potholes, faded crosswalks) have been resolved, 63% of sidewalk problems (i.e. trip hazards, construction) have been resolved, and 75% of sites with litter have been cleaned up. **Chart 3.1** shows resolution rates for several other major problem categories including dumping, overgrown vegetation, and abandoned/unregistered vehicles.

What does this mean for Worcester?

We believe that the problem resolution rates described above demonstrate the success of ComNET as a tool to improve the physical conditions and overall quality of life in Worcester’s neighborhoods. Follow-up surveys afford residents an opportunity to observe improvements and systematically track the resolution of

Chart 3.1: Resolution Rates by Category, 2001-2009



Source: The Research Bureau, ComNET Surveys

problem conditions. In addition, since each survey also presents an opportunity to identify problems that did not previously exist or were not previously documented, 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* magazine, 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."¹²

ComNET has led to a better understanding of who is responsible for what when it comes to addressing neighborhood problems. 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 examples: 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 and improved performance. As

discussed in **Indicator 1**, the program has now become self-sufficient, and a revenue generator for the City; it has resulted in the tagging of almost 7,800 vehicles since its inception.

As the City analyzes the data collected and develops strategies in response to identified problems, it should consider establishing performance targets against which the work of departments and public officials may be measured. In October, 2007, the City Manager announced several new initiatives to deal with nuisances that may detract from the physical appearance of a neighborhood, including the following:

- ❖ An ordinance to strengthen enforcement capabilities, including incremental fines ranging from \$25 to \$300 against property owners and landlords who refuse to care for their buildings and properties;
- ❖ The establishment of a Problem Properties Resolution Team that meets regularly to identify and share information about persistent problem properties;
- ❖ The formation of a "Clean Team" that organizes neighborhood clean-ups and encourages residents and visitors to be actively involved in keeping Worcester clean. Since its start in October 2007, the Clean Team has collected almost 31,000 pounds of trash in six

different neighborhoods in the city.

In October, 2009, the City of Boston launched an iPhone application called Citizens Connect, which allows users to send pictures of problems or service requests like potholes and graffiti to the Mayor's 24-hour hotline.¹³ Users are given a tracking number and updates for requests they send through the application. Although it would not provide a sweeping survey of a neighborhood like ComNET, an application such as this in Worcester

could give residents citywide the ability to document and track problem conditions similar to ComNET. City Councilor Rushton has suggested that the City look into developing this technology for Worcester.¹⁴ It would allow users to take photos of nuisances, provide their exact location, and enable issues to be filed with the responsible city department. If the City were to adopt a similar iPhone application, the ComNET survey could be used to complement the iPhone application by looking at the overall condition of the neighborhood over time.

INDICATOR 4: CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT

Why is it important?

Measures of civic engagement include the number of citizens applying to serve and 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 to help improve in the quality of life in the communities in which they reside.

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 are nominated for appointment by the City Manager upon the recommendation of the Citizens' Advisory Council, which publicizes vacancies and recruits and screens applicants.^{15, 16} 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. While some boards are legally required to

have members with particular expertise, most appointments do not have specific educational or vocational prerequisites. The only universal requirements are that candidates be bona fide Worcester residents and registered voters. In some instances, candidates cannot be City of Worcester employees.¹⁷ 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).¹⁸

The number of advertised vacancies totaled 98 during the 2009 calendar year, 57 of which occurred on boards or commissions classified as regulatory or advisory. **Table 4.1** shows the distribution of applications by district, which totaled 75. During the same period, 41 vacancies occurred on boards or commissions that did not have district representation requirements, as shown in **Table 4.2**. The Citizens' Advisory Council considered 57 applicants for these positions, or a ratio of

1.4 applicants per available position.

Charts 4.1 & 4.2 show the distribution of applicants by district for the two types of

boards and commissions. If a vacancy is not filled by the next round of vacancy advertisements, it is advertised again.

Table 4.1: Board and Commission Vacancies and Applications - Regulatory & Advisory, 2006-2009

	2006		2007		2008		2009	
	Vacancies	Applications	Vacancies	Applications	Vacancies	Applications	Vacancies**	Applications
Total	38	97	24	38	36	29	57	75
District 1	6	20	5	9	2	9	na	18
District 2	2	10	3	4	3	7	na	10
District 3	7	15	1	8	2	6	na	8
District 4	7	20	5	12	3	0	na	18
District 5	2	32	1	5	0	7	na	21
Various*	6	na	9	na	13	na	na	na
Any	8	na	0	na	13	na	na	na

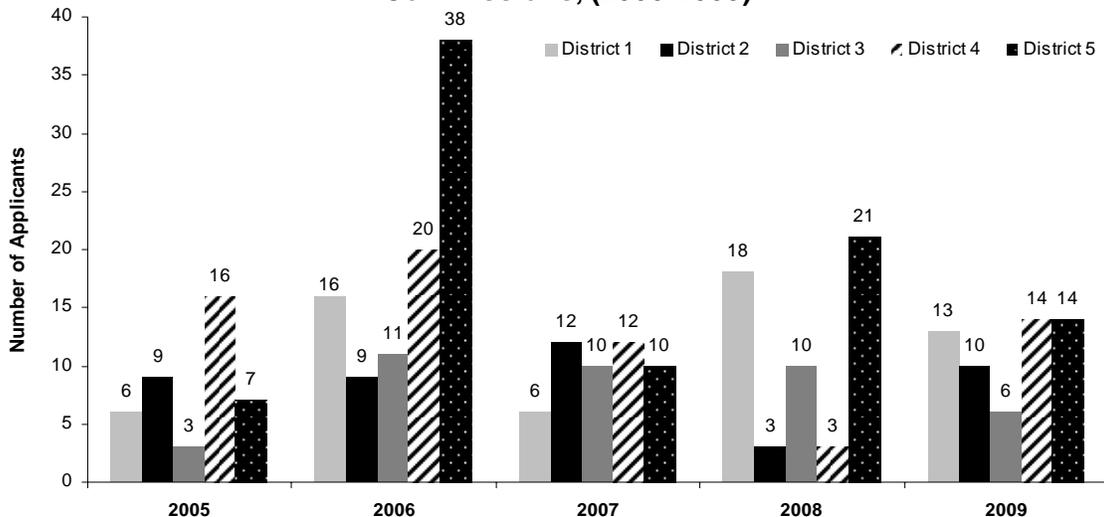
*Candidates from more than one district were eligible to apply for the vacant position
 **Vacancies per district no longer included in advertisements
 Source: City of Worcester Executive Office of Human Resources

Table 4.2: Board and Commission Vacancies and Applications - Executive, 2006-2009

	2006	2007	2008	2009
Total Vacancies	27	17	18	41
Applicants				
Total Applicants	94	50	55	57
District 1	16	6	18	13
District 2	9	12	3	10
District 3	11	10	10	6
District 4	20	12	3	14
District 5	38	10	21	14

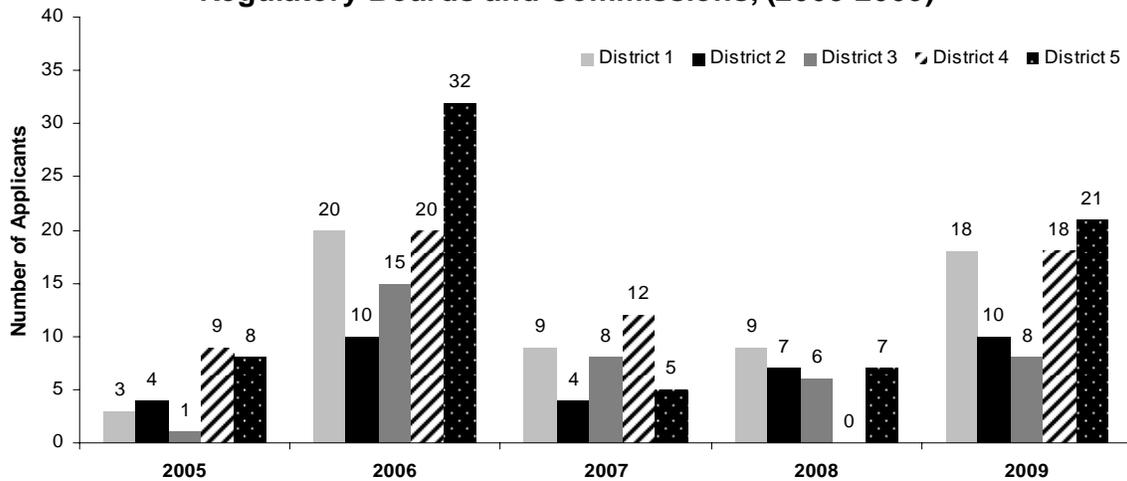
Source: City of Worcester Executive Office of Human Resources

Chart 4.1: Applications for Positions on Executive Boards and Commissions, (2005-2009)



Source: City of Worcester Executive Office of Human Resources

Chart 4.2: Applications for Positions on Advisory and Regulatory Boards and Commissions, (2005-2009)



Source: City of Worcester Executive Office of Human Resources

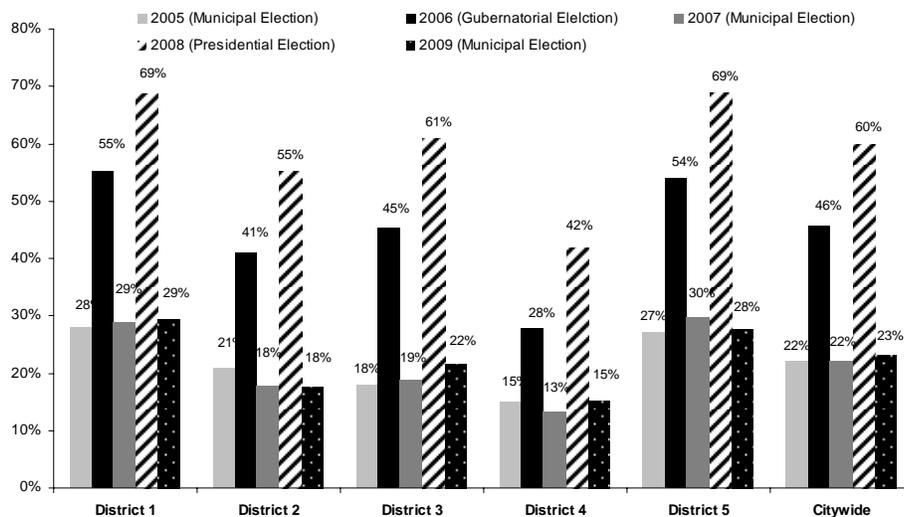
Voting in Worcester

From October, 2005 to October, 2008, the number of registered voters in Worcester increased by 15.5%, from 89,249 to 103,111. The large increase in registered voters in 2008 can probably be attributed to the circumstances of the presidential election that year. Between 2008 and 2009, the number of registered voters in the City decreased by 12% to 90,729. As shown in **Chart 4.3**, about 60% of those who were registered in Worcester actually voted in the 2008 presidential election, compared to 57% of registered voters participating in the 2004

presidential election. In Worcester's 2009 municipal election, 23% of registered voters went to the polls, roughly equal to the 22% who voted in the previous municipal election in 2007.¹⁹

Chart 4.3 also shows that voter turnout in each district in the 2009 municipal election was similar to that in 2007, with District 3 experiencing the largest difference (a 3 percentage point decrease). Turnout rates for the 2008 presidential election were substantially higher in each of the five districts than in the 2007 and 2009

Chart 4.3: Voter Turnout in Worcester, 2005-2009



Prepared by The Research Bureau
Source: Worcester Election Commission

municipal election and the 2006 gubernatorial election (with increases around 30-40 percentage points). These fluctuations in turnout are similar to statewide and nationwide trends. Districts 1 and 5 continue to produce the highest turnout rates in the City. In 2009, slightly less than three-quarters (72%) of Worcester’s voting-age population was registered to vote, while approximately 17% of the voting age population actually voted. **Table 4.3** breaks down by age the percentage of the population registered to vote, and the percentage of registered voters who actually voted in 2009. Voter registration rates were lowest among 18- and 19-year olds, with less than half registered to vote (47%), and turnout among those registered in this age group was 7%. However, this represents an increase from 2006, when about 37% of 18-19 year olds were registered to vote. While 54% of all 20-24 year olds were registered

to vote, only 5.5% of them cast a ballot in 2009, resulting in the lowest turnout among any age group. The 60-64 year old group had the highest percentage of registered voters (93%) and the 65+ age group had the highest percentage of registered voters casting a ballot (42%). These voting patterns are typical nationwide.

What does this mean for Worcester?

The municipal government’s efforts to increase citizen participation on boards and commissions have resulted in an increase in the number of applicants. The City is actively engaged in focused outreach and recruitment strategies, including presentations and promotions to community groups, religious, cultural, and non-profit establishments, as well as increased media coverage. An ongoing collective effort by City officials, neighborhood groups, and community leaders to encourage residents to apply and serve on boards and commissions is commendable.

While voter registration rates have increased in the City, there has been little change in the proportion of these individuals who actually vote. In the 2006 gubernatorial election, slightly fewer than half of Worcester’s registered voters participated. Sixty percent of registered voters participated in the 2008 presidential election. While this election generated an increase in voter registration, a large decrease occurred just a year later.

Table 4.3: Characteristics of Worcester's Voting Age Population and Voters, 2009

Age	% of Population Registered to Vote	2009 Voter Turnout (% of Registered Voters Casting Votes)
18-19	46.7%	7.0%
20-24	54.2%	5.5%
25-29	61.2%	6.9%
30-34	61.9%	9.5%
35-39	81.6%	13.9%
40-44	66.6%	19.0%
45-49	75.3%	23.1%
50-54	78.2%	28.5%
55-59	82.8%	33.6%
60-64	93.3%	36.4%
65+	84.6%	42.1%
Total	71.5%	23.0%

*Prepared by The Research Bureau
Sources: US Census Bureau and Worcester City Clerk, Election Division*

As noted, voter registration rates are lowest among 18 and 19 year olds, and voter turnout is poorest among 20 to 24 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 are less likely to own property or have children in school, and as a result, may feel that many of the campaign issues, particularly in local elections, do not directly affect their lives. However, to the degree that non-voting reflects a lack of trust and/or lack of knowledge of politics, there is an opportunity for business and civic leaders, along with policymakers to strengthen efforts to communicate with and engage young voters on an ongoing basis.

¹ The complete *City of Worcester Fiscal 2010 Annual Budget* is available at <http://www.ci.worcester.ma.us/city-manager/budget-central>.

² 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 also affect the cost of snow and ice clearing efforts.

³ As reported in the *City of Worcester Fiscal 2008 Annual Budget*, were the City to avoid incurring an annual snow removal deficit, assuming an average seasonal snowfall total of 65 inches, it would need to budget more than \$4.2 million for snow removal activities.

⁴ Since snow-removal expenditures consistently exceed the amount budgeted, the Massachusetts Department of Revenue allows cities and towns to underfund this account in order to balance their budgets.

⁵ Source: Department of Public Works and Parks.

⁶ While DPWP 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., Inspectional Services or the Worcester Police Department). The system also allows for tracking of outstanding or unresolved work orders.

⁷ These data reflect initial inspections only; Housing Enforcement 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.

⁸ Worcester Public Library, <http://www.worcpubliclib.org>

⁹ 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, 2008.

¹⁰ ComNET was developed by the Fund for the City of New York's Center on Municipal Government Performance and adapted for use in Worcester.

¹¹ Detailed reports for each of the 14 neighborhoods covered by ComNET are available on our website, <http://www.wrb.org>.

¹² Jonathan Walters. "Tracking Team," *Governing*, April, 2006, pp 76-78.

¹³ <http://www.cityofboston.gov/news/Default.aspx?id=4401>.

¹⁴ Kotsopoulos, N. "OMG! Click and text complaint to City Hall." *Worcester Telegram & Gazette*, July 23, 2009.

¹⁵ This procedure was established by the Home Rule municipal charter approved by Worcester voters in 1985.

¹⁶ Each of the City's Boards and Commissions is classified as either executive (policy setting), regulatory (administrative and/or adjudicatory, establishing policy in specific areas and or applying laws and ordinances), and advisory (providing information and advice to City agencies and public officials).

¹⁷ In 2007, City of Worcester employees became eligible to serve on certain boards and commissions. Restrictions include: serving on the Citizens' Advisory Council, Executive and Regulatory Boards and Commissions, and boards and commissions in direct relationship with the department the employee is working in.

¹⁸ A description of each of the 31 boards and commission is available on the City's website at www.ci.worcester.ma.us.

¹⁹ 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.

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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