



The Research Bureau

# Breaking Down the Budget: Questions to Consider

## City of Worcester & Worcester Public Schools FY15

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Research in the Public Interest

Worcester Regional Research Bureau, Inc.

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**EACH YEAR** on July 1, Massachusetts cities and towns must implement a new budget. The City of Worcester’s Fiscal Year 2015 (FY15) budget will take effect on July 1, 2014. Municipal budgets must balance—expenditures cannot exceed revenues. The budget process forces municipalities to confront the challenge of fixed costs like debt service and pensions while deciding among priorities like education, public safety, economic development, and public services.

### Who’s in charge of the budget?

The City of Worcester, as established by the City Charter, is known as a modified Plan E form of government which is a Council-Manager form of government with a popularly elected Mayor. The Worcester Public Schools is a quasi-independent department of the City.

The City Council is the City’s legislative body while the City Manager serves as chief executive officer. The City Council is composed of 11 members - six elected city-wide (or at-large) and five elected from districts. The Mayor is a member of the City Council who receives the most votes in the mayoral election and wins an at-large City Council seat. In addition to his or her role as City Councilor, the Mayor serves as the ceremonial head of the government and chairs both the City Council and School Committee. The City Council hires the City Manager and can remove him or her by majority vote. The City Manager hires all City employees (except Worcester Public Schools employees), oversees City operations, and presents the City Council with an annual budget that must be approved by June 30th of each year. The City Council has the authority to reduce the City Manager’s proposed budget, but not increase it. The approved budget must be balanced.

The Worcester School Committee is the Worcester Public Schools’ legislative body while the Superintendent of Schools serves as chief executive officer. The School Committee consists of the Mayor and six elected city-wide members. The School Committee sets district-wide school policies, votes on the district budget, and hires and removes the Superintendent.

City Council and School Committee elections are held in odd numbered years.

**Figure 1: The Budget Approval Process**



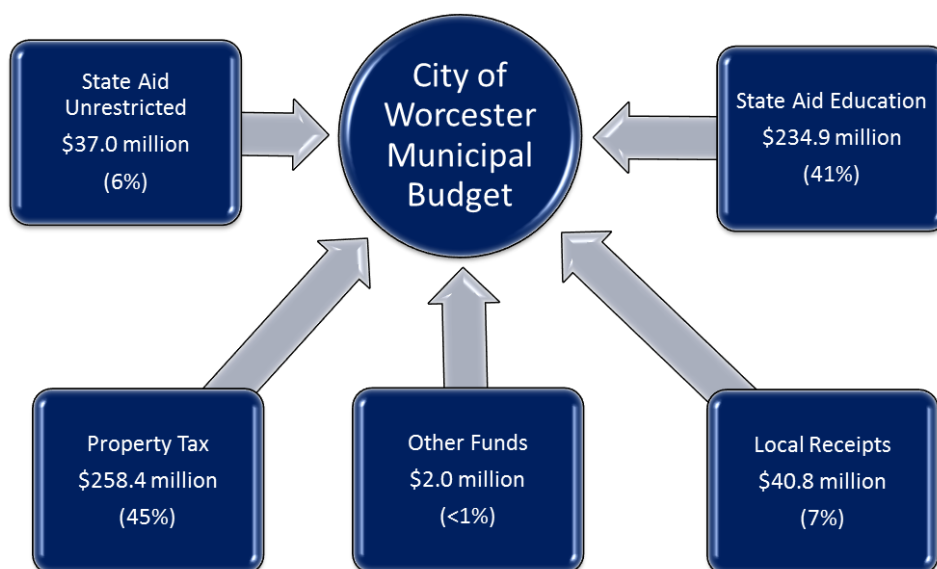
## Where does the City's money come from?

The City of Worcester's budget, approximately \$575 million for FY15, is financed by a combination of locally raised funds, funds provided by the State and Federal governments, and public and private grants.

Worcester's largest single source of revenue is the local property tax levy. The property tax levy is the aggregate revenue raised from the annual tax assessment on the value of real (land and buildings) and personal (equipment and machinery) property in the city. When combined with other local receipts (motor vehicle excise taxes, licenses and permits, hotels and meals taxes, etc.), 51% of Worcester's revenues are generated locally.

The remaining 49% of revenues are primarily State aid programs, which are largely dedicated to public education, especially through the Chapter 70 School Finance Program.

**Figure 2: Sources of City Revenue**



A key challenge of municipal budgeting is estimating revenues. Local revenues and receipts are based on economic and financial projections for the coming year performed by the City. State aid is based on initial indications from the Massachusetts legislature, as State revenue sharing and education aid is not finalized until passage of the State budget, which often occurs after the City has adopted its own budget.



## How are my property taxes assessed?

Property taxes, the largest source of local revenue, are based on the value of land, buildings, and personal property. Established by Chapter 59 of the Massachusetts General Laws, the property tax assessment process follows a regular year-long cycle as outlined in Table 1.

Property values are determined by the City Assessor's Office under the supervision of the Massachusetts Department of Revenue. Every year, State law requires that the Assessor maintain property assessments at that year's full and fair cash value. Every three years, the Assessor conducts a reassessment of all properties in the city by sampling. Once every nine years, all properties in the city are reassessed by physical inspection.

Property tax is assessed on the full and fair cash value of a property. Certain property classes such as commercial/income properties are assessed by the cost approach (the cost to replace the property) or the income capitalization approach (annual net operating income divided by the capitalization rate). A property owner can seek an abatement of property tax liability on the basis of 1) overvaluation; 2) disproportional assessment; 3) improper classification; or 4) statutory exemption.

Worcester currently has a dual tax rate, taxing residential property and commercial/industrial property at different levels. (Under Massachusetts law, the dual tax rate is limited so that no property tax rate on any property classification can exceed 75% of the single tax rate.) In FY2014, residential properties are charged \$19.54 per \$1000.00 of the property's value and commercial/industrial/personal (CIP) properties are charged \$30.83 per \$1000.00 of the property's value.

**Table 1: A Year in the Life of the Property Tax**

FY15 Assessment Process	
January 1, 2014	Property Tax Valuation Date for FY2015.
July 1, 2014	Fiscal Year Begins. 1 <sup>st</sup> Quarter preliminary tax bill is issued (preliminary tax bills are based on prior fiscal year taxes). Statutory exemption claim filing period begins.
August 1, 2014	1 <sup>st</sup> Quarter preliminary tax due.
October 1, 2014	2 <sup>nd</sup> Quarter preliminary tax bill issued.
November 1, 2014	2 <sup>nd</sup> Quarter tax due.
Late December 2014	3 <sup>rd</sup> Quarter actual tax bill issued (bill reflects the actual value and tax rate for current fiscal year). Statutory exemption claims are determined.
January 1, 2015	Property Tax Assessment Date for the following fiscal year. Abatement application filing period begins.
February 2, 2015	3 <sup>rd</sup> Quarter tax due. Abatement filing period ends.
February-May 2015	Review of Abatement and Exemption applications - Notice of decision mailed out.
April 1, 2015	4 <sup>th</sup> Quarter tax bill issued.
May 1, 2015	4 <sup>th</sup> Quarter tax due.
June 30, 2015	Fiscal Year Ends.



The City Council sets the tax rate each fall. During this process, tax classification (i.e., the dual tax rate) and its effect on property owners is a key topic. Since 1984 through FY13, CIP property owners have paid \$601,720,658 in taxes that would have been paid by residential property owners under a single tax rate. On average, CIP property owners have paid more than \$20 million per year in additional taxes as a result of the dual tax rate. Yet the relative portion of CIP property in Worcester has declined during this same time period. In 2013, residential property made up 71.86% of the assessed value in Worcester while CIP property made up 28.14%. In 1984, at the initiation of tax classification, residential property made up 64.58% of the assessed value in Worcester while CIP property made up 35.42%.

The City of Worcester relies heavily on the local property tax as a source of revenue, however a significant portion of Worcester's land area—35%—and a significant portion of its property value—31%—are exempt from local taxes. As a result, the remaining taxable properties must generate sufficient revenue to maintain the general operations of government.

To recoup some of that lost revenue, the City has asked larger not-for-profits in Worcester to make payments in lieu of taxes, also known as PILOTs. While some institutions have complied, many not-for-profits argue that they contribute significantly to Worcester through jobs and educational and cultural benefits. Five Worcester colleges have made PILOT agreements or similar financial arrangements with the City.

**Table 2: Select City of Worcester PILOTs and Other Financial Arrangements**

Institution	Effective Date	Duration	Financial Contribution	Beneficiary
MCPHS University	November, 2008	25 years	20% of assessed value of properties increasing by 2.5% per year	Worcester Public Library
WPI	July, 2009	25 years	Annual payment \$450,000 increasing by 2.5% per year	Worcester Public Library
UMass Medical	March, 2013	5 years	Annual payments of \$32,000	Unrestricted
Clark University	September, 2010	20 years	Annual payment of \$262,000 increasing by 2.5% per year	Worcester Public Library and Main South/University Park
College of the Holy Cross	May, 2012	5 years	Annual payments of \$80,000.	Worcester Public Library—Mobile Library

In 1980, Massachusetts voters adopted an initiative limiting tax levy increases each year to 2 ½% over the previous year, plus the value of new construction. So-called Proposition 2 ½ also limited the total tax levy of a community in any given year to 2 ½% of the total taxable assessed value of the community. Since the City of Worcester has not collected the maximum levy allowed by law each year, it boasts an unused tax levy capacity of approximately \$10 million. Under the law, the City has the authority to increase taxes to capture this additional amount without seeking a voter-approved override.

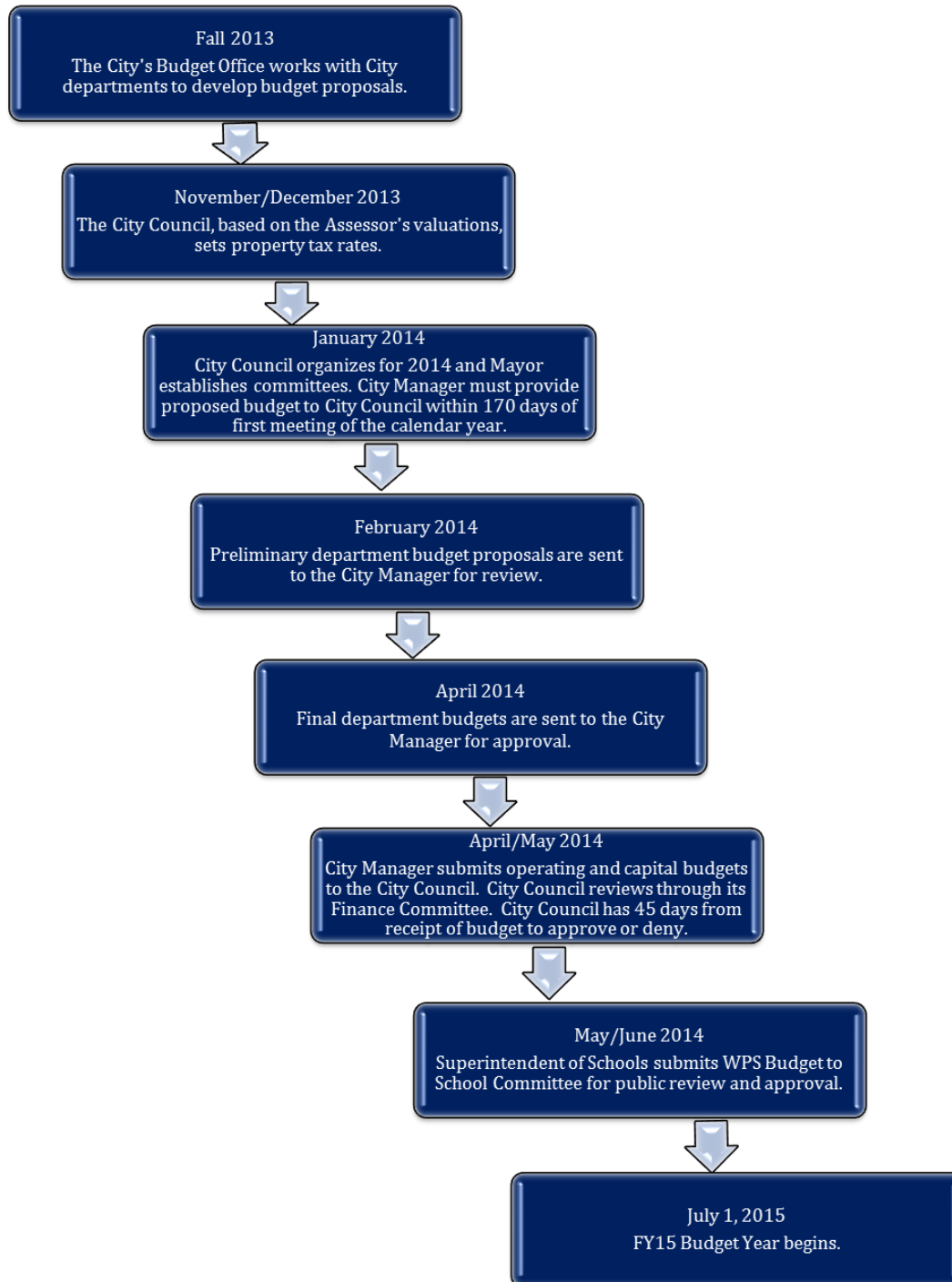


## How is the budget approved?

Under the City Charter and Chapter 44 of the Massachusetts General Laws, the City Manager must submit a budget to the City Council within 170 days of the Council's first meeting of the new calendar year. The Council must act on the budget within 45 days of receiving it and approve it by June 30th. The Council is limited in its authority over the budget. While it can make general reductions in the budget, it cannot target individual line items and it cannot increase the budget without the recommendation of the City Manager. Thus, City Council is not able to move funding from one priority to another; it can only reduce general funding and request that the City Manager consider alternative priorities.

Since the City's budget must be balanced, the budget process requires the Manager and City Council to set priorities as they decide how to spend the City's limited resources.

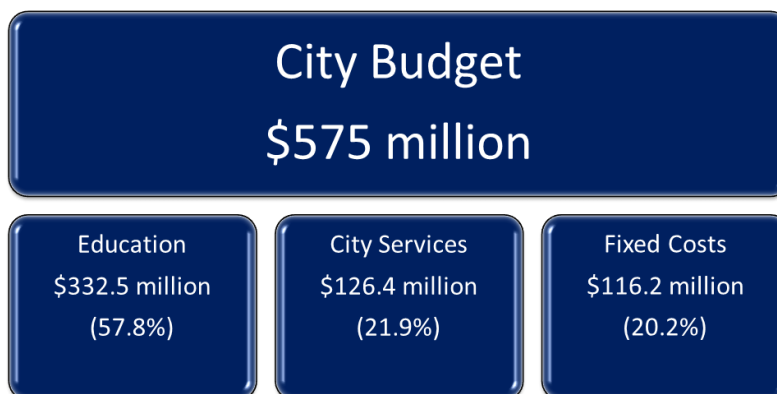
**Figure 3: City of Worcester/Worcester Public Schools FY15 Budget Process**



## What does the City budget fund?

The City of Worcester's budget of approximately \$575 million funds three main activities: fixed costs, education, and city services.

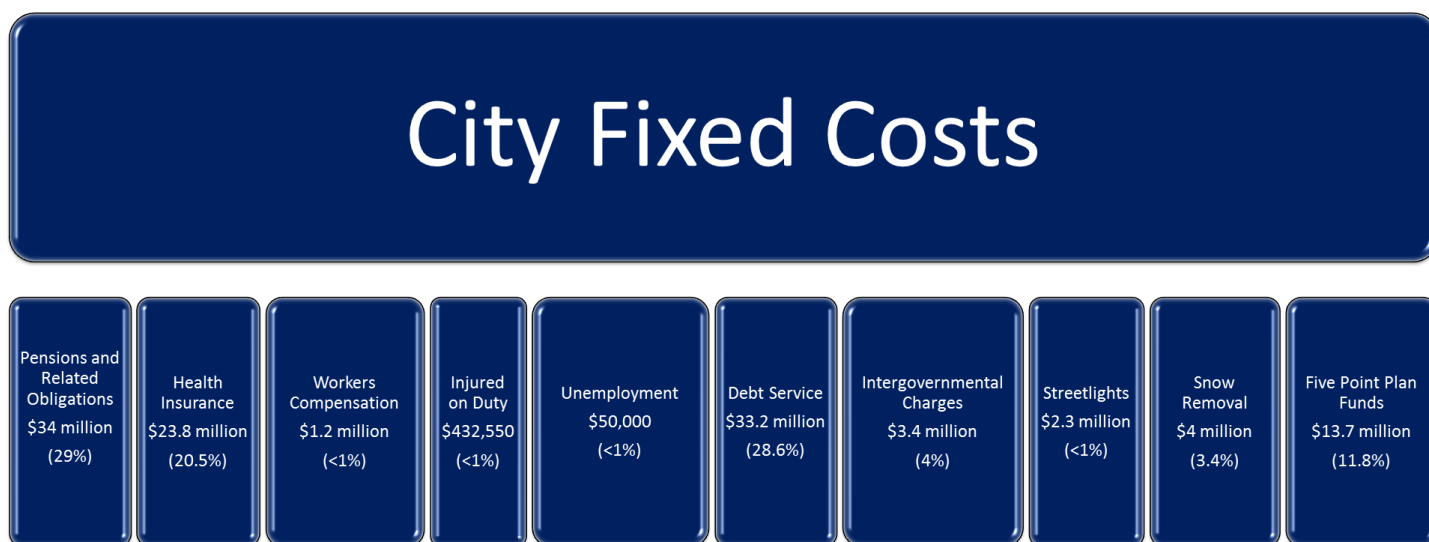
**Figure 4: City of Worcester FY15 Budget**



Fixed costs comprise more than 20% of the City's budget. Fixed costs are expenditures required by law, regulation, contract, or the City's Five Point Plan. Fixed costs include debt service, pensions and other post-employment benefits, insurance, and such annual obligations as snow removal and streetlights.

Fixed costs are not discretionary.

**Figure 5: City of Worcester FY15 Fixed Costs**



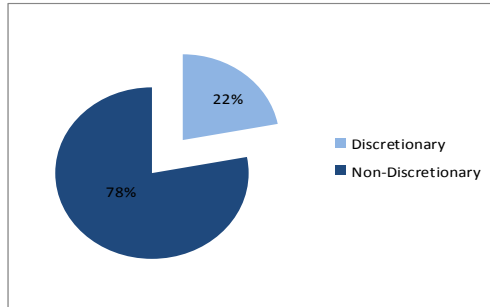
Education is both a fixed and discretionary cost. As a result of Chapter 70 of the Massachusetts General Laws, cities and towns are mandated to spend a fixed amount on public education based on factors including number of students by grade, median income, English language proficiency, etc. Public education funding includes the Worcester Public Schools and charter schools, school choice, and special education. Yet communities often spend additional funds on education, both through so-called non net school spending (which includes such items as transportation, equipment, building rentals, adult education, and in-kind services) and additional tax levy allocations. In FY15, the City of Worcester provided \$1.1 million in tax levy above the State-mandated local contribution. See page nine for additional details about education funding.



## How flexible is the budget?

Since the City's budget must balance, the budget process requires the City Manager and the City Council to set priorities as they collectively decide how to spend the City's limited resources. Certain priorities, like education, are obligated by law. Other priorities are set by annual determinations of need. Most municipal priorities—those of public officials and the citizenry alike—are funded out of the 22% of the budget committed to City Services.

**Figure 6: The Discretionary Slice of the Pie**



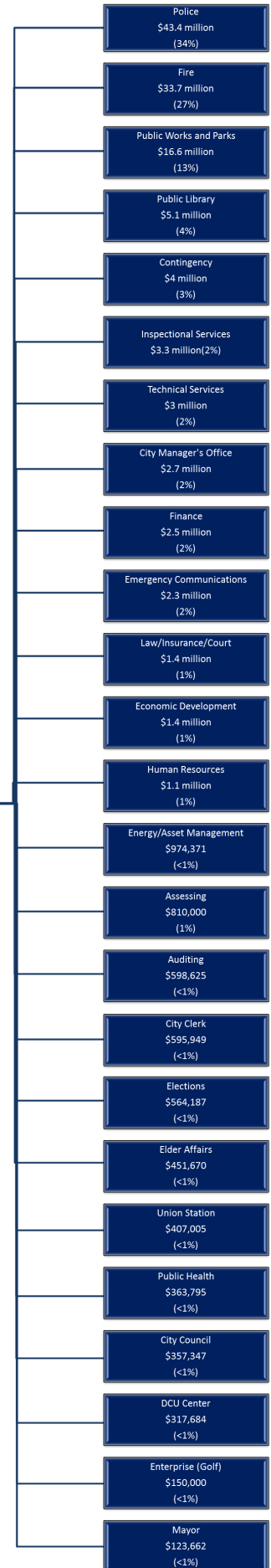
Public safety, street and sidewalk maintenance, public parks, economic development, and the public library are all funded from the discretionary 22% of the budget. While potholes, crime, traffic, and trash often rouse significant debate, these items directly compete with each other for the limited funding remaining after education and fixed costs are covered.

**Table 3: FY15 Municipal Priorities Based on Spending**

Department	Budget Amount	Percent of Total FY15 Budget
Education	\$ 332.5 million	58%
Police	\$43.4 million	7.5%
Fire	\$33.7 million	6%
Public Works and Parks	\$16.6 million	2.9%
Worcester Public Library	\$5.1 million	0.9%
Other/ Contingency	\$4 million	0.7%
Inspectional Services	\$3.3 million	0.6%
Information Technology	\$3 million	0.6%
City Manager's Office	\$2.7 million	0.5%
Finance	\$2.5 million	0.4%
Emergency Communications	\$2.3 million	0.4%
Law	\$1.4 million	0.2%
Economic Development	\$1.4 million	0.2%
Human Resources	\$1.1 million	0.2%
Assessing	\$810,000	0.1%

**City Services**  
\$126.4 million  
(21.9%)

**Figure 7: FY15 Discretionary City Services**





## How is public education funded in Worcester?

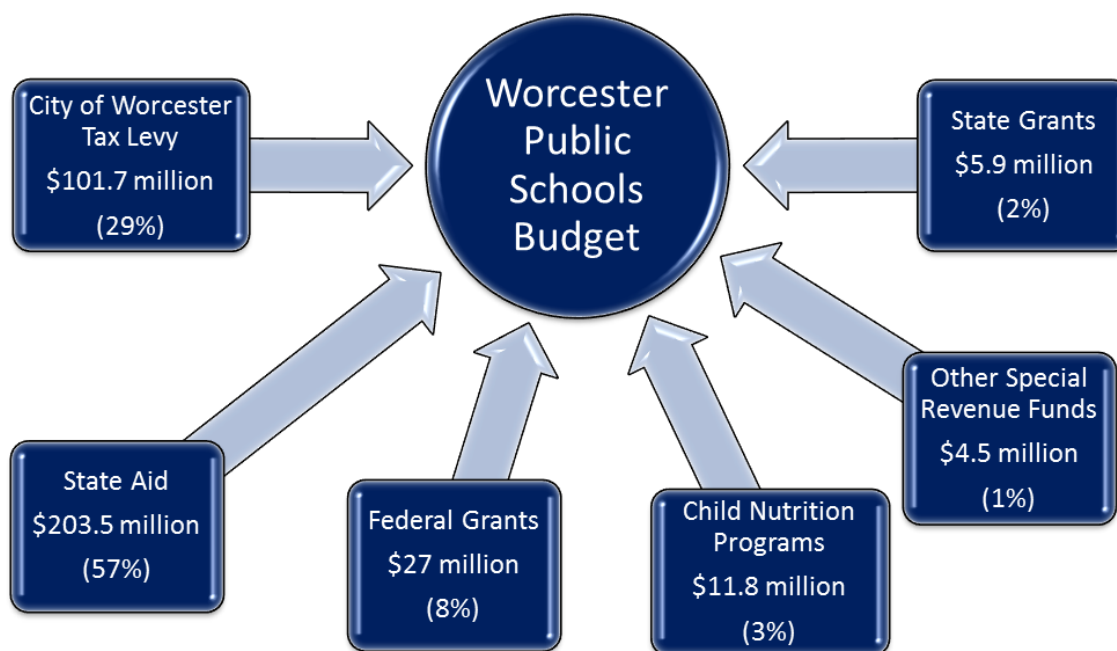
Chapter 70 of the Massachusetts General Laws ensures adequate funding for all school districts in Massachusetts. The Chapter 70 funding formula, known as the foundation budget, establishes a baseline for public education funding for each school district and outlines minimum local contributions and State aid. The formula is complex and considers individual school district variables such as student enrollment by grade and program, student demographics and socio-economic status, community income and property values, and cost of living.

Chapter 70 simply outlines the minimum requirements for school funding. School districts can increase their local contributions beyond the foundation budget as local funding allows. In addition to the Worcester Public Schools, the City's public education budget provides support to charter schools, school choice, and certain special education expenses.

Required local education spending and State aid are considered "Net School Spending" and totaled \$288 million in Worcester in FY15. In addition to Chapter 70 requirements, however, the City must address certain non-educational costs to support Worcester Public Schools operations including transportation, crossing guards, adult education, leases, and debt service for the WPS capital budget. This additional "Non Net School Spending" cost \$17.2 million in FY15. Therefore, the total FY15 City of Worcester allocation for the Worcester Public Schools is \$305.2 million.

The Worcester Public Schools, with a budget of \$354.4 million in FY15, receives funding beyond that allocated by the City, from Federal and State grant sources.

**Figure 8: FY15 Worcester Public Schools Revenues**



The Worcester Public Schools is the third largest school district in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, behind Boston and Springfield, educating nearly 25,000 students. 81.4% of Worcester Public Schools students are high needs, including 73% that are low-income, 72.9% that receive a free or reduced lunch, 31.7% that are English language learners, and 20% that are students with disabilities.

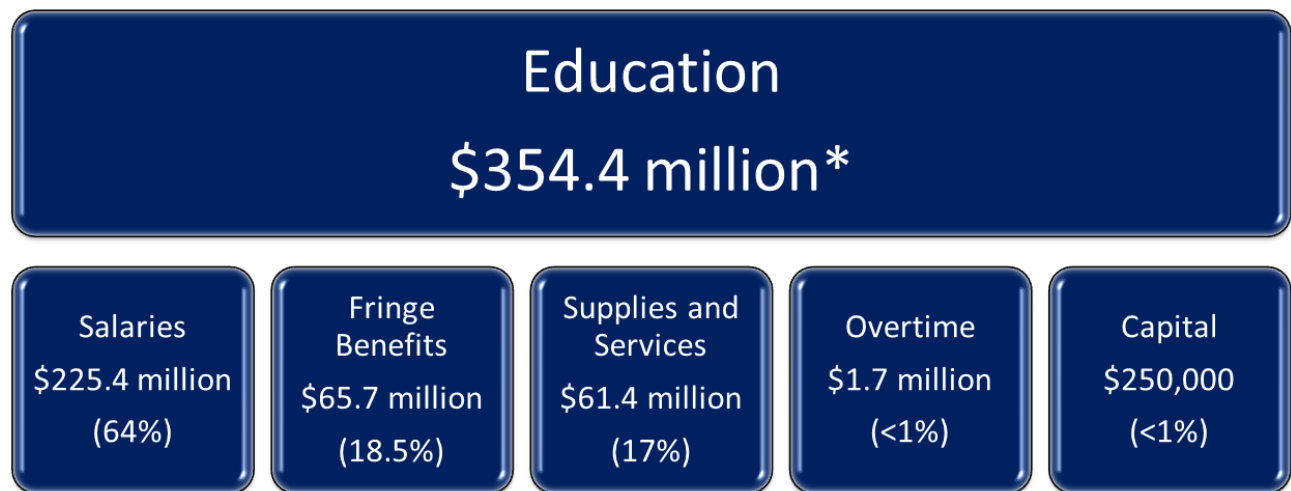
The Worcester Public Schools budget includes a diverse range of expenditures. Personnel costs make up a significant portion of the budget—\$292.8 million, including nearly 2,700 teachers and educators. Yet the Worcester Public Schools also manage a portfolio of nearly 50 properties, a dining services operation that provides over five million meals annually, a fleet of vehicles including cars, trucks, and busses, and a sports program that includes 17 different athletic programs for high school students.

According to the Worcester Public Schools' budget, the district follows a Seven Point Financial Plan for Advancing Student Achievement and Program Sustainability, which includes: 1) long-term budget planning, 2) annual budget reviews, 3) a transparent budget process, 4) quarterly financial reporting, 5) development of supplemental and sustainable programs, 6) creation of a cap on administrative spending, and 7) identifying targets for new revenue.

**Table 4: The Worcester Public Schools**

<b>A Snapshot of the Worcester Public Schools</b>	
<i>Number of Schools</i>	
Elementary Schools	33
Middle Schools	4
Grade 7-12 Schools	2
High Schools	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>
<i>Number of Students</i>	
Elementary Schools	14,580
Middle Schools	3,064
Grade 7-12 Schools	668
High Schools	6,250
<b>Total</b>	<b>24,562</b>
<i>Number of Employees</i>	
Administration	102
Teachers and Educators	2,781
Other	957
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,840</b>

**Figure 9: FY15 Worcester Public Schools Budget**



\* \$354.4 million is the total budget of the Worcester Public Schools. While the City of Worcester allocated \$101.7 million in property tax levy and \$203.5 million in State Chapter 70 aid to the WPS budget, the City's total \$332.5 million allocation for public education included funding for charter schools, certain special education expenses, and school choice. The total Worcester Public Schools budget includes the City of Worcester allocation as well as outside State and Federal grants.



## How has the annual budget changed over time?

**Table 5: City Revenues (FY11—FY15)\***

	FY11 Actual	FY12 Actual	FY13 Actual	FY14 Adopted	FY15 Adopted
Property Tax Levy	\$ 216.33	\$ 227.38	\$ 233.74	\$ 247.60	\$ 258.43
State Aid General City	\$ 39.42	\$ 37.28	\$ 39.48	\$ 39.12	\$ 38.92
State Aid Education	\$ 193.42	\$ 201.14	\$ 210.36	\$ 219.90	\$ 220.57
State Aid Charter Schools	\$ 4.02	\$ 3.51	\$ 3.50	\$ 2.37	\$ 2.73
State MSBA - School Building	\$ 16.11	\$ 15.20	\$ 15.20	\$ 15.20	\$ 11.58
Local (Permits/Motor Vehicle)	\$ 39.07	\$ 42.88	\$ 42.10	\$ 39.97	\$ 40.83
Other Available Funds	\$ 1.30	\$ 3.03	\$ 1.17	\$ 1.21	\$ 1.97
Free Cash	\$ 0.52	\$ 3.02	\$ 4.28	\$ 9.10	\$ -
<b>Totals</b>	<b>\$ 510.19</b>	<b>\$ 533.44</b>	<b>\$ 549.83</b>	<b>\$ 574.47</b>	<b>\$ 575.03</b>

**Table 6: City Expenses (FY11—FY15)\***

	FY11 Actual	FY12 Actual	FY13 Actual	FY14 Adopted	FY15 Adopted
Education	\$ 285.15	\$ 299.32	\$ 313.39	\$ 325.92	\$ 332.45
Fixed Costs	\$ 111.98	\$ 109.74	\$ 116.78	\$ 123.81	\$ 116.16
City Services	\$ 108.43	\$ 113.60	\$ 118.44	\$ 124.75	\$ 126.42
<b>Totals</b>	<b>\$ 505.56</b>	<b>\$ 522.66</b>	<b>\$ 548.61</b>	<b>\$ 574.48</b>	<b>\$ 575.03</b>

**Table 7: Worcester Public Schools Revenues (FY11—FY15)\***

	FY11 Actual	FY12 Actual	FY13 Actual	FY14 Adopted	FY15 Adopted
State Aid	\$ 174.61	\$ 186.15	\$ 194.26	\$ 202.74	\$ 203.52
Local Contribution	\$ 85.44	\$ 86.94	\$ 91.10	\$ 96.31	\$ 101.68
Federal Grants	\$ 52.92	\$ 39.00	\$ 31.90	\$ 31.31	\$ 26.99
Child Nutrition Programs	\$ 11.02	\$ 11.62	\$ 10.04	\$ 11.49	\$ 11.84
State Grants	\$ 9.20	\$ 9.00	\$ 5.96	\$ 5.89	\$ 5.88
Other Special Revenue	\$ 3.69	\$ 4.89	\$ 5.01	\$ 4.72	\$ 4.52
<b>Totals</b>	<b>\$ 336.88</b>	<b>\$ 337.60</b>	<b>\$ 338.27</b>	<b>\$ 352.46</b>	<b>\$ 354.43</b>

**Table 8: Worcester Public Schools Expenses (FY11—FY15)\***

	FY11 Actual	FY12 Actual	FY13 Actual	FY14 Adopted	FY15 Adopted
Administration	\$ 4.60	\$ 5.03	\$ 4.76	\$ 5.18	\$ 5.12
Instruction	\$ 194.56	\$ 200.42	\$ 190.39	\$ 203.08	\$ 203.44
Other School Services	\$ 27.91	\$ 32.23	\$ 38.70	\$ 38.91	\$ 36.72
Operations & Maintenance	\$ 21.23	\$ 19.84	\$ 23.98	\$ 24.05	\$ 22.88
Fixed Charges	\$ 64.65	\$ 58.70	\$ 58.89	\$ 62.56	\$ 65.75
Community Services	\$ 0.94	\$ 0.79	\$ 0.78	\$ 0.47	\$ 0.48
Fixed Assets	\$ 0.37	\$ 0.39	\$ 0.30	\$ 0.40	\$ 0.42
Debt Service	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Tuition Programs	\$ 16.98	\$ 21.73	\$ 22.55	\$ 17.80	\$ 19.62
<b>Totals</b>	<b>\$ 331.24</b>	<b>\$ 339.13</b>	<b>\$ 340.35</b>	<b>\$ 352.45</b>	<b>\$ 354.43</b>

\*In millions. Numbers are rounded.

## What goes into the capital budget?

In addition to its operating budget, the City of Worcester approves an annual capital budget to fund lasting items such as equipment purchases (police cars, school busses, snow plows), infrastructure improvements (roads, sidewalks, parks), technology upgrades, and major building maintenance. For the capital budget, the City issues debt and finances these purchases over the life-span of the item using tax levy funds and grants from State and Federal government. The debt is generally issued as a municipal bond and is often exempt from Federal and State taxes. Under the Five Point Plan, the City caps how much borrowing it can do in any one year based on prior year borrowings and debt service.

**Table 9: FY15 Capital Funding**

FY15 Capital Projects	FY15 Debt Authorizations	Anticipated FY15 Borrowing (including Current & Prior Year Authorizations)	FY15 Available Non-Tax Levy Funding (Grants)
Dam Repair	\$600,000	\$995,000	-
DCU Center	\$650,000	-	-
City Rehabilitation	\$9,653,000	\$1,328,000	\$1,328,000
City/Schools Equipment	\$3,242,000	\$3,042,000	\$560,000
Citywide Street/Sidewalk	\$9,585,000	\$12,510,000	\$4,025,000
Parks Infrastructure	\$3,970,000	\$5,345,000	\$1,370,000
School Rehabilitation	\$3,400,000	\$3,400,000	\$2,880,000
WRA	\$450,000	\$650,000	\$650,000
<b>Totals</b>	<b>\$31,550,000</b>	<b>\$27,270,000</b>	<b>\$10,813,000</b>

Also included in the capital budget is borrowing for the City's enterprise funds. Enterprise accounts are fully funded by fees paid for those direct services, not the tax levy. The City Square Project is included with the enterprise accounts, although it is a District Improvement Financing (DIF) Project under Chapter 40Q of the Massachusetts General Laws. Bond issuances related to CitySquare are funded by the incremental tax receipts generated within the project area.

**Table 10: FY15 Enterprise and Related Funding**

Enterprise and Other Funded Projects	FY15 Debt Authorizations	Anticipated FY15 Borrowing (including Current & Prior Year Authorizations)	FY15 Enterprise or Other Funding
CitySquare	-	-	-
Golf Equipment	\$900,000	\$900,000	\$900,000
Golf Infrastructure	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000
Golf Rehabilitation	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000
Off Street Parking Rehab	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000
Off Street Meters	\$525,000	\$525,000	\$525,000
Sewer Equipment	\$685,000	\$685,000	\$685,000
Sewer Rehabilitation	\$400,000	\$363,462	\$363,462
Sewer Infrastructure	\$16,300,000	\$2,553,329	\$2,553,329
Water Equipment	\$553,000	\$553,000	\$553,000
Water Land Acquisition	-	-	-
Water Rehabilitation	\$200,000	\$200,000	\$200,000
Water Infrastructure	\$9,100,000	\$1,893,998	\$1,893,998
<b>Total Enterprise and Funded Projects</b>	<b>\$31,163,000</b>	<b>\$10,173,789</b>	<b>\$10,173,789</b>



Upon completion of its latest debt issuance, the City of Worcester owes \$644,100,261 in debt, the majority in general operating debt (24.6%), pension obligation bonds (24.1%), and school building projects (18.5%). The City's debt service payments total approximately \$71.8 million in FY15, with \$33.2 million funded by tax levy and \$38.6 million funded by enterprise or other funded accounts.

A municipal bond's interest rates are determined by the perceived credit worthiness of the issuer. The City of Worcester's bonds are considered investment grade with a very low investment risk. Credit worthiness is assessed by the three primary credit rating agencies, Fitch, Moody's, and Standard & Poor's.

**Table 11: City of Worcester Credit Rating**

Rating Agency	Rating
Fitch Ratings	AA-
Moody's Investors Service	Aa3
Standard & Poor's Rating Services	AA-

**Table 12: City of Worcester Debt 2013**

City of Worcester's Outstanding Debt 2013		
Category	Outstanding Debt	Debt %
Airport	\$ 1,070,100.00	0.2
General Fund	\$ 158,369,885.00	24.6
ESCO (Energy)	\$ 30,483,418.00	4.7
Golf	\$ 1,789,200.00	0.3
Medical City	\$ 8,515,080.00	1.3
Off-street	\$ 7,355,600.00	1.1
Pension Obligation Bonds (POB)	\$ 155,063,454.00	24.1
School Building	\$ 119,171,761.00	18.5
Sewer	\$ 72,482,682.00	11.3
Water	\$ 66,141,379.00	10.3
CDBG	\$ 1,742,000.00	0.3
DCU Center	\$ 12,671,860.00	2
CitySquare	\$ 9,243,842.00	1.4
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$ 644,100,261.00</b>	<b>100</b>

### Do we get what we pay for?

It is difficult to come up with a single yardstick to measure a city's strength. Business models may measure inputs and outputs, but a city does not post profits and it must continue to provide certain services no matter how much those services drain a budget. Measuring the quantity and quality of services does not balance the unfunded demands placed on municipalities.

Over the past decade, Worcester has faced a national recession and decreasing State aid for municipal services. Despite these difficulties Worcester has balanced its budget, fulfilled its fixed cost obligations, funded schools, maintained city services, made improvements to its downtown and neighborhoods, and increased its bond rating. The city has attracted new businesses and population has grown steadily. Yet Worcester's total taxable assessed property value of \$11.03 billion in FY14 is down from \$12.7 billion in FY08.

While the budget reflects priorities, it is a poor means for determining priorities. Worcester's residents, businesses, and elected and appointed officials must annually readdress the City's priorities and how those priorities are represented in the budget. If the agreed upon priorities require additional funding, the City should review costs for efficiencies, explore State and Federal grant programs, or consider whether local taxes must be increased to meet prioritized needs.

Ultimately, we do get what we pay for, but it may not be all that we want. In order to ensure that revenues, expenditures, and outcomes match our collective needs and wants, more Worcester stakeholders must get informed and get involved as part of the annual public process.



## What does it mean?

**Abatement:** A reduction or exemption in an owner's property tax. A property owner receives an abatement if he or she can document that the property was overvalued, that the property was disproportionately assessed compared to comparable properties, that the property was improperly classified, or that the property is exempt under statutory exemption.

**Capital Budget:** A budget for purchasing fixed assets, machinery, or equipment; generally represents larger investments with a multi-year lifespan.

**Chapter 70:** Chapter 70 of the Massachusetts General Laws establishes a program for State aid to public elementary and secondary schools. In addition to State funding, it also sets minimum spending requirements for each school district and minimum requirements for each municipality's share of school costs. See Foundation Budget.

**Charter School:** A public school chartered by the Commonwealth's Board of Education independent of local school districts.

**Charter School Reimbursement:** School districts are responsible for paying tuition for local students attending charter schools. To offset the cost, the Commonwealth reimburses a school district for 100% of the tuition for the first year and provides 25% reimbursement over the next five years.

**Cherry Sheet:** The Commonwealth's official notification to municipalities and school districts of estimated State aid to be paid and charges to be assessed over a fiscal year.

**District Improvement Financing (DIF):** DIF, authorized under Chapter 40Q of the Massachusetts General Laws, enables municipalities to fund public works, infrastructure, and development projects by allocating future, incremental tax revenues collected from a predefined district to pay project costs.

**Fiscal Year:** An annual budget period; in Massachusetts municipalities the fiscal year begins on July 1 and ends on June 30.

**Five Point Financial Plan:** The City of Worcester's fiscal policy adopted by the City Council in 2006. The five points are: 1) a five-year forecasting and long-term planning of City finances and projects; 2) creation of a Bond Rating Stabilization Fund and strengthening of reserves; 3) quarterly financial reporting; 4) institution of a \$16.85 million cap on borrowing (can be adjusted for inflation); and 5) establishment of a Capital Improvement Plan to achieve debt service stability in budget.

**Fixed Costs:** A municipality's expenditures that are obligated by law, contracts, or borrowing commitments. Examples are State-mandated funding for education, repayment of debt, and pension obligations.

**Foundation Budget:** State aid for local education is established by the foundation budget formula. The formula considers the cost of education and the financial capacity of a municipality. State aid represents the difference between these two amounts. See Chapter 70.

**Full and Fair Cash Value:** The highest price for a property likely in a competitive, open market with knowledgeable parties.

**General State Aid:** Unrestricted State aid to municipalities allocated annually. Formerly Lottery Aid or Additional Assistance.

**Local Receipts:** Monies generated by a municipality from local fees, charges, and fines.

**Mill Rate:** The amount of tax payable per thousand dollars of value of a property.

**Municipal Bond:** A debt security issued by a local government or its agencies to finance capital expenditures.

**Nonprofit or Not-for-Profit Organization:** An organization that is not required to pay property taxes under State or Federal law. Examples of these tax-exempt entities are colleges, churches, and social service agencies.

**Personal Property:** Property not permanently affixed to land or building (e.g., furniture, equipment, merchandise).

**PILOT - Payment in Lieu of Taxes:** In limited cases, nonprofit organizations exempt from paying property taxes will voluntarily negotiate an annual payment to the municipality in recognition of the organization's impact on public finances and/or services.

**Property Tax:** Revenue raised through an assessment on the value of real and personal property.

**Property Tax Levy:** The total amount of money a municipality raises through property taxes.

**Proposition 2½ (Prop 2½):** A Massachusetts referendum passed in 1980 that limits tax levy increases each year to 2 ½% over the previous year, plus the value of new construction. Prop 2 ½ also limits the total tax levy of a community in any given year to 2 ½ % of the total taxable assessed value of the community.

**Real Property:** Property affixed to a particular location, generally land and buildings.

**Tax Increment Financing (TIF):** A TIF waives a portion of the increase in property taxes that accrue from new investment in exchange for the investment and jobs added as a result of the project. A TIF also makes the recipient eligible for a credit on the State corporate excise tax.

**Tax Rate:** The amount of tax assessed per thousand dollars of value. Worcester has a dual tax rate, charging differing amounts for residential property and commercial/industrial/personal property.

