"Don't Boo. Just Remember to Vote."

Civic Engagement in the City of Worcester

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"Don't Boo. Just Remember to Vote."

-President Barack Obama

Worcester Technical High School Graduation, June 11, 2014

The Greek philosopher Aristotle argued that participation in the life of a city must be considered an obligation, not just for the good of the city but for an individual's own happiness and well-being.[1] Alexis de Tocqueville, the French aristocrat who visited the United States in 1831, marveled at American involvement in the social and political life of cities and towns. He believed that the strength and success of U.S. democracy was in large part a result of citizen engagement.[2] Today, however, civic involvement in communities like Worcester likely falls far short of what de Tocqueville observed. Although Worcester continues to boast many social organizations, the city's civic activities indicate a disheartening lack of citizen participation in local governance.

Using the metrics of voter participation, competition for elected office, and participation on local boards and commissions, residents seem increasingly disconnected and disinterested in local government. While the City of Worcester makes significant efforts to inform residents, this report outlines the theory and practices needed to better engage and involve residents in local governance.

Engaging the Public

In Worcester, many residents participate in community, business, cultural, or religious organizations such as ParkSpirit, Rotary Club of Worcester, Liberian Association of Worcester County, or the Interfaith Hospitality Network. These private initiatives illustrate residents' willingness to promote and improve life in Worcester. That same enthusiasm seems lacking when it comes to resident involvement with local government, however, and residents are often not participating in identifying problems, developing answers, and implementing solutions in municipal governance.

In 2000, Robert Putnam's seminal work *Bowling Alone* highlighted significant threats to vibrant civic engagement in modern U.S. cities and towns. In 2007, a University of North Carolina—Chapel Hill School of Government report on civic engagement identified a number of reasons for citizen apathy: a sense of disconnect with government (including the view that government is either incompetent or in opposition to an individual's interests); lack of time; lack of encouragement or support from government; and the complexity and duration of issues.[3] The average citizen's view of local government is increasingly negative. A 2010 Pew Charitable Trust poll found that just over half (51%) of respondents had a favorable view of their local government, down from nearly two-thirds (64%) in 1997.[4] The National Research Center of *Governing* magazine found in 2012 that only 19% of those surveyed had contacted an elected official during the course of the year and only 24% had attended a local government meeting or hearing.[5]

In spite of this apathy, advocates of citizen engagement argue that municipalities must work to connect citizens with government for the simple reason that participation is the basis for a well-functioning democracy. According to the National League of Cities, community engagement can "...foster a sense of attachment, expand access to information and resources, and create opportunities for citizens to play more active roles in setting priorities, addressing issues, and planning the longer-term sustainability of their communities."[6] Citizen engagement is not simply the right thing to do, but can also be the smart thing to do.[7] Although residents may not have policy expertise on certain issues, they do have knowledge of local conditions and neighborhood concerns—information that can contribute to the development of better policies. Citizen engagement is a means for public officials to ensure effective local government. In surveys of public officials, respondents reported that the majority of public interactions were with residents dissatisfied with the job city hall was doing, or had been negatively impacted by a municipal activity or regulation, or were upset about an impending policy decision. Officials therefore have little incentive or desire to encourage additional engagement with unhappy residents. Yet direct communication has the po-

tential to turn enraged citizens into engaged citizens who work collaboratively with, instead of in opposition to, local administrators and officials.

How Engaged is Worcester?

According to the Worcester Home Rule Charter, all "inhabitants" of Worcester are the "municipal corporation."[8] In this manner, government is theoretically by the people. Yet not all residents are citizens who can participate in local government. Moreover, those who can participate often do not. Worcester's participation rate in key civic indicators illustrates a troubling trend for civic engagement in the city.

Worcester's Electorate
Voting in local elections is the simplest way for a citizen to participate in government and has broad participatory potential. All citizens over the age of 18 are eligible to vote. Citizens can register to vote at City Hall or can download the voter registration form from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Secretary of State's website and mail the completed form to the Worcester Election Commission. Citizens can also register when applying for or renewing a license at the Registry of Motor Vehicles.

In Worcester, primary and general elections are held annually with municipal elections occurring in odd-numbered years and State and Federal elections occurring in even-numbered years. Polling stations are plentiful—50 located throughout Worcester—and are open twelve hours on Election Day. If a voter knows in advance that he or she is unable to make it to the polls, the voter can obtain and complete an absentee ballot from the Election Commission and return it to the Commission's offices at City Hall in advance of Election Day. With so few barriers to voter participation, participation rates should be high.

While the number of registered voters in Worcester does not fluctuate much from year to year, voting data for Worcester illustrates very low turnout, especially for years in which municipal elections are the only races on the ballot. From 2001 to 2013, the average percentage of registered voters that participated in municipal elections was 21%, with a low of 14% in 2013. During that same period, the average voter turnout for elections for State offices was 40%, while the average turnout for State and Federal elections combined was 44%.

City of Worcester Voter Turn-0ut (2000-2014)
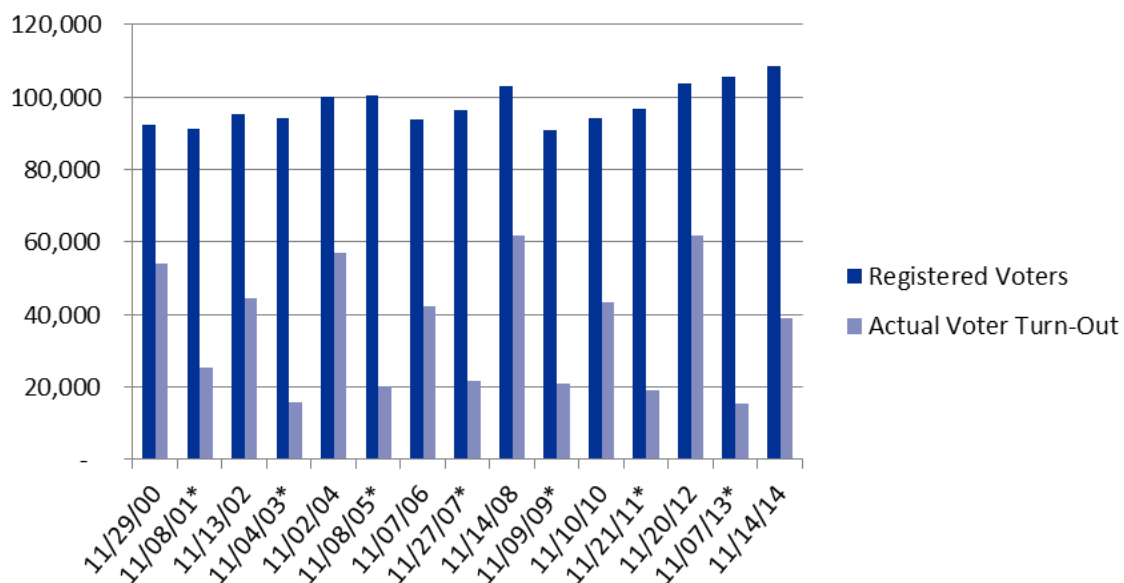
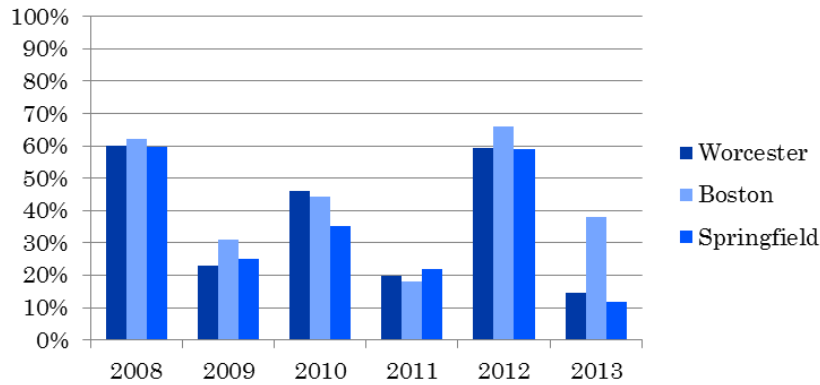*Municipal Election. Source: Worcester Election Commission.

Registered Voter Turnout in Worcester, MA Municipal Election, 2013
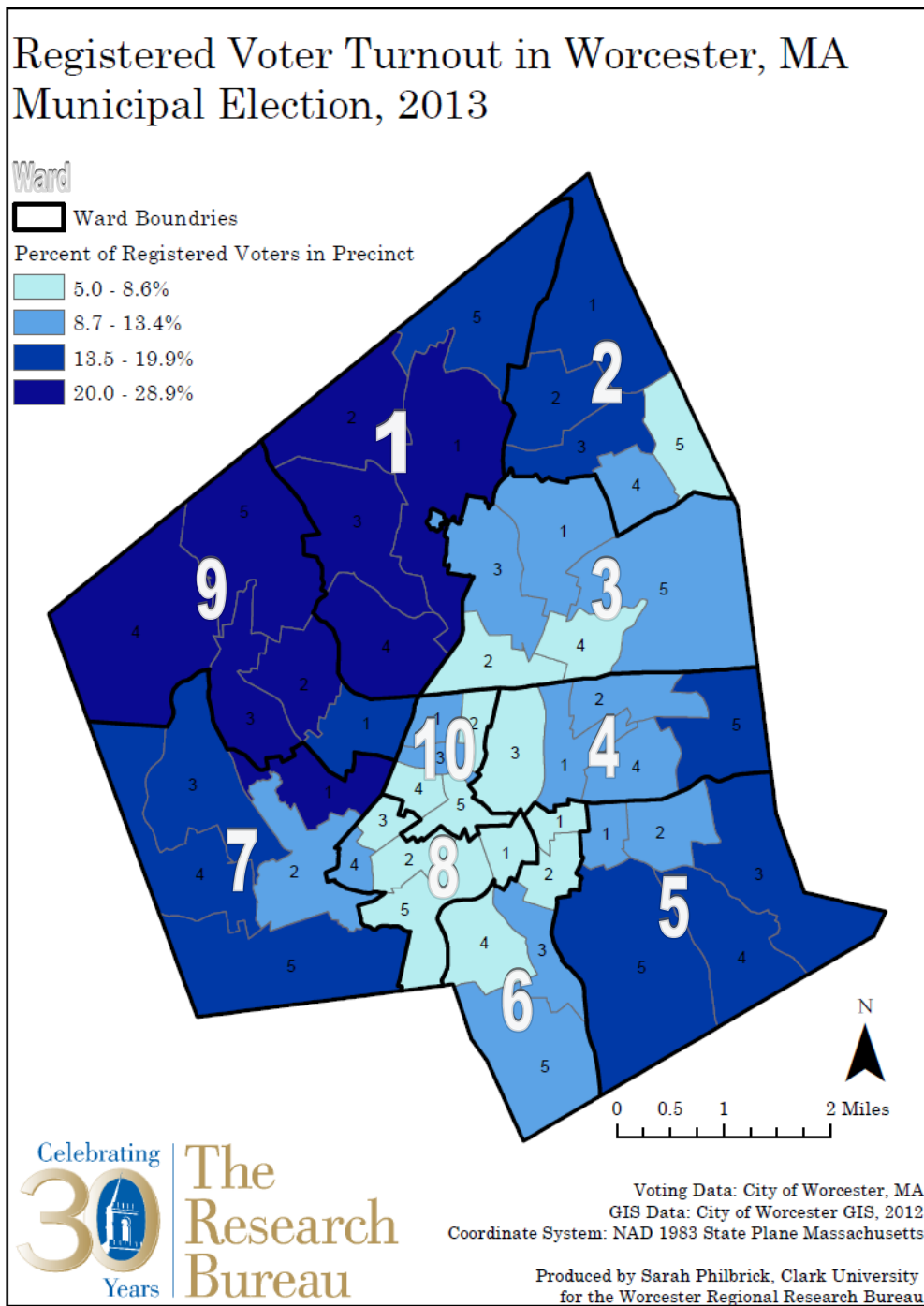
Highest and Lowest Turnout by Ward-Precinct in City of Worcester 2013 Election						
Top 5				**Bottom 5**		
	% Turnout	Ward-Precinct	Poll Location		% Turnout	Ward-Precinct	Poll Location
1	28.87	1-4	Congregation Beth Israel, 15 Jamesbury Drive	**50**	4.99	8-3	Saint Peter's Church, 929 Main Street
2	25.76	9-5	First Congregational Church in Worcester, 1070 Pleasant Street	**49**	5.37	6-1	Worcester Senior Center, 128 Providence Street
3	25.73	9-4	Worcester Seventh Day Adventist Church, 2 Airport Drive	**48**	6.01	8-2	Main South CDC, 875 Main Street
4	25.68	1-3	Assumption College, 500 Salisbury Street	**47**	6.52	10-5	Murray Avenue Apartments, 50 Murray Avenue
5	25.66	9-2	Temple Emanuel, 280 May Street	**46**	6.55	3-4	Worcester Technical High School, 1 Skyline Drive

Worcester is not alone in its lack of voter participation in local elections. Boston and Springfield records illustrate the same voting patterns as Worcester – more voters turn out for State and Federal elections than for municipal elections. In 2013, Worcester and Springfield had their lowest municipal turnout in ten years. In Boston, 2013 saw high turnout in the municipal election, but it was also the first time in twenty years that long-running mayor Thomas M. Menino was not a candidate on the ballot.

Worcester-Boston-Springfield
Voter Turn-Out (2008-2013)

Source: Worcester Election Commission, Boston Election Commission, Springfield Election Commission.

Competition for Public Office in Worcester

Citizens of Worcester have many opportunities to run for office, yet few do. The City of Worcester has eleven City Councilors (one of whom is the Mayor), six School Committee members, five State Representatives, and two State Senators. Running for office requires a significantly larger commitment of time and money than voting, but an elected official can have a major impact on public policy. Despite the opportunities, running for elected office in Worcester is rare. In 2013, out of a possible 108,593 eligible candidates for City Council (i.e., registered voters), only .02% competed for office. Two district councilors ran unopposed and only four individuals ran for mayor. As a result, fewer than 1 in 10 eligible Worcester voters (and approximately 1 in 20 Worcester residents) elected the city's mayor from among the four candidates.

According to the Worcester Home Rule Charter, only 12 candidates may appear on the ballot for the six councilor-at-large positions on Election Day.[9] If more than 12 people have the required number of signatures to be on the ballot, the City must hold a preliminary or run-off election with the top 12 vote-getters making the final Election Day ballot. Over the last decade, there have been only two run-off elections for at-large Council seats: 18 candidates ran in 2007 and 14 candidates ran in 2011. In those same years, there were also preliminary elections at the Council's district level, required if more than two candidates run for a district seat. In 2007, Districts 1 and 5 each had a preliminary election with three candidates running. In 2011, District 1 had a preliminary with three candidates and District 3 had a preliminary with four candidates.

Number of Candidates for Worcester City Council Seats

	2005	**2007**	**2009**	**2011**	**2013**
Councilor at Large (6 positions)	12	12 (18)	11	12 (14)	12
District 1 Councilor	2	2 (3)	2	2 (3)	2
District 2 Councilor	2	1	2	1	2
District 3 Councilor	2	2	2	2 (4)	1
District 4 Councilor	2	2	2	2	1
District 5 Councilor	1	2 (3)	1	2	2

(Items in parentheses indicate number of candidates prior to preliminary elections.)
Source: City of Worcester Elections Office

While public education and quality schools are critically important to the well-being of the community and regular topics of general discussion, the School Committee also does not draw robust competition. Since 2005, the large majority (66%) of individuals who ran for the office secured a seat on the School Committee. While School Committee elections have been contested for the last five election cycles, the number of candidates has not exceeded twelve, the number necessary to trigger a preliminary election.

Number of Candidates for Worcester School Committee

Election	Number of Candidates
2005	10
2007	8
2009	8
2011	10
2013	9

Source: City of Worcester Elections Office

State legislative races are even less competitive. Of 56 potential primaries held for Worcester state legislative seats between 2008 and 2014, only 7 or 13% were contested. Of the 28 regular general state legislative elections in Worcester, only 12 or 43% were contested. If competition exists, it often occurs prior to the general election and usually in the Democratic primary. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, 46 states held elections for state legislative offices in 2014.[10] Across the country, 34.1% of incumbents ran unopposed.[11] By comparison, that same year in Worcester, 57% of the incumbents ran unopposed.

Competition for State Office: Was The Election Contested?

	2008			2010			2012			2014		
	Primary		General	Primary		General	Primary		General	Primary		General
	Dem.	Rep.		Dem.	Rep.		Dem.	Rep.		Dem.	Rep.	
First Senate Worcester	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	Y
Second Senate Worcester	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N
13th District Worcester Representative	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y
14th District Worcester Representative	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N
15th District Worcester Representative	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N
16th District Worcester Representative	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N
17th District Worcester Representative	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y

Source: City of Worcester Elections Office

Citizen Rule: Boards and Commissions

Participation on local boards and commissions is another important opportunity for citizens to be involved in the civic life of Worcester. Serving on a board involves less time and money than running for and serving as an elected official, however a board member can still play a significant role in the review of specific areas of municipal concern. Some boards and commissions (e.g., Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Board of Health, License Commission) have significant regulatory authority. Worcester has 29 official boards with a total of 203 available seats for volunteers, in addition to more informal or affiliated groups such as the Youth Advisory Council, Lake Quinsigamond Commission, Theatre District Urban Renewal Advisory Committee, etc. Residents interested in serving on a board fill out and submit a form through the City of Worcester's website. The Citizen Advisory Commission (itself an ap-

pointed board) reviews candidates and makes recommendations for appointment to the City Manager. Some board appointments may require the approval of the City Council. One board—the Library Board of Trustees—is appointed solely by the City Council. In addition to providing a means for citizens to serve the City, boards and commissions provide expertise and advice to the Manager and City Council on many issues facing Worcester.

Boards and Commissions of the City of Worcester

	Number of Seats
Affirmative Action Advisory Committee	9
Board of Election Commissioners	5
Board of Health	5
Cable Television Advisory Committee	7
Citizen Advisory Council	11
Civic Center Commission	5
Commission on Disability	7
Commission on Elder Affairs	15
Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Advisory Committee	10
Conservation Commission	7
Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.) Memorial Board of Trustees	5
Historical Commission	9
Hope Cemetery Commission	5
Human Rights Commission	9
License Commission	3
Mayor Thomas J. Early Scholarship Committee	5
Memorial Auditorium Board of Trustees	5
Off-Street Parking Board	5
Parks, Recreation & Cemetery Commission	7
Planning Board	5
Retirement Board	5
Status of Women Advisory Committee	9
Trust Funds Commission	3
Worcester Airport Advisory Committee	9
Worcester Arts Council	9
Worcester Housing Authority	5
Worcester Public Library Board	12
Worcester Redevelopment Authority	5
Zoning Board of Appeals	7
Total Number of Boards: 29	**203**

Source: Office of the City Manager

From June 2012 to March 2015, there was an average of 24 vacancies on boards and commissions which represents 12% of the total number of seats available. The average number of applications received for board or commission appointment during this time frame was 12, meaning that the number of vacancies was greater than the number of applications received. While the appointment process takes time—applicants must be vetted by the Citizens Advisory Council as well as the City Manager, and in some cases, the City Council—there is not a waiting list of qualified, interested parties looking to sit on boards

or commissions. It should be noted that some openings require representatives from certain City Council districts, making the pool of potential candidates even more limited.

Civic Engagement: A Two-Way Conversation

The U.S. system of government, and that of states, cities, and most towns, are representative democracies, not direct democracies. While the Town Meeting is still an important tradition in many smaller communities, it is generally accepted that direct democracy does not function in a larger municipality like Worcester. Program and funding decisions often demand detailed understanding and accountability. Management decisions often require direct experience, technical knowledge, or professional expertise. Yet public priorities—questions that involve value choices (e.g., should a community dedicate resources to public education or public safety)—are choices that can and should involve broader citizen participation and engagement. In order to make running for office or voting a worthwhile endeavor, citizens must understand and appreciate a government's ability to create change.

Five Stages of Public Engagement (From Least to Greatest Public Involvement)[12]				
Inform	Consult	Incorporate	Collaborate	Empower
Provide the public with balanced and objective information. Assist them in understanding the issues.	Obtain and respond to public input and feedback.	Make sure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered throughout decision making process.	Identify issues and alternatives and make choices together with citizens.	Place final decision-making authority in the hands of citizens.

As outlined above, there are five major options for engaging residents and citizens.

Most localities take seriously the responsibility to "Inform." State law in Massachusetts requires public process and public notification of major official acts, and legislative schedules and agendas are published at least 48-hours in advance of meetings. Most communities issue press releases on major public actions and use websites and other electronic media to assist in disseminating public information.

Many communities also "Consult" with the public, offering opportunities for public comment and public input. Public hearings offer residents opportunity to speak directly to policymakers on issues of concern. In Worcester, every City Council meeting includes an agenda item entitled "Items of Public Interest," in which any person is able to speak for up to two minutes on any item appearing on the agenda.

"Inform" and "Consult" represent an exchange of information between governments and their constituents, but does not impose action or specific decisions on either.

Some cities go further with citizen engagement, offering residents opportunities for "Incorporation," "Collaboration," and "Empowerment." While these can be challenging due to time and space considerations, limited resources, legal considerations, and the need for informed policy development, these efforts create more citizen-directed public policy. They also raise questions, however, about accountability, efficiency, and appropriate public policy outcomes.

"Incorporation" puts the burden on government to ensure that community concerns are understood and addressed as a regular part of government operations. "Collaborate" allows for a shared burden between local officials and the public, but it diminishes accountability and allows for vocal advocates to influence, and potentially impede, public policy. "Empower" places power and responsibility fully in the hands of the public, creating a more democratic approach to governance, but leaving the general public at risk to single-issue voters or a dominant, but ill-advised, majority.

In 2010, National League of Cities (NLC), a resource and advocacy organization representing 119,000 U.S. cities and towns, completed a survey to understand how municipal officials view public engagement and how cities and towns actually inform and engage citizens.[13] The NLC survey defined public engagement as a process of "proactive efforts to involve people in deliberating public issues and in helping to solve public problems." NLC sent out 1,748 surveys and received 313 responses. Eighty-one percent (81%) or 254 municipalities responded that their municipalities used public engagement processes often or sometimes. According to the survey, the vast majority of communities—92%—provided information to residents through a town website. Over two-thirds of respondents—67%—reported that they involve residents in the deliberative process, although there was no information on topics discussed or types of decisions made in public forums. Only 28% of respondents reported that their municipality had a specific plan for public engagement in their city. Engagement tools referenced included email blasts to residents, tele-town hall meetings, surveys, leadership open houses, social networking utilization, and local government television channels.

Tools Regularly Used to Support & Encourage Public Engagement	
Accessible municipal website, including email addresses for all public officials.	92%
Council agendas and proposed executive actions published online well in advance and comments invited.	86%
Special deliberative processes, such as town hall meetings, to engage larger numbers of people.	67%
Staff and funding assigned for facilitating public engagement.	51%
Neighborhood structures in place for community engagement.	44%
Specific plan for public engagement.	28%
Interactive online forums.	14%
Other	19%

When asked about obstacles or risks to greater levels of public engagement, the most frequent responses to the survey were:
- Public apathy and/or ambivalence (69%);
- Lack of media attention or unfair/unbalanced coverage(39%);
- Difficulty of reaching youth and other segments of the community (36%).

When asked about the benefits of increased citizen engagement, the most frequent responses to the survey were:
- Builds a stronger sense of community (80%);
- Builds trust between citizens and government (78%);
- Provides residents with information about government policies and processes (71%);
- Grows future community leaders (71%).

According to respondents, budget, land use/zoning, downtown development, neighborhood planning, and public safety were the issues that generated the most interest from residents.

Stages of Public Engagement in Service Delivery (From Least to Greatest Public Involvement)[14]				
Provide	Respond	Co-Produce	Collaborate	Empower
City provides services and enforces laws and regulations.	City responds to resident requests and complaints and measures satisfaction and service.	Residents volunteer, help produce services, and assess results from surveys.	Residents partner to determine priorities and achieve objectives.	Residents take responsibility for meeting a community need.

A notable theory of public engagement goes beyond policy development and argues that citizens should be involved in the actual delivery of city and town services.[15] In the service delivery model, real engagement occurs when residents are more than just consumers of services but part of the delivery system.

Local examples of residents "co-producing" services include recycling (residents separate garbage and recyclables to facilitate the recycling process) and regulations that require property owners to shovel snow off adjacent public sidewalks. Neighborhood crime watch groups "collaborate" in service delivery with public safety officials, offering information in exchange for a voice in setting priorities. "Empowerment" is quite rare, but an example is the Neighborhood Resilience Program in San Francisco. In this program residents are engaged in emergency planning and are trained and organized into emergency response teams. The neighborhood teams develop strategic emergency response plans and serve as secondary response and emergency distribution centers for supplies, including food and water.[16]

Engaging Constituents: City of Worcester Outreach

The City of Worcester engages residents in a number of ways. On the City's website, every City department has its own web page with contact information. Eight City departments have Facebook and Twitter feeds. Council agendas are published online in advance of meetings. Citizens may attend City Council meetings, submit petitions, and address the Council on agenda items. City Council Standing Committees also hold hearings and provide opportunities for resident comment. On major plans and initiatives, such as land use master plans or the distribution of community development block grant funds, the City holds neighborhood meetings to seek community input. As referenced previously, boards and commissions provide opportunities for direct citizen involvement. In rare cases, such as the distribution of Greenwood Street Landfill funds or CSX mitigation funds, residents are formed into advisory groups to recommend the specific distribution of public dollars.

In the context of the stages of citizen engagement:
- Provide: Worcester, like all cities, provides services—street construction, public education, trash collection, snow plowing, etc.
- Respond: The City responds to resident requests legislatively through City Council meetings and administratively through its customer service line at 508-929-1300 and, more recently, through online formats like the on-line app Commonwealth Connects, which allows Worcester residents to report issues and receive confirmation of resolution through texts and email.
- Co-Produce: The City co-produces certain services, such as recycling, neighborhood cleanups, and joint efforts with many sports leagues to maintain public parks and playing fields. This winter, the City announced the Adopt a Fire Hydrant Program, which encouraged residents to shovel out public fire hydrants. Worcester also has more than 16 neighborhood crime watches that meet on a regular basis and provide a two-way exchange of information between residents and public safety officials.

The City does not regularly create opportunities for collaboration and empowerment. In singular occurrences, the city may collaborate with groups to plan (urban renewal), identify opportunities for public art (Public Art Working Group), or distribute dedicated public funds (Greenwood Street Landfill Task Force and CSX Advisory Committee). At times, crime watch meetings are both communication opportunities and collaborative efforts. Generally, however, the Worcester government does not engage in collaborative or empowering efforts with citizens.

How Other Municipalities Engage Residents

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there are 89,004 local governments in the United States.[17] While each may offer lessons for Worcester in terms of outreach and engagement, we offer a few highlights below.

Technology
The City of Boston is focused on both engagement and empowerment, establishing the Mayor's Office of New Urban Mechanics (MONUM) in 2010.[18] MONUM's mission is to use technology to increase communication between the city and its residents and to facilitate resident participation in government decision-making and delivery of services. MONUM has piloted digital applications (i.e. apps), such as "Citizens

Connect," which enables residents to use smart phones to report graffiti, potholes, and broken street lights. Resident input is sent directly to the agency responsible for management of the issue, and notifications are posted to an online map that is updated as maintenance is completed. Citizens Connect accounts for 20% of all service requests filed with the City. MONUM also hosts the Engagement Lab, which looks to better connect residents to city government. Engagement Lab 1) pilots new programs for community deliberation and empowerment; 2) increases government transparency through both data and storytelling; and 3) deepens the city's relationship with local universities as a source of new ideas and talent. One example of an Engagement Lab program, Hub2, used virtual technology to plan a neighborhood park.[19] Eight workshops were held at a local community center and participants used the technology to plan parking, play structures, and amenities for the park. Participant suggestions and feedback were provided to city park planners for consideration in the design. MONUM also piloted Project Oscar, a program to encourage residents to compost. Communal composters were placed in two neighborhoods.[20] 150 families participated, composting 2,300 pounds of food. 93% of participants said they would continue to compost after the pilot phase. The city is extending the pilot based on the initial results.

Education
Eau Claire, Wisconsin is building an educated electorate through Public Works 101.[21] This initiative used outside facilitators to develop an eight hour civic training course designed to enable residents to engage effectively in the political life of the city. The course focuses on civic engagement, economic development, education, health, quality of life, and transportation. The city also hosts training classes for local elected leaders.

Crowd-Sourcing
In addition to using passive information exchange platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and the internet, Manor, Texas, developed Manor Labs, an e-platform where citizens can submit ideas, crowd source the submissions, and work with city officials to develop policies.[22]

Surveys
Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin, regularly surveys its citizens.[23] The municipality determined that surveys reach a larger number of residents beyond those who show up at hearings with complaints. Surveys ask residents about the quality of services and about policy decisions facing the city. The questions, covering transportation, natural and cultural resources, housing, economic development and land use, energy and sustainability, utilities and community facilities/services, and priorities, are generally consistent from year to year so that community opinion can be tracked over time.

Participatory Budgeting
New York City has introduced participatory budgeting in twenty-four of its 51 Council districts.[24] Under participatory budgeting, residents directly decide how to spend a certain amount of capital dollars budgeted in their district. Participatory budgeting was first used in Brazil and has now spread to communities throughout North and South America, including nearby communities Cambridge and Boston. Each of New York's participating Council districts is given $1 million in capital funds to decide how to spend. The process is open to all residents 16 years or older – all that is necessary is proof of residency. The process occurs over the course of a year. Guided by district Councilors, residents come to Neighborhood Assembly meetings, share ideas, host forums to advocate for proposals, and then vote on the proposals. This process encourages participation, but also educates residents to the political process and the realization that choices and compromises have to be made within a limited municipal budget.

Conclusions and Suggestions

Worcester struggles with citizen engagement. An absentee electorate, non-existent or single-digit competition for local and state political offices, and limited participation in local boards and commissions highlight an apathetic approach to local governance. In order to have a strong democracy, Worcester must reconnect with long-time residents and embrace new residents. The City should continue its positive work informing and consulting residents on issues facing Worcester. But in order to gain the full benefits of citizen engagement, the City must actively encourage and facilitate residents' involvement in decision-making and service delivery. The following recommendations are intended to support the City's efforts to achieve greater citizen and resident involvement.

Civics Education—Inform
According to Thomas Jefferson, "The qualifications for self-government are not innate. They are the result of habit and long training." The Worcester Public Schools should reaffirm the importance of civics in a curriculum that educates and engages students on the role of government and the importance of civic participation. As the training ground for future voters, public schools should focus on building an electorate that understands the purpose, structure, processes, and value of government. It should provide practical opportunities for students from all the communities of Worcester to engage with municipal government, observe local elected officials in action, and participate in public internships or service-learning opportunities.

Citizen Academies—Inform
Municipal government, with elected officials, appointed officials, and volunteer boards and commissions, can be confusing to the uninitiated. Additionally, State laws and local ordinances often result in complicated processes that move laterally as much as forward toward a goal. Similar to recommended efforts in the public schools, education of the electorate will help clarify the role, and importance, of local government. The City can overcome citizen apathy by educating residents and stakeholders on the benefits of improved engagement in municipal government and the importance of local decision-making by developing and hosting citizen academies with a goal to "educate, develop skills, form bonds and generate discussion on the future of the community."[25] The academies should advertise and offer classes in multiple languages geared toward the city's diverse cultures, including online opportunities for those unable to participate in person.

Election Handbook—Inform
Running for public office is complicated, time-consuming, and potentially costly. To increase the pool of candidates for local office, the City, with the help and input of local civic organizations, should create a "How To" handbook explaining the process for becoming a candidate and running a campaign for local office. The Massachusetts Secretary of State's candidates guide that explains the process for running for state elected offices can be use as a model.[26]

City Survey—Respond
While the City of Worcester has numerous options for public input, anecdotally, only a small percentage of residents generally appears at public meetings or submits petitions. The City has no means to secure input from those who believe that their concerns or issues may not be worthy of direct or attributed action. The City should distribute an annual survey that provides residents with the opportunity to identify priorities and share ideas and concerns, as well as evaluate the City's performance in major policy and service delivery areas. The surveys should be offered in targeted ways to encourage responses across the city's diverse cultures.

Joint Local/State Elections—Co-Produce
Currently, local elections occur in odd-numbered years while State elections occur in even-numbered years. While this provides greater clarity on races, candidates, and issues, it can create voter fatigue and allows for a diminished turnout for local elections. Although moving municipal elections to the same

year and date as State and Federal elections would require a charter change, the potential for greater voter turn-out and citizen participation at this most basic and important level of democracy is significant.

Emergency Response—Collaborate
In the past, Worcester has participated in the Citizen Corps Councils, a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) program to empower residents in emergency response.[27] Similar to San Francisco's program, volunteer residents received twenty hours of training over nine weeks on how to respond to local emergencies. The Worcester program, however, was disbanded because of a lack of participants. The City should reconstitute this group and advertise this opportunity for people to be empowered in an important city service. The Citizen Corps Council could work with City government to establish emergency response plans that publicly outline the emergency response to natural and man-made catastrophes that might occur so that all residents can become reasonably prepared.

Participatory Budgeting—Empower
The City of Worcester is divided into five City Council districts. Participatory budgeting offers an opportunity for residents in these diverse districts to establish their own priorities for capital investment. The City should allocate a certain amount of capital funds for consideration and allocation by District residents. These funds could be used for park improvements, street and sidewalk upgrades, signage, or any other neighborhood enhancement effort. Participatory budgeting offers residents a chance to learn as well as participate in the difficult process of prioritizing a limited municipal budget. Unlike most civic roles, participatory budgeting, like in New York, can be open to all residents regardless of citizenship.

Neighborhood Area Councils—Empower
Perhaps the most innovative opportunity for citizen engagement is already established in Worcester's Home Rule Charter which outlines the establishment of Neighborhood Area Councils. Article 8, Sections 8-1 and 8-2 of Worcester's Home Rule Charter states:

> *It is the purpose of this article to encourage citizen involvement in government at the neighborhood level by permitting limited self-government through the establishment of neighborhood area councils as legal entities of the city government. The city council may establish one or more neighborhood area councils to provide advisory and self-help functions that the neighborhood area council is authorized to undertake.*

The Councils, composed of five to nine members elected for two year terms, are required to write bylaws, make annual reports, keep financial records, and hold regularly scheduled public meetings. Under the Charter, a neighborhood council's authority is determined by the City Council, but may include such initiatives as:
- Supplemental refuse collection
- Beautification
- Minor street and sidewalk repair
- Street fairs and festivals
- Cultural activities
- Recreation
- Housing rehabilitation and sale

The City may also give advisory or real authority to the councils in regard to such areas as:
- Community action
- Urban renewal
- Relocation
- Public housing
- Planning and zoning actions
- Other physical development programs

- Crime prevention and juvenile delinquency programs
- Health services
- Code inspection
- Recreation
- Education
- Manpower training

These councils can work with the City to develop local neighborhood initiatives and leadership. Neighborhood Council meetings would allow residents to identify issues proactively and exchange ideas with public officials and with other residents who attend the meetings. The City Council should consider piloting one or more Neighborhood Councils during the 2016-2018 term of office.

Tips for Successful Engagement

For City Administrators:
- Outline the decision-making process and clarify all legal requirements for public information and open meetings.
- Set clear goals and objectives for projects and meetings.
- Invest adequate time, staff, and funding for public engagement.
- Follow-through on all decisions agreed upon publicly in a timely manner.
- Create meaningful exchanges that are not just top down, and not just between citizens and officials, but among all participants at meetings.

For Citizens and Residents:
- Be constructive in your suggestions – do not simply complain.
- Respect others' input and be willing to compromise.
- Be willing to invest the time needed to make meetings productive.
- Fulfill commitments and finish tasks you have volunteered to do.
- Remember that simply because you shared your opinion does not mean that what you want will occur exactly as you want it or in any way at all.

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