

Advisory Committee Meeting #2 Notes | 6/2/2022**Attendees****Advisory Committee Members:**

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Mark Borenstein | <i>Land Use Attorney at Bowditch & Dewey, LLP, Worcester Resident</i> |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Roberta Brien | <i>Worcester Business Development Corporation, Vice President of Projects</i> |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Lynn Cheney | <i>Business Owner – Maker on Main, Worcester Resident</i> |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Germán Chiriboga | <i>University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School, Program Director, Worcester Resident</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Alyssa Corazzini | <i>Worcester Resident</i> |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Amanda Gregoire | <i>Massachusetts Development Finance Agency, Vice President of Real Estate Services, Worcester Resident</i> |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Sujatha Krishnan | <i>Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission, Deputy Director</i> |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Albert LaValley | <i>Worcester Planning Board, Chair, Worcester Resident</i> |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Joyce Mandell | <i>Urban Planning Partnership, Worcester Resident</i> |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Amie Shei | <i>The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts, President and CEO</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Casey Starr | <i>Main South Community Development Corporation, Director of Community Initiatives, Worcester Resident</i> |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Suzanne Wood | <i>University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School, Sustainability Manager</i> |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Ulysses Youngblood | <i>Business Owner – Major Bloom, Worcester Resident</i> |

City Staff (Worcester Planning & Regulatory Services Division):

- | | | |
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| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Stephen Rolle | <i>Assistant Chief Development Officer</i> |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Michelle Smith | <i>Chief Planner</i> |



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Consultant Team (Utile):

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Tim Love	<i>Principal-in-Charge</i>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Zoë Mueller	<i>Project Manager & Urban Planner</i>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Rahi Patel	<i>Urban Planner</i>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Guillermo Creamer, Jr.	<i>Community Organizer</i>

Agenda

1. **Organizer Introduction: Guillermo Creamer, Jr.**
2. **Timeline/Process Updates**
 - a. Advisory Committee Membership Confirmed
 - b. Working Group Membership
 - c. Preparing for Public Engagement
3. **Survey Debrief & Results Summary**
4. **Engagement Plan Update**
 - a. Social Justice & Equity Framework
 - b. Populations of Focus & Strategic Outreach
 - c. Translation Approach
 - d. Accountability Metrics
5. **Existing Conditions Overview**
 - a. People
 - b. Housing
 - c. Economic Opportunity
 - d. Transportation
 - e. Growth Framework
6. **Next Steps**
 - a. What to expect in the next few months

Meeting Notes

I. Organizer Introduction

Guillermo introduced himself, shared his vision and goals for the plan with the Committee, and added that he sees it as his role to bring a more representative group of people into the planning process. Zoë polled the Committee members, asking if they would like to have a one on one conversation with Guillermo at another time.



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II. Timeline/Process Updates

A. Working Group Membership

Zoë asked Committee members which topic-specific working groups they are most interested in. Zoë also asked members to share names and contact information for community members who they suggest inviting to participate in the working groups.

B. Preparing for Public Engagement

Zoë introduced the Committee to the plan's comment cards, which provide a short, interactive way for community members to get involved in the planning process. She also introduced the Committee to the "meeting-in-a-box" tool and the focus groups, which are designed to create more intimate settings that welcome previously unrepresented groups to provide input for the plan.

Comments from Committee Members:

- **Question:** will the Committee have the chance to hear the results of the focus groups?
 - **Planning Team Response:** Yes, the feedback from focus groups and meeting-in-a-box engagement sessions will be part of the overall report-out on feedback that will be shared with the Committee and the public as part of the Worcester Now report. In that report we will highlight if the feedback received in the focus groups and meeting-in-a-box engagement sessions was significantly different from what we heard in other settings or if it reinforced themes emerging from other engagement events.
- **Suggestion:** to extend the impact of these strategies:
 - Partner with local businesses to provide food for the meeting-in-a-box
 - Partner with ESL classes in Worcester for focus groups or meeting-in-a-box. Since the teacher is already there, there is usually not a need for an interpreter.
 - Connect with Worcester students who were active in helping to develop the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission Youth Plan.
- **Suggestion:** having an interpreter with background knowledge of the planning issues being discussed can be very helpful to the conversation, but that it was important to have a professional interpreter that was able to support a smooth conversation even without much background knowledge of the subject.

III. Survey Debrief & Results Summary

Zoë shared an overview of the online survey. By the time it closed, 1,376 people had responded to the survey. Zoë noted that homeowners were overrepresented in the survey responses compared to the proportion of Worcester households that own their home. However, she emphasized that surveys often over-represent certain groups like homeowners and that this survey is just one tool of many that are being used to solicit feedback from the community. Major themes included improving sidewalks and street



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safety, expanding public transit, supporting a diversity of local businesses, and supporting a vibrant downtown, among others.

Comments from Committee Members:

- **Question:** were there any themes related to housing?
 - **Planning Team Response:** there were comments about luxury housing and the right mix of affordable and market rate housing. In terms of the items that received the most overall activity, transportation and infrastructure themes were most popular. The survey will be summarized in greater detail for the public workshops and as part of the Worcester Now report.
- **Comment:** the Polis survey was engaging and enjoyable but we should be aware that at an Age Friendly Worcester meeting attendees stated they had a difficult time accessing and using the online survey. At this meeting, the committee member emphasized that this initial survey would only be one tool of many for feedback.
 - **Planning Team Response:** the committee member's response was accurate - the survey is just one tool of many, and there will be many more opportunities for those who were left out of the survey to be included in the planning process. There is no one engagement tool that is a good fit for all community members' needs, but we hope that by providing a diversity of ways to share input, we will be able to incrementally get a more representative understanding of issues, needs, aspirations, and priorities.
- **Comment:** we have to make an effort to capture voices that are unwilling or unable to physically participate in plan events to ensure that the planning process is inclusive, and is perceived that way - as a legitimate representation of what the Worcester community needs and wants for its future.
 - **Planning Team Response:** the Planning Team is also vigilant about the need to build trust and buy-in with all of Worcester's communities. The Polis survey shows some of the division between different opinion groups, and that often the most negative comments are very visible but may not be majority opinions. The planning team received feedback from disability and senior advocacy groups about the nature of the online survey and how to improve it moving forward, which will be incorporated into our planning for the upcoming Summer Listening Tour as well as the Fall Survey in Phase 2 of the planning process.

IV. Engagement Plan Update

A. Social Justice and Equity Framework

Zoë shared historical and recent context that may have eroded trust between community members and the local government, as well as priorities for trust building going forward. These priorities include not overpromising, making space for discussions of urban renewal and redlining, and having a clear narrative on how issues of policing and public safety relate to the plan. Zoë



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emphasized that policing issues are important and can be addressed to a certain extent in this process, but that this plan is not the right mechanism to implement operational or policy changes within the police department.

B. Populations of Focus

Zoë shared that the Planning Team intends to focus upcoming engagement efforts to strategically reach out to and center members of the community that have been excluded from or underrepresented in past planning processes. This will inform who we partner with to host engagement events, the content, type and format of engagement activities, and the geographic areas where events and recommendations are focused.

C. Translation Approach

Zoë shared the Planning Team's criteria for determining which languages to provide translation/interpretation services for, and at what level. Based on census data, languages with at least 2,500 speakers and less than 35% English proficiency were selected as priority languages. Worcester Public Schools data was used to confirm the need for translation services in certain languages. Zoë also presented a matrix outlining which languages will be prioritized for translation/interpretation services for each engagement tool or event.

D. Accountability Metrics

The Planning Team committed to, where feasible, track the number and percent participation for historically underrepresented groups and track the geographic distribution of participation. This will be used as an accountability and course-correcting tool to ensure equitable feedback across different groups within the community and across council districts and neighborhoods.

Comments from Committee Members:

- **Suggestion:** many district councilors have strong community ties and could help connect the planning team to neighborhood resources.
 - **Planning Team Response:** that would be great. It will take time to build trust in and awareness of the planning process.
- **Suggestion:** outreach through local churches can be effective, and many of the Ghanaian churches have been active partners in the past.
 - **Planning Team Response:** we have found in the past that churches can be hit or miss in terms of their ability to generate feedback from the overall congregation versus just church leadership. However, the Planning Team would very much appreciate recommendations of specific churches in Worcester that have active congregations and leadership that is committed to involving their congregation members in civic conversations like our planning process.
- **Suggestion:** the community development corporations in different parts of the city can be good outreach partners.
 - **Planning Team Response:** this is a great suggestion and is something the Planning Team has already begun acting on - especially as we move



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into the smaller-scale public events partnering with the community development corporations will be critical.

- **Suggestion:** the Transportation Planning Advisory Group, which is a disability rights advocacy group, and the Age Friendly Worcester Coalition would both be good to reach out to.
 - **Planning Team Response:** this is great feedback. We are planning to customize some of the July and August Summer Listening Tour events to make sure we are hearing from seniors and people with disabilities.

V. Existing Conditions Overview

A. People

Worcester's population is growing and getting younger and is diverse in terms of race, ethnicity and country of origin. However, a significant portion of the population in Worcester is living below the poverty line, is cost-burdened and is living in substandard housing. Finally, as with cities all over the US, Worcester's current zoning is reinforcing patterns of race- and income-based segregation within the city, with more restrictive low-density residential zones being disproportionately White and high-income.

B. Housing

The top three issues or patterns of note that emerged in the analysis so far are:

- How can Worcester encourage investment in existing housing to improve its quality without displacing current residents?
- How can Worcester retain, improve and expand protected affordable rental housing and counteract racial and ethnic disparities in homeownership?
- How can Worcester encourage private developers to build housing in walkable mixed-use neighborhoods that better serves the needs of commuters and middle-income households?

C. Economic Opportunity

The top three issues or patterns of note that emerged in the analysis so far are:

- How can Worcester leverage its potential to benefit from the thriving regional "meds & eds" economy?
- How can Worcester reduce income inequality and expand access to family-wage jobs, especially for BIPOC residents?
- How can Worcester cultivate a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem that supports community wealth building and quality of life along neighborhood commercial corridors?

Comments from Committee Members:

- **Comment:** the pharmaceutical industry may be ramping up in Worcester which could be a good opportunity for driving growth.



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- **Comment:** an organization (MBI/QCC) has a workforce development program that is teaching lab skills and professional development skills for low-income youth and people of color.
- **Comment:** it is worth looking at what other cities are doing through workforce development and other initiatives to pursue economic development approaches that provide opportunity for all.

D. Transportation and Mobility

The top three issues or patterns of note that emerged in the analysis so far are:

- How can Worcester's regional transportation network better serve Worcester as an increasingly popular destination for commuters and visitors?
- How can Worcester encourage equitable transit oriented development in areas that are well-served by public transit?
- How can Worcester increase safety and comfort on its streets for all users, especially near schools and in environmental justice communities?

Comments from Committee Members:

- **Comment:** there are ongoing projects to actively redesign certain corridors. The Chandler St. corridor, which is highlighted on the crash map, is being redesigned as part of a larger street safety project.
- **Comment:** with the redesign of Main St. and multiple years of construction, it didn't solve the primary issues on the street. The parking enforcement and signage has not caught up with the street redesigns to effectively meet Downtown on-street parking demand. This lack of clarity is frustrating for business owners, commuters, visitors, and residents alike. There is a lot of double-parking in bike lanes and people blocking crosswalk ramps. There is also a chicken or the egg sequencing issue - there are downtown vacancies, so people don't walk there.
 - **Planning Team Response:** these are classic growing pains that many cities are struggling with when trying to balance maintaining vehicle access/parking with creating safe spaces for people traveling by foot or bike. This plan's strength is its ability to tie economic development in with a mobility plan. In other cities, businesses and active ground floor uses are not included in the street redesign process as much as they should have been. It is also worth noting that the City is proposing a Transportation and Mobility department to address these types of issues.
- **Comment:** Request for a color-blind friendly version of the growth framework map that would allow committee members to zoom in and study it in greater detail.
 - **Planning Team Response:** Yes, absolutely. We will make those revisions and send the map as a high-quality PDF so that committee members can zoom in.



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VI. Next Steps

Next steps include tabling at local events, analyzing data from the Spring Survey, and planning for future public workshops and other public events. Specifically:

- Tercentennial Tabling:
 - In-Person, June 11, 12pm - 5pm
- Public Visioning Workshops:
 - In-Person: June 23rd, 5:30pm - 7:30pm at the Worcester Senior Center
 - Virtual: July 7th, 5:30pm - 7pm via Zoom
- Topic-Specific Working Groups:
 - Virtual, July 11th-15th, time TBD

Comments from Committee Members:

- **Suggestion:** this plan is an opportunity to hear from and provide support and services for people experiencing homelessness and those dealing with mental illness and/or substance abuse.
- **Suggestion:** the team should make sure people understand the long-term nature of this plan.
 - **Planning Team Response:** Absolutely, it is important to inform people of the role of the plan. This plan can't address every municipal issue, and making sure people know what power this plan has versus what work needs to be done after/outside the scope of this plan is important. A ten-year time frame is a good ballpark figure for how long things may take to be implemented, and is the intended life of this plan. The City hopes this plan kicks off a more continual practice of conducting more long-range planning efforts - part of this plan will be creating a framework for future neighborhood- and district-level planning efforts.
- **Suggestion:** it would be useful for the City to be clear about how it will implement the recommendations that come out of this process.
 - **Planning Team Response:** We should be clear about what the City can do on its own and what would require state/federal funding and support to implement. For instance, policy adjustments generally cost less than expensive capital projects.

