



Now | Next
Worcester's Citywide Plan

Equity & Engagement Framework

Context and Recommendations
June 20, 2022

Project Context

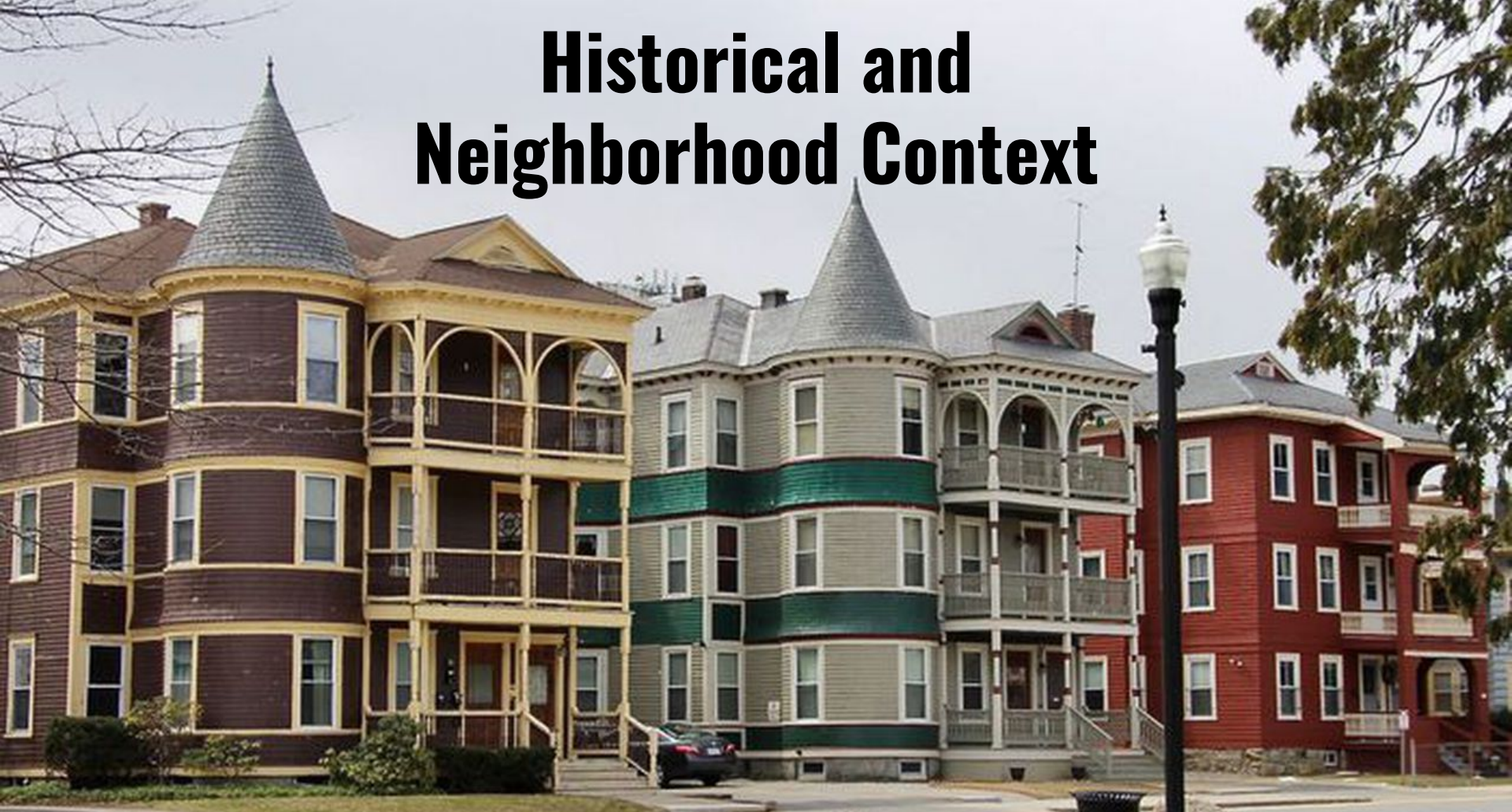
- The City of Worcester launched Worcester Now | Worcester Next to **“articulate a shared vision for the city and its future.”**
 - The City of Worcester envisions an **“interactive community process”** for the plan that will “lead to sustained civic engagement helping to implement recommended actions.”
- Rivera Consulting is serving as **equity consultants** as part of the consultant team led by Utile. **Rivera Consulting is:**
 - Advising the city on **community engagement**, including on the recent hiring of a Community Organizer focused on Worcester Now | Worcester Next
 - Providing **data analysis of existing conditions** and recommendations on equity metrics
 - Ground-truthing and context-setting for historical, policy, and community context that informs the city’s approach to Worcester Now | Next

Social Justice and Equity Lens

An equitable planning process should...

- Be grounded in **historical and neighborhood context**, including on past planning processes and equity work in Worcester city government.
- Employ **inclusive and equitable data** to document the existing planning landscape in Worcester, inform engagement and policy design, and measure outcomes.
- Use **human-centered community engagement** so residents can shape a planning process from the start, rather than just providing feedback near the end.
- Center **equity in planning and development** by prioritizing policy areas that impact marginalized residents in land use and policy design.

Historical and Neighborhood Context



Equity Now Equity Next: Why we are Looking Back

It is critical for municipalities and their planning teams to incorporate equitable engagement and policy priorities for larger scale master planning projects:

- What does it mean to approach long-term citywide planning projects with **the upfront acknowledgment** that institutional racism and economic segregation have produced unjust policy outcomes for cities across Massachusetts and the nation?
- This process must be grounded in **historical and neighborhood context**, including past planning processes and the successes and shortcomings of ongoing equity work within city government.

Historical Context: Development, Displacement, and Urban Renewal in Worcester

The story and history of planning within Worcester is one not different from the U.S. as a whole, with racial and socioeconomic disparities rooted in past urban renewal, redlining, and historical structural racism seen across the United States

- **Laurel/Clayton** was a predominantly working class African American neighborhood adjacent to downtown Worcester. Much of the neighborhood was **demolished to build I-290 through Worcester in 1970**, and the Worcester Redevelopment Authority **seized and demolished many homes with eminent domain** in order to build Plumley Village.
- The **Worcester Galleria** opened in 1970. Planning authorities demolished 34 blocks of downtown Worcester to build the mall, which was sold in 1994 and closed in 2003.

People and businesses were displaced within Worcester or forced out of the city as a result of past planning processes. Any successful planning process must **recognize this history** in order to **earn back community trust**.

Modern Context: Economic Development

Recent economic development strategies focused on downtown Worcester have been generally well received by many within the community, with positive impacts for broad constituencies and interests across the city

- However, for communities of color and residents of lower-income that are vulnerable to the impacts of gentrification and displacement, the negative externalities associated with these efforts remain a front-of-mind concern
- To examine and name these concerns is a needed step to conduct an inclusive and comprehensive master planning process
- Rebuilding trust requires acknowledging past and current perceived harm amongst Worcester's most vulnerable and economically disadvantaged communities

A successful comprehensive planning process in Worcester must acknowledge where other recent processes have struggled to include the visions and perspectives of all neighborhoods and residents.

Browse Data by City Department

There's a lot to see here so the data has been organized by department to make it easier for you find the information you need.



Administration & Finance



Economic Development



Customer Service Orders

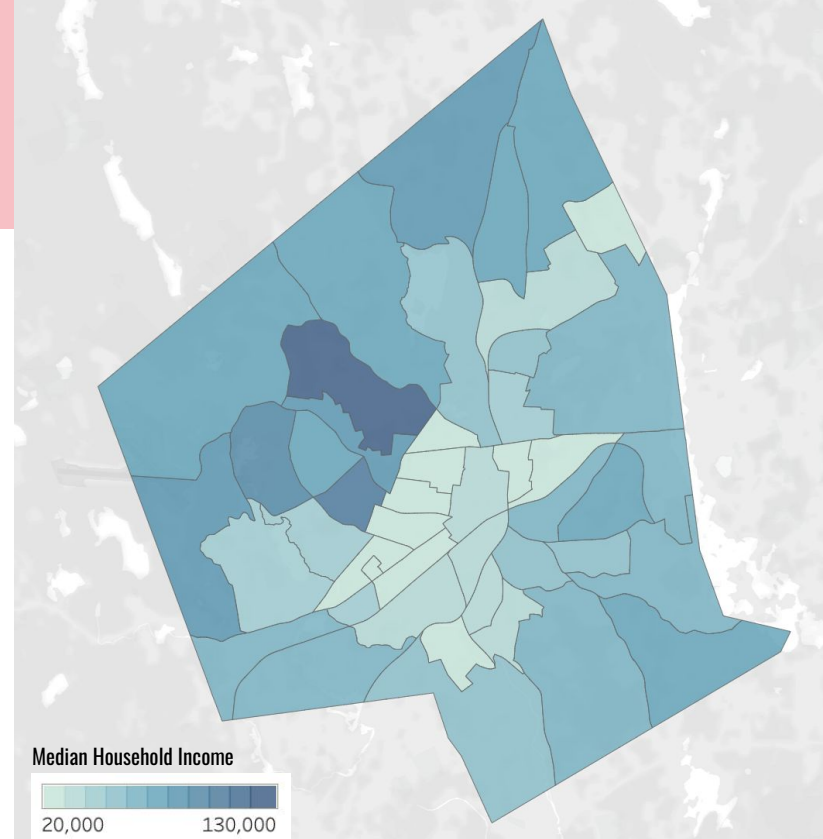


Department of Inspectional Services



Using data to document racial and economic segregation in Worcester

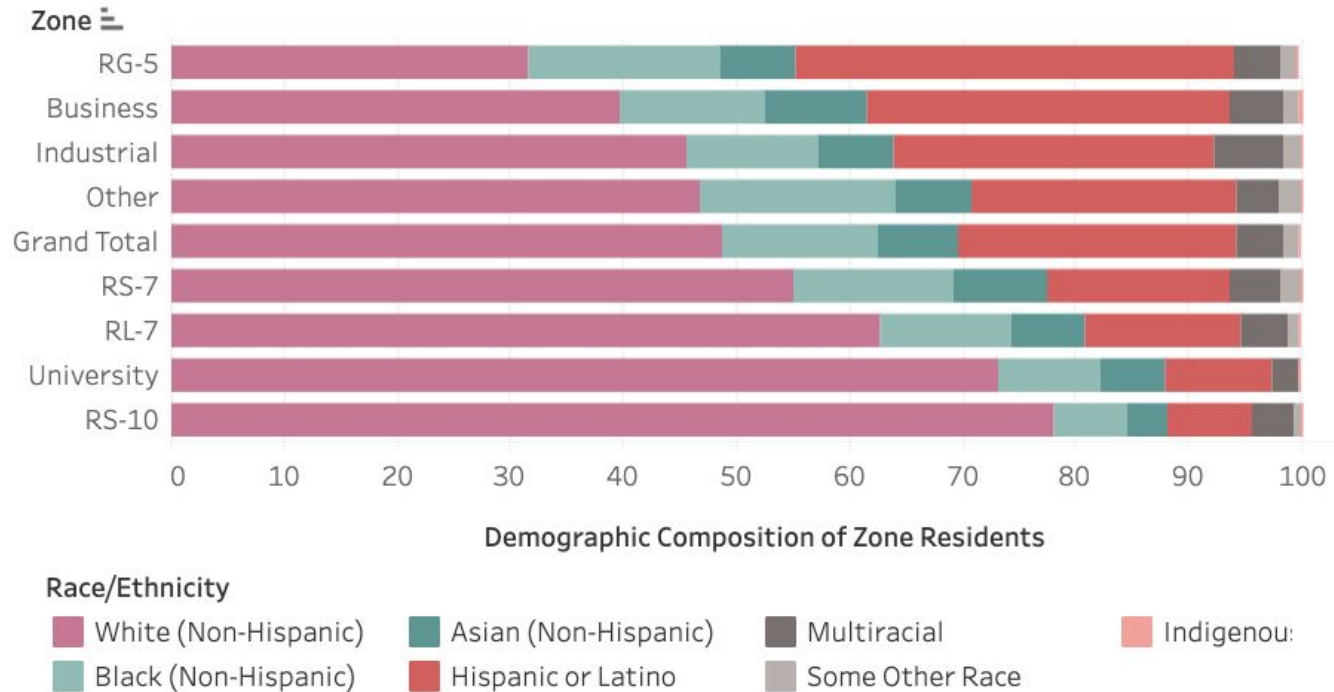
- Neighborhood-level differences in racial demographics and socioeconomic status mean that the neighborhood-level focus of Now | Next engagement will substantially influence how successfully the City engages residents of color and residents in low-income households.
- In the Salisbury Street neighborhood (tract 7308.01) the median household income is **\$122,841**. Nearby tracts in Elm Park and Main South have household incomes **below \$30,000**
- The [Neighborhood Atlas](#) includes key demographic, housing, economic, and transportation indicators.



Data Sources for Neighborhood Atlas:

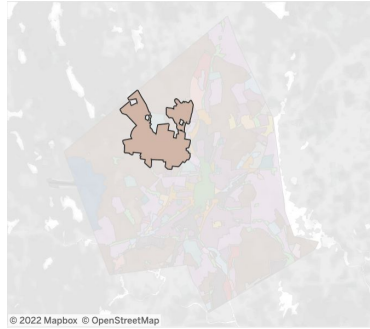
- 2020 US Census tract-level population, race, and ethnicity
- 2016-2020 ACS tract-level 5-year estimates (tables DP04, S1901, S1501, and S0802)

Racial and Ethnic Demographics of Worcester Land Use Zones

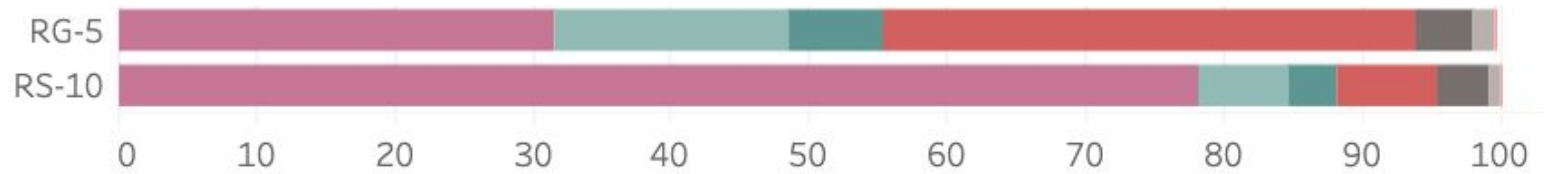
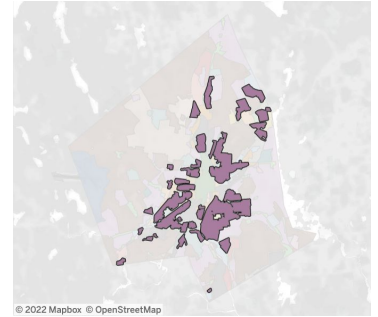


- Data Sources for [Zoning Demographic Analysis](#): 2020 US Census block-level population, race, and ethnicity data; City of Worcester zoning shapefiles
- Blocks were assigned to zones based on the zoning of each block's centroid, then aggregated by zone to produce city-level demographics for each zone

The RS-10
single-family
residential zone is
78.2% non-Hispanic
White



The RG-5 general
residential zones are
68.4% residents of
color



Race/Ethnicity

- White (Non-Hispanic)
- Asian (Non-Hispanic)
- Multiracial
- Indigenous
- Black (Non-Hispanic)
- Hispanic or Latino
- Some Other Race



Human-Centered Community Engagement

Human-Centered Community Engagement

- **Hired community-rooted organizer to lead grassroots engagement of Worcester residents and justice-movement organizations**
- **As Worcester Now | Worcester Next Community Organizer, Guillermo Creamer Jr. will ensure ongoing insight and feedback of residents is incorporated into real-time analysis and design of the master planning process**
- **In addition to formal engagement visioning workshops and neighborhood listening tours, the community organizer will prioritize the insight of underserved and historically underrepresented communities guided by the tenets of this equity framework.**

Centering Equity in Planning and Development

The standard planning and land use approach...

- Seeks to find an empirically determined “**highest and best use**” and prioritizes tax base growth over many other needs.
- Asks communities to **react to proposals** from planners and developers, rather than creating chances to shape them.
- Preserves the status quo by creating **many veto points** in the policy process and few opportunities for transformative thinking when the status quo fails.

Modifying this approach to center equity means...



Seeking to plan for a set of uses that meets **community needs and desires**.



Asking community members to **shape planning** through multiple engagement points, rather than to react to proposals.



Creating **opportunities for developing and testing new approaches**, even if not everyone supports them right away.

Social Justice and Equity Metrics and Indicators

- Social justice and equity metrics inform both **formative** and **summative** evaluations of Worcester Now | Worcester Next.
 - **Formative metrics** help determine whether engagement for Worcester Now | Worcester Next is reflecting the demographics and experiences of Worcester residents. These metrics can help adjust the engagement strategy to fill any gaps.
 - **Summative metrics** help determine whether the policies and plans adopted in Worcester Now | Worcester Next have advanced equity in Worcester. These are metrics that the city can use several years after completing the plan to evaluate its effectiveness.
- Each **key topic area** of the plan requires **equity-driven metrics** in both categories.

Formative Indicators For Equitable Engagement

- These key topics are drawn from priority areas identified in the Now | Next RFP. The demographics of community engagement participants should **broadly mirror those of the city** on each of these metrics
- Metrics marked with an asterisk are included in the Neighborhood Atlas tool. Those marked with a caret are included in the Zoning Data Dashboard

- **Neighborhoods, Land Use, Zoning**
 - Racial demographics of each zone^
- **Housing**
 - % of residents who rent*
 - % of renters who are rent burdened*
 - % of households experiencing crowding (>1 person/room)*
- **Economic Development/Opportunity**
 - Median Household Income*
 - % of residents with a bachelor's degree or higher*
- **Natural/Cultural/Historic Resources, Open Space, and Recreation**
 - Access to parks
- **Public Services and Facilities**
 - Access to libraries
 - Access to health centers
 - Access to youth/teen/community centers
- **Access, Mobility, and Circulation**
 - % of residents with commutes of 30 minutes or less*
 - % of households who do not own a vehicle*
 - % of commuters who use public transportation*

Summative indicators for evaluating the success of the plan must be **based on goals and outcome measures** identified by community members during engagement.

Barriers and Recommendations to an Equitable Worcester Now | Worcester Next Process

- **Barrier: Past processes have eroded community trust in planning**
 - Recommendation: Acknowledge the harm in Worcester's history of planning and listen to community members sharing its effect on them.
- **Barrier: Past engagement has struggled to include lower-income residents and residents of color**
 - Recommendation: Intentionally prioritize engagement in neighborhoods that have been underrepresented in past processes.
- **Barrier: Community engagement often takes place late in the process, after many outcomes are set**
 - Recommendation: Hire a community organizer to lead human-centered engagement throughout the process.
- **Barrier: Existing land use regulation in Worcester reflects and reinforces segregation by race**
 - Recommendation: Evaluate the likely impact of land use restriction on racial equity to inform land use recommendations in Now | Next