



Committee Members

Mary Knittle, Chair
Evelyn Herwitz, Vice Chair
Patricia Austin
Ted Conna
Nathan Fournier
Deirdra Murphy
Mary Leovich

Contacting the Committee

Department of Sustainability and Resilience
Address: 455 Main Street, Room 108,
Worcester, MA 01608 (by appointment)
Email: GreenWorcester@worcesterma.gov
Website:
www.WorcesterMA.gov/GreenWorcester

Department of Sustainability and Resilience

Our Mission:

To implement the ambitious and urgent goals of the Green Worcester Sustainability and Resilience Strategic Plan (GWP), a roadmap for making Worcester the greenest mid-size city in the country.

Our Staff:

John Odell, *Chief*
Jacquelyn Burmeister, *Lakes & Ponds Program Coordinator*
Jessica Davis, *Project Manager*
Robert DeFosse, *Energy Services Manager*
Nick Pagan, *Senior Environmental Analyst*
Sarah Mount, *Energy Analyst*
Luba Zhaurova, *Director of Projects*

Accessibility:

The GWAC is committed to ensuring that its public meetings are accessible to all. Should you require interpretation, auxiliary aids, services, translations, written materials in other formats, or reasonable modifications in policies and procedures, please contact the DSR a minimum of 48 hours in advance of the scheduled meeting.

Translations:

Hay disponibles servicios de interpretación y otras adaptaciones con solicitud previa.
Avisanos por
greenworcester@worcesterma.gov

CITY OF WORCESTER

Meeting Agenda

Green Worcester Advisory Committee

Monday, April 3, 2023, at 5:30 p.m.

Location: Meeting Room A, 50 Officer Manny Familia Way

*This meeting will be held in-person
with an option to also join remotely (see the bottom of the agenda for details)*

Call To Order

1. **Welcome**
2. **Approval of Minutes – March 13, 2023** (*Attachment A*)
3. **New Business**
 - i. Presentation: Worcester Community Action Council, Mary Knittle (30 minutes)
4. **Continued Business**
 - i. Update on Miyawaki Forest Pilot and MVP Grant (10 minutes)
 - ii. Staff Update on Planning the 1st Green Worcester Summit (5 minutes)
5. **DSR Updates** (10 minutes)
 - i. Zero Waste Coordinator Position posting (*Attachment B*)
 - ii. Green Worcester Dashboard development. Request a picture of the GWAC Members.
 - iii. Lakes & Ponds Program
 - a. Discount Rain Barrel Pre-ordering now open (*Attachment C*)
 - b. 2022 WCMC Water Quality Reports
6. **Standing Items**
 - i. Community outreach
 - ii. Community feedback
 - iii. Media
 - a. Worcester Magazine Article, 3/24 (*Attachment D*)
 - iv. Upcoming events
 - a. Earth Day Tabling at library, April 21st
 - b. Worcester Cyanobacteria Collaborative virtual training, April 12th

Adjournment

Attachments

Attachment A: Minutes, March 13, 2023

Attachment B: Zero Waste Coordinator Job Posting

Attachment C: Lakes & Ponds “Get Involved” Flyer

Attachment D: Worcester Magazine 3/24 “Pond Scum” Article

2023 Upcoming Meetings

Green Worcester Advisory Committee meetings begin on Mondays at 5:30pm:

<i>May 15</i>	<i>Esther Howland</i>
<i>June 26</i>	<i>Meeting Room A*</i>
<i>July 31</i>	<i>Levi Lincoln</i>
<i>September 18</i>	<i>Meeting Room A*</i>
<i>October 16</i>	<i>Esther Howland</i>
<i>November 27</i>	<i>Esther Howland</i>

**Meeting Room A is located at 50 Manny Familia Way.*

Virtual Meeting Information

This meeting will be held in-person at the date, time and location listed above. Meeting attendees will have the option to participate remotely by joining online or by phone. Note: If technological problems interrupt the virtual meeting, the meeting will continue.

Web: Use the following link to join the meeting via computer <https://cow.webex.com/meet/greenworchester>, or

Call: 415-655-0001. **Access Code:** 2313 821 4580.



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greenworcester@worcesterma.gov

CITY OF WORCESTER

Meeting Minutes

Green Worcester Advisory Committee

Monday, March 13, 2023 at 5:30 p.m.
 Location: Esther Howland Room, City Hall

Attendance

Present

Mary Knittle, Chair
 Patricia Austin
 Ted Conna
 Nate Fournier
 Mary Leovich (online)
 Deirdra Murphy (online)

Absent

Evelyn Herwitz, Vice Chair (excused)

Staff

John Odell
 Luba Zhaurova
 Jessica Davis

Call To Order at 5:42 pm by Mary Knittle, Committee Chair

1. **Welcome**

- i. Chair Knittle read out the rules of meeting conduct.

2. **Approval of Minutes – January 23, 2023**

- i. The Committee voted unanimously to approve the January 23, 2023 meeting minutes.

3. **New Business**

- i. Presentation: Worcester Native Plant Initiative (WNPI), Beth Fleming, Joanne Hart, Leonardo DaSilva and Nikki Howell (*Attachment A*)
 - a. Member Fournier and Member Conna expressed appreciation and support for the WNPI's work. They said that GWAC would like to support WNPI's work wherever possible.
 - b. Ms. Howell shared that WNPI is working with a city conservation project at Coal Mine Brook to recommend that only native plants be planted at that location. This can be an example project for the city to see how native plants can be beneficial in terms of

maintenance, ecosystem services and aesthetics compared to the status quo of planting grass and mowing. She added that it would be helpful for GWAC to support that effort.

- c. Member Murphy proposed that this topic be added to school curriculum and that native plant gardens should be planted at all city schools. She would also like the city to incentivize native pollinator gardens for landscaping at businesses.

d. Chair Knittle asked if the city will be creating an ordinance to limit the hours that residents can use leaf blowers and other loud yard equipment. Mr. Odell replied that that topic has been brought up in the past and he will bring an update on that to the next meeting. Member Conna suggested that the current noise ordinances could be more strictly enforced to limit noise from lawn mowers and leaf blowers.

Mr. Odell noted that he or a member of staff would reach out to WNPI to review possible future collaboration opportunities.

ii. Planning the 1st Green Worcester Summit – Discussion (15 minutes) (*Attachment B*)

- i. Ms. Davis explained the event proposal for the first Green Worcester Summit. The theme of this event would be Building Community Connections. The summit's purpose would be to create stronger community connections to enhance collaborations and strive towards the goals set forth in the Green Worcester Plan (GWP). The possible event activities could be short presentations, tabling, panels, rounds tables and networking. The invitees could include community groups, non-profits, students, interested individuals, government agencies and small businesses. Ms. Davis said that the Department of Sustainability and Resilience (DSR) is looking for feedback on the concept and ideas.
 1. Member Fournier suggested a festival format with music and food. The goals would be having people sign up on email lists, collaborating with other organizations, and meeting community members.
 2. Member Leovich suggested proposing a very specific goal and topic for the event and holding a more traditional and formal summit. The invitees would include leaders from universities, large businesses and other community leaders. A common goal would be determined, and the stakeholders would work on it together and commit to meeting again. There would be a focus on just one or two topics to keep it focused.
 3. Member Austin suggested looking at the GWP to see how an event can relate to those goals. The invitees could include volunteer groups, such as the Worcester Native Plant Initiative, as this would provide the opportunity for groups to connect.
 4. Resident Paul Popinchalk made a public comment that the event should focus on issues that citizens have a big impact on including waste generation/management and the protection of the Blackstone River watershed. Additionally, he thought this should be an annual event at a consistent date such as lining up with Earth Day or the Spring or Fall equinox.
 5. Resident Deb Cary made a public comment that this event could have a theme or focus on the topics from the GWP or the Now | Next citywide master plan. The goal could be to bring people together and create concrete next steps on how to work together. Mass Audubon would be happy to spread the word and get their members involved once the event is planned.

6. Member Conna said that there are many good event ideas in this discussion but we can't do everything at all once so we need to define the focus if we want a productive event. Additionally, if we want college students involved, then the event shouldn't be hosted in the summer since they are taking exams and leaving town in May. However, there could be a different event in future to include them. Overall, we need to narrow down the ideas and determine a clear goal for the event.
7. Mr. Odell said that DSR will take these ideas, consider other factors such as budgets and time capabilities for the department, and then will report back for the next meeting. In the interim, DSR will welcome feedback and ideas for the event from GWAC over email.

4. Continued Business

- i. Update on Miyawaki Forest Pilot and MVP Grant
 - i. Ms. Zhaurova said that the research for this project is continuing and includes gathering information from other communities, specifically Cambridge. There is an upcoming grant opportunity through the Massachusetts Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness program that DSR plans to apply for to fund a pilot of planting these forests in various locations in the city. DSR will update the committee once there is a more concrete plan to propose.

5. DSR Updates (15 minutes)

- i. Energy
 - i. Electric vehicle charging stations
 1. Mr. Odell announced the launch of 18 public electric vehicle charging stations at 3 public garages: Common, Federal Plaza and Pearl Elm. The stations are free to use currently, and people are already using them. DSR will determine the pricing structure for future charging after a month or so, taking into consideration the costs of maintenance and electricity.
 - ii. Energy Advocates and Community First Partnership Grant
 1. Mr. Odell reported that DSR received this two-year grant from National Grid and Eversource, for \$60,000 per year (a total \$120,000) to hire two part time Energy Advocate positions who will work approximately 20 hours per week. Their job will be to market the Mass Save program, with a focus on historically underserved communities. The Mass Save programs provide no cost energy assessments and incentives for energy efficiency work that will help residents be more comfortable and save money in their homes.
- ii. Mobility
 - i. Mobility Plan kicked-off
 1. Mr. Odell explained that DSR has been working in collaboration with the Department of Transportation and Mobility (DTM) to develop a Mobility Plan for the city. It is a subset of the Now | Next citywide master plan. The Mobility Plan will take a year to develop and will be roadmap and guide for DTM, playing a role similar to that of the Green Worcester Plan guiding DSR.
 - ii. Endicott / Bigelow Complete Streets Project
 1. Mr. Odell shared an update on the Complete Streets project at Endicott and Bigelow streets. This project created a design for that area which includes bike lanes, parking improvements, safety measures for pedestrians and green infrastructure. This will hopefully serve as a template to be used for other areas in the city. There will be a community meeting in District 4 to discuss the sustainability, safety, and connectivity benefits of the design and GWAC members are invited to attend. The meeting date and

time are to be determined. The current draft design and information from previous community meetings is on the DTM website.

- iii. Lakes & Ponds Program: State of the Lakes Event
 - i. Mr. Odell reported that the State of the Lakes event was a couple of weeks ago at the Senior Center and was very successful with lots of attendees. The Lakes and Ponds Coordinator, Jacquelyn Burmeister, did an excellent job and many city officials attended including the Mayor and City Manager. The recording of the State of the Lakes will be available to watch this week on the city website. Member Austin attended and said the event was well done and she learned a lot.
 - ii. Ms. Davis shared that the Lakes and Ponds Worcester Cyanobacteria Monitoring Collaborative, a community science program, is hosting a virtual training on April 12 for anyone interested in volunteering. The information can be found on the DSR website.
- iv. Waste: Zero Waste Coordinator Position is opened
 - i. Mr. Odell shared that this is a new position that will sit in DSR but work closely with DPW. It is essential to achieving the zero waste goals set forth in the GWP. Many people, particularly staff in DPW, have been working on zero waste initiatives but there has not been one person whose position is completed dedicated to this work. Once someone is hired, a Zero Waste Master Plan will be developed. Member Conna expressed appreciation for the work of Bob Fiore (now retired), architect of the city's groundbreaking 1993 curbside recycling program, and was pleased that this new position portends collaboration between DSR and DPW.
 - ii. Chair Knittle noted that there is a new textile recycling program available for residents. Mr. Odell recognized the work the DPW did to develop and launch that program.
- v. Collaboration / Partnership: Chamber of Commerce collaboration follow-up
 - i. Mr. Odell said that DSR has met with the Chamber of Commerce to discuss collaboration and will continue to do so.

6. Standing Items

- i. Received Communications
 - i. Mr. Odell noted that there are upcoming public workshops to share feedback on the draft plan recommendations for the Now/Next citywide plan. The topics include housing, job growth, sustainability and more. There will be an in-person event on March 30 and a virtual event on April 12.
- ii. Community outreach
 - i. Chair Knittle provided a review on the Impact event at Arts Worcester on 3/3/2023 as she attended and represented GWAC there. She said it was a positive event, the art pieces were beautiful, the event was focused on climate change and event attendees were interested in GWAC's work. There were tables for Mass Audubon, GWLT and others too.
- iii. Community feedback
 - i. Member Conna shared two pieces of community feedback. The first is that residents have been asking him how they can plant trees and he told them that they can go to city website or call customer service and get on the planting list. The second is the issue of recyclables being blown around streets on very windy days. There are multiple factors that contribute to this issue. Member Conna believes that the bins that the city chose to purchase and give to residents are more susceptible to being blown over in the wind (because they are taller with a smaller base), the lids don't stay on, and the bins and lids are too fragile, maybe because the plastic is too thin. His 30-year old bin is still unbroken, but many of the new bins in his neighborhood were quickly broken. He suggested that if the weather forecast is for heavy winds, then the city could delay the recycling collection to avoid the otherwise guaranteed outcome, a mess of litter in the streets. Member Conna also noted that in 2019, the city proposed to solve the windblown recyclables problem by requiring recycling collection in plastic bags, but that he joined many other citizens in

opposing this idea because it would have added about 135 tons of new plastic waste to the waste stream per year, and about 250 tons per year of new carbon emissions from the production and recycling of the plastic bags. The idea was scrapped, and the city later distributed the bins with lids instead.

- ii. Member Leovich asked if there was a different location for drop off of recyclables if collection was delayed or cancelled due to wind. Mr. Odell replied that recyclables can be dropped off at the Millbury St. residential drop off facility.
- iii. Mr. Odell explained that city trash is collected by city staff and recycling is collected by a third party, Casella, which could complicate changing collection days due to wind. Ms. Zhaurova added that communication can be an issue in terms of notifying residents if collection will be delayed. Member Conna suggested that the city's text/email alerts and the news media could be used, as they are now for holiday postponements and winter parking bans.
- iv. Upcoming events
 - i. Ms. Davis shared that there was an invitation from the library for an event on April 21 for Earth Week and she asked if GWAC would like to table at it.
 - ii. Member Fournier shared that there will be an Earth Day clean up event organized by the Regional Environmental Council on Saturday, April 22 and you can register on their website to participate. It is put on in collaboration with DPW.
 - iii. Member Conna shared that there are two Urban Forestry Commission meetings coming up on March 22 and April 12 at 6pm at Manny Familia Way in Meeting Room A.

Adjournment

The committee voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 7:17pm.

Attachments

Attachment A: Worcester Native Plant Initiative Presentation

Attachment B: Green Worcester Summit Proposal

Attachment C: City Council Memo for CFP

Attachment D: Zero Waste Coordinator Job Posting

Attachment E: Now | Next Workshops Flyer

2023 Upcoming Meetings

Green Worcester Advisory Committee meetings begin on Mondays at 5:30pm:

<i>April 3</i>	<i>Meeting Room A*</i>
<i>May 15</i>	<i>Esther Howland</i>
<i>June 26</i>	<i>Meeting Room A*</i>
<i>July 31</i>	<i>Levi Lincoln</i>
<i>September 18</i>	<i>Meeting Room A*</i>
<i>October 16</i>	<i>Esther Howland</i>
<i>November 27</i>	<i>Esther Howland</i>

**Meeting Room A is located at 50 Manny Familia Way.*

DRAFT

Title

ZERO WASTE COORDINATOR

Department/Division

Sustainability and Resilience

Apply Start Date

03/02/2023

Apply End Date

03/17/2023

Type

Full Time

Hours

40 Per Week

Wage

\$68,500 - \$76,159 annually

Description

**ZERO WASTE COORDINATOR
SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCE
CITY OF WORCESTER**

The City of Worcester's Department of Sustainability and Resilience seeks applicants for the position of **Zero Waste Coordinator** to assist with implementation of Zero Waste goals of the Green Worcester Sustainability and Resilience Strategic Plan (GWP). This employee will work closely with the Department of Public Works & Parks and coordinate the development and implementation of a Zero Waste Master Plan to promote waste prevention, materials reuse, and diversion of food waste, as well as construction and demolition waste. The employee will prepare public educational and outreach materials in various formats and platforms; attend community events to educate the public about initiatives; initiate and/or expand new programs to divert waste and increase awareness of recycling requirements to ensure compliance with state and local laws, in collaboration with residents, public schools, institutions, businesses and community groups. In addition, the position will pursue applicable MassDEP and other grant opportunities to advance GWP zero waste goals; prepare and submit required annual MassDEP reports on solid waste, recycling rates, etc.; and organize and participate in waste collection events. The employee will lead student projects on topics of interest, including developing and piloting behavior change campaigns to promote waste reduction and reduce contamination of recyclables; review and propose changes to the policies, practices, ordinances, and laws governing the collection, recycling, and disposal of household solid waste.

REQUIRED KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND ABILITIES:

- Knowledge of the principles, practices, and objectives of different aspects of waste reduction and management
- Demonstrated proficiency with Microsoft Office Suite
- Excellent written and verbal communication skills

- Proven strong project planning and management, organizational, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills
- Willingness and ability to learn and think creatively
- Ability to read, interpret, understand, and apply laws, rules and regulations, policies, procedures, specifications, and guidelines related to integrated solid waste systems and programs
- Ability to understand and communicate complex data analysis and complex sustainability issues in a simple manner to garner credibility and support
- Ability to work and communicate with diverse populations, maintaining professional and helpful attitude while educating stakeholders on resolving issues
- Ability to examine data from different primary and secondary data sources and create meaningful analyses and determine solutions
- Ability to work both independently and collaboratively as part of a team

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS:

- Associate's Degree of Environmental Science, Sustainability, Natural Resources, Public Health, or related discipline, OR,

o equivalent combination of education and experience demonstrating the knowledge, skills, and abilities may substitute for the above degree requirement.

- Three (3) years of experience in the field of waste management or coordination of a similar program.
- Two (2) years of experience in public outreach or educational campaigns of a related nature
- Strong computer skills and knowledge of standard productivity software (MS-Office Suite, Adobe Acrobat, etc.)
- Possess a Valid Driver's License

PREFERRED QUALIFICATIONS:

- Bachelor's Degree of Environmental Science, Sustainability, Natural Resources, Public Health, or related discipline, or equivalent education.
- 5+ years of experience in the field of solid waste management or coordination, or a similar program.
- Relevant work experience in the New England area.

SALARY RANGE: \$68,500 -\$76,159 annually, full-time, with an excellent benefits package.

To apply, please visit: www.worcesterma.gov/employment or send resume and cover letter on or before **FRIDAY, March 17, 2023**, to: City of Worcester, 455 Main Street, Room 109, Worcester, MA 01608. Preference is given to Worcester residents. **The City of Worcester is an equal opportunity, affirmative action employer. Women, minorities, people with**

disabilities and protected veterans are encouraged to apply. Direct inquiries to: City Hall, Human Resources, Room 109, 508-799-1030, HR@worcesterma.gov.

Get Involved at *Your Lakes!*

Connect and Learn

**Subscribe
to our
Newsletter**



Keep up to date with Lakes & Ponds Program events and opportunities by signing up for our monthly newsletter, "The Blue Space Splash"!



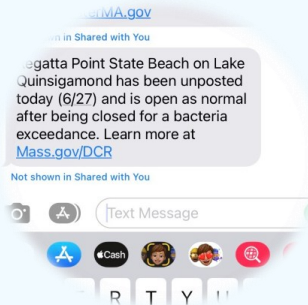
**Become a
WCMC
Volunteer**



Learn more about the WCMC at worcesterma.gov/wcmc. Scan the QR code link to sign up for the Virtual Volunteer Information and Training session on 12-Apr.



**Sign Up
for Text
Message
Alerts**



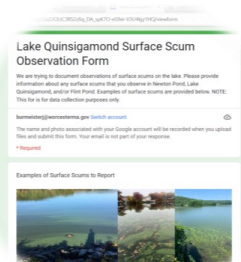
Sign up to receive Text Message Lake Alerts to get information about lake advisories and closures so you know what to expect before heading to the lake.



**Report a Scum
on Lake
Quinsigamond**



We need your help to track local algal blooms on Lake Quinsigamond! If you see scum, report when and where on our web form.



**Order a
Rain Barrel**



Rain Barrels save water and reduce nutrient loading in our lakes and ponds. Pre-order a discounted rain barrel for pickup at our bulk-distribution event in June.



Visit us at worcesterma.gov/bluespace

Get Involved at *Your Lakes!*

Connect and Learn

Join Your
Local
Watershed
Association



Watershed associations meet to discuss and act on issues occurring in and around waterbodies. Organizations in Worcester include the Tattuck Brook Watershed Association (tattuckbrook.org), the Lake Quinsigamond Watershed Association (lqwa.org), and the Indian Lake Watershed Association (ilwa.org).

Join a City
Board or
Commission



Join a board or commission to be a part of decision making on issues you care about in the City. There are currently vacancies on several City of Worcester boards and commissions, including the Conservation Commission and the Parks and Recreation Committee.

Home / Boards & Commissions

BOARDS & COMMISSIONS

One of the duties of the City Manager as Chief Executive Officer of the City of Worcester is to appoint members of municipal boards, commissions, and advisory committees. In some cases the nominated appointees must have their nominations approved by vote of the Worcester City Council.

All residents committed to preserving the vitality of our democratic institutions are urged to volunteer their services to one of these local government agencies whose effective operations depend on healthy open-minded citizen participation.

PUBLIC NOTICE - VIRTUAL MEETINGS

Pursuant to Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2012 and in order to ensure active, public engagement, the City of Worcester currently allows for both in-person and remote participation at all City Council and Standing Committee meetings. To participate in the "Public Participation" section of this meeting, you may attend the meeting in-person within the meeting location, or to join via the Virtual Application follow the link or dial the direct phone line and access code as indicated on the meeting agenda.

- [Joining a City Council Zoom Event](#)
- [Government Channel Live Stream](#)

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CITY COUNCIL

History Mayor Petty Meet the City Councilors Standing Councilors

ABOUT

Worcester's City Council consists of eleven council members, including the Mayor & Councilor-at-Large, Joe Petty. These eleven elected officials serve as the legislative body of the city. City Council members are responsible for representing the interests and needs of their city and community. There are six Councilor-at-Large and five Councilors that each represent a specific district in Worcester (Districts 1-5).

Another way to have your voice heard is to contact your elected officials. Scan the QR code to learn more about how to get in touch with your district and at-large councilors.



Vote in Your
Local
Elections



Voting in local elections is one of the best ways to make a difference in your community. Scan the QR code to learn about ballot questions, candidates, and how to make your voting plan.



Visit us at worcesterma.gov/bluespace

COLUMNS | Opinion *This piece expresses the views of its author(s), separate from those of this publication.*

City of Worcester teams up with community to take on pond scum

Ted D. Conna Special to Worcester Magazine

Published 5:01 a.m. ET March 22, 2023

Worcester's lakes and ponds have an age-old problem, which seems to be getting worse. And thankfully, the solution may lie in a growing partnership between effective government and a concerned community of volunteers.

First, the problem: Cyanobacteria, or blue-green algae, are naturally occurring, single-celled, photosynthetic organisms that play an important role in aquatic ecosystems, but sometimes multiply out of control, which is called a bloom.

Blooms can be invisible, or obvious, with discolored, scummy water — but not all pond scum is a bloom. They can happen year-round, but usually occur in the summer and fall.

Pollution, goose poop among culprits

Many factors contribute to cyanobacteria blooms, including weather conditions (warm temperatures and rainfall), poor water circulation, and pollution and nutrients from human and natural sources (runoff containing fertilizer, human waste from septic systems, goose poop, etc.) By all accounts, the problem is worst in urban water bodies where there is more nutrient pollution.

Why are blooms a problem? Whether or not they make the water discolored, scummy, or stinky (the technical term is “yucky”), blooms deplete oxygen from the water, which can cause fish kills and may also produce dangerous toxins that can sicken people, pets and wildlife.

This is why lakes and ponds get closed to public swimming when there is bloom. Dogs are at particular risk, because they're happy to get into yucky water and then lick themselves clean.

Worcester has dozens of water bodies, almost all of them human-made, which means they are shallow and warm up quickly. Some circulate poorly or not at all. Most get plenty of pollution from urban runoff.

So, cyanobacteria blooms are fairly common, but not entirely predictable. People depend on these waters to swim, boat and fish. So the challenge for city government is to monitor these many "blue spaces" frequently, with limited resources, so the public can be alerted when blooms occur.

A team approach

One solution could be the Worcester Cyanobacteria Monitoring Collaborative, a happy marriage of concerned and committed community volunteers with a nimble, technically savvy city agency (the Lakes and Ponds Program, part of the Department of Sustainability and Resilience), supported by experts at Environmental Protection Agency and the University of New Hampshire.

The collaborative began in 2017 and has grown more effective each year. In 2022, more than 50 volunteers collected and analyzed water samples from 24 water bodies in and around the city twice monthly from May through October, with results uploaded to the collaborative's page on the city's website.

The testing produced a clear picture of when and where cyanobacteria blooms occurred. Special attention is paid to Coes Reservoir, Indian Lake, Bell Pond and Lake Quinsigamond, which all have public beaches, so the city can protect the public with targeted closures when necessary. There are even signs posted at the beaches with QR codes linked to current water quality information on the city's website.

Several of the volunteer teams involved partnerships with educators and students at the EcoTarium, Bancroft School, WPI and QCC. And at WPI, there is a project underway to turn the water testing program into a STEM learning module, so that it could be integrated into the public school curriculum citywide. What better way to teach appreciation and stewardship of our blue spaces than to involve young people in the hands-on work of understanding and protecting them!

The WCMC continues to innovate. At Burncoat Pond, one of the ponds hardest hit by blooms, the city will experiment next year with treatments using barley straw, which releases hydrogen peroxide that is toxic to cyanobacteria as it decomposes. If it works, we'll have a low-risk, natural solution to a very common — and sometimes high-risk — natural problem.

Many ways to help

The ongoing goal of the program is to keep refining the test methods and treatments to better predict and prevent cyanotoxin exposure risk. Worcester is on the cutting edge of this work, using EPA/UNH protocols to develop test methods that deliver accurate results at a fraction of the cost of current state-certified methods, which the city also uses. Our success here may help make water-quality monitoring more affordable and accessible to communities everywhere.

And of course, none of this would be possible without all the well-informed and engaged volunteers. The WCMC, with a city staff of just two people, Jacquelyn Burmeister and Nick Pagan, is a prime example of how sustainability goals can be achieved even with limited resources. It's no surprise that this partnership continues to grow, because it's working. Real progress is possible when government partners with the community, and everyone learns in the process.

Want to help understand and protect your favorite lake or pond? The 2023 monitoring program will resume with a virtual training at 6:30 p.m. April 12, with the first samplings taken in early May. Anyone can register for free at tinyurl.com/WCMC23 or <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/523602377807>. To learn more or to volunteer, visit <http://worcesterma.gov/WCMC> or email greenworcester@worcesterma.gov.

Ted D. Conna is a longtime environmental activist. He was the first executive director of the Regional Environmental Council, and now represents District 4 on the Green Worcester Advisory Committee, promoting the full implementation of the award-winning Green Worcester Plan.