



GREEN WORCESTER: REPORT ON OCTOBER 16 PUBLIC WORKSHOP

On the evening of Wednesday, October 16, 2019, a group of over 80 Worcester residents (as well as a few people from adjacent towns) braved a downpour to spend one and a half hours in an interactive workshop at the Worcester Senior Center to discuss their ideas and aspirations for sustainability and resilience in Worcester. Participants received a folder with an information sheet about the Green Worcester planning process and a set of worksheets to complete for a series of exercises. They were seated in small groups at tables.

The workshop began with a welcome from City Manager Ed Augustus and John Odell, the City's Director of the Energy and Asset Management Department. City Manager Augustus welcomed the participants and talked about Worcester's commitment to sustainability evidenced by a number of programs. Examples include the implementation of the City's 2007 Climate Action Plan through the energy efficiency and renewable energy program, including the largest municipally-owned solar farm in New England; investment of over \$60 million in City parks and green spaces; and the new Blue Spaces program focused on improving water quality in major lakes used for recreation. The welcome remarks were followed by a brief presentation by the plan consultant, Larissa Brown of Larissa Brown + Associates, on the meaning of sustainability and resilience, the principles guiding the plan, and the topics it will cover, which were developed in discussions with the Green Worcester Working Group. The Working Group, appointed by the City Manager, is made up of City staff, representatives of local organizations, and other volunteers. The presentation can be found at www.worcesterma.gov/greenworcester.

During the remainder of the workshop, a series of exercises guided participants through a series of discussions. The exercises were designed to give each participant the opportunity to express individual ideas, followed by a discussion to share their ideas around the table and then identify five priorities.



PERSONAL VISION STATEMENTS

Each participant wrote an individual statement expressing his or her vision for sustainability in Worcester. The most commonly mentioned elements focused on enhancing and accelerating energy efficiency and the transition to renewable energy sources, with an important emphasis on transportation alternatives—walking, biking, and public transportation—to personal vehicles. Other themes included a focus on environmental justice communities (the urban core of the city), green and blue spaces, and food security.

A word cloud based on the personal visions is on this page. All the personal vision statements can be found online at www.worcesterma.gov/greenworcester.

Selections from Personal Vision Statements

“A neighborhood with well-kept three-deckers that have been modernized for energy efficiency...big beautiful trees providing shade...and water absorption...urban farms...sidewalks...bikeways....public transportation to get to neighborhood corner markets or visit commercial districts....”

“A vibrant city connected by public transportation, brought together in green spaces, parks, gardens, etc., kept cool by trees, people + businesses committed to environmentally friendly practices, keep down waste, preserving the environment, living simply, sustainably in community + working together, inclusively to improve our city on environmental + social issues...”

“Retrofitting streets...that prioritize pedestrians, biking, public transit....Highly energy + climate efficient buildings via strict green building codes....more trees!...wherever possible, using bioretention planters, green roofs....”

“Car-free streets/zones/blocks/neighborhoods...plant more trees...net zero transportation....electric car charging stations in every neighborhood...free public transit...outlaw diesel fuel....”

“Asset management plan...urban [tree] canopy...green infrastructure...electric school buses”

“Environmental education in Worcester schools....increase support/funding/grants for Worcester watershed groups to battle aquatic invasive, water quality issues etc., within the lakes and ponds not under the Blue Space Program....Waste stream improvements”



“Carbon neutral/electrified....100% renewable....improved, safe bike infrastructure....bringing green collar jobs to Worcester...repurpose now underutilized industrial spaces....educated, informed process that people can be comfortable with and proud of the transition.”

“Sustainable Worcester will be a place where every citizen is engaged + aware + have a sense of ownership for the well being + survival of fell citizens, the ecosystem + all living things.

“Preserve and protect parks, water bodies + open spaces for people to enjoy....a more walkable, bikeable community with inexpensive, predictable public transportation. Involve children + senior citizens.”

“Net-zero by 2035...or at the latest, by 2050....”

“Equity...community identifies concerns + prioritizes them....transition to renewable energy....youth employed as sustainability ambassadors....coordinate with sustainability curriculum in WPS....justice committee within City of Worcester.”

“Transformation of our local food system drawing upon “food sovereignty” concept...incentivization of “green” practices....real bottom-up/grassroots approach to this entire transition”

“Environmental justice—prioritizing the equitable distribution of environmental benefits...and the equitable addressing of environmental problems...in Worcester’s most vulnerable neighborhoods and communities...healthy homes/schools—ensuring...buildings are free from lead, asthma triggers and other environmental health hazards....”

“Worcester will be business-friendly, but not at the expense of the environment or subsidizing biz by “regular” citizens...”

“urban forest: planting new trees; planning street and sidewalk structures that accommodate the planting of trees; upkeep of existing trees”

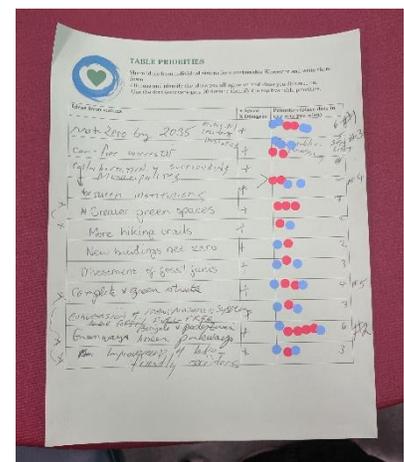
“City should be divesting fossil fuels from retirement + other stock Portfolios...”

Top Table Priorities

A volunteer table leader wrote down the vision elements discussed at each table. Participants each had ten dots to “vote” on the elements that they thought were most important, resulting in a list of five priority elements at each table. At the end of the meeting, a volunteer table leader from each table reported back to the entire group on their top five priorities for sustainability in Worcester. Priority items organized by theme are below. Items fitting under multiple themes are repeated as needed..

Energy – Priority items reflect a continued focus on energy efficiency and renewable energy

- Net zero by 2035, municipal, residents, businesses
- Worcester-owned energy source – renewable to power ourselves independently
- Energy infrastructure shared equally by all neighborhoods and socioeconomic sectors
- Electric school buses
- Encourage and improve Mass Save audits; sustainable building policies/net zero
- Solar panels on every roof where practical



- Retrofit all buildings to net zero
- Divest city investments in fossil fuels
- Solar and renewable energy expedited and improved permitting
- Repair underground gas leaks

Transportation – More sustainable transportation, especially through development of a robust multi-modal transportation system, as well as a transition from fossil fuels, was important to all table groups.

- All electric fleet (buses, trucks, etc.)
- Enhance active transportation network (bikes, walking, rail trails)
- Improved public transportation – WRTA
- Electric school buses
- Walk/Bike infrastructure for anyone to safely commute throughout Worcester
- Robust bike/walk systems
- Educate to improve use of transportation system alternatives
- Greenways – bicycle and pedestrian linear parkways
- Car-free Worcester
- Complete green streets
- Safe, bikeable streets, no-car streets
- Free, affordable reliable public transportation
- Improve public transportation infrastructure citywide and regional
- Complete green streets – reduction of impervious surfaces; bioretention planters/rain gardens
- Develop bike and walking routes
- Public transit options (comprehensive)

Green and Blue Spaces – Continued improvements in open space, water quality, and tree planting were important to participants.

- Improve urban [tree] canopy
- Water gardens, preserve trees
- Urban forest – trees in every neighborhood, caring for existing trees, accommodation of trees with street and sidewalk structures
- Complete green streets – reduction of impervious surfaces; bioretention planters/rain gardens
- Supportive of urban forest; trees in every yard and community orchard; street trees
- Increased support or grants for watershed/water quality not included in Blue Space program
- Easy access to open space and parks – environmental justice

Waste – Although waste-related items were not a top priority for all groups, it was mentioned by many.

- City composting for food waste—neighborhood or collection – waste stream
- Composting – large institutions and residential
- Waste diverted into anaerobic digester and recycled locally

Equity – Ensuring that Worcester’s most vulnerable residents are fully included in the Green Worcester process and implementation was a high priority for many participants.

- Easy access to open space and parks – environmental justice
- All projects designed to prevent financial and health harm to most vulnerable
- Center equity and deep democracy over the Green Worcester planning process
- Affordable housing and subsidies for low-income individuals

Food – Enhancing Worcester’s food security and food justice programs also emerged as a priority sustainability issue.

- Access to healthy food and food opportunity to grow their own; affordable, healthy, culturally inclusive
- Gardens and urban farms
- Educating youth + all public on urban farming – include schools – see Envirothon

Disaster and Climate Resilience – In addition to the items related to reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, one group focused on preparedness for climate change effects and disasters.

- Organize communities to withstand disasters (disaster planning)
- Resilient system to withstand climate disasters, localized distributed power microgrids throughout city
- Built infrastructure to support any + all community members through power loss to maintain warmth in home and inclement weather
- Climate and civic education

Planning and Implementation Process – Participants placed a priority on issues related to the planning and implementation process.

- Continued public outreach – workshops, townhalls
- Collaboration with surrounding municipalities and institutions
- WPS initiatives – buy local; education about glyphosphates and Monsanto; health effects on children; water quality in WPS
- Coordinated initiatives for all projects
- Easily accessible info on all Green Worcester projects with contact info for an ombudsman
- Youth as sustainability ambassadors
- Better design for society’s health
- Healthy homes and schools (asthma, lead); green building ordinance

