

**Strengths and Opportunities
to Improve Access
to Healthy Food and Active Living
in Worcester, Massachusetts
through
Land Use and Transportation**

Worcester Food and Active Living Policy Council

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Originally prepared June 2011 by the Worcester Mass in Motion partnership through a grant from the Mass in Motion Municipal Wellness and Leadership program of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health to the Worcester Division of Public Health. Henceforth revised by Worcester Food and Active Living Policy Council.

The impact of the built environment on food access and active living potential is receiving increasing focus in public health. A significant body of research has demonstrated that people walk and bike more when they have greater access to convenient, safe, aesthetically pleasing facilities and eat more healthily when they have greater access to healthy food outlets. Publications such as *Local Government Actions to Prevent Childhood Obesity* (Institute of Medicine, 2009) and *Action Strategies Toolkit: A Guide for Local and State Leaders Working to Create Healthy Communities and Prevent Childhood Obesity* (Leadership for Healthy Communities/Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2009) lay out action steps for higher level strategies. These action steps must be tailored to local conditions.

The walkability and bikeability and access to healthy food – or not - of a community reflects current public policies governing land use and transportation layered on an environment resulting from history, geography and economics. These policies can be adjusted to achieve an environment offering greater opportunity to make healthy choices. Policy change complements the more traditional public health approaches of promotion or programming with less immediate but more fundamental effects that have potential for greater equity and sustainability over the long term.

This document is an initial attempt to describe the local public policy landscape in Worcester relevant for healthy food access and opportunity for physical activity, with reference to state and federal levels. It identifies the presence and absence of public policy factors suggested by research and other work to be relevant at the local level for healthy food access and an active community environment plus stakeholders involved in existing processes. It is a reference to help entities and individuals outside these systems who are interested in their utility for chronic disease prevention understand factors that shape the built environment and how to participate in decision making. This document is a work in progress, and corrections, additions and questions may be submitted to the Worcester Food and Active Living Policy Council (www.worcesterfoodpolicy.org).

This policy and process description expands on the findings of the Community Health Assessment and Group Evaluation (CHANGE) assessment required as part of Mass in Motion year 1 activities. CHANGE was a broad survey to provide a community snapshot of public policy plus organizational policy in the health care, school, worksite and community-based organization sectors. This snapshot approach did not allow for detailed examination of municipal plan and policy language and identification of specific opportunities. We therefore included in our initial Worcester Community Action Plan a goal “to lay the groundwork for changes to City policies and practices that will consider the health impact of the built environment by describ[ing] how City of Worcester policy impacts healthy food access and physical activity/active living opportunities through “collaborat[ion] with [city partners on a] written description of *strengths and opportunities* to improve healthy eating/active living through health, land use, and transportation policy development, implementation and enforcement”.

OPPORTUNITIES IN WORCESTER FOR CHRONIC DISEASE PREVENTION THROUGH MUNICIPAL BUILT ENVIRONMENT POLICY CHANGE

Worcester Department of Public Health or Board of Health actions:

- Request placement on distribution list for land use applications
- Review land use applications (Preliminary and Definitive Plans); seek parallel to process whereby Planning Board requests advisory opinion from Conservation Commission on potential impacts of development proposals to on- and off-site wetlands
- Attend weekly Interdepartmental Review Team meetings where developers receive informal review of plans, comment on implications for food and active living access
- Continue cross-agency communication begun under Mass in Motion

Community and WDPH/BOH actions:

Monitor meeting agendas and minutes for the following agencies. Attend meetings and testify as opportunity presents to raise awareness of healthy food access and walking and biking conditions.

- Planning Board (specific development projects)
- Zoning Board of Appeals (variances, special permits)
- City Council
- City Council standing committees (Economic Development, Public Works, Traffic and Parking, Public Health and Human Services)
- Central Mass Metropolitan Planning Organization (CMMPO)
- MassDOT design hearings

Advocate for citizen input on transportation (or bicycle/pedestrian issues specifically) through board or other mechanism

Support completion by health promotion personnel and advocates of Citizen Planner Training Collaborative (www.umass.edu/masseptc) core courses to increase knowledge of land use decision making

- Seek appointment of these qualified health promotion personnel and advocates to relevant Worcester boards and commissions

Monitor developments at state level (GreenDOT, Healthy Transportation Compact) and federal level (transportation reauthorization, Safe Routes to School, Complete Streets) and provide input as opportunity arises.

Plans

Functional plans

Development and implementation of food plan (plan should assess conditions; set policy and environment change goals and objectives; describe citizen involvement, strategies, activities)

Development and implementation of bicycle/pedestrian plan (plan should assess conditions; set policy and environment change goals and objectives; describe citizen involvement, strategies, activities)

Stronger physical activity connection in revision of Open Space and Recreation Plan

Implementation of relevant Climate Action Plan policy goals (food, transportation elements)

Area plans - Inclusion of food access and active living elements in area plans; advocate for community definition of “pedestrian-friendly”; advocate to require citizen input on projects

Master Plan – Inclusion of food and active transportation elements in any planned update

Policies

Given the absence of regular master plan updates, maximize walkability and bikeability and healthy food access in routine project review by including more specific bicycle and pedestrian considerations in Standards for Review.

Transportation: Given constraints on new construction and municipal public works (e.g. new sidewalks, repairs), maximize walkability and bikeability by specifying design standards to routinely accommodate walking and bicycling (design, public works) in maintenance and repair as well as for private development. Prioritize pedestrian and bicycle accommodation in public works maintenance based on mapping of routes and destinations.

Processes for:

- citizen input on transportation decisions
- health impact assessment of development
- prioritizing routes and destinations for public works improvements

Clear permitting process for farmers markets and mobile markets

Permitted uses under zoning to accommodate urban agriculture

Board of Health resolution on built environment

City Council resolution that all municipal decisions and policies should consider health, recreation, active living, and access to healthy food

City Council adoption of Complete Streets policy

City Council adoption and later expansion of Streetscape Policy and Urban Design Guidelines

School Committee support of Safe Routes to School expansion

School Committee/Administration support for biking to school (*not principals' decision*)

Ordinance change to allow bicycles on sidewalk (at minimum children, outside central business district)

Use of completed sidewalk inventory to prioritize repairs

Mapping (GIS)

- Walking routes / routes to destinations
- Gaps in information, including bicycle/pedestrian accommodations

METHODOLOGY

To evaluate how elements and language in Worcester's plans and policies support access to healthy food and active living, we needed to answer several questions:

What are the elements that support an environment with destinations reachable by walking or biking? Such macro factors include:

- Density
- Mixed use
- Permitted land uses

What design standards exist in land use and transportation regulations that require consideration of access to healthy food and active transportation and how are they applied? Such micro factors include:

- Standards
- Review processes

How can the goal of chronic disease prevention be brought into the process?

We asked selected city staff and elected officials (1) what policy and plan documents exist, (2) the processes by which policies and plans are developed, and (3) how policies and plans are created, modified and implemented.

No one authoritative instrument exists to examine such municipal policies. We adapted audit and checklist instruments developed by researchers and others for use in reviewing the documents.

Bridging the Gap / Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Community Obesity Measures Project: This set of instruments was developed for research on presence and strength of food policy environment and active living policy factors in municipal plans and policies.

Domains used: walkability, traffic calming, active recreation, passive recreation, bicycle accommodation

Walk Friendly Communities: This new program, sponsored by the US Department of Transportation and FedEx and maintained by the UNC Highway Safety Research Center's Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center, "...serves to both recognize existing walkable communities and to provide a framework for communities seeking to improve their walkability...through policies, projects and programs...identify areas of needed improvement and use the tools to develop specific solutions...any specific efforts to create a community-wide culture of walking...how communities are supporting walking and pedestrian safety and how well those efforts are working".

Domains used: planning and engineering

University of Washington Active Community Environments: This checklist was developed to help communities evaluate their environments and prioritize change.

Domains used: Planning policies, regulation and funding; subdivision and site design review for new developments, public works standards for streets and public areas, maintenance of bicycle and pedestrian facilities,

PLANS AND POLICIES

Plans

Master Plan: Worcester's most recent plan was completed in 1987. Elements include Housing, Open Space and Recreation, Economic Development, Infrastructure, Transportation, Community Facilities and Cultural Activities. Currently, there is no intention to update the master plan due primarily to cost constraints. Massachusetts General Law allows a municipality to substitute its Zoning Ordinance and map for an updated master plan. The Zoning Ordinance and map are periodically amended, most recently in 2013. Although it has not been updated, some recommendations in the Master Plan have been implemented in the intervening time.

Area planning and incremental zoning changes do not provide for the vision-setting and community input that underlie a master planning process. Without an updated master plan, the main routes to influence land use by private entities are zoning and project review. Policies rather than plans underlie these processes.

Functional plans

Open Space and Recreation Plan: Last approved in 2006, the Open Space and Recreation Plan is currently revised for submission to the state in May 2013. This mechanism of the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs serves to help municipalities assess recreation and open space needs and resources and recommend a strategy to help it to take full advantage of its opportunities over the next seven years. It is a requirement for participation in the grant programs offered by the Massachusetts Division of Conservation Services. The plan includes an inventory of lands of conservation and recreation interest, community vision, needs analysis, goals and objectives and a 7-year action plan.

Climate Action Plan: An Energy Task Force comprising City departments and community representatives, led by the Regional Environmental Council, developed a broad survey of possible measures after Worcester joined the Cities for Climate Protection campaign of ICLEI Local Governments for Sustainability in 2003. The plan was approved by City Council in 2007. An Energy Officer was hired to work in Planning and Regulatory Services in 2009, and a new Task Force was convened in 2010. An actionable plan with measurable goals and objectives is currently under development.

Area plans

Worcester does limited area planning. There is no master list, but existing area plans include City Square, Gateway Park, North Main, Canal District, and Washington Square. A draft plan is under development for a Theatre District. Plans are created by city agencies (e.g. Executive Office of Economic Development) as well as community groups or business associations. There is no history of involvement by the Worcester Division of Public Health.

Local legislation

Home Rule Charter

General Revised Ordinances Part I

- Chapter 11 Licenses
- Chapter 12 Streets and Sidewalks
- Chapter 13 Traffic and Parking
- Chapter 14 Street Vendors and Pawnbrokers

General Revised Ordinances Part II Organization of City Agencies

Zoning Ordinance and map

Use regulations: The Zoning Ordinance details uses by zone (residential, general, commercial and manufacturing). All uses not listed as “Y” or “SP” (special permit) are prohibited.

Site Plan Review: Article V of the Zoning Ordinance includes Standards for Review the Planning Board must apply in reviewing all applications.

Land use regulations

Subdivision Regulations:
Design standards

Parking Plan Approval

Special Permit Regulations

Site Plan Approval Regulations

Board of Health regulations

Massachusetts General Laws

- Chapter 40A The Zoning Act
- Chapter 90 Motor Vehicles and Aircraft
- Chapter 6C Massachusetts Department of Transportation/ Section 33 Healthy Transportation Compact
- Chapter 44B Massachusetts Community Preservation Act

Other policies

Design guidelines: Several departments and divisions collaborated on development of *Urban Design Guidelines* and a *Streetscape Policy* unique to Worcester. Both were submitted to City Council in 2009 but not adopted. They are currently under revision with resubmission to City Council expected in spring 2013. The guidelines and policy apply to an area known both as the Design Guidelines District and the Streetscape Policy District and are intended to foster an environment that invites pedestrian travel in the area. If successful, they could be a model for other parts of the city.

The *Design Guidelines* “address the urban design of the District. They focus on the pedestrian environment and the public experience of the street and focus on massing,

scale and style, while allowing for and encouraging design creativity.” Principles include build-to lines, streetwall height/stepbacks, prominent elements, façade articulation/composition, ground level façade, architectural expression, and surface parking and service locations.

The *Streetscape Policy* “regulates the type and use of materials as well as the dimensions and the construction of the public ways in downtown Worcester.” Elements include street furniture (trash receptacles, benches, bicycle racks, bus shelters, bollards), lighting, traffic equipment and signage, sidewalks and surfaces (paving materials, crosswalks, sidewalk and crosswalk accessibility), and street trees and plantings (including traffic and pedestrian visibility).

Annual budget and Capital Improvement Program/Capital Infrastructure Budget: The annual budget presents mission and overview of responsibilities for each department and division plus budget summary, budget overview (narrative) and departmental/divisional activities as appropriate.

Every year DPWP submits a four-year Capital Improvement Program to the City Manager listing projected expenditures on capital needs citywide. It is sometimes included in the formal budget document submitted to City Council. The Capital Improvement Program always includes the following categories: sewer (equipment, rehabilitation); water (equipment, rehabilitation); street rehabilitation and sidewalks; and transportation projects (improvements). Streets and sidewalks are funded by Chapter 90 funds (state reimbursement administered through MassDOT) and tax levy dollars. Transportation projects (i.e. new facilities or improvements) are funded by the Transportation Improvement Program (federal aid for eligible roadways), state transportation bond bill, and tax levy.

Commonwealth Capital application: This municipal development scorecard for state programs and grants is in the process of being changed, and municipalities were not required to submit as of FY2012. Although public health is not an explicit goal of the program, Commonwealth Capital principles support healthy community design. The 2011 application contained thirty-four measures in ten categories rating a community’s smart growth characteristics and actions. The ten categories were (1) Plan for and promote livable communities and plan regionally; (2) Zone for and permit concentrated development and mixed use; (3) Expand housing opportunities; (4) Make efficient decisions and increase job and business opportunities; (5) Protect land and ecosystems; (6) Use natural resources wisely; (7) Promote clean energy; (8) Provide transportation choice; (9) Advance equity; (10) Promote sustainable development via other actions. Worcester’s most recent score was 106, well above the median score of 76.

Other relevant documents

Central Massachusetts Regional Transportation Plan: “Long-range planning document that describes the region’s current transportation system and how that system should be maintained or modified over the next 20 years. The new federal planning provisions passed in August of 2005, requires the CMMPO to update the RTP every 4 years, since it presides over a region that does not meet federal air quality standards for ozone.”

Transportation Improvement Program: “The TIP lists federal-aid eligible highway, bridge and transit projects that are expected to be implemented over the next 5 years. This document must be financially constrained -- there must be a reasonable expectation that the projects listed there will be implemented based on available funding. A new list is compiled over the course of every year and endorsed by the CMMPO.” Communities submit projects for inclusion by the CMMPO in the TIP. Municipalities typically pay for design.

Central Massachusetts Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan: “The goal of the plan is to: (1) inventory existing facilities; (2) identify physical and other impediments to walking and bicycling in the region; and (3) develop strategies to increase the use of walking and bicycling modes as transportation options in the region. Further, the plan provides a clearer understanding of the value of walking and bicycling in the transportation planning process and how the provision of facilities and infrastructure for these modes is important in helping to create healthy and livable communities. It is the intent of the CMMPO to evaluate its past and present efforts and offer direction and recommendations for the future development or improvement of pedestrian and bicycle facilities within individual communities and the region as a whole.”

MassDOT Project Development and Design Guide: In 2006 the Massachusetts Department of Transportation released a design manual considered a model for consideration of the needs of all roadway users. All federal aid transportation projects in Massachusetts are subject to the requirements of this guide (although exceptions may be granted in response to requests by municipalities). Local projects funded with Chapter 90 or tax levy funds are not required to meet these standards, although paperwork for reimbursement under Chapter 90 is reviewed by MassDOT district offices.

Worcester Regional Mobility Study: The WRMS was a partnership between the Central Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization (CMMPO), the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC), and the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT). The goal of this comprehensive state-sponsored study of the transportation network within the greater Worcester area, including the City of Worcester and the communities surrounding Worcester, was to improve the movement of people and goods through the urban core of Central Massachusetts. The recommendations were to enhance economic opportunities along transportation corridors, improve safety, and improve multimodal connections among businesses, neighborhoods, and communities. Among other recommendations, the WRMS addressed improvements at several intersections for bicyclist/pedestrian safety.

STATUS OF HEALTHY FOOD ENVIRONMENT AND ACTIVE COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT

HEALTHY FOOD ACCESS

Rationale: Data about food environments are increasingly available, for example, the USDA Food Environment Atlas. Such data illustrate geographic availability (where stores are located or not) or accessibility (affordability as well as availability). The policy audit complements these other forms of data by illuminating factors that influence whether and where various types of food outlets and supports exist.

Documents reviewed:

- Master Plan
- Open Space and Recreation Plan
- Climate Action Plan
- Zoning Ordinance
- General Revised Ordinances
 - Chapter 11 Licenses
 - Chapter 14 Street Vendors and Pawnbrokers

Audit domains:

- Food store provisions
- Fast food restaurants
- Healthy / locally grown food access/availability
- Local food production
- Other policies:
 - Menu/calorie/nutrition labeling
 - Healthy food sold in government worksites
 - Food policy councils

Findings:

CHANGE assessment: There are few local public policies regarding food availability in Worcester. This finding is not surprising given the role of private versus public entities, i.e. food producers, processors, distributors, retailers and preparers.

Plans

The Master Plan includes no references to food access.

Worcester has no functional (i.e. stand-alone) food plan. Factors that do not exist in Worcester policy and could be addressed in such a plan include:

- public-private partnerships related to food production, food accessibility / availability, urban agriculture-related items, etc.
- how local government bodies will work together to implement food-related policy
- how zoning code / land use regulations will be amended to incorporate food-related elements
- economic development/incentives to facilitate healthy food access / availability

The 2006 Open Space and Recreation Plan contained references to community gardens and urban agriculture for their value as open space. Plan goals and objectives included:

- encouraging community gardens within more densely populated areas;
- protecting tax foreclosure property by transferring significant parcels of open space that can be preserved as conservation land or utilized as community gardens to Worcester Conservation Commission;
- promoting community gardens, identifying parcels;
- safeguarding agriculture through protection of existing and potential sources of arable land in community garden model and provision of appropriate municipal supports for farmers' markets;
- using vacant lots for "urban gardening" program

The original Climate Action Plan contained language encouraging community gardens ("Protect open space, support community gardens, and plant more trees") for their value in combating climate change.

Existing area plans do not address food access.

Policy

The following factors were reviewed in the code, or policy, audits.

Food store provisions

"Retail food sales" is the only food store category in the Zoning Ordinance, making no distinction among supermarkets, grocery stores or convenience stores. Retail food sales are permitted by-right in some but not all business zones (e.g. not office zones) and prohibited in residential. There are no ordinances, regulations or incentives with language related to healthy food availability in food stores, such as:

- Requirement for fresh fruit and vegetable options
- Candy product placement
- Outward-facing labels for poor nutrient foods
- Contiguous floor space for products meeting certain nutritional requirements

Fast food restaurant-related zoning

"Drive-through service", "Food service establishment" and "Food service establishment/fast food drive-in" are defined in the Zoning Ordinance. Food service (drive-through) is permitted by special permit in some business zones (e.g. not office) and not in residential. Food service is permitted by right or special permit in some business zones (e.g. not office) and not in residential. No ordinances contain language concerning fast food outlet density restrictions nor any restrictions / prohibitions within certain distance of schools ("healthy school zone").

Healthy / locally grown food

Relevant definitions in the Zoning Ordinance are “Agricultural, commercial” and “Community garden”. The only language in the use table relating to food production is “Agriculture, horticulture, viticulture, flora culture on parcels less than 5 acres”, which is permitted by-right in all zones but prohibited in residential zones. There is no language in the Zoning Ordinance or other ordinances regarding farmers’ markets, green or fresh fruit and vegetable carts, other mobile food vendors, or urban agriculture.

No single license is listed under General Ordinances for operations that provide access to farm-fresh foods, although a new permit for farmers’ markets became available in 2011. Information in the General Ordinances Chapter 11 Licenses on licensing authorities (i.e. License Commission, Police Commissioner, DPWP Commissioner) does not correspond directly to information in Chapter 14 Street Vendors and Pawnbrokers, which lists license types. Relevant DPWP licenses include: Open Air Sales Vendors, Sidewalk Food Sales, Sidewalk Merchandise Sales, and Street Fairs. Relevant WPD licenses include: Transient Vendors (Hawkers and Peddlers), Street Vendors, Temporary Charitable Events, Stationary Vendor. There is no language in these ordinances regarding acceptance of food assistance program or Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) and/or coupon or voucher. The Worcester Farmers’ Market does not accept EBT, although it does accept senior coupons.

Menu / calorie / nutrition labeling

There are no menu labeling provisions in the General Revised Ordinances or Board of Health regulations. Plans by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health for regulations that would apply to chains with 20 or more outlets were put on hold due to preemption by federal regulations still under development.

Of the 16 Standards for Review in Site Plan Review of the Zoning Ordinance, none require or encourage the Planning Board to consider relationship or access to types of destinations such as food stores.

No Board of Health regulations address access to healthy food.

ACTIVE COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT

Rationale: Plans and policies for both land use and transportation affect the built environment and, through it, mode choice. We reviewed plans and policies using several markers developed by researchers and advocates. We verified whether plans contain relevant elements and whether these elements contain references to markers of walkability and bikeability. We examined whether policies permit particular land uses and whether land use or transportation design standards or requirements contain relevant markers.

We did not audit for other, more programmatic markers in these tools, including enforcement, education, and encouragement.

Documents reviewed:

- Worcester Master Plan
- Open Space and Recreation Plan
- Climate Action Plan
- Urban Design Guidelines
- Streetscape Policy
- Zoning Ordinance
- Land use regulations
 - Subdivision
 - Parking Plan Approval
 - Special Permits
 - Site Plan Approval
- General Revised Ordinances
 - Chapter 12 Streets and Sidewalks
 - Chapter 13 Traffic and Parking
- Public works regulations
 - Standard Specifications and Details

Audit domains:

- Walkability
- Recreation (active, passive)
- Bicycle accommodation
- Trails and greenways
- Other policies
- Citizen participation

Findings:

CHANGE assessment: More local public policies affecting the active community environments exist than policies affecting food availability. This is not surprising given government's key role in transportation and land use and, in turn, their impact on routine physical activity in the form of walking and bicycling.

Plans

The Master Plan has no separate pedestrian and/or bicycle element. The transportation element addresses only vehicle circulation and not pedestrian and/or bicycle considerations. There are no walking/pedestrian, traffic calming, active recreation, bicycle or trail-related provisions in the Master Plan. The introduction does encourage passive recreational opportunities, and the Plan does support mixed use development.

There is no inventory of existing pedestrian and/or bicycle facilities, identification of deficiencies in networks, or prioritized list of improvements.

The Plan does not include a policy that public facilities such as community centers, municipal buildings, libraries, etc. are sited to be accessible by public transit or walkable from neighborhoods, and/or grouped with other public uses.

Functional plans

Worcester has no functional (i.e. stand-alone) bicycle, pedestrian or combined plan.

Factors that could be addressed in such a plan include:

- performance indicators
- target mode share for walking and bicycling
- how local government bodies will work together to implement the plan
- how zoning code / subdivision regulations will be amended to incorporate the plan's guiding policies
- what other community policies or documents authorize, allow or enable plan development and revision

The 2006 Open Space and Recreation Plan supported maintenance and development of both active and passive recreation facilities for their value to the community and individual health generally, although it had no force to require creation or maintenance. It contained no references to walkability or traffic calming. It included an inventory of City as well as non-City, publicly accessible facilities (e.g. Greater Worcester Land Trust lands). It provided a brief overview of on-road and off-road bicycling facilities as well as hiking facilities. It supported and encouraged development of bike/pedestrian-related trails/paths/greenways, but it did not address bicycle lanes or bicycle parking facilities. It did not identify corridors (such as utility corridors or abandoned rail lines) for potential trail development. The implementation plan goals and objectives were not presented in measurable form.

The original Climate Action Plan contained draft municipal policy recommendations for making Worcester more walkable and bikable for the value in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, but it did not include a specific implementation plan with measurable goals and objectives. It did not contain specific details on crosswalks, traffic-calming provisions, markers of active recreation, bike lanes, bike parking facilities or bike/pedestrian-related trails/paths/greenways. It encouraged passive recreation elements. The new plan under development will contain recommendations, from a variety of community partners, to affect the whole city as well as municipal operations.

Area plans

Existing area plans do not generally address walking and bicycling factors. A plan may reference pedestrian friendliness, but there is no clear standard applied. Neither is it clear who defines it, nor what is required or encouraged.

Policy

Presence/absence and location of the following factors were reviewed in the policy (code) audit. Overall:

*there is no reference to or requirement of assessment of potential impact of proposed development on health (e.g. air quality, traffic/pedestrian safety, access to healthy food, non-motorized transportation)

*nearly all policy language relative to walkability, pedestrian access, etc. encourages rather than requires adherence (exception: paved sidewalk on one side of streets for new developments).

Walkability

Complete Streets

Worcester does not have a local Complete Streets policy that would require consideration of all users in all projects, including those implemented with Chapter 90 or tax levy funds.

Mixed use/Density

The Zoning Ordinance allows a mix of uses in many higher density residential zoning districts, business districts, and mixed use overlay zoning districts, all of which allow for mixed use development along corridors and in historic triple decker neighborhoods. There are also provisions that allow for home-based businesses. The City has an Arts Overlay District which allows for live/work space and Adaptive Reuse Overlay Districts which also allow for mix of uses and less parking than more suburban-style developments to encourage mixed use and redevelopment of historic structures, often located on brownfield sites.

In 2008 the City amended the Zoning Ordinance and map to modify one parking overlay district and create four new parking overlay districts. These overlay districts allow for the reuse and rehabilitation of buildings that do not conform to the ordinance's parking requirements without seeking further relief; thereby encouraging reuse of existing buildings and discouraging the demolition of buildings for additional surface parking. Through the overlay districts, the City hopes to encourage the continuing redevelopment of areas such as the Canal District while maintaining the historic character of the streets such as buildings close to the street line which encourage walkability and vibrancy of these areas.

The following Articles of the Zoning Ordinance allow development in a more compact form that promotes walkability.

Article VII Density bonuses (purpose: "...promote the provision of safe, sanitary and affordable housing for all sectors of the population of Worcester")

Article VIII Cluster zoning (purpose: "...provide for cluster subdivision developments and cluster developments of designed groups of single family dwellings as a means for more efficient and effective development of Worcester while also protecting its sensitive natural environment and providing for preservation of open space in both natural and improved states")

Mixed Use Development Overlay: Mixed use overlay district requires devotion to recreation and open space of at least 5% of gross floor area devoted to other proposed uses; "at least half of the recreation and open space must be built as part of proposed structure; recreation and open space includes the provisions of places, activities and/or amenities, either built or natural, which are free and accessible to the public." While the MUD review standards include "consideration of the traffic to be generated and its impact" and "location and design of vehicular access and parking facilities", they do not specifically require consideration of impact on pedestrian access. There have been no applications for this overlay since inception.

Development review

Per regulation development proposals are routed to multiple agencies for review. Parking Plan and Special Permit applications should be sent to WDPH, but Site Plan applications are not.

Development review requires only general review of pedestrian circulation within the site and access to the street and adjacent developments. There are no distinctions made for (residential) subdivisions, worksites or commercial areas.

Preliminary application (optional): "demonstrate how the proposed development impacts upon each of the standards for review...with particular reference to...:

3. Dimensions and number of all vehicular and pedestrian circulation elements, including streets and roadways, driveways, entrances, curbs, curb cuts, parking spaces, loading spaces, access aisles, sidewalks, walkways and pathways.
6. Impact upon traffic and pedestrian movement...

Definitive Site Plan Review: Application includes Impact Statement "analyzing how the proposed development impacts on each of the standards for review...with particular reference to how [it] will impact upon the natural, built and operating systems of the City including open space...traffic and pedestrian movement...recreation and other similar amenities." Of the 16 Standards for Review in Site Plan Review:

1. Adequacy and arrangement of vehicular traffic access and circulation including intersections, road widths, pavement surfaces, dividers and traffic controls.
2. Adequacy and arrangement of pedestrian traffic access and circulation, walkway structures, control of intersections with vehicular traffic and overall pedestrian convenience.

8. In the case of an apartment complex or other multiple dwelling, the adequacy of useable common property or open space.
15. Adequacy and impact on the regional transportation system.

Review standards do not require “pedestrian-friendly” building design, e.g. obvious pedestrian entrance, pedestrian level windows, weather protection, architectural details and pedestrian signage on the street.

There are no residential design guidelines to increase eyes on the street (e.g. to limit garage-fronts on houses and encourage alley-access or set back garages, front doors facing the street, front porches). There are no limitations to front fence heights to increase visibility.

There are no development guidelines for residential, commercial or employment buildings to be built close to the street, with parking located behind, below or to the side. There are no surface lot size and design requirements, including pedestrian and vehicle separation (walkways), locating lots to side or behind businesses, alternative use of parking lots, landscaping, etc. Planning Board reviews plans for parking lots with 9 or more spaces with respect to...safety to pedestrians and vehicles using the facilities and using abutting streets (IV.7.A.2 Jurisdiction). Planning Board shall review the plan in respect to...safety to pedestrians and vehicles using the facility and abutting streets ... lighting ...curbing ...walkways and landscaping...Parking and loading areas shall be arranged for convenient access, egress and safety to pedestrians and vehicles (IV.7.A.2 Design Standards).

There are no pedestrian-friendly block-length standards (600 feet or less) or connectivity standards for new developments, or convenient pedestrian access requirements

There is no connectivity policy to discourage cul-de-sacs.

There is no requirement for level and continuous sidewalks at driveways so they do not look like roadways.

Standards do not limit the number of driveways on arterial streets (i.e. access management), which reduces danger to bicyclists and pedestrians by reducing number of turning movements.

Subdivision Regulations, Article X Required improvements: 10’ sidewalk area required on both sides, but only one side must be paved. The only specifications about intersections concern wheelchair ramps (required).

Public works standards

Worcester adheres to design standards in the following publications. (Descriptions below utilize information available on the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) website.)
A Policy on Geometric Design of Highways and Streets: This publication of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) is

known as the Green Book. FHWA has adopted applicable parts of the Green Book as the national standard for roads on the National Highway System or NHS (all interstates and some other primary routes). States must adopt the Green Book design criteria standards for them to apply to roadways that are not part of the NHS. Standards adopted by a State are usually based on the Green Book criteria.

Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices: Published by FHWA, the MUTCD represents the national standards governing all traffic control devices “on all public streets, highways, bikeways, and private roads open to public traffic”. Non-compliance with MUTCD can result in loss of federal-aid funds and significant increase in tort liability. Traffic control devices include road markings, signs, and traffic signals/controls.

City practice is to make pedestrian and bicycle accommodations “when it can”. The following statements refer to presence or absence of written criteria in City of Worcester documents:

There is no written sidewalk retrofit policy to fill gaps, repair sidewalks and provide new sidewalks as needed. There is no written policy to prioritize selection based on connection to particular destinations, although priority has been given to areas around Worcester Public Schools in recent years.

Street standards do not include buffer strips between sidewalks and the street to provide more comfort and safety from traffic, place for street trees, and snow storage.

There are no standards about sidewalk furniture, landscaping, art, lighting; amenities like public restrooms, water fountains, signs or wayfinding systems; public spaces to include benches, garbage cans and/or other amenities (water fountains, restrooms) for bicyclists and pedestrians.

Standards do not require pedestrian-scaled lighting (8-12 feet high downward-pointing lighting) for urban pedestrian streets, designated pedestrian corridors, plazas and other pedestrian areas.

Standards do not require utility access covers to be even with street surface and storm sewer grates be designed to avoid trapping bicycle wheels and not be slippery.

There are no standards for busy intersections that include well-marked or textured crosswalks, pedestrian refuges, curb extensions to shorten the crossing distances and improve visibility, pedestrian and bicyclist signal actuators, signs, or other devices to improve crossings. There is no detail on crosswalks, such as standard marking type, selection of locations, maintenance, or how stop/yield sign locations are selected.

Number and width of automobile travel lanes are specified, but number and width for bike lanes or wide shoulders, parking lanes, buffer strips and sidewalks for each type of street are not.

There is no language in any policies about traffic calming or elements of it. Worcester has a few existing traffic calming features (traffic circles/roundabout/rotary, speed humps/tables, median with traffic island, curb extension/bulb-out, chicanes). DPWP previews crash data annually.

Street standards do include adequate sight distance so drivers and bike riders can see all other road users in time to avoid potential crashes.

A process has been worked out that enables the Commission on Disabilities to provide input on expenditure of the \$200,000 allocated annually for ADA accommodations.

Design

The Urban Design Guidelines encourage walkability through design elements but as guidelines they have no force to require developers to follow them and apply only to a small downtown district. The Guidelines do not address crosswalks, traffic calming, active recreation, passive recreation, bicycle lanes or bicycle parking facilities, or bike/pedestrian-related trails/paths/greenways.

The Streetscape Policy encourages walkability through type and use of materials, but as a guideline it encourages but does not require adherence by the Department of Public Works and Parks and applies only to a small downtown district. It does not address roadways or intersections. The Policy encourages but does not require bicycle lanes and bicycle parking facilities. It does not address traffic calming, active recreation, or passive recreation. It does not address bike/pedestrian-related trails/paths/greenways.

Recreation

Active: The Zoning Ordinance contains little language about recreation.

Recreational/service facilities (nonprofits) are permitted by right in institutional and business zones and by Special Permit in residential and manufacturing zones, and distinguished by category (such as health club and yoga studio). Indoor recreation/health clubs (for-profit) are permitted by right BL-MG and prohibited in residential, business (office), industrial park and institutional zones. Outdoor recreation (for profit) facilities are permitted by Special Permit BG-MG and prohibited in residential, BO, business (office), industrial park and institutional zones.

Passive: Zoning Ordinance provisions for open space, green space, parks, etc. do not reference value for physical activity.

Bicycle accommodation

Complete Streets

Worcester does not have a local Complete Streets policy that would require consideration of all users in all projects, including those implemented with Chapter 90 or tax levy funds.

Bicycle accommodation: Neither required nor addressed in any policy.

Bicycle parking facilities: The Streetscape Policy addresses bicycle parking (not required). Bicycle parking is therefore not required at employment sites, commercial and public facilities, or multifamily developments.

Trails/greenways

Bicycle/pedestrian-related trails/paths/greenways: These are neither required or encouraged in any policy. No incentives to create them have been established.

Other policies

Context Sensitive Design: Worcester does not have a local Context Sensitive Design (CSD) policy. CSD refers to “roadway standards and development practices that are flexible and sensitive to community values. CSD allows roadway design decisions to better balance economic, social and environmental objectives.” (Online TDM Encyclopedia, Victoria Transport Policy Institute, 2010).

Board of Health regulations: No Board of Health regulations address active living.

Citizen participation: Worcester has no advisory board, council or other venue for citizen input on bicycle/pedestrian or general transportation (i.e. not public transportation) issues or opportunities. Regulatory board meetings and City Council meetings are open to the public. Agendas are available through the City Clerk’s office.

There is no dedicated staff person specifically responsible for pedestrian and bicycle transportation in PRS or DPWP.

Capital Improvement Program

Annual budget for streets and sidewalks is allocated for 1) sidewalk improvements, 2) ADA improvements, 3) sidewalk improvements in conjunction with street resurfacing, 4) pavement improvement, and 5) street resurfacing. Chapter 90 funds related to streets and sidewalks are allocated to 1) sidewalk improvements in conjunction with street resurfacing and 2) street resurfacing.

Approximately \$7 million is allocated annually for streets and sidewalks. In 2010 City Council approved an investment of \$20 million of tax levy dollars over four years in streets and sidewalks above the annual allocation. This FY10-13 investment has been applied to neighborhood (residential streets), while the annual allocations of approximately \$7 million have been applied to arterials and “pass-through” streets. District City Councilors assisted with final selection of neighborhood streets in their district from DPWP lists of streets (from petition list and not) with greatest need based on Pavement Condition Index (PCI) score.

Prior to the FY10-13 street and sidewalk investment program, half the annual allocation for street and sidewalk repair and installation was programmed by DPWP and half was divided among district councilors for selection of streets in their districts from the petition list. No written criteria or guidelines for selection exist.

The Capital Improvement Program does not contain language about bicycle accommodation.

STAKEHOLDERS

Administration

Office of the City Manager

Executive Office of Economic Development

Department of Inspectional Services

Department of Public Works and Parks

Division of Engineering

Division of Parks, Recreation and Cemetery

Police Department

Division of Public Health

Fire Department

Law Department

Administration and Finance Department

City Council

Standing Committee on Economic Development: economic development, neighborhood development, housing development, marketing, workforce development, zoning, planning and regulatory service functions of City, and energy

Standing Committee on Public Works: hears petitions (sidewalks and streets); approval for state-funded work if street layout is being changed; public works (streets, water, sewers, sanitation, recycling, snow removal, construction of public buildings)

Standing Committee on Public Service and Transportation: cable TV and telecommunications, public transportation, street lighting, taxis, liveries

Standing Committee on Health and Human Services: public health, the elderly, veterans, human rights, equality of women, the disabled, Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding

Standing Committee on Traffic and Parking: ordinances about public streets, traffic patterns, parking patterns; traffic and parking ordinances and off-street parking facilities

Standing Committee on Youth, Parks and Recreation: youth, parks, playgrounds, recreation activities, Hope Cemetery

Boards and Commissions

There are three types:

Executive boards and commissions “establish policy for City departments and supervise department operations through an executive officer who is the administrative head of a City agency. The City Manager appoints all members without need for City Council confirmation.”

Regulatory boards and commissions “have responsibilities relating to the application and enforcement of laws and regulations, and have the power to adjudicate disputes regarding the application of laws and regulations; issue permits or licenses; and hear appeals from aggrieved persons complaining about administrative actions. The City Manager appoints all members without need for City Council confirmation.”

Advisory boards and commissions “provide advice and information to the City Council, the School Committee, and the City Manager. Such advice is not binding upon these agencies. Nominees to advisory committees must be confirmed by a majority vote of the City Council. The City Charter requires district representation for all boards classified as Advisory or Regulatory.”

Planning Board: Regulatory authority. One of Worcester’s two land use boards. Staffed by Planning and Regulatory Services. Agendas posted on the City Clerk’s website. PRS also sends them to email distribution list; anyone can request to be added to the list. Responsible for drawing lines on City’s official Zoning Map; responsible for enforcing subdivision control laws as well as site plan review. Enforces Chapter 40A and 41 of MGL as they apply to land use. Participating agency in the Massachusetts Environmental Protection Act review process.

Zoning Board of Appeals: Regulatory authority. One of Worcester’s two land use boards. Staffed by Planning and Regulatory Services. Agendas posted on the City Clerk’s website. PRS also sends them to email distribution list; anyone can request to be added to the list. Authorized to hear and decide appeals by any person aggrieved by reason of his inability to obtain a permit or enforcement action from an administrative officer under Chapter 40A.

Board of Health (Executive): Staffed by Worcester Department of Public Health. Reorganized per Public Health Task Force Recommendations 2010 to a 5-member board with executive authority, but a new Board has not been installed. Previously the Board’s responsibilities were limited to assisting the commissioner in carrying out his or her responsibilities.

Off-Street Parking Board (Executive): Maintains off-street parking facilities of the City.

Disabilities Commission (Advisory): Purpose is to bring about full and equal participation in all aspects of life in the City of Worcester.

Commission on Elder Affairs (Executive): Multiple functions including disabilities in the elderly, advising public agencies of the City, operation of Senior Center.

Community Development Block Grant Advisory Committee (Advisory): Makes recommendations to the City Manager regarding agencies and programs to be funded annually through CDBG.

Conservation Commission (Regulatory): Staffed by Planning and Regulatory Services. Enforces Massachusetts Wetland Protection Act and City of Worcester Wetlands Protection Ordinance; participates in Massachusetts Environmental Protection Act review process. Owns conservation land.

License Commission (Regulatory): Staffed by Planning and Regulatory Services. Responsible for issuance of licenses and promulgation of rules and regulations (e.g. outdoor seating).

Parks, Recreation and Cemetery Commission (Executive): Supervises, maintains and promulgates rules and regulations for 1200 acres of municipally owned parkland, operation of City-owned golf course, provision of athletic facilities, tennis courts and basketball courts.

Worcester Housing Authority (unclassified): Developer and landlord of local low-income housing programs.

Regional

Central Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization (CMMPO): “The Central Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization (CMMPO) was established in 1976 to undertake the comprehensive, continuing, and cooperative transportation planning process required by the United States Department of Transportation. The Central MA Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) is one of ten members of the CMMPO and it is the staff to this organization as well. The CMMPO is responsible for preparing and updating the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) and the Public Outreach Plan (POP) for the Central Massachusetts region that includes the City of Worcester and the surrounding 39 communities.”

Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC): “The Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) is the designated regional planning entity for the Central Massachusetts region, which includes the City of Worcester and the surrounding 39 communities encompassing the southern two-thirds of Worcester County. CMRPC provides municipal and regional planning for Land Use and Transportation, as well as a variety of Community Development services, Transit Planning for the region’s transit authority, Geographic Information Services (GIS), staffing for MORE (Municipalities Organized for Regional Effectiveness), and other programs. CMRPC collaborates with local, regional, state and federal officials, as well as

with legislators, in order to bring a regional perspective and a coordinated approach to the planning and development that occurs in this region.”

Worcester Regional Transit Authority: “The WRTA service area includes over half a million in population. It is the second largest regional transit authority in Massachusetts, serving 35 communities.”

State

MassDOT: There are 6 district offices around the state. Each MassDOT district office has designated bicycle/pedestrian coordinators. The District 3 office is located in Worcester and has 2 bicycle/pedestrian staff.

RESOURCES

Local

Geographic Information Systems (GIS)

Numerous local data layers exist, held by various agencies and organizations.

- Streets, zoning districts and overlays, city parkland, driveways, parking lots, ponds and streams, Census blocks and tracts, school quadrants, and City Council districts are among the relevant layers available from City of Worcester Technical Services.
- Sidewalks: Department of Public Works and Parks has an incomplete sidewalk inventory from approximately 2003. They have purchased software to complete the inventory.
- Pedestrian and bicycle crash data: Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission has compiled data on all bicycle and pedestrian crashes in the city, including analysis of crash clusters.
- Bus stop data: Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission expanded on a project of students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute to record attributes, including surrounding land use, of all bus stops in the city.
- Blue and green assets: MA Audubon worked with students of Worcester Polytechnic Institute to map all open space (water and land) in the city.
- “Green”: Division of Planning and Regulatory Services commissioned Clark University faculty to map “green” factors in the city, including factors as diverse as community gardens and solar or wind power installations.
- Food outlets: Regional Environmental Council / Hunger-Free and Healthy created a map of food outlets in the Main South area.
- Clark University, Worcester State University and Worcester Polytechnic Institute have all created layers as part of student projects.
- Food security: Worcester Polytechnic Institute has created layers as part of student projects.
- MassGIS: The state’s Office of Geographic Information is a statewide resource for geospatial technology and data. OLIVER, an online data viewer, is available to all.