

ANNUAL REPORT 2020

TURNING DATA INTO INSIGHT

www.wrrb.org



The Research Bureau

Actions Matter



Paul Kelly

Paul Kelly,
Regional President

At Berkshire Bank, we are acting on our vision of being a socially responsible 21st-century community bank that's guided by our Be FIRST values. Our commitment to purpose-driven performance is integrated into every aspect of our business.

This year, in response to COVID-19, we've adapted to prioritize the health, safety and economic resiliency of our communities, providing loan forbearance for customers, launching an employee assistance fund and fulfilling thousands of Paycheck Protection Program loans totaling over \$700 million. We also increased our annual Foundation giving by \$1 million, which supported many organizations in Worcester including the Research Bureau.

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CHAIR OF THE BOARD AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

DEAR FRIENDS OF THE RESEARCH BUREAU,

There is no question that the past year marked unprecedented challenges due to the global pandemic and its impact on our local community. Without hesitation, Worcester and its regional leaders pulled together and did whatever it took to keep our community strong. The Bureau thanks, salutes, and illuminates the real heroism and enormous resiliency exhibited by all in Greater Worcester.

While this heroism has been widespread and defies characterization, our medical and public health care workers deserve special mention. Given the importance of Worcester's health care institutions, such as UMass Memorial Healthcare, St. Vincent Hospital, Reliant Medical Group, the University of Massachusetts Medical School, and Edward M. Kennedy Community Health Center and Family Health Center, our medical practitioners have been on the front lines from the very beginning. While not as high profile, our essential workers at grocery stores, pharmacies, and other retail establishments also played critical roles in providing food, medicines, and other necessary supplies. Our municipal workers, such as teachers and public works staffers, provided crucial services to the public. Municipal leaders – particularly Mayor Petty, City Manager Augustus, Superintendent Binienda, and the city's Commissioner of Health and Human Services Dr. Matilde Castiel and Medical Director Dr. Michael Hirsch - have led by making difficult and controversial decisions objectively and transparently.

These ongoing responses to the pandemic have been supported by our employers, individuals, and families, by providing funding, volunteer hours, and in-kind expertise. Our philanthropic community has been crucial in these efforts, most visibly with the United Way of Central Massachusetts and the Greater Worcester Community Foundation collaborating with the city to create the Worcester Together Fund. Beyond the generous funding, this new initiative is providing needed and ongoing coordination between public, private, and community organizations' responses to the shifting needs of the pandemic.

The Bureau has been proud to be part of these ongoing responses and Worcester's resiliency, by continuing to meet our mission of "conducting independent, non-partisan research and analysis of public policy issues to promote informed public debate and decision-making." Through our innovative staff, strong board leadership, and committed supporters, the Bureau pivoted its research agenda to meet evolving needs in the pandemic response by providing key data and technical assistance, and collaborating with policymakers, public agencies, community institutions, and key stakeholders.

Our research agenda has included reports on specific subjects thrown into relief by the pandemic, most notably our *Broadening Broadband* report, since

we're all dependent on the internet for education, employment, civic engagement, and telehealth. The Bureau is proud that our work on this topic is being utilized by the City Council, School Committee, municipal staff, and other stakeholders, and we're supporting potential short and long term responses to this problem.

The Bureau has also incorporated an ongoing focus on the pandemic into our recurring reports and initiatives. This includes our work on municipal budgeting – which this year highlighted areas of particular volatility from the pandemic, and also our work on education beyond the digital divide. Even before the pandemic, we called attention to the need for appropriate investment of the state's promised Student Opportunity Act funding, and we're continuing to work on the implementation of the School Department's strategic plan to ensure innovative and effective educational initiatives.

In the meantime, the Bureau adjusted to the pandemic's limitations, and shifted to virtual programming for our governance and traditional objective issue-based forums. We were able to provide our Board with the opportunity to hear directly from Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito and Secretary of Housing and Economic Development Michael Kennealy about the state's economic development plan and response to the pandemic. We briefed the public on the key findings of our *Broadening Broadband* report and our 2020 Worcester Almanac, while continuing to provide technical assistance on a wide range of other issues, including walkability, fare free transit, and the impacts of the pandemic on the municipal and state budget plans. The relevance and topicality of the Bureau's work was made clear by the level of public and stakeholder interest, as well as national media coverage from the *New York Times* and *Huffington Post*, and regional media coverage from *FOX25*, *MassLive*, *Spectrum News 1*, *Talk of the Commonwealth*, the *Worcester Business Journal*, the *Worcester Telegram and Gazette*, and *WGBH*.

None of these responses by the Bureau to the pandemic would have been possible without the support and vision of our leadership on the Executive Committee and Board of Directors. Despite the disruptions posed by the pandemic, our leadership has continued the Bureau's commitment to independent and objective policy research, while recognizing the need to be nimble in identifying and addressing issues of emerging importance.

The Bureau's work couldn't have proceeded without the continued support of so many private companies, higher education institutions, non-profits, and philanthropies across Greater Worcester. This year's virtual Annual Meeting wouldn't be such a success without our range of sponsors, particularly the extraordinary support of Commerce Bank, a division of Berkshire Bank; AbbVie, and Country Bank. Beyond our Annual Meeting, the Bureau also receives much support from the private sector

through leadership and financial contributions, as well as significant in-kind contributions from highly skilled supporters. These contributors include PENTA Communications, which provides invaluable marketing assistance; Greenberg, Rosenblatt, Kull & Bitsoli, P.C. for their key financial and administrative support; the *Worcester Telegram and Gazette's* media sponsorship; and a project collaboration with the *Worcester Business Journal*. We recognize that the pandemic's demands have been unprecedented, and greatly appreciate the continued support and commitment from so many individuals, companies, and institutions across Greater Worcester.

Beyond our leadership and financial supporters, the Bureau's work has benefitted from collaboration and partnership with many other stakeholders, including elected officials, employers, public agency staff, non-profits, and volunteers. Our accomplishments are not solely those of the Bureau's dedicated staff, but instead represent all of your collective contributions, despite the most challenging conditions experienced in Greater Worcester in generations.

Many thanks to all for your support and engagement in our work. As we enter our 36th year during the pandemic, rest assured that the Bureau stands stronger than ever, and we look forward to continuing to serve the needs of Greater Worcester. We also want to mention that as noted by *Bloomberg News*, Worcester is ranked #8 nationally and #2 in New England "for a relatively strong recovery from the coronavirus recession", and the Bureau is committed to providing both the data and research necessary to ensure a strong recovery!



DEBORAH PENTA
Chair, Board of Directors



PAUL MATTHEWS
Executive Director and CEO

THE YEAR IN REVIEW

2020

THIS YEAR WAS ONE OF CHANGE. Executive Director and CEO Paul Matthews completed his first full year at the helm of The Research Bureau, staff offices moved from their longtime home at Assumption University to the Slater Building in downtown Worcester, and a global pandemic shut down in-person gatherings, casting a pall over many planned Research Bureau events and reports. Despite these changes, The Research Bureau remained focused on its mission of conducting independent, non-partisan research and analysis of public policy issues to promote good governance and informed public debate and decision-making.

RECURRING REPORTS & EVENTS

The sixth annual **Worcester Almanac** was released in September, fulfilling a community demand for a centralized compendium of information about the city and Greater Worcester. For the first time, The Research Bureau held a companion event, inviting a panel of industry experts who have made use of the report over the last five years to discuss its importance with a wider audience. In addition to the panel discussion, the program incorporated optional breakout groups, facilitated by WRRB Board members, on specific topics such as education, health, and children. Much as last year's edition of **Breaking Down the Budget** was especially important because of the impact of a new baseball stadium on municipal finances, this year's took on new meaning due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the uncertainties it created in the financial outlooks for the City of Worcester and Worcester Public Schools. The Research Bureau tackled the tough question of identifying which budgetary elements were most affected by the pandemic, while still making sure the document was streamlined and readable by the average Worcester resident. Like **Breaking Down the Budget**, the 32nd Thomas S. Green Public Service Awards was revamped due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Typically held in the spring, the Awards ceremony celebrated these unsung heroes in a video tribute with individual private ceremonies for each of this year's honorees.

Some reports from last year continued to lead to follow-up work for The Research Bureau in 2020. **The Implications of a Fare-Free WRTA** continues to be cited in an ongoing effort by community

members, including elected officials and longtime Research Bureau partners like the Chamber of Commerce, as part of an ongoing discussion on eliminating fares from transit buses in Worcester County. This year, staff testified at City Council and WRTA Advisory Board meetings and fulfilled media requests from outlets including the New York Times in an effort to keep the public and policymakers informed of the report's facts and figures. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Worcester Regional Transit Authority adopted a temporary fare-free model. Based on public inquiry, the Bureau released a follow-up publication **Bureau Brief: An Addendum to "Implications of a Fare Free WRTA"** examining the funding mechanisms for Worcester to consider if adopting a permanent fare-free policy. **Choosing a Better Voting System**, the 2019 report on Ranked Choice Voting and its history in Worcester, gained new relevance this year after an unrelated campaign successfully placed Ranked Choice Voting on the statewide ballot, reviving interest in The Research Bureau's locally-minded analysis of the subject. On the education front, The Research Bureau continued its partnership with the Worcester Education Collaborative and its involvement with the Worcester Public Schools by hosting two forums on the **Student Opportunity Act** that drew large crowds to hear about a new tool in the age-old effort to improve educational outcomes.

While The Research Bureau focuses on public policy broadly, new work done over the course of 2020 can be grouped into a few areas of emphasis.

TECHNOLOGY

While **Broadening Broadband**, a report on municipal internet systems, was already on The Research Bureau's radar before the COVID-19 pandemic, the new reality of videoconferencing and remote learning intensified the urgency and relevance of the already important subject. The report was able to diagnose a problem with the current state of internet access in Worcester, including that 1 in 5 residents have no internet access, 1 in 3 have no broadband subscription, and that the quality of the city's options for internet lag behind other areas of the state and country. The philosophical argument that the internet should be treated as a public utility

rather than a luxury left to the private sector was analyzed through the lens of objective data and statistics. Even though municipal broadband would be a large financial investment, interest from decision-makers has been extremely strong. Staff were granted dedicated City Council and School Committee subcommittees to make presentations on the report, in addition to a WRRB-hosted event that drew high attendance and media coverage. Both the City Council and School Committee have recommended further action on the report, with official motions drawing directly from language used in the recommendations section of The Research Bureau report. The Research Bureau has also been invited to be a part of the City of Worcester's internet access working group, which is taking concrete steps toward solving some of the issues identified in the report.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

While Worcester voter turnout has been studied before, **Absent Voters** took a new approach to identifying patterns and trends in municipal election voters. One of the more technically complicated reports The Research Bureau has published in recent memory, the report cross-referenced Election Commission records, Census Bureau statistics and City of Worcester Assessor's Office data to provide demographic information on Worcester voters. Areas covered included "supervoters," voter housing, race, ethnicity, age, polling locations and more. The Human Rights Commission invited staff to give a presentation on the report, which is useful in the ongoing citywide conversation about how to boost voter turnout and ensure everyone has a voice in choosing our elected leaders.

The Research Bureau continued to participate in Worcester's Complete Count Committee, a coalition of city departments and community organizations who meet frequently to ensure high response rates to the U.S. Census Bureau's decennial census. This work is important for its implications on federal funding and political representation, but also more specifically to Research Bureau work, matters for getting an accurate estimate of population statistics and demographics. Census Bureau data underlies most reports The Research Bureau publishes, and the Complete Count Committee is a crucial part of making sure that data is as complete as possible.

DEVELOPMENT

The Research Bureau continued its long tradition of weighing in on urban design and transportation issues with **Bureau Brief: Walkability**. The report both measured the current status of pedestrian-friendly measures through efforts like the Complete Streets initiative in Greater Worcester and explained the characteristics that have allowed some communities to create truly walkable downtowns and neighborhoods. The report included a scorecard intended to allow regular residents to grade an area on various elements to see how walkable it is. This scorecard was developed into a virtual version that garnered several dozen responses that were shared with WalkBike Worcester, while the scorecard effort in general was begun as part of The Research Bureau's involvement with the Community Health Improvement Plan. In addition to these efforts on walkability, The Research Bureau continues to be a member of the Community Health Improvement Plan's Research and Evaluation subcommittee that measures and evaluates the progress toward the outcomes identified in the Plan.

One of the Research Bureau's most popular reports for years was the **Downtown Office Occupancy Report**, which provided information on the various office spaces available in Worcester's downtown core and the vacancy rates and prices for those buildings. This report has been in high demand since it was discontinued in 2011, and in 2020 The Research Bureau published a spiritual successor. This version streamlined the old format to focus on a representative sample of key downtown buildings, but also broadened the scope to examine the economic impact of Worcester's office space market.

The Bureau partnered with local media outlet, *Worcester Business Journal*, on a collaborative research project on liquor license policies throughout the region. The Bureau released its study **A Top Shelf Liquor License Policy** examining patterns throughout the state with an in-depth look at Worcester and the impact of a no-quota policy on the local economy. Additionally, The Research Bureau released **Bureau Brief: English for Speakers of Other Languages**. This brief examined the economic impact of ESOL programs and identified the discrepancy between capacity and current demand.

REPORTS AND BRIEFS

SINCE OUR LAST ANNUAL REPORT, THE RESEARCH BUREAU PREPARED THE FOLLOWING REPORTS AND BRIEFS:

Bureau Brief: Walkability

Downtown Office Occupancy Report

Absent Voters: Who is Voting and Not Voting (Yet) in Worcester Municipal Elections

COVID-19 Resource Guide

Broadening Broadband: Considering Municipal Ownership as a Solution to Worcester's Internet Challenges

Worcester Almanac: 2020

Breaking Down the Budget: Questions to Consider, City of Worcester & Worcester Public Schools

A Top Shelf Liquor License Policy: The Impact of the (Lack of a) Section 12 Quota on Bars and Restaurants

Bureau Brief: An Addendum to "Implications of a Fare Free WRTA"

Bureau Brief: English for Speakers of Other Languages

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETINGS

MARCH 3, 2020

BOARD MEETING AT THE BEECHWOOD HOTEL

Guest Speaker: Michael Kennealy

Secretary of Housing & Economic Development
for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts



JULY 22, 2020

BOARD MEETING VIA ZOOM

Guest Speaker: Karyn Polito

Lieutenant Governor for the Commonwealth
of Massachusetts



FORUMS AND EVENTS

SINCE OUR LAST ANNUAL REPORT, THE RESEARCH BUREAU ORGANIZED THE FOLLOWING FORUMS AND EVENTS:

34th Annual Meeting featuring Dr. Francis Collins, Director of the National Institutes of Health

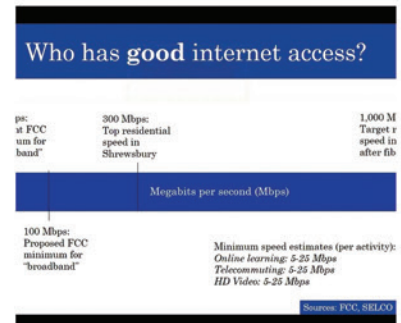
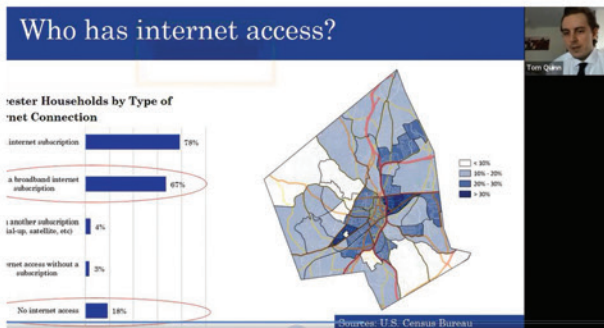
Student Opportunity Act: Provisions, Purposes, and Potential (session 1)

Student Opportunity Act: Provisions, Purposes, and Potential (session 2)

Broadening Broadband: Worcester's Internet Challenges

Worcester Almanac: Discussing Data

2020 Thomas S. Green Public Service Awards



34TH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE RESEARCH BUREAU

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 10, 2019
DCU CENTER | WORCESTER, MA

WITH FEATURED SPEAKER:
DR. FRANCIS COLLINS
DIRECTOR, NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH (NIH)





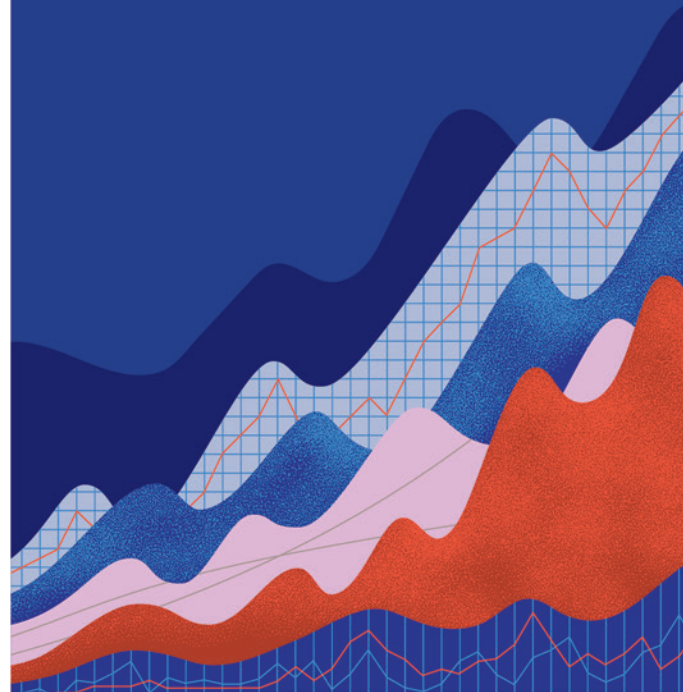
FAIRMAN C. COWAN MUNICIPAL LEADERSHIP AWARD



BRIAN THOMPSON

A nonprofit doesn't make money – but it still needs money. This paradox has stymied many a worthy organization, but thanks to the tireless work of Brian Thompson, The Research Bureau has always been financially secure. Over his long and illustrious banking career, Brian has served as a key conduit for The Research Bureau and many other groups, ensuring that funding flowed from those who wanted to give back to those who could use that money in serving the community. Brian himself gave back generously, going beyond financial contributions to give freely of his time, expertise, and passion.

We are, figuratively, in his debt.



ANNUAL MEETING SPEAKERS

- 2020** **DR. ROSABETH MOSS KANTER**, Ernest L. Arbuckle Professor of Business Administration, Harvard Business School
- 2019** **DR. FRANCIS COLLINS**, Director, National Institutes of Health (NIH)
- 2018** **DR. KERRY HEALEY**, President, Babson College, and former Lieutenant Governor
- 2017** **JAMES A. PEYSER**, Secretary of Education, Commonwealth of Massachusetts
- 2016** **JOHN H. SUNUNU**, Former Governor, State of New Hampshire, and White House Chief of Staff
- 2015** **JONATHAN KRAFT**, President, The Kraft Group
- 2014** **JAY ASH**, City Manager of Chelsea
BERNARD F. LYNCH, Founder, Community Paradigm Associates, LLC
MICHAEL V. O'BRIEN, Executive Vice President, Winn Development
- 2013** **EDWARD GLAESER**, Fred and Eleanor Glimp Professor of Economics, Harvard University
- 2012** **ERIC S. ROSENGREN**, President & CEO, Federal Reserve Bank of Boston
- 2011** **SENATOR SCOTT BROWN**
- 2010** **LISA A. MANCINI**, Senior Vice President, CSX Corporation
- 2009** **AMITY SHLAES**, Bloomberg News Columnist, Political Economist
- 2008** **JOHN W. ROWE**, Chairman, President & CEO, Exelon Corporation
- 2007** **DR. THOMAS PAYZANT**, former Superintendent of the Boston Public Schools and senior lecturer at the Harvard Graduate School of Education
- 2006** **DR. DAVID DRISCOLL**, Commissioner of Education, Commonwealth of Massachusetts
- 2005** **TAMAR JACOBY**, Author and Senior Fellow at the Manhattan Institute
- 2004** **JOHN GANNON**, Staff Director, U.S. House of Representatives, Select Committee on Homeland Security
- 2003** **GOVERNOR MITT ROMNEY**, Commonwealth of Massachusetts
- 2002** **FRED SIEGEL**, Professor of History, The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, New York City, and Senior Fellow, Progressive Policy Institute
- 2001** **HEATHER MACDONALD**, Senior Fellow, The Manhattan Institute
- 2000** **REV. DR. FLOYD H. FLAKE**, Senior Pastor, Allen African Methodist Episcopal Church and former U.S. Representative to Congress
- 1999** **HOWARD HUSOCK**, Director of Case Studies in Public Policy and Management, Kennedy School, Harvard University
- 1998** **MYRON MAGNET**, Editor, City Journal
- 1997** **THOMAS BIRMINGHAM**, Senate President, Commonwealth of Massachusetts
- 1996** **GLENN C. LOURY**, Professor of Economics, Boston University
- 1995** **PETER HARKNESS**, Editor and Publisher of Governing
- 1994** **JAMES Q. WILSON**, Author and Professor of Political Science, UCLA
- 1993** **ROBERT POOLE**, President, Reason Foundation
- 1992** **WILLIAM HUDNUT**, former Mayor of Indianapolis
- 1991** **DAVID P. FORSBERG**, Secretary, Executive Office of Health and Human Services, Commonwealth of Massachusetts
- 1990** **BRUCE CARNES**, Director of Budget Planning, Office of National Drug Control Policy
- 1989** **EDWARD J. LOGUE**, CEO, Logue Boston, former Director of the Boston Redevelopment Authority
- 1988** **RAYMOND FLYNN**, Mayor of Boston
- 1987** **WILLIAM BULGER**, Senate President, Commonwealth of Massachusetts
- 1986** **IRA JACKSON**, Commissioner, Department of Revenue, Commonwealth of Massachusetts

THOMAS S. GREEN PUBLIC SERVICE AWARDS

EACH YEAR, THE RESEARCH BUREAU RECOGNIZES THE “UNsung HEROES” in municipal government who are committed to making Worcester and nearby communities better places to live and work. The 2020 Thomas S. Green Public Service Award recipients will be honored at a virtual ceremony on December 3, 2020.

THE 2020 THOMAS S. GREEN PUBLIC SERVICE AWARD RECIPIENTS



PETER DUNN

City of Worcester’s Executive Office of Economic Development



JOHN FRANCO

Lieutenant, Worcester Fire Department



EDWARD GAGNE

MassHire Central Region Workforce Board



PAUL JORNET

First Sergeant, MCJROTC, Montachusett Regional Technical School



KATHERINE OTA

formerly of the Worcester Public Schools

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