



The City of Worcester

WORCESTER BOARD OF HEALTH MEETING

Meeting Minutes

June 1, 2026

25 MEADE STREET, ROOM 109 1ST FLOOR. WORCESTER, MA

Welcome

Board Members Present:

Chair-Frances Anthes, Michael Perotto, Dr. Patrick Lowe, Joseph Kahoro

Staff Present:

Seema Dixit, HHS Commissioner; Alex Arriaga, Assistant Commissioner HHS; Nikki Nixon, Interim Director, DPH; Jennifer Bradford, Medical Director, HHS; Erin Quaiel, Community Health Coordinator – Built Environment, DPH; Lee Hall, Director of Housing and Inspectional Services; Nick Antanavica, Commissioner of Inspectional Services.

Staff Virtual:

Brenda Wright, Principal Clerk- DPH
Amelia Houghton, Chief of Public Health Nursing, DPH;
Desiree Sutton, Business Manager, DPH

Guest Present:

Henry Schwan, Reporter- Worcester T&G

Guest Virtual:

Julie Nash & Jim Froia, residents

1. Call to Order

Chair Frances Anthes called the meeting to order at 6:30pm.

2. Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed everyone and asked Board members and attendees to introduce themselves.

3. Announcements

Nikki Nixon reported that a public hearing is scheduled for June 15 at 25 Meade Street.

- The hearing notice has been posted on the City's public meeting website (PrimeGov/OneMeeting).
- The notice was also published in the Telegram & Gazette (T&G).
- A link to the proposed regulation is included with the public notice.
- Written comments are requested by June 12, the Friday preceding the hearing.

4. Minutes of last meeting

Motion to approve was made by Michael Perotto.

The Chair noted that, pursuant to Robert's Rules for small boards, a second was not required. The minutes passed unanimously on a vote of 4-0

5. Nursing and Communicable Disease Update, Amelia Houghton, Chief PHN, DPH

Amelia gave a brief overview of the report.

- Overall declines were observed across most communicable disease categories.
- A small increase in cryptosporidiosis cases was reported.
- No significant disease activity or concerning trends were identified.

Seasonal Education and Resources

- Respiratory illness prevention
- Cryptosporidium awareness
- Camp safety
- Mosquito and tick-borne disease prevention
- Animal-related disease prevention

Resources included links to CDC guidance and the City's "Fight the Bite" information.

Emerging Infectious Disease Update

- Ebola was highlighted as the featured emerging infectious disease.
- Update was provided to inform the Board of current conditions, risk levels, and monitoring efforts.
- Amelia indicated that the situation continues to be monitored and that the current risk remains low.

Additional information is available through the resources and links provided in the report. The report can be accessed online at www.worcesterma/health.

6. *Presentation: Inspectional Services Department*

Nick Antanavica, ISD Commissioner, provided an overview of recent initiatives and ongoing collaboration efforts with Health & Human Services (HHS) and the Division of Public Health (DPH).

Risk-Based Food Licensing

- ISD has implemented a risk-based food licensing system aligned with federal and state food safety standards.
- The approach allows inspectors to focus resources on higher-risk establishments while reducing regulatory burdens on businesses with strong compliance records.

Residential Chickens Policy Review

- ISD worked with the City Manager's Office to review residential chicken keeping within the city.
- Based on public health and safety concerns, ISD recommended maintaining the current prohibition.
- Limiting chicken keeping to select areas was not considered an equitable citywide solution.

Keep Worcester Clean and Rodent Control Efforts

- ISD continues to collaborate with the Department of Public Works (DPW) and the Keep Worcester Clean program on sanitation and nuisance issues.
- The annual sewer baiting program is underway as part of the city's rodent control efforts.
- ISD and DPW are developing enhanced enforcement strategies to address illegal dumping, nuisance conditions, and other quality-of-life concerns.

Nick said he would be providing regular updates to the Board moving forward.

Overview of Inspectional Services Operations

Lee Hall, Director of Housing & Inspectional Services, provided an overview of the department's scope of responsibilities.

Housing Division

The Housing Division consists of approximately 15 inspectors. Responsibilities include enforcement of local nuisance ordinances, including:

- Graffiti violations
- Trash and debris complaints
- Overgrown properties
- Unregistered vehicles
- State Sanitary Code requirements

They handle approximately 4,000–6,000 complaints annually through inspections and 311 requests

Food Protection Division

- Oversee 1,000+ food establishment permits and approximately 600 temporary permits (including mobile vendors)
- Staffed by six inspectors
- Conducts food safety inspections and permit compliance
- They are currently preparing rollout of risk-based permitting system for upcoming renewal cycle (notices begin August; renewals through October)

Air, Water, and Hazardous Materials Division

Staffed by three inspectors whose responsibilities include:

- Campground inspections
- Public and semi-public swimming pool inspections
- Water quality testing in city culverts
- Beach water testing
- Noise complaints
- Air quality complaints
- Other environmental health concerns

Consumer Advisory Division (Weights and Measures)

Responsible for consumer protection through the inspection and certification of weighing and measuring devices. They inspect equipment used in Gas stations, Pharmacies, Delicatessens, Grocery stores, and other retail establishments. They ensure accuracy and compliance with applicable consumer protection standards.

Approximately 35 inspectors work within the Health and Housing unit of the department.

Board Questions and Discussion

Board Member Patrick Lowe requested clarification on the risk-based food licensing system. Commissioner Antanavica explained that establishments are categorized based on the type of food

served, preparation methods, establishment type, and compliance and inspection history. Low-risk establishments such as convenience stores carrying mostly prepackaged foods require fewer inspections, while high-risk establishments such as sushi restaurants may require up to four inspections annually. Establishments may move between risk categories over time depending on their compliance history, with strong performers potentially receiving fewer inspections and reduced fees, and those with recurring violations subject to increased inspections and fees.

Board Member Michael Perotto asked whether they had responsibility for nail salons. Nick clarified that they are regulated and licensed by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts rather than the City and therefore fall under state inspection authority.

Upcoming Data Reporting Initiative

Nick reported on a collaborative effort with the Division of Public Health to improve inspection data collection and analysis. A digital inspection reporting system has been implemented, allowing inspectors to document inspections, nuisance conditions, and code violations electronically. The data collected is expected to support more detailed reporting and trend analysis, and ISD anticipates presenting preliminary findings to the Board at the next meeting, including information on inspection activity, violations, and citywide nuisance conditions.

The Chair thanked ISD staff for the update and expressed appreciation for the department's ongoing collaboration with the Division of Public Health.

7. Presentation: Built Environment and Neighborhood Connect

Erin Quaiel, Built Environment Coordinator, provided an overview of the Division's built environment initiatives and Neighborhood Connect and related community health projects. Historical efforts have included Mass in Motion, REACH (Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health), walk audits, and community engagement projects.

Neighborhood Connect

Neighborhood Connect is a research initiative led by the UMass Prevention Research Center that helps residents learn how to influence decisions related to the built environment and implement community improvements. The program is delivered in partnership with the City of Worcester,

Walk Massachusetts, and the Coalition for a Healthy Greater Worcester.

The program consists of six sessions over eight weeks and is offered in English and Spanish. Participants learn about healthy neighborhoods, conduct community audits, identify local priorities, and develop action plans for community-driven improvements. Eligibility is open to adults who live, work, or spend time in one of eight designated Worcester neighborhoods.

The full presentation is available online at www.health@worcesterma.gov

Board Discussion

Board members expressed support for the Neighborhood Connect initiative and highlighted the potential benefits of small community improvements. Erin explained that participants receive guidance on navigating municipal processes and advocating. The Board also discussed collaboration with neighborhood groups and expressed enthusiasm for the program's potential to strengthen civic engagement and improve community health.

Board Chair requested that the Director's Report include an update regarding discussions with Community Healthlink and matters previously discussed by the Board. It was agreed that an update would be provided following the Director's report.

8. Director's Report

Interim Director, Nikki Nixon, gave an update on the Fitness in the Park program, a free community wellness initiative that promotes physical activity and social connectedness in Worcester neighborhoods.

- Programs are offered in parks throughout the city, with locations selected based on public health and social vulnerability indicators.
- The initiative focuses on increasing access to physical activity in neighborhoods disproportionately impacted by health disparities.
- Program participation and demographic data are collected to evaluate effectiveness and guide future improvements.
- The program is funded by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts, which recently committed to a three-year funding agreement, and is supported through partnerships with the YMCA, YWCA, and other community organizations.
- The 2026 kickoff event will be held on June 12 at Elm Park and will include a demonstration fitness class and participation from City leadership.

The Director's report can be accessed on our website at www.worcesterma/health.

9. Community HealthLink Update

HHS Commissioner Seema Dixit reported that no significant changes had occurred since the previous Board meeting, but discussions and planning continue among CHL, UMass Memorial Health, and other stakeholders.

Seema noted that transition plans and service agreements are still being finalized. Behavioral Health Network (BHN) is expected to assume most behavioral health services, while Community Health Alliance (CHA), Open Sky Community Services, and Clinical & Support Options (CSO) will provide additional services in designated areas. Public announcements regarding patient transitions are expected once all agreements and required documentation have been completed. Board members expressed appreciation for the update and were encouraged by the continued progress toward finalizing the transition.

10. Next Meeting Date & Topics

- Public Hearing for New Proposed Tobacco Regulations: June 15, 2026
- BOH Meeting: August 3, 2026

No meeting will be held in July

11. Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made by Michael Perotto and seconded by Dr. Patrick Lowe. The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 7:19p.m.



The City of Worcester

Department of Health and Human Services

Division of Public Health

Board of Health Monthly Nursing Communicable Disease Report

Report Date: June 1, 2026

Reporting Period: May 2026

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1. Brief Overview of Communicable Disease Trends

The following section provides an overview of trends in case counts observed between April 2026 and May 2026 (Table 1).

Note-

May saw **broad declines across respiratory, foodborne, and hepatitis categories**, with only a small uptick in **Cryptosporidiosis**.

Category	Condition	Apr 2026	May 2026	Change
Respiratory	Influenza (Flu) (viral)	155	36	-119
	Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) (viral)	28	7	-21
	Streptococcus Pneumonia (bacterial) (coughing, sneezing or direct contact with secretions)	1	0	-1
	Group A Strep (bacterial or direct contact with wounds)	3	3	0
	Group B Strep (bacterial) (usually affects newborns and adults with chronic diseases)	1	0	-1
Contact	Mpox (viral) (close contact with infected individuals, contaminated materials, infected animals)	0	0	0
Foodborne Illness	Salmonellosis (bacterial) (contaminated food and water or direct contact through fecal-oral route)	0	0	0
	Norovirus (viral) (contaminated food or utensils)	2	1	-1
	Campylobacteriosis (bacterial) (also by animal feces contact)	2	1	-1
Waterborne Illness	Cryptosporidiosis (parasite) (common cause of waterborne disease, parasite is ingested usually through contaminated water)	0	1	+1
Hepatitis	Hepatitis A	0	0	0
	Hepatitis B	9	6	-3
	Hepatitis C	5	0	-5
Travel	Malaria (parasites transmitted through mosquitos)	1	1	0

Table 1 Shows monthly case count changes. A negative (-) sign indicates a decrease in case counts from last month. A positive (+) sign indicates an increase in case counts from the previous month.

2. Seasonal Education and Resources

Respiratory Illness Resources

Masks and Respiratory Virus Prevention from the CDC:

[Masks and Respiratory Viruses Prevention | Respiratory Illnesses | CDC](#)

Learn about ways to prevent Cryptosporidium spread at camps

[Preventing and Controlling Crypto at Camps | Cryptosporidium \("Crypto"\) | CDC](#)

Mosquito, Tick, and Animal-Related Illness Prevention

Learn about mosquito bite prevention, rabies, ticks, Lyme disease, and how to safely remove a tick under City of Worcester website Worcesterma.gov [Fight the Bite | City of Worcester](#)

3. Emerging Infectious Diseases: Ebola Outbreak

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO):

- On May 15, 2026, the Ministry of Health in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo** (DRC) confirmed an Ebola outbreak in Ituri Province, pinpointed to the Bundibugyo strain—marking the **17th Ebola outbreak** in the country since 1976; the previous outbreak concluded in December 2025
- On May 15, CDC released a **Level 3 Travel Health Notice for the DRC** and a **Level 1 Travel Health Notice for Uganda**, citing increased risk, and emphasized the situation remained under close evaluation
- By May 16, 2026, the DRC reported **246 suspected cases** and **80 deaths**.
- On May 17, WHO declared the outbreak a **Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC)**, noting the outbreak is unusual, has cross-border cases (including at least two lab-confirmed cases in Kampala, Uganda), and requires global attention—but clarified it does **not** meet pandemic criteria
- CDC and DHS implemented **enhanced traveler screening, port-of-entry restrictions**, and **public-health travel measures** on May 18, including entry restrictions for non-U.S. nationals who were in DRC, Uganda, or South Sudan within the prior 21 days

Massachusetts State-Level Status:

- Neither **Massachusetts health authorities** nor any **other U.S. state** have reported any **suspected or confirmed cases** related to this outbreak. No local travel restrictions or special advisories have been issued beyond federal guidance
- Although the **current risk to the U.S. and Massachusetts** remains **low**, **travelers from affected areas** may still enter the country.

Travelers returning from the affected regions, especially the DRC, are recommended to:

- Register with **CDC or Department of State systems** (such as **STEP**).
- **Self-monitor** for Ebola symptoms (fever, vomiting, diarrhea, bleeding) for **21 days**.
- **Seek immediate medical attention** if symptoms develop during the monitoring period

To learn more:

- [Ebola Outbreak | Travel.State.gov](#)
- [Ebola Disease Outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda | HAN | CDC](#)
- [CDC Statement on the Use of Public Health Travel Restrictions to Prevent the Introduction of Ebola Disease into the United States | Ebola | CDC](#)

END OF REPORT



The City of
Worcester

Worcester Division of Public Health : Built Environment and Neighborhood Connect

Erin Quaiel

Overview

- What is the built environment and its public health connections
- WDPH's history in this context
- Neighborhood Connect
- Other priority projects
- Impacts on other WDPH work
- Q&A

What is the Built Environment?

- “...includes the physical makeup of where we live, learn, work, and play. It involves homes, schools, businesses, streets and sidewalks, open spaces, and transportation options.” (CDC,2024)



What is the Built Environment?

**Transportation
Facilities**

**Streets and
Roads**

**Commercial and
Non-Commercial**

**Public
Art**

Parking

**Public Places
and Spaces**

Buildings

Transit

**Trails and
Parks**



Impacts on Public Health

Direct

- **Physical Activity**
- **Air Quality**
- **Noise Pollution**
- **Safety**
- **Mental Health**

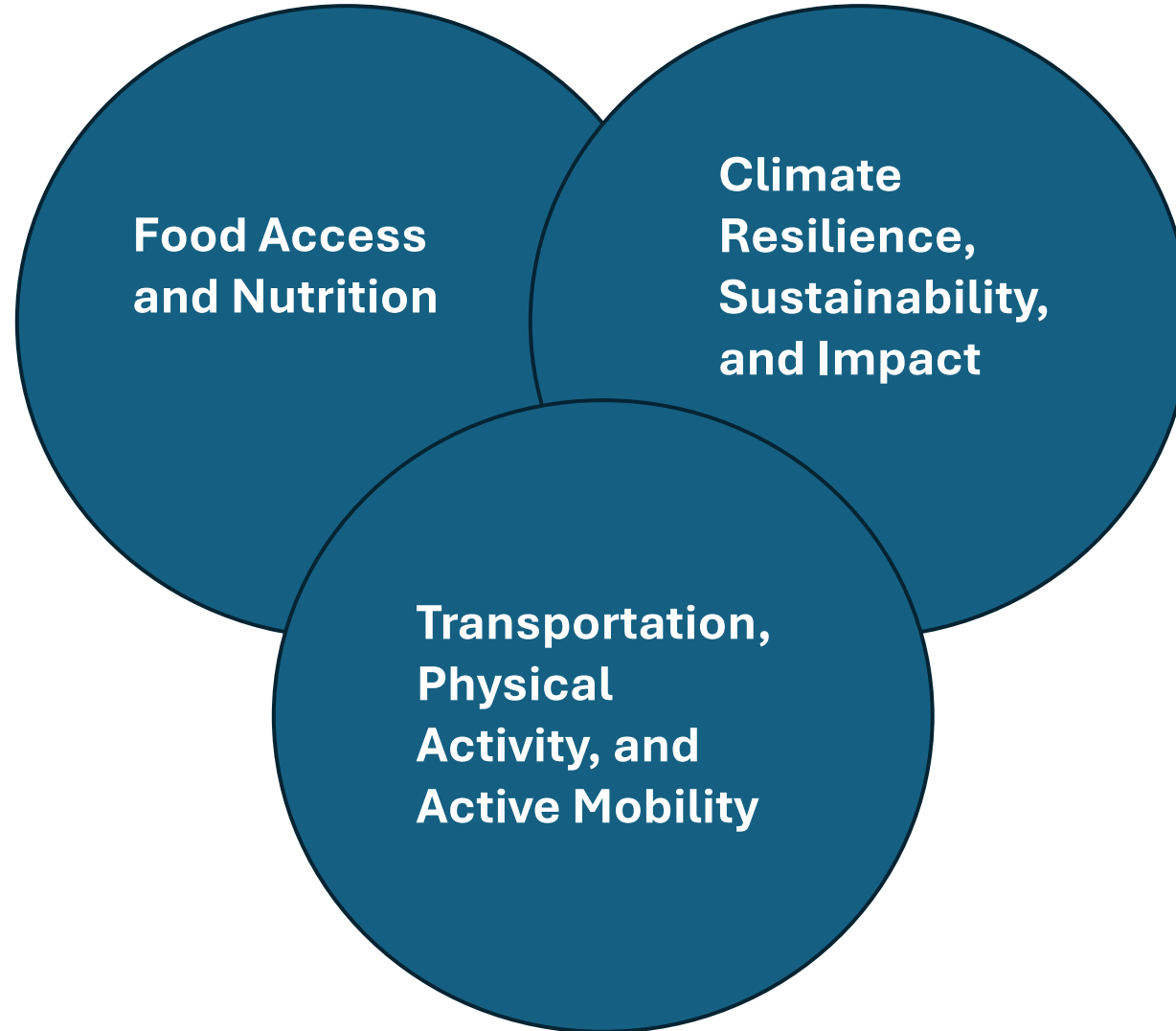
Indirect

- **Access to...**
 - **Employment**
 - **Healthcare**
 - **Food**
 - **Education**
 - **Goods and Services**
 - **Education**
 - **Social Interaction/Connection**

The History

- **Mass In Motion (2009-2011)**
 - Partnership building, outreach, data collection, and regulatory analysis
- **Union Hill Health Impact Assessment (2013)**
- **Mass In Motion (2013-2018)**
 - **Safe Routes to School**
 - Task force
 - Pedestrian safety training
 - Crossing guard training
 - Physical activity and nutrition education
 - Pedestrian safety task force (led to Transportation Advisory Group [TAG])
- **REACH (2018-2023)**
 - Walk Audits
 - GHNA Art Demonstration Project
 - Walk Audit Academy training with PRC
 - LEI and Mass Audubon walking groups
 - Goddard Athletic Field

Priority Areas



What is Neighborhood Connect?



Neighborhood Connect is a program that prepares people who live, work, or spend time in selected areas of Worcester to participate in neighborhood changes or improvements that build healthy, thriving neighborhoods.

Participants will learn simple ways to influence community decisions about neighborhood features like sidewalks, parks, benches, and gathering spaces.

DPH's Role

- **Group program leadership**
- **Division capacity-building: built environment specialist duties related to Neighborhood Connect**



Why focus on community members to drive change?

Prosperity starts with place

- The condition and design of neighborhoods directly influence health, opportunity, and quality of life

Neighborhood design must be intentional

- Thriving places don't happen by accident –they require thoughtful planning, sustained investment, and coordinated infrastructure (ex. schools, housing, parks, transport)

Shared responsibility for fairness

- All communities deserve access to quality infrastructure, regardless of zip code or demographic infrastructure
- Collective responsibility

Showcase community assets and leadership

- Residents are the experts and leaders---they are not passive recipients but active co-creators of revitalization
- Amplify local knowledge and cultural values

Acknowledge the past

- Connect disinvestment to present conditions, using built environment as visible, tangible expressions of structural racism or policy neglect
- Link past and present policies (ex. redlining, urban renewal, etc.)

Celebrate success

- Share success stories of transformation and pride
- Share examples of place-based intervention where investments in physical space led to increased social cohesion, economic activity, and resident pride

Types of small changes Neighborhood Connect aims for

Can be temporary or permanent

Spaces and places

- Lighting, signage
- New space (e.g. parklet) in unused location
- New trees
- New public art
- Hosting community event

Active transportation and transit

- Signage and artistic designs (e.g. crosswalk)
- Bus stop seating or lighting
- Road and street design features that slow cars (e.g. temporary curb extension)

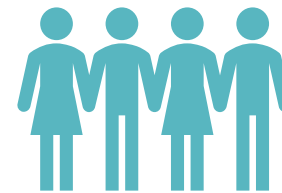


The Neighborhood Connect partners



Program delivery

The Worcester Division of Public Health
WalkMassachusetts



Participant outreach and recruitment

The Coalition for a Healthy Greater
Worcester

The Neighborhood Connect program

Group program

6 sessions held over Zoom

- Delivered in English with Spanish interpretation available

A program website with a variety of materials to support participants

- Materials are available in English and Spanish

Action plan implementation

- Built environment specialist provides technical assistance with support from PRC



Participants learn



About healthy thriving communities and the built environment



How to observe their neighborhoods using an “audit” and identify potential changes or improvements to the built environment that they care about



How to create a plan for action to help make these changes happen

Who is eligible to participate



People 18+ who speak English and/or Spanish

People who live, work or spend time in 8 selected areas of Worcester (shown on the next slide)

People can join as part of a team or on their own

The 8 included areas

Wave 1 (Jan-March 2026)

Area 1: Main South / Piedmont

Area 2: Quinsigamond Village / Whipple Apartments area / Part of Rt 20

Wave 2 (July-Sept 2026)

Area 3: Canterbury St/Cambridge Street / South Worcester/Webster Square

Area 4: Pleasant St / Elm Park / Downtown

Wave 3 (Jan-March 2027)

Area 5: Shrewsbury St / Bell Hill / Plumley Village

Area 6: Union Hill / Vernon Hill / Grafton Hill / Green Island

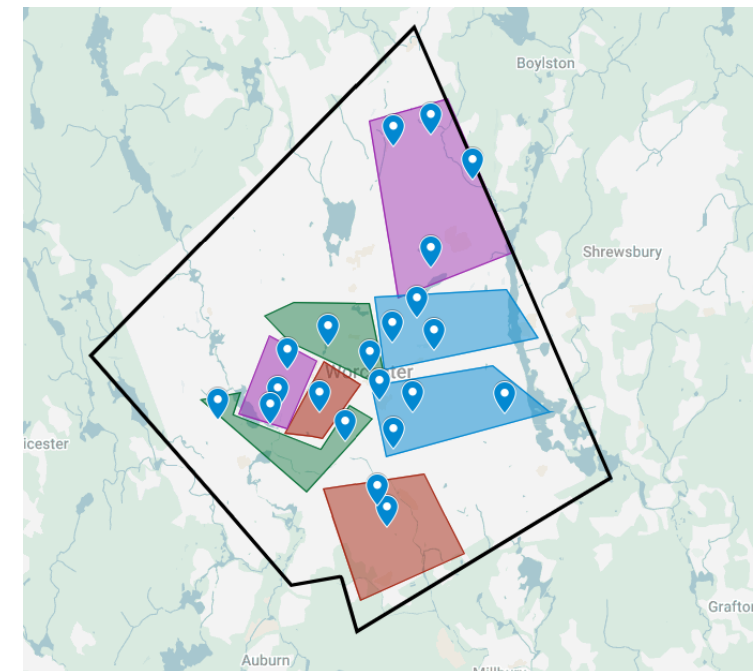
Wave 4 (July-Sept 2027)

Area 7: Great Brook Valley / Upper Lincoln Street / Green Hill / Burncoat / Greendale

Area 8: Beaver Brook / Columbus Park / Coes Pond area

Data indicates that residents of these areas have lower rates of physical inactivity and higher rates of chronic diseases than the city and state averages

These areas were reviewed and approved by the Community Advisory Board





How we will determine if the Neighborhood Connect program is effective



The program will be offered in 4 waves or phases

Participants from 2 of the 8 areas will go through the program at the same time



All participants will be asked to complete surveys at 3 time points

Before starting the program (when they are enrolled)
Right after completing the program
12 months after completing the program



The survey information will allow us to determine if the program had an impact on things like

Participant actions to make built environment changes
Participant feelings of connectedness with neighbors
Participant physical activity levels

WDPH Capacity Building Related to Neighborhood Connect

- **Purpose: enhance awareness of WDPH role in built environment change and Neighborhood Connect approach (community engagement in built environment decision making)**
- **Activities**
 - **Document information about Worcester's current policies, plans, projects, and processes related to built environment**
 - **Lead annual presentations to WDPH leadership and staff, presentations to Board of Health, and informal community sessions**
 - **Champion Neighborhood Connect to fellow officials through outreach and relationship building as means to build community engagement in built environment change**
 - **Contribute to built environment specialist guide and companion document for supervisor created by PRC**
 - **Serve on PRC Community Advisory Board**
 - **Contribute to dissemination and translation planning**

Other Work

Climate Resiliency:

- **Healthy Air, Healthy Communities monitoring project**
- **Collaboration with DSR on programs, policies, and education**

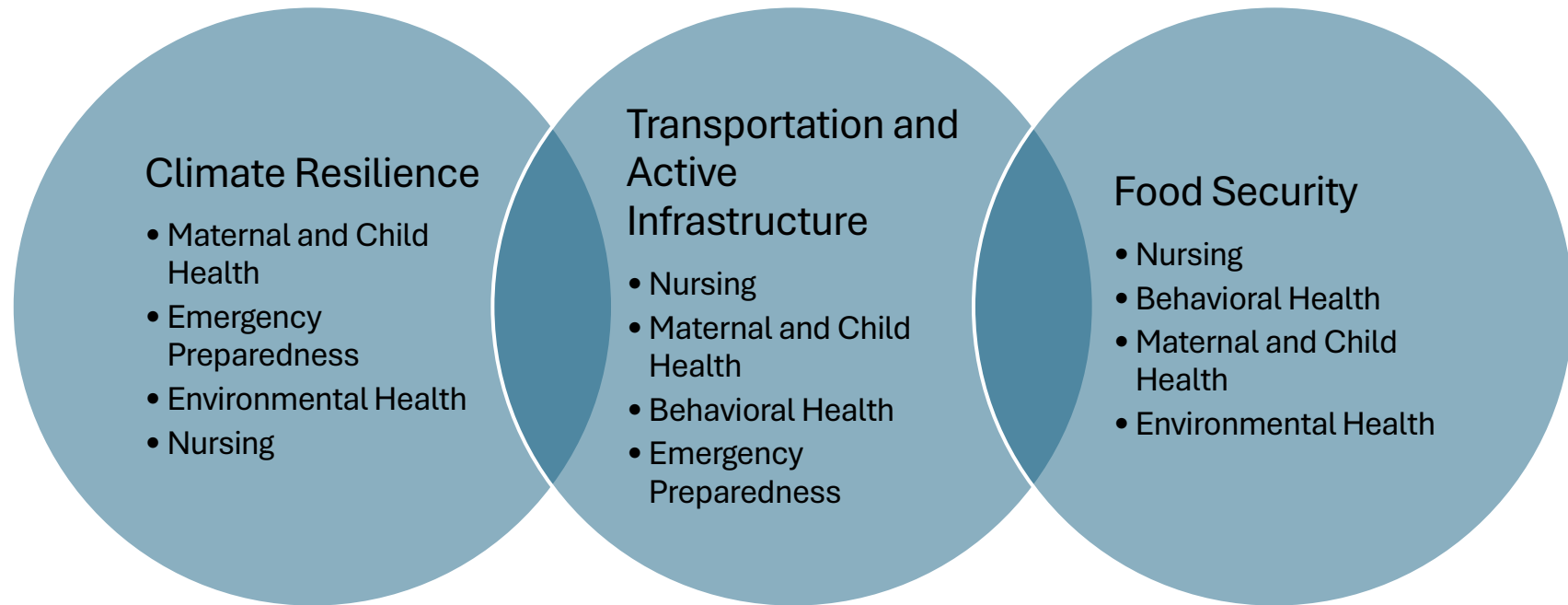
Food Access:

- **Grocery store access workgroup (WAGS)**
- **Food access and resource communications (Summer Meals, WIC, SNAP, Farmers Markets...ext.)**

Transportation and Physical Activity:

- **DTM collaboration**
 - **Vision Zero Internal Working Group**
- **CMRPC CMMPO Advisory Board**
- **Fitness in the Park**

The Overlaps





Questions?



The City of
Worcester

WDPH DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Presented by:

Nikki Nixon, MS
Interim Director
Division of Public Health

■ PURPOSE OF DIRECTOR'S REPORT

To keep Board of Health members informed on key operational activities and accomplishments within the division.

FITNESS IN THE PARK: Overview

Promotes Increased physical activity

Free, accessible outdoor fitness opportunities across Worcester parks and neighborhoods

Open to residents of all ages, fitness levels, and abilities

Enhances social connection and community engagement

Provides access to wellness resources in neighborhood settings

Strategy supports the City's strategic goals toward health equity and active living

**Historically led by Health and Human Services administrative office
Currently led by Division of Public Health's Built Environment Coordinator**

City of Worcester **FITNESS IN THE PARK**



DANCE

BASKETBALL DRILLS



PILATES

STRENGTH TRAINING

HIIT



YOGA

ZUMBA

CAPOEIRA

FITNESS IN THE PARK: Overview

Parks are prioritized in neighborhoods with residents that are disproportionately impacted by:

**Chronic
Diseases**

Disability

**Low
Socioeconomic
Status**

**Other Health
Inequities**

FITNESS IN THE PARK: Overview

Engaged 200+
Worcester residents
across neighborhoods

Strong participation
from women, young
adults, older adults,
and racially/ethnically
diverse groups

Classes ranged from
5 - 20 participants

FITNESS IN THE PARK: Collaborative Partners

Funder

- Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts

Program Coordination

- City of Worcester Division of Public Health

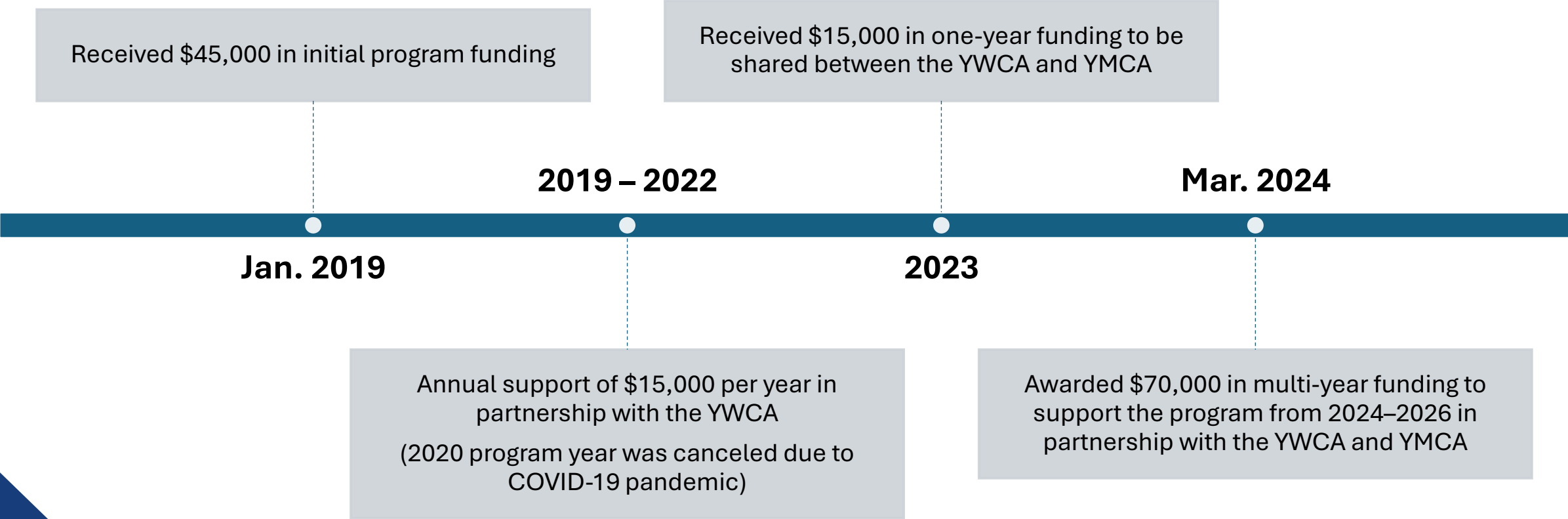
Subrecipients and Implementation

- YMCA of Central Massachusetts
- YWCA of Central Massachusetts

Data Analysis

- City of Worcester Department of Health and Human Services

FITNESS IN THE PARK: Timeline



FITNESS IN THE PARK: Summer 2026

Focus on refining our marketing and outreach strategies to enhance target population reach and participation; connect participants to health and wellness resources

FITP Kick-off

June 12th from 12 noon to 2 pm at the entrance of Elm Park (Rain Location: Levi Lincoln in City Hall)

Representatives:

- BCBS, YMCA, YWCA,
- City Manager, Mayor Petty, Commissioner Dixit

Features

- Demo Class





THANK YOU