

CITY OF WORCESTER
PUBLIC HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE

Monday, October 19, 2026
Esther Howland (South) Chamber
Convened: 5:23 P.M.
Adjourned: 7:26 P.M.

MAYOR

Joseph M. Petty

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Chairperson Gary Rosen

Vice Chairperson Khrystian E King

Councilor Kathleen M Toomey



CLERK OF THE CITY COUNCIL

Nikolin Vangjeli

www.worcesterma.gov

City Hall - 455 Main Street Worcester, Massachusetts

Present Were:

Chairperson Councilor Gary Rosen

Councilor Khrystian E. King

Councilor Kathleen M. Toomey

Also:

Commissioner of Health and Human Services Seema Dixit

Assistant Commissioner of Health and Human Services

Alex R. Arriaga

Director of Public Health Nikki Nixon, participated virtually

Director of Elder Affairs Amy Vogel Waters, participated
virtually

Director of Youth Opportunities Raquel Castro-Corazzini,
participated virtually

Commissioner of Inspectional Services Nicholas J.
Antanavica

WPD Alcohol Unit Sgt. Thomas A. Needham

Deputy City Clerk Stephen AJ Pottle, clerk

1. Virtual Attendee Call-In Information/Important Notice to Residents

- a. Pursuant to Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2021 and in order to ensure active, public engagement, the City of Worcester currently allows for both in-person and remote participation at all City Council and Standing Committee meetings. To partake in the meeting, you may attend the meeting in-person within the meeting location, follow the below link to join via Zoom or dial the direct line as indicated. If you join a Zoom meeting by dialing in with a phone number, you can raise your hand by dialing *9.

Public Health and Human Services Committee Zoom Link:
<https://worcesterma.zoomgov.com/j/1610140100>

Public Health and Human Services Committee Zoom Phone Number: +1 646 828 7666

Public Health and Human Services Committee Zoom Access Code: 161 014 0100

- b. Important Notice: Residents are advised of an ongoing scam involving the impersonation of city officials and departments. Scammers are fraudulently requesting payments be made for planning and zoning permits, as well as City Council petitions. All official emails regarding your petition will come exclusively from an @worcesterma.gov email address (such as clerk@worcesterma.gov), or via physical mail on the City of Worcester's official letterhead. Any legitimate hearing letter will always include your specific application details, along with the scheduled hearing date, time, and location. The City of Worcester will never request payments via wire transfer.

2. Approval of the Minutes

- a. Order - That the City Council Standing Committee of Public Health and Human Services hereby approves the minutes of the Public Health and Human Services Committee meeting on August 24, 2026.

Chairperson Councilor Rosen read the item and moved to adopt the item. Order adopted

3. Miscellaneous Items

- a. Petition of Cristina DePina request regulations be established to ensure cats are not allowed to roam freely.

10d CC September 8, 2026

Chairperson Councilor Rosen read the item and recognized the following Speakers:

- 1. Cristina DePina, Worcester resident, spoke in favor of the item**
- 2. Arlene Rosario, Worcester resident, spoke in favor of the item**

Chairperson Councilor Rosen discussed an estimated number of owned cats and the estimated number of thirty thousand (30,000) feral and/or stray cats in the city that roam freely with Speaker #1.

Chairperson Councilor Rosen recognized Councilor Toomey, who discussed the feasibility of the Animal Control Unit enforcing additional animal related regulations.

Chairperson Councilor Rosen then brought forth the following Chairman's Order: "Request City Manager provide City Council with a report detailing best methods practiced by other cities and towns to mitigate owned cats from roaming freely throughout the city. Further, request said report include an estimated cost analysis to implement and enforce such potential regulation changes and any incentives for pet owners to spay/neuter their cats."

Chairperson Councilor Rosen discussed the estimated one hundred (100) trap-neuter-release (TNR) cats trapped in six (6) months within a half mile radius in District 4, the process relative to TNR, the importance of educating the public of responsible pet ownership, and an estimated amount of trappers in the city dedicated to TNR with Speaker #2.

Chairperson Councilor Rosen recognized Councilor Toomey, who spoke concerning the feasibility of the Department of Health and Human Services working with the Veterinary Assisting Program at Worcester Technical High School to brainstorm best practices relative to educating the public of responsible pet ownership.

Chairperson Councilor Rosen discussed the feasibility relative to the Department of Health and Human Services to commit to assisting with the free roaming cat issue in the city with the Commissioner of Health and Human Services.

Chairperson Councilor Rosen then discussed issues related to cats being left behind by owners due to financial hardships, such as homelessness, and/or due to unforeseen animal free living arrangements with Speaker #2.

Chairperson Councilor Rosen then moved to recommend the item be placed on file.

Recommend File

Chairman's Orders

Request City Manager provide City Council with a report detailing best methods practiced by other cities and towns to mitigate owned cats from roaming freely throughout the city. Further, request said report include an estimated cost analysis to implement and enforce such potential regulation changes and any incentives for pet owners to spay/neuter their cats.

- b.** Petition of Brian Dutremble request the banning of the sale of miniature alcohol bottles, or "nips," in the city to reduce litter and alcohol abuse.

8c CC August 18, 2026

Chairperson Councilor Rosen read the item and discussed a history of the City Council's discussions relative to reducing miniature alcohol bottle litter throughout the city.

Chairperson Councilor Rosen recognized the following Speaker:

- 1.** Jim Vasiliadis, Worcester resident, spoke in opposition to the item

Chairperson Councilor Rosen discussed negative financial impacts banning miniature alcohol bottles would have on small liquor sale businesses and the demographic of customers who typically purchase miniature alcohol bottles with Speaker #1.

Chairperson Councilor Rosen recognized Councilor Toomey, who discussed feasible local incentives for small liquor sale businesses to implement for the purpose of accepting returned miniature alcohol bottles with Speaker #1.

Chairperson Councilor Rosen recognized Councilor King, who spoke concerning the item with the Deputy City Clerk.

Chairperson Councilor Rosen moved to recommend the item be placed on file.

Recommend File

- c. Order of Councilor Gary Rosen and Councilor Khrystian E. King - Request Standing Committee on Public Health and Human Services review Metrik, the Commonwealth's new public health data and workflow platform. With Metrik, the Department of Public Health (DPH) strives to help municipalities reduce administrative burdens, improve visibility into local trends, enhance the ability of communities to provide efficient and effective public health services, and ensure access to the same secure, high-quality reporting tools throughout the Commonwealth.

17m CC April 28, 2026

Chairperson Councilor Rosen read the item and recognized the Commissioner of Inspectional Services, who provided an overview relative to the state's public health data and workflow platform, Metrik, which included the city working with Metrik and state personnel to help develop the program, the process relative to integrate Metrik with the city's current program, OpenGov, the ability to analyze trends within different communities across the state, highlighted the notion Metrik currently remains in development, and the process relative for data recorded in OpenGov be transmitted to Metrik.

Chairperson Councilor Rosen recognized Councilor Toomey, who discussed the feasibility relative for Metrik to be utilized interdepartmentally to encompass all city departments and highlighted the Department of Health and Human Services, the Division of Public Health, and the Department of Inspectional Services as the only city entities to utilize Metrik with the Commissioner of Inspectional Services.

Chairperson Councilor Rosen recognized Councilor King, who discussed potential costs associated with the city utilizing Metrik and highlighted the importance relative to streamlining received complaints, inspections, and other reports with the Commissioner of Inspectional Services.

Chairperson Councilor Rosen then discussed the importance relative to informing City Council of updates and/or changes as the program remains in development with the Commissioner of Inspectional Services.

Chairperson Councilor Rosen recognized Councilor King, who discussed the Department of Inspectional Services' staffing capacity, the eight (8) unfilled positions assigned to the department, and challenges relative to onboarding new employees to fill said unfilled positions with the Commissioner of Inspectional Services.

Chairperson Councilor Rosen moved to recommend the item be placed on file.

Recommend File

- d. Order of Councilor Gary Rosen - Request Standing Committee on Public Health and Human Services meet with representatives of the Department of Public Health, the Division of Youth Opportunities, the Worcester Police Department and the seven (7) city teens who worked on the city's Sticker Shock Campaign, for the purpose of discussing the successes of the program and further supporting similar initiatives in the future. Said Sticker Shock Campaign is designed to discourage adults from purchasing alcohol for minors, reinforce ID checks at the point of sale, is a youth-led public health effort aimed at curbing underage drinking before it starts, and is part of a broader set of prevention initiatives combining education, enforcement and community outreach.

10q CC March 31, 2026

Chairperson Councilor Rosen read the item and recognized Councilor Toomey, who moved to recuse herself from the item and left the room.

Chairperson Councilor Rosen recognized the WPD Alcohol Unit Sgt., who provided an overview relative to the Worcester Police Department's (WPD) collaborative work with the Alcoholic Beverage Control Commission (ABCC) to address underage drinking, the process relative to facilitate alcohol sales sting operations, and trends observed relative to underage alcohol sale violations.

Chairperson Councilor Rosen discussed the Sticker Shock Campaign primarily being within the purview of the Division of Public Health with the Director of Youth Opportunities.

Chairperson Councilor Rosen recognized the Director of Public Health, who provided an overview relative the city's Sticker Shock Campaign, an evidence-based public health strategy to raise awareness around underage drinking and to prevent adults from purchasing alcohol for minors, which also included Worcester Public School (WPS) data analyzed relative to a youth health survey as relates to alcohol purchases and consumption, and efforts made by the Worcester youth who participated in the campaign.

Chairperson Councilor Rosen recognized Councilor King, who discussed the prevalence of adults purchasing alcohol for minors, efforts made to work with local colleges and universities to educate incoming students about underage drinking risks during their first-year orientations, and approximately seven percent (7%) of WPS students who report to drink alcohol also report providing money to individuals to purchase alcohol on their behalf with the WPD Alcohol Unit Sgt. And Director of Public Health.

Chairperson Councilor Rosen moved to recommend the item be placed on file.

Recommend File

- e. Order of Councilor Gary Rosen, Councilor Morris A. Bergman, Councilor Robert A. Bilotta, Councilor Tony Economou, Councilor John P. Fresolo, Councilor Khrystian E. King, Councilor Satya B. Mitra, Councilor Luis A. Ojeda, Councilor Jose A. Rivera, Councilor Kathleen M. Toomey and Mayor Joseph M. Petty - Request Standing Committee on Public Health and Human Services hold one or more public hearings, far in advance of next winter, in an effort to help the city identify and to secure a sufficient number of safe and secure emergency shelter locations that serve the needs of the unhoused population during the winter of 2026-2027. Further, request said public hearings should also focus on strategies to increase the number of individuals who volunteer at said emergency shelter locations as well as training for said individuals.

9i CC February 3, 2026

In Committee April 6, 2026 - Held

Chairperson Councilor Rosen read the item and recognized the Commissioner of Health and Human Services, who discussed the process relative for the city to apply for available winter shelter funding with anticipation of being granted state funding in early November, plans to provide a minimum of sixty (60) individual overflow beds for winter shelter services, conversations with state administration to stress the critical need for overflow winter shelter operations in the city, alternate plans to continue with the sixty (60) bed minimum in the event state funding is not granted, and the expectation to open winter overflow shelters on December 1, 2026.

Chairperson Councilor Rosen discussed the state funded overflow winter shelter request for proposal (RFP) amount of \$1.5 million with the requirement for the Department of Health and Human Services to partner with experienced community organizations, overflow winter shelter location negotiations, the winter overflow shelter sites providing both overnight and daytime services, and a timeline associated with opening the day shelter in April 2027 with the Commissioner of Health and Human Services.

Chairperson Councilor Rosen recognized Councilor Toomey, who discussed the process relative for the overflow winter shelter services ensure individuals have access to food, such as close proximity and/or transportation to food pantries with the Commissioner of Health and Human Services.

Chairperson Councilor Rosen recognized Councilor King, who spoke concerning the status of overflow winter shelter location identification, the Department of Health and Human Services identifying the need for sixty (60) to sixty-five (65) individual beds, the city's historical capacity of thirty-six (36) available individual beds for overflow winter shelter, the number of reported chronically unsheltered individuals in the city compared to available overflow individual overflow beds, and strategies implemented to ensure adequate shelter staff capacity with the Commissioner of Health and Human Services.

Chairperson Councilor Rosen discussed the intention for the committee to continue discussing topics related to unsheltered individuals and shelter services with Councilor King and the Commissioner of Health and Human Services.

Chairperson Councilor Rosen discussed supplemental location options in the event state funding be granted but no locations are agreed upon with the Commissioner of Health and Human Services.

Chairperson Councilor Rosen then moved to recommend the item be placed on file.

Recommend File

4. Communications of the City Manager

- a. Transmitting Informational Communication Relative to the City of Worcester Opioid Allocation.

8.19B CM September 15, 2026

Chairperson Councilor Rosen read the item and recognized Councilor Toomey, who moved to recuse herself from the item and left the room.

Chairperson Councilor Rosen recognized the Assistant Commissioner of Health and Human Services, who provided an overview relative to the city's prior, pending, and future use and allocations of opioid settlement funds, best practices relative to refining the process relative to identifying priority areas, the process relative to reviewing request for proposal (RFP) applications, and an estimated amount of funds received annually based on available settlements.

Chairperson Councilor Rosen discussed the importance relative to remaining transparent throughout the RFP application processes, the process relative to assessing programs' use of awarded funds, decreased overdose related deaths in the city, and the distribution of Narcan throughout the city with the Assistant Commissioner of Health and Human Services.

Chairperson Councilor Rosen recognized Councilor King, who spoke concerning the Assistant Commissioner of Health and Human Services' title and involvement at the time of the first round of distributing settlement funds, the process relative to replace Community Healthlink's crisis response model, shower access and supportive services, the process relative to measuring the efficacy related to the work completed by awardees under contract, funding allocations with awarded grants from prior fiscal years, funding allocated to the women's shelter, the process relative to maximize community feedback and coordination, the process relative to allocating funds as relates to culturally responsive strategies, clarified opioid settlement funds are used for general substance abuse and/or misuse in addition to opioid specific related matters, and available funding to combat the rising xylazine epidemic with the Assistant Commissioner of Health and Human Services.

Chairperson Councilor Rosen brought forth the following Chairman's Order: "Request City Manager request Commissioner of Health and Human Services provide City Council with a report detailing xylazine related overdoses in the city."

Chairperson Councilor Rosen discussed the operation status of Community Healthlink and the member demographic relative to the stakeholder review committee for opioid settlement funds with the Assistant Commissioner of Health and Human Services.

Chairperson Councilor Rosen moved to recommend the item be placed on file.

Recommend File

Chairman's Orders

Request City Manager request Commissioner of Health and Human Services provide City Council with a report detailing xylazine related overdoses in the city.

- b. Transmitting informational communication relative to the Worcester Senior Center.
22.19A CM June 2, 2026

Chairperson Councilor Rosen read the item and recognized the Director of Elder Affairs, who provided an overview relative to the Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26) Worcester Senior Center Participant Survey Report.

Chairperson Councilor Rosen discussed an estimated three hundred (300) to five hundred (500) daily patrons who utilize the Senior Center, an estimated thirteen hundred (1,300) registered fitness center members, and outreach methods used to inform residents of available resources for the city's senior residents with the Director of Elder Affairs.

Chairperson Councilor Rosen recognized Councilor King, who highlighted the diverse programs offered at the Worcester Senior Center.

Chairperson Councilor Rosen recognized Councilor Toomey, who discussed the positive impact the Worcester Senior Center has for patron's mental health.

Chairperson Councilor Rosen moved to recommend the item be placed on file.

Recommend File