

Woonsocket Public Workshop

March 24, 2022

Workshop Feedback

Below is a summary of all the feedback received at the March 24 Public Workshop. The lists of responses start with the most common things heard. The number in parentheses are the approximate number of times an issue was raised.

Cork Board Exercise

People were asked to write down three words that describe what they want Woonsocket to be like 20 years from now. Below is a summary of responses:

- Thriving/Prosperous/Productive/Thriving small business centers (5)
- Safe/Peaceful (4)
- Diverse/Culturally Diverse (3)
- Better Education/Has improved children's education status (3)
- Healthy (3)
- Bustling/Lively/Vibrant (3)
- Collaborative
- Innovative
- Artistic
- A Destination
- Community
- Hoppin' like the '20s.
- More Transit
- Market Basket
- Has maintained friendliness
- Is financially stable
- For the People – People of this City matter
- Connected
- Cohesive

Small Group Discussion Summaries

Approximately 30 attendees split into four small groups to discuss the following questions:

Question 1: What is the one thing you love best about Woonsocket? Why do you love it?

Question 2: What is the one thing about Woonsocket you most want to change? What are some of the changes you'd like to make?

Question 3: What is one thing you really want to see in Woonsocket that is missing? What are the opportunities and challenges to making this happen?

Summary of Question 1 Responses:

- Generosity, friendly, helpful, caring people – come together through difficult times (6)

- Blackstone River (all three major rivers) and its possibilities, walking paths, bike paths (6)
- Parks and Recreation opportunities (Run of the Park, Autumnfest, and other programming) (5)
- Arts and Culture, Stadium Theater (4)
- Cultural diversity, thriving community culture (4)
- History and architecture – adds character to the city (4)
 - Woonsocket’s existing infrastructure has a lot of potential for reuse, including the potential for reusing historic building.
- Urban community that still has the feel of a suburban, small community – close knit (3)
- Its convenient location to Boston, Providence, Hartford, makes commuting by car easy (2)
- Restaurants (Christopher’s restaurant, River Falls, all the restaurants in this area) (2)
- Young, bright leaders
- Schools
- Library
- Many destinations in the city are walkable
- Hope, resilience, community
- Access to all types of services
 - Health
 - Fortunate to have the social services it has in a small place
- Good police, fire departments; they do a great job clearing snow around schools
- Place where you are able to build a thriving business
- Corporate Park
- It’s my home
- “Hub of Northern RI”
- YMCA

Summary of Question 2 and 3 Responses Organized by Topic

Economic Development/Marketing

- Need regional draws, businesses and entertainment. More “economic variety” and local businesses – reasons for people to come to Woonsocket (e.g. Heritage Corridor, river activities, Trader Joe’s, a zoo) (7)
- Enhance Main Street businesses. Vibrant Main Street. Main Street should be the “heart” of the city. Two livelier areas currently separated by an underused part of the corridor—connect the whole corridor. Create better connections from Main Street to the Blackstone River. (6)
- Small business development center. Have a clearer process for opening businesses (especially locally owned and small businesses). Hire/designate a business liaison at City Hall. The liaison should be a one-stop shop for business assistance and questions (ex., how to start a business in the city, assistance with connecting to suitable sites, etc.) (3)
- Loss of commercial/industrial tax base. The tax rate is too high – need to find ways to incentivize more economic development. Need better tax incentives to get people and businesses to come (ideally 5 years of assistance for new businesses) (3)
- Restaurants, healthy restaurants, more variety (3)
- Reputation for the better; more positive coverage of the city in the news. The city’s image as just a “mill city” – need marketing to change that image and highlight other things. (2)
- Have areas/events for food trucks (2)

- Have things that attract/appeal to young people (e.g. photo opportunities like the new pedestrian bridge in Providence)
- Build more of a technology-based economy.
- More retail and commerce of all kinds.
 - Movie theater
 - Breweries
 - Bakery
 - Deli
 - Rooftop venues
 - Safe, good hotels

Housing

- There are too many subsidized/housing authority buildings in the city; people can't seem to get out of there once they get in (not enough subsidies, need other options) (3)
 - Stigma in certain areas where people live
 - The Woonsocket Housing Authority is great though (protects landlords, keeps up with inspections)
 - Housing Authority apartments are supposed to be a short-term option, but it is cyclical right now
 - Would be good to give families in Housing Authority properties Section 8 vouchers that would allow them to live wherever they want, perhaps closer to other family members so they can have access to additional support (i.e., babysitting).
 - Need to have greater accountability for the "+1's" who are visiting certain "hot spot housing complexes" (Housing Authority properties) and causing trouble – this makes up a lot of the calls police respond to
 - Should switch to smaller single-family home options instead, not having everyone in one big complex
 - Need a range of affordable housing options, not more Housing Authority/public housing
- Need more high-quality affordable and workforce housing – need to connect people in need with housing resources (2)
- Address the anti-housing attitude in the City. Density is a good thing, especially downtown (2)
- Need to eliminate old housing stock (housing stock that has "outlived its life") (2)
 - Would be good to rebuild here with housing that includes things like in-law apartments, tiny houses, modestly sized single-family houses - diversify housing options
 - Need a range of affordable housing options, not more Housing Authority/public housing
- Need more housing attractive to young people
- Use existing infrastructure, convert mills
- Development opportunities at auto salvage on Cumberland Hill Road: could be high density residential overlooking the river
- Would be good to explore other low-income housing co-op options (i.e., CLT – Community Land Trusts) where people can have an ownership stake.

Circulation

- Finish and connect bike paths throughout the city. Have bike rentals along the bike path. Bike path across bridge into MA was supposed to be completed last year and construction still not started. (6)
- Open a commuter rail line (6)

- Improve road safety and traffic (5)
 - Reduce traffic speed and noise
 - One-way roads—make traffic safer; allow less pass throughs
 - Traffic on Mendon Road (a state road)
 - Cumberland Hill Road
 - Widen with a turning lane to 99
 - Become the entry way into the city
 - Traffic at Middle School, backs up along Hamlin from those taking a right. Do you limit right turns during school drop off/pick up?
- Transportation doesn't work to get to places where people work outside of the city. Offer better commuting options. (3)
 - Bus, bike, train, carpooling services
 - Get creative with transportation/transit options

Services & Facilities

- Improve/change schools for the better. Need to improve the quality of the middle and high school (this impacts property values); we want to draw people in with our good schools (the grade schools seem to be doing ok), "people with older kids shouldn't be afraid to send their kids to school here". Need more choice in schools. People shouldn't feel like they have to send their kids to private schools if they live in Woonsocket. Need more public charter school options. (3)
- Sewer treatment plant smells (3)
- Invest in making Woonsocket a "smart city." New, sustainable infrastructure for the 21st century (ex., LED streetlights). Develop a modern City Hall (2)
- Rehabilitate animal shelter to improve facility (2)
- Get more parents involved in local schools – parents aren't as active in their children's education as they should be.
- Upgrade the library
- Reliance on Woonsocket's Wastewater Treatment Facility for revenue (taking waste from neighboring communities). This leads to negative impacts. Need to identify other revenue sources.
- City needs to fact check before giving people information. Sometimes it is hard to get accurate information about municipal operations.

Social Services & Public Health/Food Access

- Improve food access—Woonsocket needs more healthy, fresh, and affordable food options (6)
 - Need a central market and/or more full-service grocery stores
 - Expand locations and hours for local farmers markets.
 - Offer year-round support for food assistance programs—free lunch program during the summer for kids.
 - Install community fridges for individuals to leave/take food, no questions asked.
 - Recover excess food from grocery stores—build municipal and business partnerships to make this happen.
- Expand/improve services for individuals who are homeless (3)
 - Need for warm places/cool places (destinations for individuals when not allowed to stay in shelters during the day)

- Offer more comprehensive services for seniors, including financial and medical counseling. Need to have the Council on Aging in a central location and ideally also have assistance for seniors living at home. (2)
- Improve collaboration between city and social services; when problems come up; linking employment opportunities, etc.
- More support for marginalized residents – better diversity of services to meet their needs.
- Social services offered in Woonsocket are a magnet for “certain types of people” which can give a bad stigma to Woonsocket.
- Improve fundraising methods for non-profits.
 - How can non-profits think outside the box and use new digital technologies to attract funders?

Natural Resources

- Improve environmental conditions and public access at Booth Pond and the surrounding conservation area – this is currently an underutilized site.
- Use of the Blackstone River for things like water sports
 - Should get rid of junkyards on River Street, clean up riverbanks
 - Would be good to add in kayaking and canoe options in addition to other attractive business options (i.e., restaurants)
- Urban agriculture/farming
- Clean up the river and surrounding areas

Historic & Cultural Resources/Tourism

- Art galleries, shows, festivals, pop-up art exhibits (2)
- City has a lot going on but left out of tourism efforts the state does (it doesn’t go north of Providence)
 - Polar Express
 - History/architecture
 - Museum of Work and Culture
 - Chan’s, Stadium Theater
 - Businesses on Main Street
 - St. Ann’s Church
 - Levitt Amp Concerts on the River (build on this program/grant funding)
- Don’t forget about the City’s history and evolution over time.
- Would be good to have options like a gondola rides or events like Water Fire (in Providence).
- Would be good to have more live music options

Parks & Recreation

- Expand recreational programming – get kids outdoors. Establish and program a teen center to give youth more options for things to do, including more summer programs. A skatepark (ideally that is staffed/monitored). Invest in Woonsocket’s youth—increase programming, create outlets for creativity, and build/use youth knowledge (7)
- Better use of recreational spaces
- Need an athletic complex that has multiple businesses in it to draw people in
 - River Street would be ideal for this
- Should make athletic/recreational facilities more affordable/accessible

- Enhance Cold Spring Park to have water activities (bring back stadium seating, benches along the bike path and water etc.)

Land Use

- Reuse vacant buildings. Make the reuse process easier (2)
- Redevelopment in Social District needed
- Encourage infill development
- Development that maintains historic character

Other

- Politics get in the way of progress—lots of political grandstanding. Make the City’s politics more data-driven and reduce political showmanship. (5)
- Build sense of community. How do we change our image and instill pride so that people take better care of the city? Change the negative attitude residents have toward the City (4)
- There is too much litter and dumping. Address litter issue (it’s not just at the Blackstone River). There is too much litter everywhere around Woonsocket (3)
- Higher priority for the state to accomplish things
- More people should know their neighbors
- City has 2 cultures, the older French-Canadian mill workers (seniors) and the younger Hispanic residents. How do these come together?
- Need to have the community coming together and speaking up in support of changes at different types of public meetings. People need to step up to advocate for changes in developable areas
 - Would be good to have “calls to action” for meetings so it is clear when residents should attend for an important vote or discussion
- Remove blight in the City (drain on existing resources)
- Increase collaboration
 - Between city leaders/municipal offices
 - Between city leaders/municipal offices and community organizations

‘Getting to Know You’ Survey Results

The following questions were optional, but we encouraged attendees to answer them.

Why? It's important that we know who we're reaching. We want to make sure ALL voices are heard in Woonsocket. If we find that people from certain neighborhoods or backgrounds aren't being heard, we need to address that. We received 22 responses.

1. What is your age?

0 - Under 18	4 - 45-54
1 - 18-24	5 - 55-64
5 - 25-34	6 - 65+
1 - 35-44	

2. How do you identify?

11 - Male

0 - Other: Feel free to specify

10 - Female

1 – No Response

3. In what neighborhood do you live?

3 - Bernon District

2 - Globe District

1 - Constitution Hill

1 - North End

3 - Downtown

0 - Oak Grove

9 - East Woonsocket

0 - Social District

0 - Fairmount

3 - Other/I don't live in Woonsocket

(Please specify) Works in, grew up in, has family in Woonsocket.

4. How do you identify your race or ethnicity (please describe however you prefer to)?

White: 10

No Response: 7

Black (Igbo): 1

Mixed (African American, Cherokee, French, Italian): 3

5. What is your annual household income?

0 - Under \$15,000

3 - Between \$75,000 and \$99,999

1 - Between \$15,000 and \$29,999

1 - Between \$100,000 and \$150,000

2 - Between \$30,000 and \$49,999

5 - Over \$150,000

5 - Between \$50,000 and \$74,999

5 – No Response

6. What is your employment status?

17 - Employed, full time

0 – Unemployed

0 - Employed, part-time

3 – Retired

2 – No Response

7. Do you identify as having a disability?

0 - Yes

Feel free to specify:

20 - No

2 – No Response

8. Are you a Veteran?

0 - Yes

2 – No Response

20 - No