

Worcester Campaign Finance: Tracking Trends through Zip Codes and Correlations between
Income and Party Support

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Introduction

Municipal elections happening in American cities have the option of being nonpartisan. But in a country which stubbornly upholds the two-party system and is battling an intense bout of partisanship in Washington, it is almost impossible to run for politics without getting labeled a Democrat or a Republican. This study focused on the most recent mayoral election for the city Worcester. Data, specifically zip code and income, was collected to analyze the characteristics of contributors to the top mayoral candidates. Those numbers were then used to see if the median income of a zip code correlated to the support of a candidate, and therefore a party. The research process began with an examination into Massachusetts' campaign finance laws. It was uncovered that the state and municipal elections are regulated not only by federal law but also by a state-specific regulatory body. Their finance restrictions were later used to understand the contributions flowing to each candidate in the 2015-2016 mayoral election. Next, data was collected from local publications to construct profiles of the three mayoral candidates who received the most attention and the most campaign contributions. Data on individual donations given to each candidate were sorted based on zip code and were used to develop profiles on the singular candidates contributors. This data included the occupation of contributors as well as the amount contributed and the zip code of their self reported address. As Worcester contains over a dozen colleges and is located in the liberal state of Massachusetts, it was expected that most of the contributions would go towards a Democratic-leaning candidate. Also, since Worcester displays distinct pockets of wealth, it was expected for the research to expose a trend stating that "richer" areas gave either many contributions or large contributions to the Democratic-leaning mayoral candidates. In the end, the analysis did not conclusively establish a link between specific

zip codes and candidate affiliation. However we were able to determine that low income neighborhoods were more likely to contribute a larger portion of their net household income. We were also able to conclusively determine that Worcester is a staunchly liberal city, as zip codes across the city all favored Petty or Palmieri, the two liberal, Democratic-leaning candidates. There is seemingly no notable, or effective, conservative enclave in Worcester.

Massachusetts Campaign Contributions Laws

In most states, federal campaign finance laws are the only regulations placed on political contributions. The state of Massachusetts imposes its own limits on those wishing to donate to campaigns, and they apply to municipal as well as state elections. The chief campaign regulating body in Massachusetts is the Office of Campaign and Political Finance (OCPF) who oversees contributions to state and municipal candidates and attempts to diminish acts of corruption. The OCPF requires that candidates create a “depository” bank account with a Massachusetts bank for all their funds to be deposited into. They must also appoint a chairman and a treasurer to their fundraising committee to oversee the rightful use of this account; their duties would entail filing periodic reports and paying for expenditures with special OCPF checks. The OCPF limits contributions from individuals and PACs to \$500 per candidate per calendar year and \$1200 in aggregated contributions. Lobbyists are limited to \$200 per candidate per calendar year. Local parties can give \$1000 and state parties can give \$3000. As for large businesses or corporations, it is prohibited by Massachusetts law for them to contribute to state or municipal campaigns. One final stipulation states that candidates are allowed to contribute and lend themselves unlimited

funds to support their campaigns, as it's widely accepted that a candidate can not corrupt themselves (*Massachusetts Campaign Finance Law*, Boatright). This report will use these parameters to study and understand the contributions made by groups and individuals to the candidates running for Worcester mayor in the 2015-2016 election.

Background on Worcester Elections

The city of Worcester is governed by a council-manager government system. This means that city management duties are divided between a single mayor and a city council. The position of mayor is simply a ceremonial title; the mayor is the chair of the city council and the school committee, but they have no greater authority over the other city councilors when voting and making decisions for the city (nlc.org). Worcester elections occur during odd-numbered years and most of the campaign activity is geared towards affecting the general election in November. Worcester elections are nonpartisan though candidates' platforms do often align with the major parties. The mayor and city council members are elected at-large, canvassing throughout the city and doing away with district representation. This creates many difficulties for candidates to reach their electorate and get them to vote in the elections. Worcester's population of 175,000 residents is a diverse body with significant proportions of minorities and hundreds of cultures, resulting in complex demographic groups, language barriers, and representative issues. Many citizens do not participate in politics, so to promote participation the city distributes voter registration forms in various languages and they advertise election day constantly on the radio and on signs around the city. As a result, voter turnout for Worcester elections is not very high, it hovers around 20-25%

(Worcester Municipal Elections, Boatright). Citizens can also participate politically by contributing money to campaigns. Worcester elections see contributions coming from PACs, party committees, and citizens from inside and outside the city. In most Worcester campaigns, small donations from individuals do not make up large portions of candidate money, rather, the maxed-out donations from small business and CEOs do. Like federal elections, Worcester campaigns are sustained mostly by donations from influential, business-affiliated people and groups *(Masterfile, Boatright)*.

Worcester Election Trends - Party Leanings of Past Mayors

Historically, Worcester has been an environment where social progressivism thrives. The city has been the site of all kinds of progressive movements, from abolition to women's suffrage to anarchism *(Worcester - History & Heritage)*. The last six popularly elected mayors have deployed progressive political agendas while in office. Mayors have launched clean-up operations, redevelopment initiatives, and created countless social programs to benefit the women, children, and minorities of Worcester. According to their Wikipedia biographies, the last six mayors of Worcester identify as Democrats. Worcester elections are at-large, so candidates can't simply focus on one district to canvas in. Worcester mayoral candidates must extend their presence and engage with community organizations throughout the city to build themselves an ample support base. It makes sense that the most successful mayoral candidates are those with strong social agendas. The predominant trend in nonpartisan Worcester elections is that the

mayoral candidates who win are those whose values and policies align them with the Democratic party.

2015 Mayoral Election Candidate Profiles

The 2015-2016 Worcester election saw three very different candidates vying for the mayor's seat. There was incumbent mayor Joe Petty, who was running for his third term as mayor; Michael Gaffney, the city councilman looking to rise in rank and responsibility; and Philip P. Palmieri, a 14 year city councilor for the second district in Worcester.

Joe Petty has been Worcester's Councilor-at-Large for twenty years and he is entering his third term as mayor. His extended time in City Hall has built him a strong resume demonstrating his capabilities as a leader and his efficiency at solving the people's problems. Under his administration, there has been significant reconstruction of the city's downtown to make it more inviting and update the infrastructure, prudent tax reforms have been passed, and he has hired more police and firemen to make Worcester safer. Adding to his ethos as a candidate, Petty has lived in Worcester his whole life. He claims to understand the city's evolution and believes that his agenda will push it in the right direction towards progress where citizens and businesses will thrive (*Mayor Petty*).

Most witnesses to the 2015-2016 election accurately predicted that Petty would come out on top. He had a strong and obvious history in politics and was being propelled by his incumbency advantage. Petty's greatest asset was that everyone knew his name. He had important endorsements, from former mayor Joe O'brien to Congressman Jim McGovern. This

helped him gain votes from regular Worcester citizens who may not have been knowledgeable of or active in the political process. Petty's close ties with Democratic party representatives made for significant party support, particularly from the Worcester Democratic city committee. Furthermore, their network of large companies and small businesses streamlined support to Petty's campaign, mostly in the form of financial contributions. Finally, as for support from the community, Petty received endorsement from Worcester's police force and firefighters as his platform included allocating funds to improve their services (Kotsopoulos).

The candidate receiving the second highest support was Michael Gaffney. Gaffney was in his first term of being Worcester's At-Large City Councilor during the time of the election, and he was seeking the mayoral seat opening as a means to achieve political mobility in Worcester politics. He is not a registered Democrat, and many of his agenda and personal values designate a conservative, if not Republican, party leaning. His platform contained measures to cut government spending and to eliminate government employees and programs that were not working efficiently. He responded to voters' criticisms against the government by promising to do a full audit of City Hall and fire those who are impeding progress, for one reason or another. His economic include putting an end to annual increases in tax and service fees. He states that this be done to keep loyal residents and their small business in Worcester (Gaffney). Finally, many local political theorists believe that Gaffney is using the mayoral seat build an experience into his resume and eventually rise in political rank to become the Republican challenger in a future Representative race against Jim McGovern (Sargent).

Gaffney is only beginning to build his political experience. While he was only in his first term as Worcester's At-Large City Councilor, he used his background in law to promote his

stringency to the law and his mission to decrease corruption in politics. Many of his supporters were fellow lawyers and attorneys from the community, and they were responsible for making ample contributions to his campaign. Unlike Petty, Gaffney did not have any endorsements of considerable political clout. Knowing this counted against his campaign, Gaffney frequently stated that he believes in merit over nepotism and that politics should not be decided by who you know. One issue he was known for was increasing school security to combat the violence and threats that have been on the rise in Worcester schools (Gaffney). This decision earned him support from school board representatives, local parents, and many family preservation groups.

Philip Palmieri is a long time City Councilor from District 2, serving for 14 years. A retired probation officer, He is the longest serving Councilor ever from District 2. However in September he dropped out of the race due to disappointing results in the cities preliminary elections. He finished 11th in the primary just ahead of Coleman. His District was noted during his tenure as having significant increases in economic investment. An Independent, Palmieri was a popular councilor whose platform focused on funding for public building restoration, increased infrastructure funding in Worcester, and better and faster transportation on the MBTA from Worcester to Boston so as to be able to more effectively have people live in Worcester and commute to Boston.

Candidate contribution Profiles

PACs aren't as represented in Worcester politics. In total there were only 24 PAC contributions, most of which only contributed between 100 and 500 dollars. However one

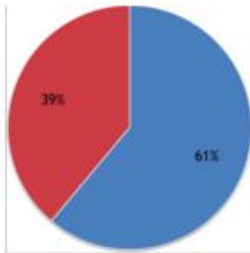
exception can be noted with the Worcester Democratic city committee which contributed \$1,000 to Petty. Most of the PACs involved in this election were founded by workers unions.

Most donors who chose to indicate their occupation listed themselves as attorneys/lawyers (self-employed and employed by a firm), CEOs/ Presidents of companies or owners of small businesses. Other large donor groups included retirees.

Michael Gaffney received a total of \$24,600 in donations from 69 donors. 21.7% of his donations came from women. 78.3% came from men. 5.8% of these donors were retired. His largest donation, other than the \$47,700 loan that he gave himself, came from an employee of the Worcester Probate and Family Court, who donated \$700. Additionally, Gaffney also received donations from the Esler family, in the sum of \$1000. Most of the other donations to Gaffney's campaign were between \$200 to \$300 and \$400 to \$500. Most of Gaffney's contributors were attorneys. This makes sense when one considers the fact that Gaffney himself is a lawyer and is most likely well known and connected within the legal community. Gaffney also received several contributions from employees of Novo Nordisk Inc., however these only totaled \$600. Gaffney received most of his contributions from zip codes 01609 and 01602. Based on the self-reported contributor information 43 of Gaffney contributors were attorneys or lawyers. This is in line with the general trend of individuals who contributed to Gaffney. Additionally 22 business owners contributed to his campaign.

Voter occupation breakdown:
Legal: 61%

Business: 39%

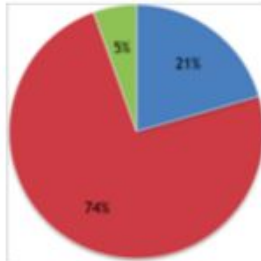


Gender:

Male: 74%

female: 21%

Retires: 5%



Total contributions: 24,600

Total donors: 69

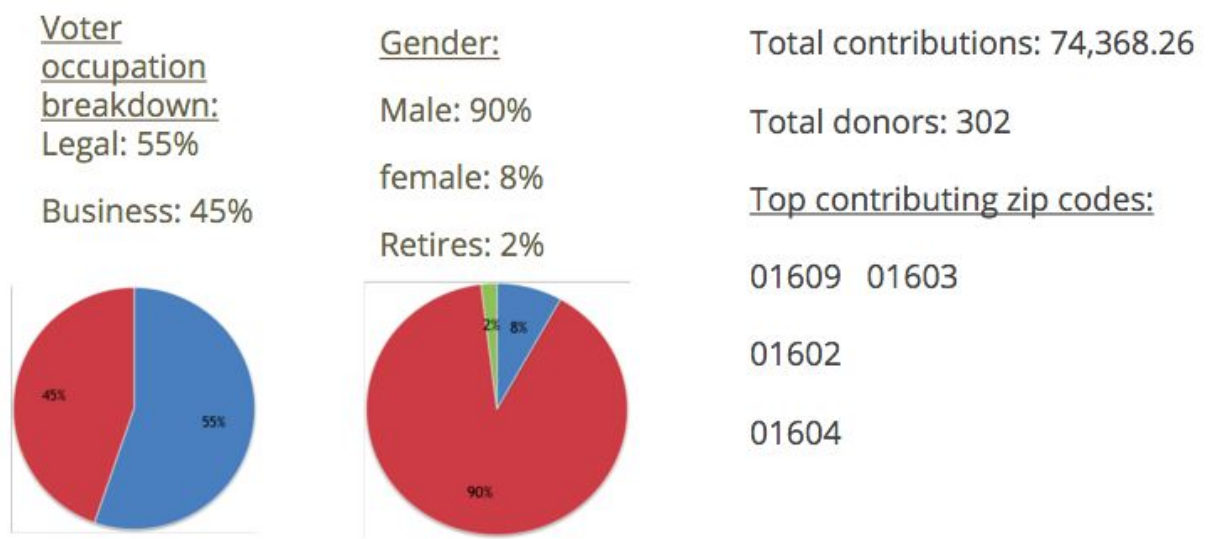
Top contributing zip codes:

01609

01602

Joseph Petty received \$74,368.26 in contributions from individual donors. Petty received his largest contributions from the CEO of the Commerce Bank. Not only did this individual alone contribute \$2,000, but the Commerce Bank in total gave \$2,800 to Petty's campaign. The Knocks family also contributed heavily to Petty. In total, members of the family gave \$3,500 to the campaign. Petty received the largest contributions (500+) to his campaign. Most of Petty's contributions came from the owners and CEOs of businesses. The top companies that contributed to his campaign were Mass Memorial (\$2,150), Commerce Bank (\$2,800), Eden, Rafferty Tetreau & Erlich, Fletcher (\$2,500) and the Mercadante funeral home (\$1,800). Petty received far more contributions than either of his competitors. He received contributions from a multitude of zip codes. Most contributions came from 01609, 01604 and 01602. Most of the contributors from these zip codes reported their occupations as small business owners, CEOs/Executives of large companies or as attorneys. This seems to indicate that Petty managed to garner the support of several large donors in the business and legal sector. In total perry received 302 donations.

Most of these donors were male (91.7%). Only 8.3% of the donations for Perry came from Women. 2% of Donors to Perry’s campaign where retirees. Most contributions were between 100 and 300 dollars. 26 of Petty’s donors labeled themselves as lawyers, 21 where CEOs and small business owners.

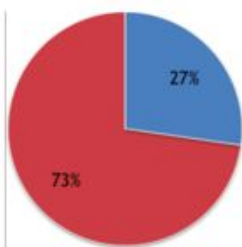


Philip P. Palmieri received \$37,438.62 in individual donations from 32 donors. 100% of these contributions came from men. 12.5% of these donors where retirees. In comparison to Petty, most of Palmieri’s donations came from small business owners as well as attorneys. When looking at the contributions to Palmieri's campaign, it becomes clear that not only did he not have the large donor base that the other two candidates had but the contributions given by each donor are not as high as those given to the other two candidates. This can be seen as a possible reason why Palmieri dropped out of the race. There was one larger contribution made to Palmieri's campaign, which came from Michael Ferguson who contributed \$1,000 dollars to the campaign. Mr. Ferguson is a lawyer in Worcester. Palmieri received the most contributions from

zip codes 01604 and 01545. There was no trend as to the occupations of contributors from these areas. 16 of Palmieri's contributors were business owners, CEOs or company presidents, 6 were Attorneys. Zip codes 01604 and 01545 do not share an economic trend either as 01604 is on the poorer end of the scale with a \$43,455 Average Adjusted Gross Income (AAGI) and a 12% unemployment rate while 01545, Shrewsbury, is on the higher end with a \$102,448 AAGI with 6% unemployment. Oddly it was Shrewsbury who comprised a fair chunk of Palmieri's fundraising, giving \$3,450 to his campaign, far more than was given in the town to conservative Michael Gaffney who totalled \$1,125. This could have something to do with contributors listing their businesses in Shrewsbury, thus 'exporting' Worcester's liberal political bent. It is very difficult to research whose contribution may be attributed to this without being able to access tax returns, thus it can only be concluded that this likely attributes to at least some of it but it is impossible to say how much. Due to Shrewsbury's not being in Worcester, and Palmieri running on a platform of infrastructure improvement in Worcester, this possibility must be asserted.

Voter occupation breakdown:

Legal: 73%
Business: 27%



Gender:

Male: 89%
female: 0%
Retires: 11%



Total contributions: 37,438.62

Total donors: 32

Top contributing zip codes:

01604

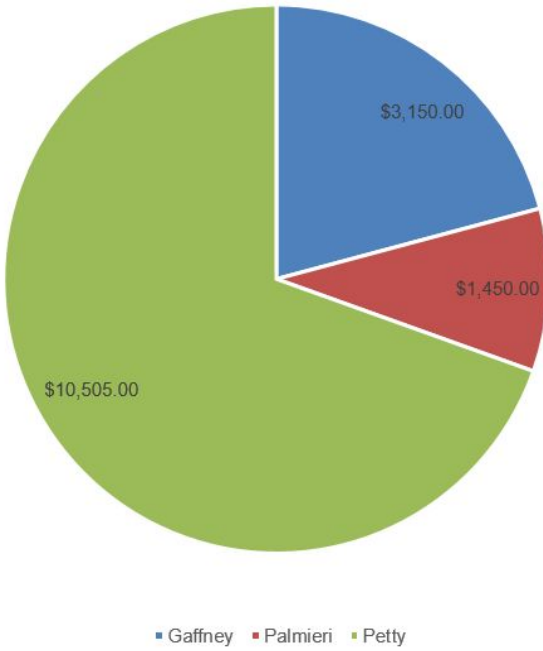
01545

Analysis of data

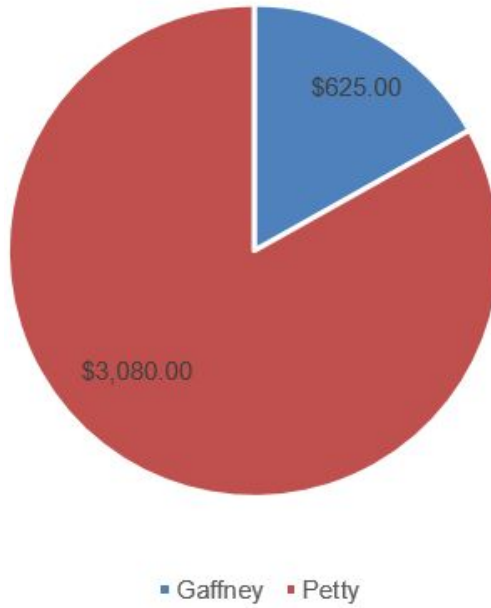
Analyzing the campaign contribution data and demographics of the zip codes of Worcester, Massachusetts, does not produce any especially groundbreaking or deviant trends, although some general trends and oddities do emerge, some of which might be worth a candidate investing some research or canvassing in. The most glaringly obvious conclusions one can glean from the data is that Worcester is heavily liberal, and is in many terms hostile terrain for a conservative politician. Incumbents seem to benefit strongly, having support from a broad coalition of business and legal oriented contributors wanting to stay on good terms with a popular liberal mayor like Joe Petty. Campaign contributions have an inverse relationship with contributing as poorer zip codes donated a larger percentage of their wealth than those in wealthier zip codes. These are tops in certainty among conclusions gathered.

Regardless of income Worcester contributes more to liberal candidates than to conservatives, and it is not very close. In zip code 01609, a wealthier area of Worcester with a \$75,560 AAGI, contributors gave to Petty by a nearly three quarters margin while the liberal-leaning Palmieri and conservative Gaffney split the rest. In Shrewsbury, zip code 01545, a wealthy area with a \$102,448 AAGI, contributors backed Petty with \$5,125, Palmieri with \$3,450, and Gaffney with just \$1,125. Even in the more middle class zip code 01602, AAGI of \$54,270, where Gaffney gets arguably his biggest show of support, he does not do particularly well. Petty received \$10,505, Palmieri \$1,450, and Gaffney a decent \$3,150. Petty and Palmieri still got over three quarters of the total contributions. In poorer zip codes Gaffney does even worse than this, for instance in \$39,390 AAGI zip code 01603 Petty received \$3,080 and

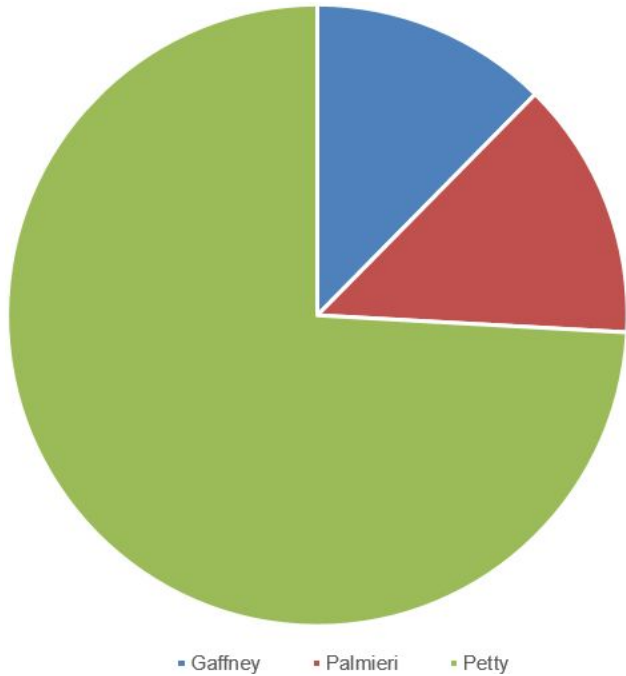
Gaffney \$625. This kind of landslide contributing to a certain ideological strain cannot be explained away by people contributing from the zip code where their business is located or an incumbency effect. Worcester very clearly supports liberal, Democratic-leaning candidates much more than conservative ones.



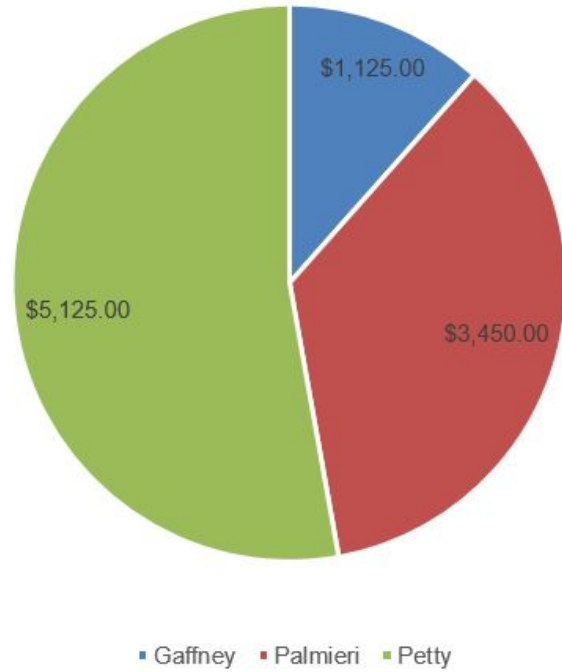
01602 Donations to Top 3 Candidates



01603 Donations to Top 3 Candidates



01609 Donations to Top 3 Candidates

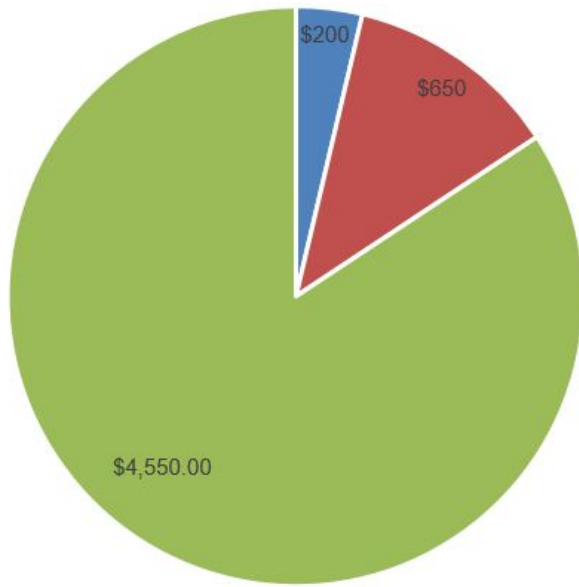


01545 Donations to Top 3 Candidates

Incumbency is still at play however, as it often is in mayoral elections. Business owners certainly want to make sure the mayor is a sympathetic ear and the fact that 55% of Joe Petty's financial backers are in the business profession speaks to this phenomenon. Having won the mayoral election three times Petty is certainly a formidable incumbent opponent who has the support of business owners and a broad coalition of liberal voters encompassing minorities such as Worcester's large hispanic and black populations, as well as a large amount of liberal whites. He outraised his opponents by a crushing amount, and barring a major scandal, his position of mayor of Worcester, Massachusetts does not seem to be in danger of coming to an end anytime soon.

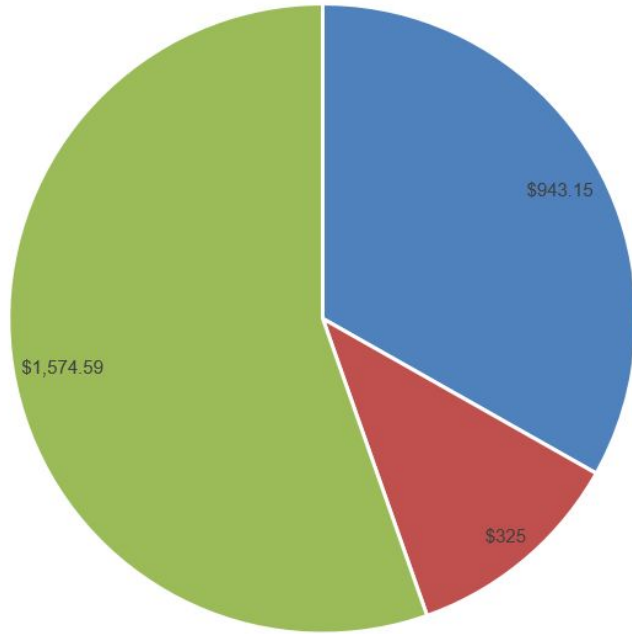
There does seem to be an inverse relationship between income and contributing in Worcester. In poorer than average zip codes like 01603, 01605 (AAGI \$41,366, unemployment

rate of 9.7%), and 01604 (AAGI \$43,455, unemployment rate of 12%) all donate more on average than wealthier zip codes like 01545, 01609, and 01606 (AAGI \$52,441, unemployment rate of 8%) donate less. 01603 donated 0.8% of their wealth, 01605 0.9% of their wealth, and 01604 donated 0.8% of their wealth to campaign contributions. 01545 gave 0.1% of their wealth, 01609 donated 0.1% of their wealth, and 01606 0.24% of their wealth to campaigns. This is a pretty clear trend, complete with the more middle class zip code 01602 donating a middle of the pack 0.4% of their wealth to campaigns. This can be explained in a fairly satisfying theory. Those in wealthier areas obviously have more money to spend on candidates campaign funds than those in the poorer zip codes, and it is possible that in order to elect the candidates they want it is simply not necessary for the wealthier contributors and zip codes to lavish much more capital on campaign funds than those in poorer areas. This argument is made even more strong when factoring in the success of Joe Petty and the heavily liberal bent of Worcester. There is simply no need for wealthier contributors to flood the political landscape with money as there seems to have been at the national level, where contributors like the Koch brothers or George Soros pour huge amounts of money into campaigns. While of course the funds that wealthier contributors would contribute are not even remotely close to the gigantic sums donated nationally, there is still no evidence that there is any need to even spend at a substantially greater rate than other contributors even when allowing for a more normative scaling down for Worcester political economics.



■ Gaffney ■ Palmieri ■ Petty

01605 Donations to Top 3 Candidates



■ Gaffney ■ Palmieri ■ Petty

01606 Donations to Top 3 Candidates

However this does not entirely explain this. While they certainly contribute a good amount, wealthier contributors in Worcester still do not seem to spend at an equivalent level than those contributors living in poorer areas. It is perhaps possible that some of this may have to do with those who own businesses operating in the poorer zip codes of Worcester filing their contributions from their business address. Considering Joe Petty's relationship with the Worcester business community and the slight but certainly notable difference in zip code campaign contributions in terms of percent of overall wealth, this does make sense as their likely would be a lot of money pouring in from these sources looking to remain friendly with Mayor Petty that could skew the numbers. However, unless one was able to comb through the tax returns, there is simply no way of proving this theory for this anomaly.

This phenomenon of business owners filing contributions under their business address also could explain for Philip Palmieri's surprising popularity in Shrewsbury. There he beat Gaffney by double the amount of contribution money, \$3,450 to \$1,125, coming in second to Petty by a lesser margin than he beat Gaffney. This success cannot be totally explained by the business owner's theory, as of course it must be said that some people with connections to both Shrewsbury and Worcester like Palmieri a significantly good amount. Palmieri also did rather well in zip code 10604, raising \$3,250 to Petty's \$6,835 and Gaffney's \$2,050. Again he beat Gaffney, although not quite by the same margins as in Shrewsbury. Zip code 01604 is a poorer area with \$43,000 being the AAGI and very large unemployment rate of 12%, as well as significant populations of minorities, with 21,914 of the population being white, and 3,474 being black and 5,823 being hispanic, which does all correlate to large support for a Democratic candidate in Massachusetts. However likely more significant is that a good portion of Palmieri's home city councilor district, District 2, lies in zip code 01604. He was a longstanding and popular councilor from this district and it very likely explains the healthy amount of support he received.

A summary of the campaign fund contributors donating habits by ideological and zip code lines is difficult to make, although it is not especially complicated. Petty seems a very representative mayor for Worcester, and sees very broad support in terms of contributions. Furthermore it is a liberal enclave and even fringe liberals like Philip Palmieri can do well with fundraising in certain areas. The contributors of Worcester do not need to donate very massive sums of money, as poorer zip codes actually have a higher percentage of overall wealth donated to candidates. This is likely due to the aforementioned factors that the candidates that tend to win

the mayoral elections are liberal and are supported in huge, landslide numbers, at least for the last three elections for Joe Petty. Worcester's liberal reputation is thoroughly affirmed by this data, and Joe Petty and candidates that share his and the cities liberal views will very likely continue to win in the future, without major changes to the contributing behavior of citizens regarding zip codes. The contributing tendencies will likely remain as they are in the majority of the zip codes surveyed, and it would take serious changes to the very citizenry and demographics of Worcester to change this.

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