

Self Financing in Worcester, Massachusetts

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The concept of self-financing is becoming more prominent in the American political sphere, while candidates increasingly attempt to use this funding technique in order to get around campaign finance regulations (there is currently no limit on the amount of money a candidate can donate to his or her own campaign). The general American public seems to have two predominant views on self-financing: one of condemnation, as a self-financed candidate can appear wealthy, and out of touch with the needs of the public, and the other of support, as they feel that self-financing keeps candidates free of the influence of “outside money” (for this purpose, this term is defined as money from issue oriented groups like climate change, pro-business, etc.).

While much of the discussion of self-financed candidates have focused on candidates for national office (like Carly Fiorina, Donald Trump, etc.), the question arises: how do self-financed candidates fair in local elections, specifically, Worcester, Massachusetts?

In order to answer this question, we scoured the Worcester Campaign Data File, 05-2015, and looked for indications of self-financed candidates. If a donor’s name was listed as the same name as the candidate, it was considered a self donation. Occasionally, there were more obvious indicators, like a candidate having “(loan)” next to their contribution, as well. In addition, some information was

gathered from outside Worcester resources, like the City's website, in order to form a more holistic view of campaign finance in Worcester. However, all numerical data presented in this essay will have been found from the Worcester Campaign Data File, 05-2015, unless otherwise stated.

First, we present an overview of some instances of self-funded candidacies in Worcester. Then, we present two case studies: the first, of Michael Gaffney, candidate for Mayor in 2015, and the second, of Gary Rosen, City Council member from District 5.

In general, Worcester, self-financing candidates do not seem to be stigmatized by their decisions. Many candidates in City Council elections choose to loan to themselves, however, the candidates still push for individual contributions in an effort to connect with the community. Candidates in Worcester do not seem able to win solely with self-loans, because it is necessary for a winning candidate to have strong ties to their neighborhood and district. It is very important that the candidates have notoriety among the voters. The candidates that combine fundraising *and* campaigning are most often the most successful at achieving elected office.

In the past, not many candidates for City Council in Worcester loaned themselves money. Instead, many candidates looked for support from individuals and local unions. Recently, however, there have been several candidates that have contributed to their own campaign with large self-loans.

In 2013 Morris Bergman loaned himself \$12,000, which is the largest self-loan of any candidate in the same election. Bergman, a candidate for Councilor-at-

large is an attorney at a private practice and clearly has an income that allows him to fund his campaign for City Council. He also was able to receive a large number of individual contributions that helped his campaign as well. Although his individual donation amounted to almost 30% of his campaign finances in that election cycle, the number of donors Bergman demonstrate his ability to connect with voters, rather than his ability to raise money.

Just two years earlier in the 2011 elections, George Russell and Virginia Ryan both loaned themselves over \$10,000. Russell loaned himself \$14,000 and Ryan loaned herself \$15,209.38. While Ryan had only 25 total donors, Russell had 175. Ultimately, Russell won his race, while Ryan did not.

However, the case gets a little more complicated when considering the 2007 City Council elections for Counselor-At-Large. Gary Rosen was able to gain the majority of votes, while lending \$4,000 dollars to his own campaign. Rosen only had a total of 74 campaign donors. Councilors-At-Large are elected in a system that elects the six candidates that receive the most votes. Therefore, in order to consider a “loser’s” campaign finance profile, we look at the candidate who was in 7th place: Michael Germaine. While Germaine loaned himself more money than Rosen (\$5,500), he also received a total of 175 donors, a number much larger than that of Rosen.

However, this stray from the pattern can best be explained by Rosen’s incumbent advantage. Although Germaine was able to reach out to more voters and get them to financially commit to his campaign, Rosen already had the resources

and connections to statistically keep his seat (incumbents are statistically more likely to get elected).

Overall, self-financed candidates for City Council in Worcester are rare. However, candidates do not often see failure due to their self-loans, due to the community outreach and individual contributions that candidates continue to seek out. In cases like candidate Virginia Ryan, where a candidate loans herself funds without continuing to solicit small donor donations, the candidates often fail, but this is probably due to the lack of community connection, rather than Worcester residents' attitudes on self-financed campaign, as evident by other campaigns that have seen the success of campaign finance.

Although, City Council campaigns don't see nearly as much press as the run for Mayor. Therefore, the race for Mayor is often aggressive and lively, but also involves more money. In order to consider self-funding in a candidacy for Mayor, we considered Michael Gaffney.

Michael Gaffney is, without a doubt, Worcester's foremost self-financed politician. Gaffney, a successful attorney who is adamant in defending and almost constantly referencing his status as a self-made man, was elected to the Worcester City Council in 2013. In pursuit of that seat, Gaffney spent roughly \$25,831.86 of his own money. When asked as to why he was willing to spend so much, Gaffney was candid in saying that he did not want to be bought and sold. He told reporters at Go Local Worcester, "When other people give you money, they want something out of it. ... They always want something" (Wright).

In a county that has slowly but surely become a sort of conservative safe-haven in Massachusetts, Michael Gaffney is still considered a far-right candidate (Phillips). A Tea Party darling and registered Independent, Gaffney has been incredibly vocal in his opposition to measures like tax increases as well as his support for policies like placing police officers in inner city schools. Gaffney has also approached Worcester politics with much more personality than one would generally expect from a typical City Councilman. Incredibly active on social media, Gaffney personally operates his own official Facebook and Twitter pages; he is consistent in using these mediums as a means of offering his take on contemporary political issues on local, national, and even global scales as well as giving his subscribers an intimate look at his personal life and workout regimen.

After serving a single term on the Worcester City Council, Gaffney opted to run for mayor against the incumbent, two-term office-holder, Joe Petty. Ultimately, Petty outraised Gaffney \$84,448 to \$71,528. What is remarkable about Gaffney's fundraising figure is the fact that \$47,700 of his campaign funds came from out of his own pocket. The fact that Gaffney's massive investment in his own campaign did not make for a successful mayoral bid is not entirely surprising considering the economic landscape of the city of Worcester. According to City-Data.com, 17.9% of Worcester residents were living below the national poverty level in 2013; that figure was nearly double that of entire state of Massachusetts' that year (City-Data).

Gaffney likes to bill himself as a maverick: a renegade, anti-establishment city councilman not bound by the confines of politics-as-usual. He tries to project an

image as a self-made, self-sustaining outsider with a mind of his own. Though this reputation that he has worked so diligently to cultivate may rile some impassioned support from hardline conservatives who favor such candidates, it can also be incredibly alienating. In a city like Worcester, which is at least partially characterized by economic hardship and disparity, a candidate like Gaffney can have a hard time relating to his constituents. The notion of funneling \$47,700 of one's money into anything, let alone a political campaign, is absolutely unheard of to the vast majority of Worcester residents, and the fact that more than half of Gaffney's campaign funds came from himself means that more than half of his campaign funds were not raised by the people of the city that he was vying to run.

Ultimately, Gaffney is much more an interesting mayoral candidate in Worcester than a viable one. In spite of the fact that he pumped almost fifty thousand dollars into his bid for mayor, he was still unsuccessful in both out raising his opponent and actually getting elected. The failure of Gaffney's mayoral campaign is very telling into exactly how plausible the success self-financed challengers for office in Worcester is. Gaffney had a great deal of personality; he spent a great deal of money, and he drummed up a great deal of coverage. Ultimately, however, none of that could make him relatable enough to be a legitimately plausible candidate for mayor, and in fact, his self-financing may have contributed to the opposite, by presenting him as a candidate that is out of touch with the actual members of the community.

Finally, we examined how self-financing works in a particular district. Worcester is made up of so many different socioeconomic backgrounds, and to

assume that self-financing is regarded in the same way across all communities would be incorrect. In order to look at a specific community, we chose District 5.

District 5 is not only a highly residential area, but a study titled *Rich Blocks, Poor Blocks* estimates that the median income in a particular neighborhood of District 5 is \$91,736. This neighborhood is the wealthiest in Worcester, from Park Avenue to Moreland Street, bordered by Salisbury Street and Pleasant Street.

Therefore, there is reason to consider that the self-financing of a candidate from the wealthiest part of Worcester may not seem obscure or hinder a candidate, because the candidates are surrounded by wealth.

Currently, the Representative for District 5 is Gary Rosen, former Councilor-At-Large, a retired high school teacher, but most notably, the host of *Rosen's Roundtable*, a public access television show where Rosen discusses politics and current issues. In the recent 2015 City Council election, Rosen was unopposed, and only had five donors: two of which are Rosen, himself, and his wife. Therefore, a further analysis of 2013 campaign data is necessary.

In 2013, Rosen faced a three-term incumbent, Bill Eddy. An examination of the campaign donors reveals that Eddy received \$25,960 in donations. Rosen, on the other hand, raised \$2,470.

Eddy received donations from a wide array of donors, but also Congressman Jim McGovern's Super PAC, as well as a Committee to Reelect Harriet Chandler (a state Senator), as well as a donation from many local unions. Meanwhile, Rosen and his wife donated a combined \$3000 for this particular election bid, which results to 12% of his entire campaign funds for the 2013 cycle. However, Rosen also had free

air-time on the local public television station, which allowed this non-incumbent to receive free media.

Rosen, the only candidate who self-financed any of his campaign, was able to unseat a three-term incumbent, while raising only 9.5% of his opponents' funds.

Unfortunately, there's not much other data relating to self-funded candidacies for District 5. In 2011, William Eddy faced a challenger, James Kaloeropoulos. Neither candidate used self funds. In 2009, Eddy didn't have an opponent. Even further back, in 2007, Eddy faced an opponent, but unfortunately, no campaign finance data was available.

Therefore, in the past 9 years, over the span of five elections, Gary Rosen is the only candidate in District 5 that has self financed, and defeated his opponent. Rosen won both of the races in which he self-financed, as well.

Perhaps Rosen was able to win because District 5 representatives disregard self-financed candidates and instead focus on the issues. However, the more likely reasoning for Rosen's initial win was his aggressive campaigning, and his notoriety from his previous stint in City Council and his talk show. Rosen's opponent had ten times the amount of money he had, from a much larger number of donors, and Rosen was still able to win (51% of the vote, compared to Eddy's 43%).

Ultimately, determining the Worcester community's stance on self-financed candidate isn't easy because there are so many factors that feed into an election outcome. The District that a candidate runs in matters, as constituents may have different beliefs on self-financing and money in elections. An incumbent advantage can make people overlook a candidate's self-financing, while many people may not

even regard campaign finance at all in Worcester. Candidates for Worcester elections raise such small amounts of money, and rarely publicize their records to the masses. In addition, elections happen every two years, allowing voters to forget about any campaign finance issue that occurred during the last election, as they have to focus on a new election constantly.

For the most part, one assumption remains: candidates can be successful while self-financing, but they must also seek out a large number of other donors, as well. This explains why the vast majority of candidates for local office in Worcester do not self-finance, and instead rely on public financing. In Worcester, it seems that campaigns are not reliant on the amount of *money* they have, but rather, the amount of community support.

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