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## Worcester, in the heart of Bos-Wash

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Union Station is dead, and so is the Worcester Regional Airport. Decent commuter rail service is a fantasy, and so is our downtown. City services are dwindling, but municipal salaries and taxes are skyrocketing.

Worcester, you might conclude, is a city you should unload faster than a financial stock.

But wait. Things are not as bad as they look. Worcester, it would seem, has some strong selling points.

The city, for example, is one of the best places in the country to raise a family, according to Richard Florida, author of "Who's Your City?"

Among medium-size cities, Worcester ranks second overall and fourth in the "best buy" category on the top-five list of family-friendly cities, according to Mr. Florida.

When it comes to gay and lesbian families, he said, Worcester ranks first overall and as "best buy" among medium-size cities.

Security, economic opportunities, physical beauty, environmental consciousness — these are among the ingredients of a city that make people feel at home, Mr. Florida suggested.

Mr. Florida, some of you might recall, wrote "The Rise of the Creative Class," in which he argued that successful economic development depends chiefly on recruiting and engaging creative people, rather than on pushing business relocations and infrastructure improvements.

In "Who's Your City?" he argues that as this creative economy evolves, where you live is becoming the most important decision in your life.

"Finding the right place is as important as — if not more important than — finding the right job or partner because it not only influences those choices but also determines how easy or hard it will be to correct mistakes made along the way," he said.

"The place we choose to live affects every aspect of our being. It can determine the income we earn, the people we meet, the friends we make, the partners we choose, and the options available to our children and families," he said.

But, according to Mr. Florida, "If you ask most people how they got to the place they live now, they'll say they just ended up there. They stayed close to family or friends, they got a job there, or more commonly, they followed an old flame. Some don't even see that there's a choice to be made at all."

OK, that describes most Worcester residents. But while our good fortune might be due to luck and not to our due diligence, we will take it. After all, we haven't had much to smile about since Tim Murray was elected lieutenant governor.

So, just how lucky are we in Worcester?



Well, according to Mr. Florida, talent, innovation and creativity are not distributed evenly across the global economy, but are concentrated in large economic mega-regions.

Well, guess what? Worcester is connected to one the biggest economic mega-regions in the world.

Mr. Florida calls this the "Bos-Wash" corridor, "stretching some 500 miles down the east coast from Boston through New York to Washington and is the world's second largest in terms of economic output, generating \$2.2 trillion in output."

Worcester benefits, he argued, because it offers people pushed out of Greater Boston an opportunity to enjoy a cost-effective lifestyle while staying connected to this economic mega-region.

Mayor Konstantina Lukes has read the "Rise of the Creative Class" but not "Who's Your City?" She is not surprised by Mr. Florida's conclusions.

All along she has known that there were things inherently good and nurturing in the many ways in which neighborhood groups, colleges and universities, and nonprofit and for-profit organizations have worked together on successful community projects in the city.

And she has always thought that the city's strength lies in its neighborhoods.

"But how do you market yourself by saying you are nicer? That is a tough thing to do," she said.

It used to be tough, that is.

"This should help," she said of Mr. Florida's book.

"I think I'll just hand out copies to those people who are thinking of leaving."

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