

Community Involvement Plan

Remediation of 47 Oread Street, Worcester, MA

Regional Environmental Council, Inc. (REC)

July 2025

A. Overview of the Community Involvement Plan

The purpose of this Community Involvement Plan (CIP) is to describe the strategy of the Regional Environmental Council, Inc. (REC) to inform, engage, and involve community members and stakeholders in the environmental cleanup of 47 Oread Street in Worcester, Massachusetts. The CIP outlines how the REC has involved, and will continue to involve, affected residents, City officials, and local organizations in the decision-making process regarding the environmental cleanup at the site.

This cleanup is supported through the City of Worcester's Brownfields Cleanup Revolving Loan Fund (BCRLF), funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The cleanup will prepare the site for the construction of a new greenhouse that will support REC's YouthGROW program and its broader food justice and urban agriculture mission.

REC is a longstanding and trusted presence in the Main South neighborhood and is committed to transparency, accountability, and ongoing communication with community members throughout the remediation process.

B. Spokesperson and Information Repository

Agency Spokesperson

Steve Fischer

Executive Director

Regional Environmental Council, Inc.

42 Lagrange Street, Worcester, MA 01610

(508) 799-9139 | steve@recworchester.org

Information Repository

REC will maintain an information repository at its office:

REC Office

42 Lagrange Street, Worcester, MA 01610

Public access: Monday–Friday, 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM, or by appointment

In addition, REC will establish a dedicated webpage on its website (www.recworchester.org) to serve as a publicly accessible digital information repository. The webpage will include relevant documents (such as environmental assessments, the Analysis of Brownfield Cleanup Alternatives (ABCA), and public notices), opportunities for the public to submit comments or questions, and REC's written responses to significant public comments. The site will be updated throughout the cleanup process and remain available as a record of community engagement.

C. Description and History

Site Location

47 Oread Street, Worcester, MA. The site is adjacent to REC's offices and is currently used as the location of REC's YouthGROW urban farm.

Site History

The site was historically developed as a multi-family residential property dating back to at least 1892. A three-story wood-frame building once stood on the site, accompanied by a four-bay garage. Approximately 30 years ago, the structure was destroyed by fire, and demolition debris—including ash, brick, concrete, and metal—was left in place to fill the cellar hole. Since 2016, REC has used the site for youth-led farming on imported clean topsoil. No evidence of industrial activity exists in the site's historical records.

Nature of Threat to Public Health and the Environment

Environmental site assessments conducted in 2024 and 2025 identified the following contaminant of concern in subsurface soils:

- **Lead:** Ash and building debris showed extremely elevated lead levels, with concentrations up to 3,860 mg/kg and an average of 2,200 mg/kg in ash-contaminated areas—well above MassDEP S-1 standards. Some materials may fail TCLP testing and require on-site stabilization or offsite disposal at a high-lead construction and demolition (C&D) debris facility.
- **Extent of Contamination:** Approximately 600–800 cubic yards of contaminated debris and soils require management.

Cleanup activities will include removal and offsite disposal of ash, concrete, and other high-lead contaminated materials; possible on-site stabilization of lead-impacted soils; and pre-construction testing to confirm that residual soils meet health and environmental safety standards. The work will make way for a new greenhouse to support REC's educational, agricultural, and workforce development goals. An Analysis of Brownfield

Cleanup Alternatives (ABCA) will outline the cleanup approach in more detail once ready and available for public comment.

D. Community Background

Community Profile

The 47 Oread Street site is located in Worcester’s Main South neighborhood, a densely developed area with 25.5 housing units per residentially zoned acre—three times the citywide average of 8.4 units per acre. The housing stock is old (77.5% of homes built before 1940) and overwhelmingly renter-occupied (91.6%), one of the highest renter occupancy rates of any neighborhood in the United States. Nearly 42% of residential structures are 2–4 unit buildings, well above national averages.

Main South has experienced a long history of disinvestment and environmental burdens, including exposure to waste facilities, blighted properties, and contaminated sites. Park space is limited to just 3.4% of the total land area. These factors—combined with aging infrastructure and public safety concerns—have contributed to persistent socioeconomic challenges.

The neighborhood is home to many low-income families, including recent immigrants and communities historically excluded from land ownership and food access. The median household income in Main South is \$26,736—only 58% of the citywide average. Nearly 42% of children live below the federal poverty level, placing the neighborhood among the most economically disadvantaged in the country. Over 21% of households are led by single mothers, a rate higher than 96.9% of U.S. neighborhoods.

Educational attainment is also low: only 18.7% of residents over 25 have an associate degree or higher, while 26.6% have not earned a high school diploma.

Food insecurity is a significant concern. A 2021 Community Health Assessment identified it as a major issue in the area. According to Rachel’s Table, in the 14 lowest-income census tracts in Worcester—including those in Main South—one in three children lives in a family unable to meet basic food needs. As of 2019, 49% of families in Main South received SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) benefits.

The Regional Environmental Council (REC) has worked in Main South for over two decades and is deeply embedded in the local landscape through long-term partnerships with youth, families, schools, and grassroots organizations.

Chronology of Community Involvement

- Since 2003, REC has operated the YouthGROW farm at 47 Oread Street and the adjacent parcel at 42 Lagrange Street.
- In 2023, 2024, and 2025, REC shared its plans for constructing a new greenhouse with YouthGROW participants, families, and neighborhood stakeholders during seasonal farm events, community meetings, and newsletters.
- Feedback from stakeholders has been overwhelmingly positive. Youth participants expressed excitement about the opportunity to expand year-round growing and learning activities, while neighbors and partners voiced support for reinvesting in the site and improving food access and youth employment opportunities.
- Environmental assessment findings were discussed with city officials, funders, and local partners in preparation for cleanup and redevelopment.
- REC staff and board are committed to maintaining transparency and collaboration throughout the cleanup and construction phases.

Key Community Concerns

Key concerns expressed or anticipated by the community include:

- Ensuring the safety of youth participants and nearby residents during cleanup and construction
- Minimizing disruption to existing urban agriculture programming
- Maintaining open lines of communication and transparency
- Guaranteeing that the site continues to serve youth and the community in a beneficial, healthy way

E. Continued Community Involvement

REC will implement the following community involvement activities throughout the cleanup process:

- **Legal Notice:** REC will publish a public notice in the Worcester Telegram & Gazette announcing the availability of the Draft ABCA, the start of a 30-day public comment period, and the location of the information repository. (Summer 2025)
- **Public Comment Period:** A formal 30-day public comment period will be provided for written and oral comments on the draft ABCA. (Summer 2025)

- **Community Meeting:** REC will host at least one public meeting at a convenient time and accessible location during the 30-day public comment period — likely at 42 Lagrange Street or a nearby community center—to present findings the cleanup alternatives presented in the draft ABCA, outline next steps, and invite public input. (Summer 2025)
- **Responses to Comments:** REC will prepare written responses to all significant public comments. These will be added to the project’s administrative record and made available at the information repository and online. (Summer/Fall 2025)
- **Ongoing Updates:** Updates will be shared through REC’s email newsletter, social media channels, flyers posted onsite, and neighborhood outreach. Updates will be available in English and Spanish. (2025-2026)
- **Closeout Meeting:** Upon completion of the cleanup, REC will host a final public update or open house to summarize outcomes and celebrate progress with community members. (Spring 2026)