

INSIDE Worcester

A Journal of Observation & Opinion ■ AUGUST 2014

SOS!


Is there hope for Webster Square? **PAGE 2**

REALLY BIG SHOWS

At The Hanover!

- Joseph & The Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat (Oct. 29-Nov. 2)
- ELF The Musical (Nov. 21-23)
- Million Dollar Quartet (Jan. 9-11)
- Flashdance: The Musical (Feb. 13-15)
- Camelot (May 8-15)

MORE EVENTS: Showtime; FACE 8



Traffic is perpetually at a standstill in Webster Square, as motorists try to navigate their way through the confluence of Main, Cambridge, Mill and Webster streets.

REP. JACK DRISCOLL

A local giant, fondly remembered

JENNIFER CASWELL

A funeral director's comeback moment

TONY THE TIGER

Mr. Nguyen's ambitious move on Webster St.

MEZCAL

Mike Covino's take on the Cantina's new address

THE RACE IN THE 17TH WORCESTER DISTRICT

Edith Morgan on the civility of the four-way contest for Mr. Binienda's seat

“We need a comprehensive traffic study (for the) death-defying situation at Cambridge and Main...”

Michael J. Germain

Candidate, 17th Worcester District

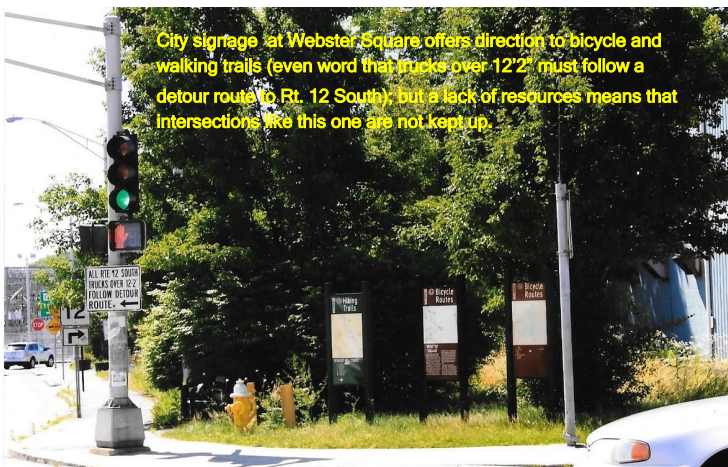
COVER STORY

Woe is us

Webster Square a wayfarers' nightmare

By ROD LEE

How interesting that the city should announce plans for full-scale implementation of a plan to guide wayfarers to cultural venues and other attractions at almost exactly the moment that Webster Square is feeling more like an abandoned child than ever. Indeed, word from City Manager Edward M. Augustus Jr. of the \$3 million project to create “an integrated system of signs and markers” (Telegram & Gazette, July 8th) came only thirteen days after the Webster Square Business Association (WSBA) fielded a litany of complaints and concerns about its beleaguered neighborhood at a “listening session” at Our Lady of Angels’ new Family Center.



City signage at Webster Square offers direction to bicycle and walking trails (even word that trucks over 12'2" must follow a detour route to Rt. 12 South), but a lack of resources means that intersections like this one are not kept up.

likely to encounter in arguably Worcester’s most forlorn enclave would undoubtedly say to them “good luck getting to the airport” or “excuse our mess, we’ll clean it up when we get the time and money.”

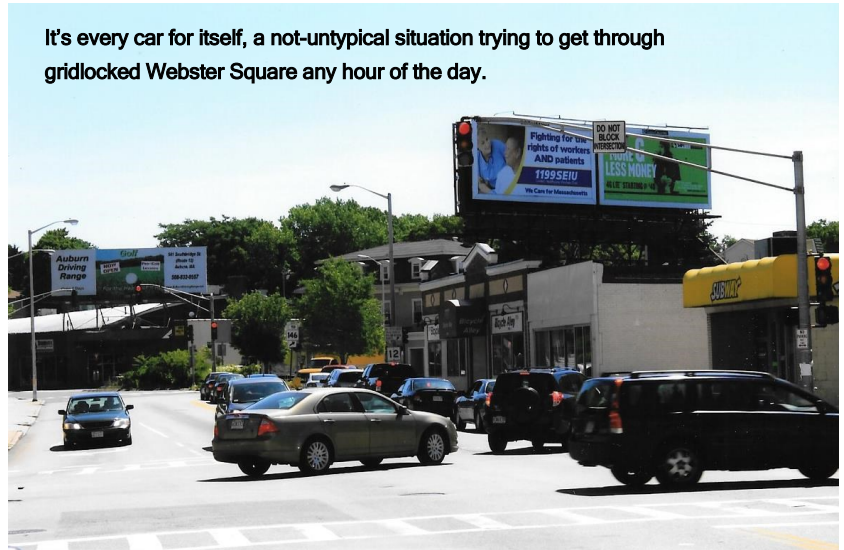
While “public safety/security,” “empty buildings,” “a lack of pride and unity,” “the city’s debilitating dual tax rate,” the sad-sack “Coes Pond bathhouse” (see PAGE 7 for Councilor Gary Rosen’s comments on the drive to revive Coes) and “the need to make Webster Square a more desirable place to be” were all mentioned as issues confronting Webster Square’s health and prosperity when Facilitator Phil Niddrie opened the floor to remarks at the June 25th meeting, the Square’s traffic headaches easily commanded center stage.

“Ludlow St. is a recipe for accidents,” said Wendy Rose of bulbs.com.

“No one stops at the traffic light out here...all day long,” said Fr. Charles F. Monroe, who hosted the meeting. “Worcester city drivers don’t believe in red lights” (Fr. Monroe also noted that “I have been here twenty years and the neighborhood has changed dramatically; a lot of people are not from this neighborhood”).

Michael J. Germain, former At-Large city councilor and current candidate for state representative in the 17th Worcester District, summed up the frustration motorists feel when they get stuck in Webster Square. “The whole area is a mess,” Mr. Germain said. “Friends of mine take a circuitous route around Webster Square. They don’t want to be in this neck of the woods.”

“Whatever the city does, ties into the RTA,” Douglas A. Belanager, the bus company’s treasurer and one of Mr. Germain’s opponents in the September primary, said, in referencing steps that can be taken to alleviate congestion in Webster Square. “The RTA’s difficulties with buses is with traffic flow. The RTA is open to suggestions, starting with traffic. A larger segment [of the population] would use



It's every car for itself, a not-untypical situation trying to get through gridlocked Webster Square any hour of the day.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

OUR TOWN/ROD LEE

Remembering Jack Driscoll

Boston media's appearances in the Central Massachusetts/Worcester area are usually limited to feel-bad incidents, which made Fox News' "Zip Trip" visit to the American Legion field in Northbridge on July 11th such a rare "up" happening that hundreds of local residents turned out to share in the good-vibes attention. Some arrived as early as 5:30 a.m. for the 6:00 to 10:00 show. Looking around, I personally couldn't help but think, however, of all of the notable "townies" who would certainly have been in attendance were they still with us. Topping that list was **John R. "Jack" Driscoll**, who died at the age of ninety-two days earlier at Belmont Manor Nursing and Rehab. Mr. Driscoll's wife Connie predeceased him a little over a year ago. I first got to know Jack Driscoll as editor of the Blackstone Valley Tribune in Whitinsville. The Tribune's office on Church St. was only a short walk from his home on Linwood Ave. and he would sometimes drop by evenings to chat while the newspaper—a weekly—was being put together in the composing room. Like his fellow State Rep. **John J. Binienda**, Mr. Driscoll knew constituent service inside-out and he practiced it with such religious fervor that he was unbeatable come Election Day. **Peter Lachapelle** was one challenger who discovered this truth the hard way. Precious few politicians are held in such high regard as Mr. Binienda and Mr. Driscoll. Many of those who aren't could learn something by emulating their approach. The Driscolls had moved east a while ago and so Jack's presence in Northbridge was no longer a given. He was nevertheless missed even before his passing; as are other luminaries I knew as friends: **Spaulding Aldrich, Ross Rajotte, Mary Frances Powers, Bob Mellor, Herbie Hammond, Ed Riley, Ron Safer, Bob Parker, Don Murray** and **Harold Mathon**.

How any one of them would have loved seeing the Fox spotlight fall on their beloved community, with snapshots of Pine Grove Cemetery, the ill-fated House of Affirmation, Whitinsville Golf Club and West End Creamery; to have Fox's "VB" try to stump Northbridge High School Principal "Mr. G" (for Gauthier) with Northbridge trivia questions; to witness **Ken Warchol** in his official "Paul Whittin" attire as he talk about historic-themed tours of the town that he will be leading this fall. As I left the grounds **Jeannie Hebert** of the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce—a relatively new and appreciated force in the life of the town and the region—was just arriving. Ms. Hebert is helping lead the charge in concert with State Sens. **Richard T. Moore** and **Michael O. Moore** along with Congressman **McGovern**, for location of a long-sought satellite campus of Quinsigamond Community College on the first floor of the former Whittin mill ("The Shop") on Main St. in Whitinsville. Rep. Driscoll would be proud of this effort. And so the beat goes on. (Pictured above chatting with representatives of **McKeough Lamacchia Realty** is **FOX25 Morning News Anchor Gene Lavanchy**; born and raised in Massachusetts, Mr. Lavanchy was a key part of the launch of the program in 2003).

A bite at Blanchard's 101

It is hard to imagine better Chicken Tenders and Fries than those served at Blanchard's 101 Diner on Cambridge St. (although I'm sure the ever-critical Gordon Ramsay would beg to differ, given the opportunity to sample them as we did). Even the lack of AC in the place on a scorching afternoon (duly noted by a couple of regulars who are allowed the luxury of hurling light-hearted, good-humored insults at the cook, Chris) could not diminish a sublime experience.

The resurgent RTA

Douglas A. Belanger, one of three Democratic candidates for retiring 17th Worcester District State Rep. **John J. Binienda's** seat, was understandably eager to discuss the WRTA when I interviewed him at the bus hub on June 19th. As treasurer of the bus company, Mr. Belanger has witnessed the RTA's steady ascendancy under the direction of **Steve O'Neil**. "We are financially in the black for the first time in eight years," Mr. Belanger said. "We are now forward-funded. We were carrying \$1 million in operational debt. That's now gone." The challenges of course never diminish; ahead, even as the RTA celebrates its push of electric buses into service, is a price tag of up to \$15 million for the removal of contaminated soil in order to build a new dispatch center and garage on Quinsigamond Ave. Does anyone doubt the ability of Mr. O'Neil and his Board of Directors to get this done?



THE NEIGHBORHOODS

Jen joins The Ladies

LINCOLN ST.—They call themselves “The Ladies of Lincoln St.” and they are now four in number with the addition of **Jennifer B. Caswell** to the ranks at Nordgren Memorial Chapel. How it transpired that Ms. Caswell joined forces with **Katherine E. Mangsen**, Katherine’s daughter **Erika M. Nordgren Mangsen** and **Gail Wiles** is a story that reads almost like a Greek tragedy in certain ways. There is, to begin with, the recent sale of the funeral home Ms. Caswell had been associated with—Caswell-King, on Grove St.—to Callahan & Fay Brothers: a move she was not aware was coming. During an interview at Nordgren on July 2nd, Ms. Caswell described the transaction, which she attributes as having been orchestrated by her brother **Chester F. “Chet” Caswell III**, as “the surprise of my life” and a huge disappointment. It is easy to see why. She was a fourth-generation Caswell and “the first female Caswell” to have had a role in the running of Caswell-King. She spent “three weeks trying to wrap my head around” the sudden development. She wept. Then, remembering the love of funeral work that had been instilled in her by her father, the late **Chester Caswell Jr.** (“my dad was the best teacher...so outgoing, caring and happy; I feel blessed that I had those ten years with him”), she summoned a second wind and a new resolve. In doing so, her thoughts turned to Nordgren Memorial. “I had heard good things about them,” Ms. Caswell said. “They are all females and hard workers, caring people. For the last month I’ve been testing the waters here. It seems like both sides are easygoing and we

“It’s nice to be in a positive environment.”

Jennifer B. Caswell

Nordgren Memorial Chapel

have a similar philosophy. I was impressed with how organized they are from A to Z. They work in a professional way.” Apparently the feeling of admiration is mutual, as it should be, considering Ms. Caswell’s pedigree. In Ms. Caswell, Nordgren Memorial is gaining not only a

veteran of the industry and another woman member of the Nordgren family (“80 percent of graduating classes are now female in the funeral business,” she says) but someone who possesses talents that will undoubtedly strengthen Nordgren’s operation. A life in music (she attended Pine Manor College and Hartwick College for that specific pursuit), for instance. “I was assistant organist at First Baptist Church in Worcester,” she said. “Music has always been an integral part of my life. Now I play live music for services which is much better than canned music. I hope to bring that here [to Nordgren].” Ms. Caswell is in fact something of a Renaissance woman: a cook; a sculptor; a pianist; and an organic farmer with her very own eighty-five acres in Princeton, where she was taught how to “run the big combines” by the farm’s former owner. From the tears then of despair over her fate at Caswell-King she is now experiencing the thrill of an abundant existence, enhanced by her affiliation with The Ladies of Lincoln Street. “I love to have the variety” going, Ms. Caswell said. “Art, music, organic gardening and farming. It is a nice balance to funeral work. I am going to make it work so I enjoy all of them. I’m always doing a piece of all of them, which is a charmed life.” Katherine Mangsen is equally pleased. “Erika, Gail, Kurt (Mangsen) and I are thrilled that Jennifer has asked to be part of our team,” Ms. Mangsen said. “She brings experience and four generations of Caswell tradition with her that will enhance our ministry of serving families.”



Jen Caswell is settling in, literally and figuratively, at Nordgren Memorial Chapel.

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Tony the Tiger

WEBSTER ST.—Tenants including **Mark Doyle** of Autumn Color and **Kevin McNamara** of Outdoor Power Equipment Service do not anticipate their occupancy at 70-76 and 82-92 Webster St. to be in jeopardy now that one of the city's biggest landlords—**Tony Nguyen** of Worcester Affordable Housing LLC—has purchased the two buildings for \$1 million. Mr. Doyle specializes in digital imaging. His shop at 70 Webster St. boasts some of the most interesting artwork to be found in the city. Mr. McNamara handles small-engine repair and power-equipment service for all makes and models of mowers, snow blowers and other paraphernalia at 88 Webster St. "I can't



Tony's turf; buildings on Webster St. recently purchased by landlord impresario Tony Nguyen.

see where it makes any difference," Mr. McNamara said. "I've had discussions with (Mr. Nguyen) and he assured me that nothing will change except maybe for upgraded lighting in the hallways." Mr. Doyle is optimistic that the sale will mean the creation of more parking. Is there a down side? Maybe. "(Mr. Nguyen) raised the rent 10% across the street," Mr. Doyle said. "There are people looking to move elsewhere."

Joey on the job

MAIN ST.—The first sight that caught our eye as residents, friends and guests gathered on the lawn behind Goddard/Homestead for an appreciation luncheon was Executive Chef **Joey Cancelmo** emulating The Roadrunner, and masterfully at that. If the success of the facility

is predicated to any degree on his work, things are in good hands. Executive Director **Joan Cusson** is certainly convinced this is the case. "Boy was he working!" Ms. Cusson said on July 16th of Mr. Cancelmo's repeated trips in and out to bring trays of lobster to the crowd (Mr. Cancelmo is pictured at right). "He has been with the organization for a year and a half. He oversees all of the menu planning for Goddard/Homestead and manages all of the staffing in the kitchen and dining room. Being a small operation, he helps in almost all departments when necessary. A great team player. At Homestead Hall Joey is the go-to guy if we have an opening in the kitchen or dining room (he's there this week cooking lunch since our cook of 25+ years is on vacation.)"



Jeremiah's, a good neighbor

CAMBRIDGE ST.—It takes a certain intrepidity to conduct a food drive outdoors when summer temperatures are at their fiercest but this has never stopped the folks from Jeremiah's Inn, who have been doing it for twenty years now. "Yes! It was a success!" Jeremiah's Inn's Executive Director **Janelle Wilson** said of the July 7-12 event.



"We (collected) almost 3000 pounds of food. The dollars are still being finalized but overall it was an improvement over last year. The partnership with Price Chopper was great! It's the start of a good new relationship with them. I'm really pleased with the effort **Terry Broderick**, the store manager at PC, put into help to make this a success. She's really great." The drive enables Jeremiah's to continue a key part of its mission which is, "together we can feed our neighbors."

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THE NEIGHBORHOODS

An R&D reprieve

BERNICE ST.—Worcester’s burgeoning research and development industry could be doing even better if City Council were to adopt two tax-relief options that would make our fair metropolis more competitive with the likes of Boston, Cambridge and Marlborough. So says the AWARE (Accurate Worcester Assessments on Real Estate) group, whose **Joan Crowell** in one of her most recent emails notes that the three latter communities all offer something called “the R&D Personal Property Tax Exemption Option” (Boston and Cambridge’s residential tax rate, Ms. Crowell says, “also includes a Residential Exemption for owner-occupied homes”—significant in that “Worcester’s residential tax rate (\$19.54) is the highest of the four”) (Boston’s is \$12.58, Cambridge’s \$8.38 and Marlborough’s \$16.11). Ms. Crowell urges Worcester City Council to adopt both options, describing them as “a great marketing tool” to keep the city’s locally educated workforce here where college students belong, after graduation.



Mr. Germain’s reach

OFF ROAD (NORTHBRIDGE)—A “Vote Mike Germain” sign stuck atop a pile of dirt in front of the China Pacific Restaurant, which is being renovated for a re-opening after several years in mothballs, seems at first glance like some sort of prank, given that Northbridge is not part of the 17th Worcester District in which Mr. Germain is campaigning. Mr. Germain must have friends in all the right places. The sight is a shock to the system comparable to Polar Corp’s bear being pilfered, Councilor **Lukes** voting for highest residential or **John DiPietro** or **Brendan O’Connor** announcing that they would no longer be telling jokes at meetings of the Chamber’s Breakfast Club. If all is fair in love and war, it would behoove **Doug Belanger** to plunk one of his signs down at the Greendale Mall, for **Moses Dixon** to do the same at the Wachusett Reservoir and for a **Kate Campanale** placard to go up at the Holden town line.

A Canal District charmer

GREEN ST.—If weekend crowds, splendid city sidewalks, cool streetlamps and a constant buzz aren’t a sign that the Canal District is pushing all the right buttons, there’s the Crompton Collective in the basement of Crompton Place: an antiques, furniture and gift shop rolled into one as only **Amy Chase** with her funky touch can create. Are they having fun? Consider these postings on the Collective’s Facebook page: “We just got an invite to our own event!” Referencing a Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce Business After Hours happening scheduled for Thursday, August 21st from 5:00 to 7:30 p.m. that coincides with the Collective’s grand opening of high-end space. Or this sign, typical of items for sale on the floor: “Patriots Parking Only/VIOLATORS WILL BE SACKED”. The Collective “is doing great!” Ms. Chase tells Inside Worcester. “We are coming up on our two-year anniversary in September! Since our opening in 2012 we have expanded three times with a current total of 84 local antique and handmade vendors.” The Collective also had a hand with Arts Worcester and the Canal District Alliance in the four-story mural of the Canal that adorns the south wall of the Crompton Place



complex, and is active in a year-round farmer’s market. It appears that Crompton Place’s struggle to find the right tenants is over; more good news for a neighborhood that continues to find new ways to drum up interest; and win followers.

complex, and is active in a year-round farmer’s market. It appears that Crompton Place’s struggle to find the right tenants is over; more good news for a neighborhood that continues to find new ways to drum up interest; and win followers.

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THE ECHO CHAMBER

(Random quotes on everything from the Cars of Summer to Coes Pond...an Inside Worcester exclusive)

Rome & Pat Derosiers

Chandler St.

"Yes we did go and it was a nice laid-back show. Total cars registered was 1006. They have a few issues to deal with but are getting there. This was only their second year. We have registered for next year already and many people we have talked to plan to go back also.

(On the 2014 Cars of Summer at Green Hill Park)

Mike Covino, president

Niche Hospitality Group

"The new location has been great for us. Ample parking, the ability to accommodate large parties and an express taco bar at lunch are 3 key reasons why the move has been successful. **(On Mezcal Tequila Cantina's relocation from Shrewsbury St. to 30 Major Taylor Boulevard).**

Edith Morgan

Host, Senior Speak, Worcester Senior Center

"I for one do not miss the 'fireworks' in campaigns—glad to see that the race in the 17th (Worcester District) is civilized, and we can decide on whom to elect based on fact rather than noise. They [Doug Belanger, Kate Campanale, Moses Dixon and Mike Germain] are apparently all above the despicable name-calling that has taken over so much of our politics of late." **(On the four-way contest for Rep. John J. Binienda's seat at the State House).**

Jack Foley

Worcester School Committee

"Mrs. Dennis brings her skills from her training at Clark's Hiatt Center for Urban Education and her leadership experience in Rutland at building a collaborative team with teachers, parents and the community. She creates inclusive environments in her school buildings



New Columbus Park Principal Siobhan Dennis in her office, with daughter Katie.

where everyone is welcome and everyone is asked to be engaged in the education of the children." **(On the appointment of Siobhan Dennis as principal at Columbus Park Preparatory Academy on Lovell St.).**

Gary Rosen

District 5 City Councilor

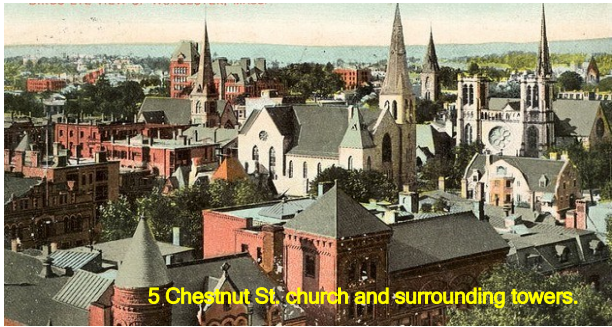
"I was at Coes Pond beach last week with City Manager Augustus. We talked to the six lifeguards on duty (for only about a dozen beachgoers). They said their busiest day so far was about thirty people. That's more reason to bring this great natural resource back to life. Unfortunately, the closing of Indian Lake beach also might keep some of the Coes Pond users away. But the lifeguards were surprised and pleased that the manager had a Parks Dept. crew sent up to the beach to cut a good deal of overgrowth—especially that right along the edge of the water and sand. The manager is also trying to find out from Rob Antonelli Jr. the cost of remodeling the bathhouse. Obviously, little funding is available now. Also, a woman called me last week. She took her children to the beach but didn't park on Mill St. because the city has banned on-street parking in the beach area (although most people ignore those signs). So she parked her car in the former Big D/Price Chopper lot where, later, she was towed at \$140. Evidently she thought the warning sign on the deserted building was posted when the market was open and busy." **(On efforts by the newly formed Friends of Coes Pond to revitalize that watershed site).**

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SHOWTIME!

Preservation Worcester's Weekend Walks!



WERE such renowned amblers as Henry David Thoreau or Ralph Waldo Emerson alive today they would undoubtedly jump at the chance to experience the Worcester of yesteryear by way of strolls offered by **Preservation Worcester**. Three such Saturday themed ambles are coming up this month: 1) "Crown Hill and

the Greek Revival Style" (Sat., 8/2); 2) "Lincoln Square and the Salisbury Legacy" (Sat., 8/9); and 3) "Steeple, Towers and Arches" (Sat., 8/16). All start at 10:00 a.m. Bring your most comfortable shoes/sneakers! These treks coincide nicely with an invitation Preservation Worcester has issued to amateur and professional photographers alike to submit digital images of "built Worcester" (buildings, monuments, statues, bridges, and arch elements and details) for a juried photo exhibition. The show resulting from this collection will be juried by James A. Welu, director emeritus of the Worcester Art Museum. The entry deadline is August 1st so there is no time to waste! (P.S., Preservation Worcester's "Better Than Your Average Yard Sale" is October 5th; donations now being accepted!)...Speaking of walks, Councilor Gary Rosen and Sue Swanson of the Friends of Coes Pond ask all persons interested in attempts to revive the watershed to join Ed McKeon for "an interesting, informative and eye-opening" walk around **Coes Pond** this Friday (August 1st) at 5:00 p.m. The walk starts at the new park's parking lot (the former Coes Knife property). **DO NOT PARK** in the former Big D/Price Chopper; cars are being towed from there at \$140 a pop...October for those looking ahead brings the Worcester Sharks' Opening Night at the **DCU Center** (10/18). Don't expect any body checks or high-sticking penalties, however, when the Central Mass. Business Expo comes to the DCU Center on September 8th (unless, that is, bankers we know like Brian Thompson of Commerce Bank, Joe Barbato Jr. of MCU or Lisa Bean of Webster First are jockeying for position on the floor of the arena). That the city's venerable downtown showplace shifts between tame and wild, meanwhile, is proven by the DCU's booking for Feb. 13-15, 2015: "Monster Jam."... For riveting images we expect it would be hard to top **Worcester Art Museum's** display entitled "Guns Without Borders in Mexico and Central America" (a perfect companion to "Knights," which showcases WAMS's recently acquired arms and armor collection). "Guns," on display through Nov. 9th, features twelve projected images taken by documentary photogs Louie Palu and Carlos Javier Ortis and eight chromogenic prints by Dominic Bracco II...A highlight of the Worcester Bravehearts' inaugural season comes this week when the Futures League team hosts the Taiwanese national team at **Hanover Insurance Park** at 7:05 p.m. Monday, July 28th. A free public baseball clinic follows on Tues., July 29th at 1:00 p.m. at Rockwood Field next to Worcester State U's campus; then it's back to regular business versus the Dirt Dawgs on Wed., July 30th, also at 7:05.

Webster Square

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

buses more if you could count on them." Mr. Belanger's point being, that, as the Square's traffic snarls go, so goes the adherence-to-schedule RTA bus drivers try to maintain.

There was no shortage of suggestions made to Mr. Niddrie, at the meeting, on ways the city can come to Webster Square's assistance:

- "A streetscape program"—**Margaret "Peg" Naylor**, Goddard House/Homestead Hall, ret.
- "There is nothing for youth...a coffee shop?"—**Pastor Steve Barrett**, Christ the Rock Fellowship.
- "The big problem is empty commercial buildings"—**Brian Barrows**, Barrows Hardware.
- "Cops on bikes...stealth vehicles, because bad people don't hear them coming. Eyes without ears is no good. The Worcester Housing Authority's (surveillance) approach is much better"—**John Reed**, Knights of Columbus/Coes Pond Initiative.
- "TIFs and the dual tax rate, questionable assessments. Worcester has an anti-business reputation and to some degree it's well-deserved"—**Ed Salloom**, Salloom Realty.

Missing from a map of "ways" (West Boylston Way, Lincoln Way, Salisbury Way, Nine Way, Chandler Way) that the T & G published on July 8th was "Webster Sq. Way." Another disappointment for a too-often-overlooked district, in the minds of those who live and work in Webster Square.

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