By working in the public sector, Tim Murray learned a lot about the private sector.

His experience in the number two job in state government prepared him for the number one job in the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce, the Commonwealth’s largest Chamber of Commerce.

His position as president and CEO, which he assumed in 2013, is in some ways a continuation of his work as lieutenant governor of Massachusetts, and mayor and city councilor of Worcester, as all are about bringing together stakeholders from the public and private sectors, as well as academic institutions and non-profit organizations.

Given the sometimes conflicting priorities, reaching a consensus can be challenging. Murray will discuss how he does it during his webinar, “Satisfying Stakeholders for Successful Project Delivery.”

Click here to register for: Satisfying Stakeholders for Successful Project Delivery Wednesday, August 5, 12:30 to 1:30 p.m.

Murray Building Relationships to Build Projects

More than a decade ago, when Tim Murray served as mayor of Worcester, the city was known for its failing shopping mall, an enclosed building that cut through the middle of the city. Rather than bring downtown visitors together, it kept them apart. Rather than spur additional development, it came to symbolize economic and urban failure.

Murray’s prescription for fixing the mall was more radical than the owners of the property envisioned—tear it down and start over.

Today, the mall is gone and more than half a billion dollars’ worth of commercial and residential development is taking its place. CitySquare is projected to create more than 2.2 million square feet of commercial, medical, retail, entertainment and residential space. And, as construction continues, Murray is proceeding with other projects, which he will discuss during the Special Webinar Series webinar, “Satisfying Stakeholders for Successful Project Delivery.” To register, click here.

Bringing People Downtown

While now pursuing development as a representative of business instead of government, Murray’s goal remains the same—capitalizing on Worcester’s many assets, which he defines as including its central location, diverse and highly educated population, 12 area colleges and universities, robotics and digital gaming sectors, and healthcare and manufacturing businesses.

All this takes people and cooperation, so much of Murray’s focus today is on “leveraging Worcester’s transportation assets,” and improving access to the city, while also increasing population density in downtown Worcester.
Round trip train service between Worcester and Boston has increased from six per day in the ’90s to 20 today, but Murray would like to bring the number to 26 by adding more non-stop trips.

With non-stop service, he says, commuters can travel from Worcester’s Union Station to South Station in Boston in 46 minutes. Convenient access to Boston would bring more people into Union Station, and would also create a more compelling reason for commuters to live in Worcester.

“If you work on State Street in Boston, you can live in an apartment in downtown Worcester for $1,200 a month versus paying $3,000 in Boston,” Murray says.

With 800 new units of market-rate housing coming online in Worcester, along with more than 300 hotel rooms, Murray sees an opportunity to increase population density, which will support more commercial development, which will draw even more people downtown, while creating jobs.

College students are an especially important target for Murray, as the city is home to nine colleges, including WPI. Many leave after graduating, but he says, “Retaining more college students locally would create a competitive advantage.”

The Central Massachusetts economy is “increasingly centered around innovation,” Murray adds.

“The cost of development is high compared to other parts of the country, it’s a relative bargain compared to the Greater Boston area. A lot of companies are still willing to invest in Massachusetts, because it has a degree of intellectual capital that is not available anywhere else.”

Increased rail service, along with greater utilization of Worcester Regional Airport, would also make Worcester a more attractive location for businesses.

“We’ve taken significant steps toward revitalizing the airport,” Murray says. “By convincing Massport to buy the airport and take ownership of it, they have an incentive to make it profitable, as they have done with Boston’s Logan Airport.”

Massport, an independent public authority that develops, promotes and manages airports, along with the state’s seaport and transportation infrastructure, previously managed Worcester Regional Airport, but the airport was owned by the City of Worcester. As owners, Massport can now make capital investments in the airport.

**Building Momentum**

One thing Murray’s trying to build that Worcester has not had in its recent history is momentum. Murray believes Worcester’s time has come and that development will spread through Worcester and into the area bordering Routes 190, 290, and 395.

Tangible evidence of progress includes the renovated Hanover Theatre for the Performing Arts, the Worcester Biotechnology Research Park, a busy restaurant strip along Shrewsbury Street, and Gateway Park, which is owned by WPI and is home to the Robert A. Foisie School of Business.

Murray cites Gateway Park as an example of how the public sector and private sector can work together for mutual benefit, as the park is “creating jobs and putting property back on the tax rolls.”

Originally developed as a joint venture with the Worcester Business Development Corporation, an organization originally established as a development arm of the Chamber, Gateway Park in 2010 and is building out the park, which also includes WPI’s Life Sciences and Bioengineering Center, its Corporate and Professional Education division and its fire protection program. It also includes the Massachusetts Biomedical Initiatives incubator, which currently hosts seven companies.

Gateway Park is located on a former brownfield property, which had to be remediated before the property could be developed. Brownfield tax credits helped make the project economically viable, according to Murray. To date, more than $115 million has been invested in Gateway Park, and 11 acres of blighted mill buildings have been converted into more than half a million square feet of new development.

“Public-private partnerships are about bringing together two worlds,” according to Murray. “The public sector tends to work slowly, the private sector works at a faster pace, but there are some things the private sector won’t invest in. For brownfields and transportation projects, you need public money.”

When working on a project that involves both public and private stakeholders, it’s important to understand everyone’s goals, and to develop a strategy for bringing them together.

“A big piece is the value of listening,” he says, “and trying to understand where the different stakeholders are coming from.”

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Wednesday, August 5

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**The Robert A. Foisie School of Business** is rooted in WPI’s strengths in technology, engineering, and science, and is known for developing innovative and entrepreneurial leaders for a global technological world. The part-time MBA program at the Foisie School of Business has been ranked number one in the northeast by Businessweek since 2007. The undergraduate programs for entrepreneurship and information systems were ranked number one in the country, and the operations management program was ranked number four by Businessweek in 2013.