



LET'S TALK



Photos: Mill No. 5, Damien S, Yelp; 2017 Folk Festival, Lowell Alliance; Operation Nourish, Merrimack Valley Food Bank; Enterprise Bank, Enterprise Bank; Lowell City Hall, Wikipedia; Former UMass Lowell ICC, Inside Lowell

Let's Talk Lowell Community Conversation Summary

January 23, 2025 | Venue: LTC

Key Themes & Issues

Economic & Business Development

- **Business Closures:** Notable closures include Mill No. 5, Gallery Z, District 5, Downtown Nibbana, Luna Theater, The Overlook, and The Keep.
- **High Rent & Vacant Spaces:** Rent for commercial spaces is too high; landlords leave spaces vacant rather than lowering prices. Need for incentives to fill storefronts.
- **Support for Small Businesses:** Improve access to vacant storefronts, facilitate connections between businesses and landlords, expand economic development grants.
- **Marketing & Visibility:** Improve awareness of business opportunities and events via integrated media campaigns, billboards, and social media diversification.
- **Event Programming:** Expand Small Business Saturdays, pop-up events, and arts-focused community engagement.

Housing & Homelessness

- **Affordability & Gentrification:** Rising housing costs, UMass Lowell expansion, and lack of affordable housing options.
- **Homelessness:** Need for more warming centers, 24-hour drop-in centers, public bathrooms, and shelter beds.
- **Rent Control & Policy Changes:** Advocacy for rent control policies, affordable housing development, and better landlord accountability.
- **Vacant Housing & Infrastructure Use:** Consider repurposing upper-floor vacant spaces for housing.

City Government & Civic Engagement

- **Governance Structure:** Community discussion on whether Lowell should adopt a strong mayor system.
- **City Accountability & Budgeting:** Concerns about city debt, lack of transparency, and need for oversight.
- **Improved Public Communication:** A centralized city resource center, improved website, and multilingual communication channels.

- **Community Engagement:** Better outreach through surveys, improved city website, and neighborhood walks to increase involvement.

Transportation & Accessibility

- **Downtown Parking:** Concerns over lack of free holiday parking, extended hours, and overall accessibility.
- **Public Transportation:**
 - Improve LRTA reliability and route frequency.
 - Bring the bus hub back downtown.
 - Explore smaller buses for downtown routes.
 - Improve pedestrian and bike infrastructure (bike lanes, sidewalks, walkability to UML campus).
- **Traffic & Safety:**
 - Address traffic flow issues around Tsongas Arena and downtown corridors.
 - Improve lighting and safety for nighttime walkers.
 - Better sidewalk snow removal and maintenance.

Community Identity & Engagement

- **Marketing the City:** Increase promotional efforts to attract businesses and visitors.
- **Revitalizing Downtown:**
 - Strengthen UML and MCC student engagement beyond nightlife.
 - Improve connections between UML and downtown via better walkability and transit.
 - Encourage evening business hours and events.
- **Public Events & Cultural Programming:**
 - Expand free music in parks, block parties, garden walks, and festivals.
 - Strengthen partnerships with cultural and arts organizations.
- **Neighborhood Strength & Inclusion:**
 - Initiate a welcoming campaign for new residents.
 - Expand cultural outreach through multilingual support and diverse programming.
 - Improve accessibility and inclusion in public resources (e.g., library services, school engagement, and city hall assistance).

Education & Workforce Development

- **Youth Engagement:**
 - Expand job training and workforce pipelines (paid internships, vocational learning, partnerships with MassHire and UML).
 - Create more inclusive and accessible spaces for youth (library, school programs, city-sponsored clubs).
 - Increase parental engagement in educational initiatives.
 - **Higher Education & Community Integration:**
 - Better connect UML students to the city to encourage post-graduation retention.
 - Expand affordable housing options for students and young professionals.
 - Improve career pathways and job opportunities within the city.
-

Actionable Solutions & Next Steps

Immediate Actions

- **Survey community members** on engagement and interest in local initiatives.
- **Expand city communication platforms** via a centralized hub (website, traditional media, social media, bus posters, bulletin kiosks).
- **Enhance safety measures** downtown with better lighting, increased policing, and traffic adjustments.
- **Increase public facilities** for vulnerable populations (drop-in centers, public restrooms, warming shelters).
- **Promote existing business incentives** and advocate for new small business support programs.
- **Improve walkability and biking infrastructure** between UML and downtown.

Long-Term Vision

- **Explore governance changes** for increased transparency and community involvement.
- **Develop a strategic revitalization plan** for downtown Lowell, integrating housing, business, and cultural investments.
- **Strengthen youth education and workforce pathways** through targeted initiatives and scholarships.
- **Expand cultural programming** to showcase Lowell as a diverse, arts-focused, and business-friendly city.

Key Organizations & Stakeholders to Engage

- **Cultural & Arts Groups:** Western Avenue Studios, Arts League of Lowell, Like Lowell, Mosaic Lowell, CASE, COOL.
- **Business & Economic Development:** Lowell Business Council, MassHire, Lowell Cultural Council.
- **Education & Youth Development:** UML, MCC, Greater Lowell Technical High School, Boys & Girls Club.
- **Community & Housing Organizations:** NPS, Winn Development, Greater Lowell Community Foundation.
- **Public Services & Infrastructure:** LRTA, UMass Lowell transit, city planning and development departments.

Tearpad Notes – First Session (Concerns and Hopes)

Group 1

CONCERNS/CHALLENGES

- How to work in community/groups to join
- Take GLHA Survey!
- Mesh w/ Pollard Library
- DISTINCT Pockets of Communities - Not mixing
 - ↳ Lowell Y - example of coming together
 - ↳ We need more!
- Mill No. 5, unique restaurants - Struggling
 - ↳ Attract new PPL - sad about losses
 - ↳ Fun for Lowell - "
- SUSTAINABILITY - **
 - Biked transportation, vegan -
 - Fear Not going fast enough "panicked"
- BUS LANES Not being used - why Not?
- Not safe to Bicycle
- POLITICAL Atmosphere - Fear among Refugees/Immigrants
 - ↳ Afraid to get healthcare -
 - ↳ other community services
 - ↳ Education
- CONCERN ABOUT being Picked Up by Police/Immigrants
- BULLYING about Immigrant/Race/Ethnicity
- ROCKLAND TRUST / ETC

CONCERNS/CHALLENGES

- Potholes in sidewalks
 - ↳ Infrastructure for walkability
 - ↳ Accessibility
 - ↳ People have fallen!
- LIKE TO JOIN IN CLEAN UP CREW
- SOLUTIONS
 - ↳ Have what's out there - Sharing Nonprofit info
 - How Do PPL find info?
 - ↳ LIBRARY
 - ↳ INSIDE LOWELL
 - ↳ LTC
 - ↳ LOWELL SUN
 - How Media come together -
 - How will media DISPERSE?
 - INFORMATION EXCHANGE
 - Connect Resources to PPL in Need
 - ↳ Organize
 - ↳ Fire hose Problem
 - MAKE COMPELLING + EASY
- PUBLIC PARKS - Do we have Robert Park System
- EQUITY IN PARKS
- LOW COST ACTIVITIES FOR families
- Utilizing Parks Library

OPPORTUNITY: New Crew @ Library

- ↳ Book MOBILE

- FREE ART classes/support for youth, Adults, classes for diff. groups
- Appeal to kids, get off the street
 - ↳ Rec Dept? Why not arts/culture in this?
 - ↳ Rec + arts center - Where is this for Lowell?

GLHA is a network of 100s

- SOLUTIONS OF NEEDS assessment + (CHIP) NARCAN availability - Mike Narcan more available
- RIGHTS TRAINING -
 - ↳ Nonprofit/Institution + City Policy
 - ↳ What is policy
 - ↳ City Statement → Library Info Resource
- City/University Collaboration -
 - ↳ share info
- SUCCESS STORIES Very Impactful - LOCAL speak about Returning from Haiti - Expand/support
 - ↳ connect to Faith community
 - ↳ LIFC - Intefairte
- POP UP market replicating quirky energy on MKT st.

Concerns

Wh town Parting!

- No free holiday Parting
- Extended hours

City Government System

- Should we have a strong Mayor instead of current system?

Nonprofit funding-

- not enough to go around
- Not getting Boston \$ - not enough Lowell \$

Closures

- Mill No 5 - Loha thata - overlook view - The keep
- Gallery 2
- District 5
- Downtown library

Why Do Landlords leave spaces open? Can we change that equation?

Rechts too High for Biz

open? Can we change that equation?

Rechts too High for Biz

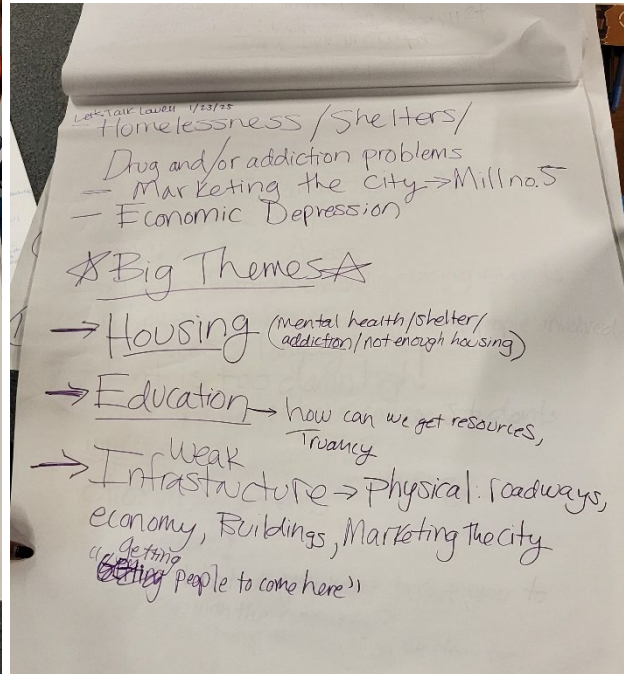
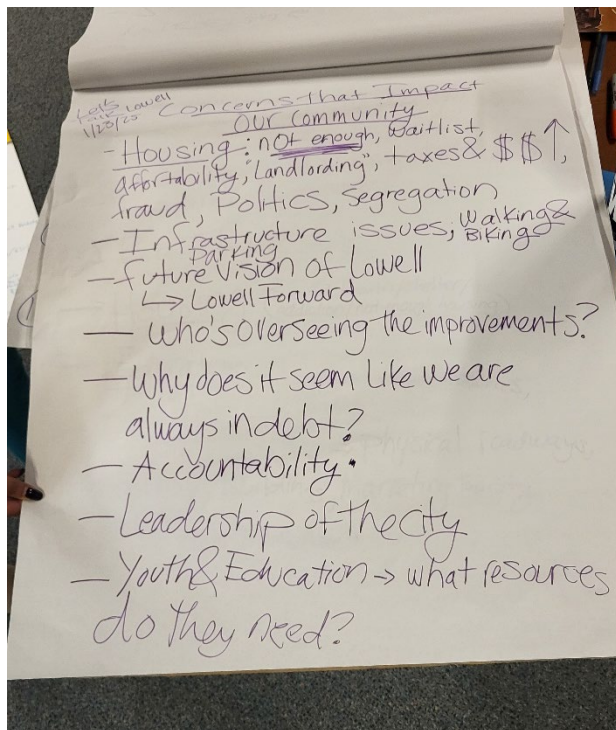
Concerns

- Negative Perceptions of Lowell
- Safety
- Neighborhoods have thriving Biz why not focus there why isn't Downtown doing as well?
- It seems like nonprofits/services can hang in Downtown. What's different?
- Housing
 - Cost
 - Gentrification
 - Homelessness
 - UMass Lowell as a pressure point
 - Creeping Out
 - Shortages
- City Gov not reaching out / listening
 - UMASS Lowell should be doing more
 - Public Education/Inequity

Solutions!

- Homelessness
 - Microapartments
 - Outreach workers
 - Housing First Models
 - Affordable Ho.
- Businesses
 - Copy other cities
 - Rent control
 - Quality of Life Downtown
 - Parting Solutions
 - Public transport - hours - Sunday
 - Hotel
 - Pop-ups
 - Peles + main streets & events *
 - Traffic Patterns
 - Sensus + traffic
- UMASS Lowell
 - Ask for more
 - Make voices heard
- Riverwalk Activation - ~~water~~
 - Attractions for people outside of town
 - Concerts & Sports

Group 3



Group 4

- ### Concerns/Challenges
- ① Lots of business closing
 - ② Need places to relax like restaurants + what to do w/ friends
 - ③ Lack of facilities, isolation, transportation for older adults, for older adults
→ Limited staff at senior center
 - ④ LRTA unreliable + limited drive
 - ⑤ Downtown inaccessible
 - ⑥ Need better public transportation
→ Master Plan had route to connect downtown + train ~~station~~ but it's hard to get
 - ⑦ Could smaller buses be better in downtown

- ⑧ Walking not always safe at night
- ⑨ ~~Not~~ Not everyone has technology so people can't use apps or email
- ⑩ Safety + business closure connected
- ⑪ Identity problem - what does Lowell want to be
→ Are we an arts community?
- ⑫ City + engaged citizens on different wave lengths
- ⑬ Does UMass Lowell in own silo
- ⑭ No local grocery stores for people in downtown
- ⑮ Lack of diversity of business on Merrimack Street
→ nothing to do after dinner
- ⑯ Rents are too high (residential + commercial)

- ### Opportunities
- ① Increase organic reach about happenings beside facebook, like fliers, + other basics
 - ② Put up signs around city to make those coming to Lowell aware
 - ③ Greater visibility
 - ④ Electronic billboard on Connector +
 - ⑤ Paper calendar of events that go out every 2 months
 - ⑥ Create common ground of communication - not website
↳ City should take lead
 - ⑦ Sandwich boards around city
 - ⑧ Different media for different audiences
 - ⑨ Integrated media campaign

- ⑩ Increase awareness of electrical aggregation program
- ⑪ Revamp City website so more navigable + accessible
- ⑫ Use volunteers to ~~redo~~ + UML students to revamp/redesign City website
- ⑬ Bring bus hub back downtown
- ⑭ Use smaller buses to run bus routes
- ⑮ Fix timing of lights Fletcher + Dutton
- ⑯ Research how many UML students come downtown → survey them to make feel connected
↳ Should you come back after graduation
- ⑰ Bike lane north campus to downtown
- ⑱ More bike + pedestrian friendly
→ more sidewalks shopping
→ clarity responsibility

- ### Top 3 Topics
- ① Accessibility of downtown
- downtown
- transportation
 - ② Improved communication about things to do
- more than one way
- Break through noise

- ③ Diversity of things to do
- More pop ups
- more nurturing of businesses
- City office for downtown development
- Bring neighborhood vibrancy + energy into downtown
- understand what people want

Group 5

Homeless
General Topics

WORKING TOGETHER

Bulletin ← Resource Center
Kiosk " Welcoming New Residents
Events Improve City Website
(link through City website) "Like Lowell" calendar.

remove language barriers SCHOOLS
Improve access @ City Hall FESTIVALS

Let people know - HOW? LIBRARY
e-mail link- BUS POSTER
VIDEO Billboard

Housing
Communication
collaboration
Events - free - Museum Children
Nights - Events

Partnerships
LRTA -
Bathroom Access
Homeless Drop In

COMMUNICATION

Resources for ^{Vulnerable} ~~Needy~~ Community
Members

Welcoming - Connecting
greeting campaign

compare/brainstorm w/ other Communities

"Neighborhood" Walks "Know Your
Neighborhood"
ROVING BLOCK PARTY

Event Ideas

Children's Day
Garden Walks
Explore Neighborhoods
Block Parties
Free Music in the Parks
Language Classes. CMAA & others?

Group 6

Top Three Topics:

Revitalization of Downtown Lowell

Arts, Culture, and Creativity

Economic Development and Business Opportunities

Revitalization of Downtown Lowell

- ❖ We want to see more commitment from MCC and UML to get their students to take part in the downtown Lowell experience outside of going to bars on weekends.
 - Possible UML issues: Stereotype of Downtown Lowell from their parents, Lack of “safe” walking paths, in bad weather no easy way downtown
- ❖ Focusing on making a more welcoming “Corridor” that connects UML East Campus to downtown with shops and better walkability
- ❖ Businesses in Downtown could expand their hours for more evening activities.
- ❖ Everyone loved the current pop-up Lowell store fronts the city is running.

Arts, Culture, and Creativity

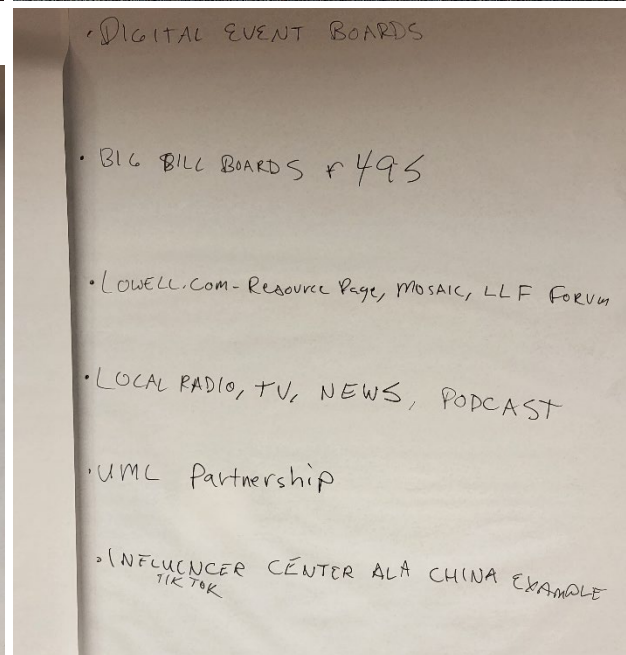
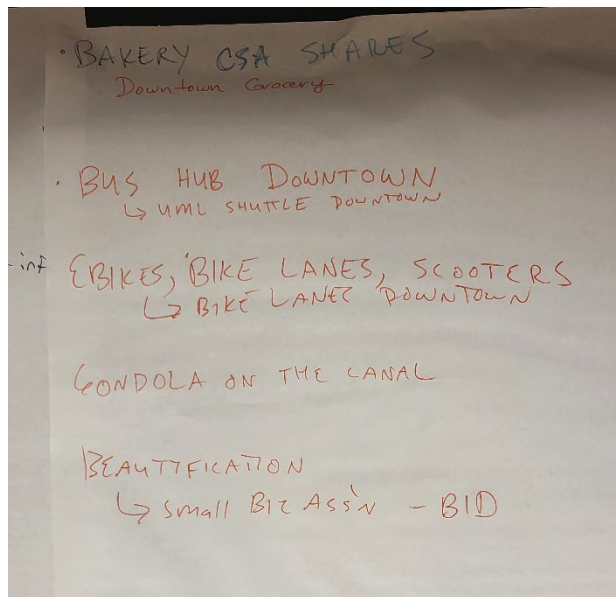
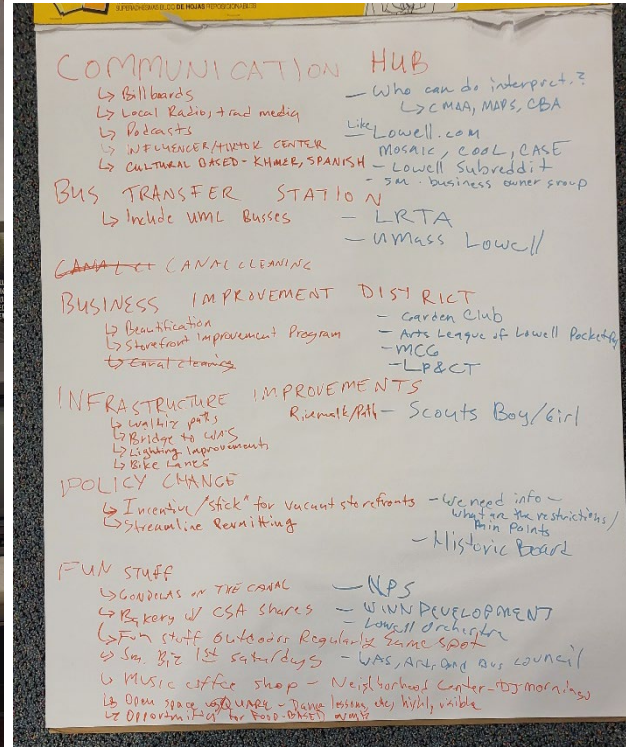
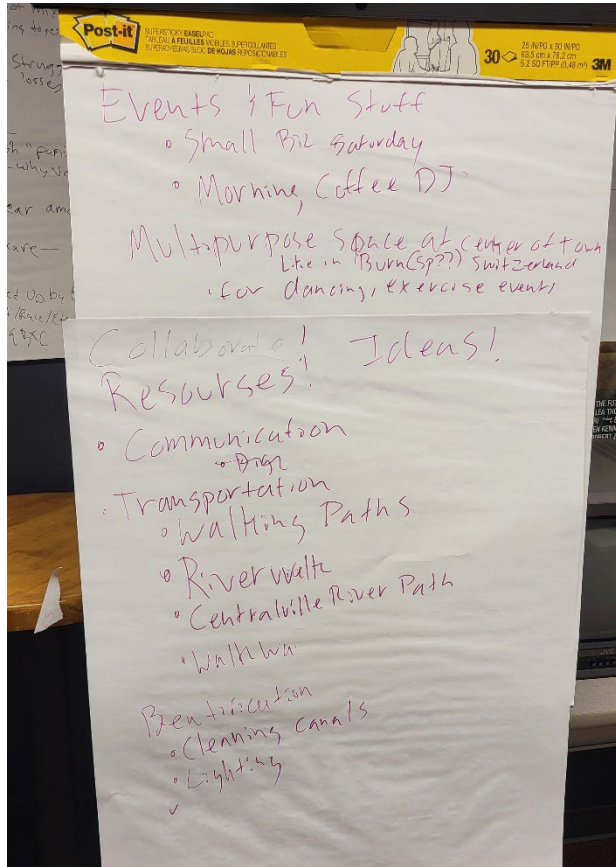
- ❖ More smaller festivals for specific topics, this will additionally help bring foot traffic to Downtown
- ❖ Enhancing the busker series with better advertising and more dates.
- ❖ Looking to expand busker series to include more than music I.E street theater
- ❖ New artists to Lowell are having a hard time finding all the galleries and clubs. Looking for smaller groups to connect with
- ❖ Looking for more art classes available for dropping in I.E A figure drawing night at a café where the model comes and for a small fee you can draw/paint them in a group.

Economic Development and Business Opportunities

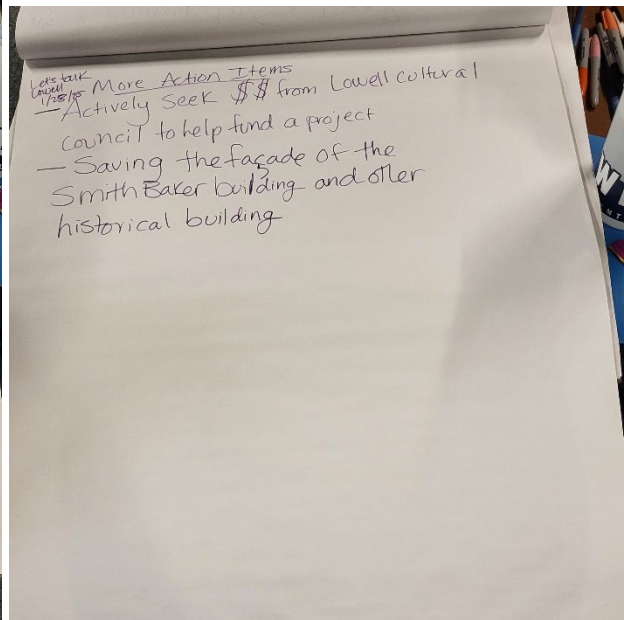
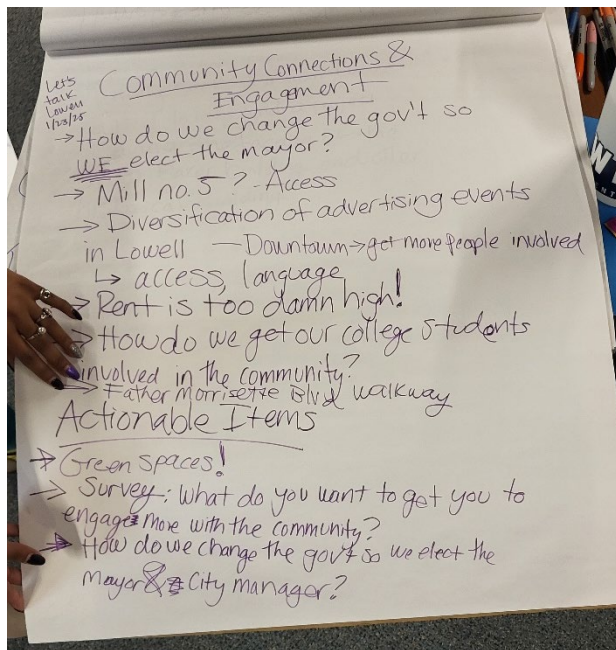
- ❖ Rent for commercial spaces in Downtown is too high and continues to rise.
- ❖ Landlords are expecting tenants to take on too much of the cost of finishing a space that is not ready for commercial use. I.E a “Blank Slate” space that would require a ~\$1mil investment with little help from the Landlord or the city
- ❖ Businesses trying to open in Lowell have a hard time connecting with the owners of the vacant store fronts and are left unanswered when attempting to connect with the city for contacts.
- ❖ Some of the available space is too big for a Small Business to start out in and places that do fill those spots do not last long enough
- ❖ Some have had good experiences with Economic Development from the city after they receive a grant

Tearpad Notes – Second Session (Actions and Partners)

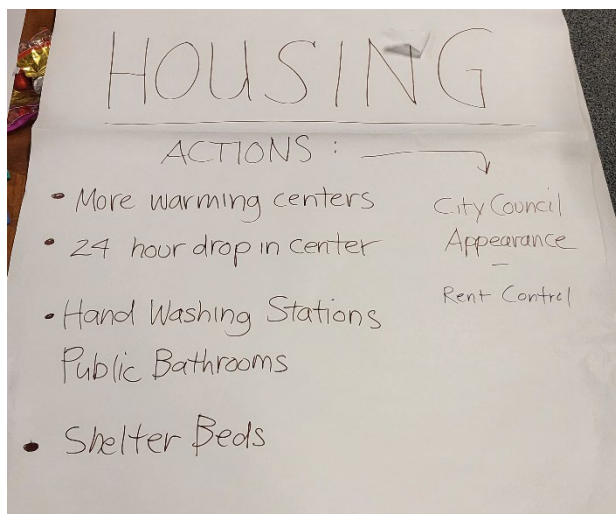
Downtown Activation and Business Retention



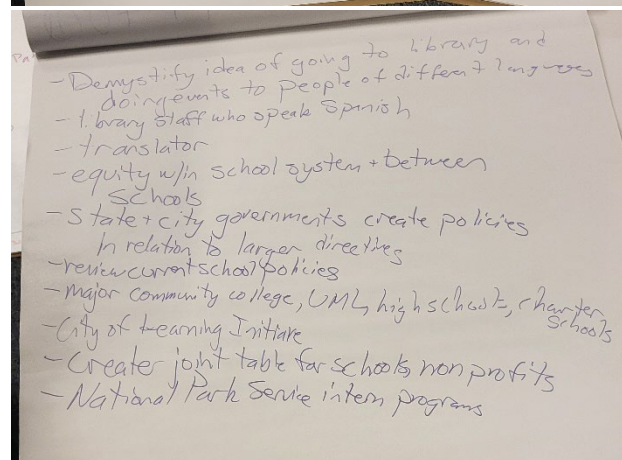
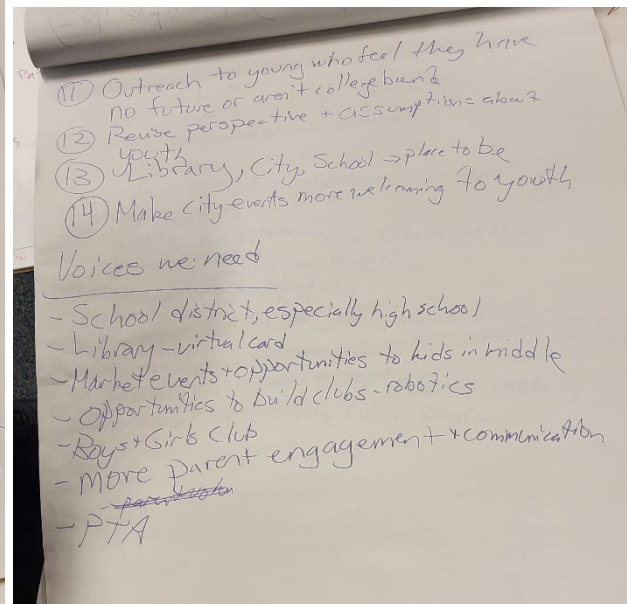
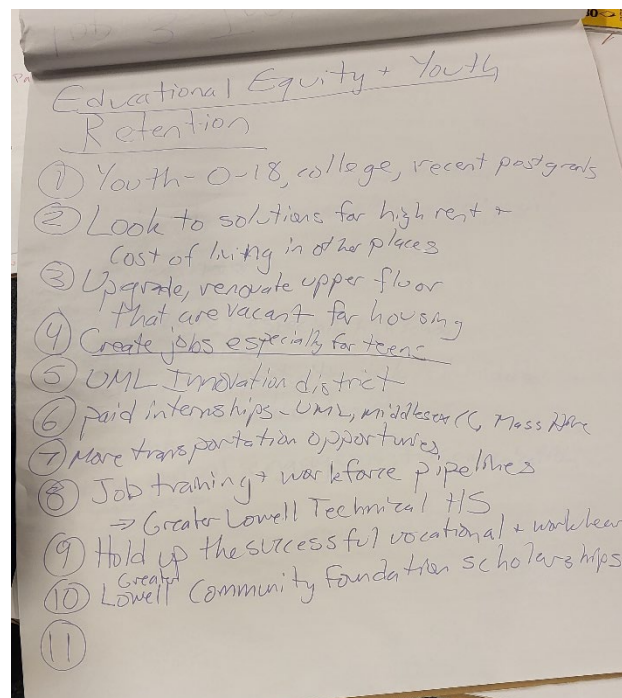
Community Connections and Engagement Group



Housing Group



Education and Youth Engagement



Arts, Culture, and Creativity

Things we want to see:

- ❖ More small Vines allowing artists to experience themselves as a collective and possibly raise money from the sales to have their groups run events.
- ❖ Better way for new artists to Lowell to find and connect with the art community.
 - Art Communities Job Fair Event: Possibly have an event for art communities to be able to have tables and market their groups. Much like Western Aves Open Studios but with the entire city invited to table.
 - Master List: Have a public list on the city website that allows you to search for the type of art you do and offers you local groups you can connect with
- ❖ More Small Meetup Events to network and learn.
 - Café Meet Ups: Having small gatherings in the off hours of a bookstore or café that would allow for a low cost offering for people to learn a new skill/practice and network. Much like the events the library is starting to run but throughout downtown.
- ❖ Less overlap with Events, currently because there is no master list, people are often stuck picking between events. If there was a more accessible master list, it could cut down on these overlaps

Actionable Items:

- ❖ I would love to CASE come and talk about the email list that they have and how they market it out to the public to get on the list.
- ❖ I would like to make a list of community boards that allow people to hang up flyers and have that as a resource for small groups trying to grow
- ❖ I would love to be able to discuss the idea of the Art Marketing Event with DIY Lowell team
- ❖ Our table all exchanged information to work at making a small arts group
- ❖ Look at the busker series and see if there are ways to open it up to other types of art.