



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

February 27, 2025 | Venue: LTC

Participants were broken into six tables with a volunteer facilitator at each table to help record the conversation, keep it on track, and encourage everyone to share while being respectful of others. After a presentation about the findings from the previous Let's Talk Lowell session, each table were given the same prompts:

- **Next Steps:** Which ideas resonate? What knowledge do we have? What do we need to learn?
- **The Role of This Group:** How can this community contribute to progress? Who else should be involved?
- **Personal Goals:** What do participants hope to gain (collaboration, learning, networking)?

After one "session," participants shifted tables to have a new mix of people discussing the same prompts.

Finally, participants discussed how the March meeting could be structured, which are captured in "additional notes" for each table. **Notes in green were not captured on the tarpad but added for clarity.**

SUMMARY: KEY THEMES

- Downtown Vitality is of key importance, with possible actions including
 - Beautification
 - More nightlife businesses
 - Programs to fill more storefronts
 - More performances, theatre space, and art
 - Learn more about LINC
 - Learning more about the BID, regulations shaping how properties can improve their storefronts and new businesses move in, and whether our rents are higher than peers or our business revenue is lower than peers
- Transit is confusing and not sufficient for our needs. Suggestions include
 - Smaller busses so they can fit on downtown streets and be more frequent
 - Find ways to connect UML with downtown via transit
- Sidewalks and roadways aren't sufficient
 - They have ADA challenges
 - They aren't shoveled
 - Basic maintenance such as filling potholes

- Improve the Riverwalk
- Communication is cross-cutting on all themes:
 - Communication from City about policy
 - Marketing for our businesses and events – both within and outside Lowell
 - Community calendars and better coordination
- The role of the Let's Talk Lowell group is fluid:
 - Create new ideas
 - Build community and create connections between community members
 - Support people pursuing individual projects
 - Create advocacy, including neighborhood council ideas or presentations to City Council
 - Build toward larger action

TABLE 1

Session 1

- Ideas resonation:
 - Transit
 - Very confusing
 - Didn't know it was currently free
 - Housing
 - Downtown vitality
 - Variety of food changed
 - Unhoused
 - Library: A lot of people spend itme here
 - It would be great to have shower/facilities for unhoused
 - Limited resources at library, at senior housing
 - Example: Cart of wet blankets – no space to dry them
 - Need more high level support than what orgs are able to provide
 - No storage for their belongings for unhoused
 - Would lockers help
 - Other countries have lockers
 - Restroom access without having to pay at cafes
- Personal goal:
 - Want to advertise our own events; Mill City Skill Share
 - Demystifying the library (outreach for the library)
 - What does community need from Lowell
 - Wants ot learn more about what is going on in Lowell (resident)
- Role of group:
 - Creativity
 - Build Community
 - Support people

Session 2

Ice, snow, sidewalks!

- Fill the vaults
- Cobblestones

- More smaller busses
- Revitalizing downtown
 - Deteriorating and filthy empty storefronts
 - Activating parks
 - Nightlife + and –
 - Businesses bars close early
 - Drawing the UML Students
 - Safety – more people or less people good?
 - What makes us feel safe?
 - More vintage stores, unique
 - Outdoor seating
 - Prettier! Flowers, lights
 - Downtown BID
- What do other downtowns do well?
- Parking
 - Why?
 - Using residential parking, during the day, using business parking at night

Additional notes – possible next meeting roles:

- Compare and contrast
- What do other cities do well?
- Traffic engineer and parking code
- Lisa Golden

TABLE 2

Session 1

- Sidewalk snow + Responsibilities
 - Who is responsible? Property owner – **but many people don't know this**
 - **Create/share** Info flyers?
 - City communication
- Learn: Why businesses close?
 - What are business issues?
 - Problem of income (**not enough customers**) or problem of expenses (**high rent**)?
- Learn: What regulations prevent new businesses from operating?
 - Specific barriers?
 - Why two years for Pizzelle?
- Learn: Why did Mill No. 5 close?
- BID – Learn about Plans

Session 2

- **We should** pick one thing to focus on – **but** what?
- Tie topics into organizations with needs
 - **Invite** those organizations to come
- City networking
- Focus on downtown vitality together
 - Create results
- “Peeling off” or spin off small groups organically
 - Intentional matchmaking or promotion?
 - Stimulate formation of peel-offs
- Have multiple “tracks”
 - Not over-rotating
 - 2-3 topics that consistently move forward
- Dedicated tables for the 6 tracks in the presentation
- **What are your particular** interests?
 - Transit
 - Including transparency
 - Including evening service
 - Downtown revitalization ✓ ✓
 - **There is so much** Potential because...
 - Concert series
 - Festivals
 - There are Pockets/silos of organizations doing the work
- What do other cities do?
- Art community
- Communication

Additional notes – next meeting roles

- Lowell Makes invitation
- Present to City Council
- Record and share online

TABLE 3

Session 1

- Lowell-Inc.com (**Lowell Innovation Network Corridor**)
 - Revitalization of Wannalancit/Tsongas area
 - Retaining talent from UML students
 - How can residents participate in this project?
 - Lots of questions concerning this project
- Art projects in area has made positive change
- Roadway infrastructure, plowing during winter
- 30+ languages spoken in LPS -> We need more language capacity
- Speak to business owners about what's going on? Why are businesses closing

Session 2

- Bringing more unique/diverse businesses downtown – no chains!
- Safety downtown and safety (-> lights!) to downtown businesses
- Businesses feel lack of support 😞
 - Pressure city to encourage landlords to not hike up rent or get tax breaks for empty storefronts
- Have more excitement around school committee elections -> How do we do this?
- What do UML students do for fun in Lowell?
 - Getting rid of ICC & UML shuttles downtown
 - What is happening to ICC?
 - Is MCC taking over ICC?
- Lowell-inc.com
- * Talking to/surveying current and former business owners
- * landlord relationships with business owners
- * Contacting sister cities/other local cities who have done revitalization projects – TDI Nate
- * Contact Lowell Economic Development to join in March event
- * Bring “Let’s Talk Lowell” to UML campus!!

TABLE 4

Session 1

- RiverWalk Hold Ups
 - Snow
 - Connectivity to downtown & Green space
- Culture center
 - Taking community events to the next level
 - Steinbeck Center but Lowell
 - Downtown bringing new life
- UML Event Sharing
 - Students->Downtown
- Lack of theater usage in town

TABLE 5

Session 1

- Topics Raised
 - Housing/homelessness
 - Downtown Business
- Unsafe housing environment, drugs, forced eviction, transparent governance around construction permits, property management companies jamming housing and legal systems with illegal renovations
 - Who holds them responsible?

Session 2

- Downtown & Communication
 - -> Multicultural Communication
 - -> Many long, long term residents of Lowell
- Bookmobile: Goes to many places
 - -> they have their own social media
 - It's a mini version of a library, a way to bring the library to the people
 - This brings awareness; newish program (~1 year)
 - Partners with rec department
 - Focuses/services elderly, home-bound
 - Trying to get younger population, transportation difficulty
- Language specific program like the Methuen Library Spanish group?
- Use the bookmobile as a way to reach the community and share events?

Ideas for March

- How do we better communicate and advertise happenings in Lowell?
 - Billboards-> on 495 with restaurant week?
 - Doing large events (sports events)
 - Multicultural/multi-lingual!!
- How do we find out about events?
 - Which channel(s)?
 - How to combat the personalized online information feed?
- Why does it seem that large events in Lowell aren't so well-advertised outside the city?

TABLE 6

Session 1

- Why choice to Lowell?
 - Good feel
 - Travel close
- Move to Lowell?
 - Remind her place
 - Second largest city (**after**) long Beach (**in Cambodian population**)
 - Class
 - Diveristy group
 - Friendly
 - Folk Fest
 - University
 - Foods
 - A lot of community
 - Lowell is welcoming city
- Gents (?)
 - A lot going, but still close family
 - Learn from people and spread kindness
- **Actions**
 - Understand historical over land
 - How building renovate
 - Spend time meeting
 - Make list, but nothing happen
 - Neighborhood association
 - We need to get united
 - Policy changing
 - Talk to developers
 - Budgets

Session 2

- Why you come today?
 - Actionable
 - Do something
 - Want to see Lowell does well
 - See other the same size but do better
 - We need to do something sighning (?) and better
 - Every city is challenging
 - You see every day may feel
- Community space we afraid to say
- Community council
- Advocate community
- Proventra business improvement
- Business put in first floor
- Concentrate what issue!
- Parking time 6 pm –8 pm