



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 VISION

Our Evolving Vision

Each community member that attends Let's Talk Lowell has different priorities and hopes. Each community conversation in the series deepens and expands our evolving vision, which is currently focused on five major areas:

DOWNTOWN VITALITY

We want to support small businesses, revitalize vacant storefronts, and promote cultural events to enhance downtown vitality. We want a safe, active, vibrant downtown that people visit every day and contributes to quality of life.

HOMES FOR ALL

We want to address the affordability of housing, making homes more accessible for residents, especially vulnerable populations. This includes long-term expansion of affordable housing availability and policies to keep homes affordable, and shorter-term emergency actions to help unhoused and vulnerable community members.

COMMUNITY CONNECTION

We want to increase local and state government transparency, improve civic engagement, and ensure better communication between the city government and residents. Diverse communities should be included in decisions that affect them.

SAFE AND SECURE MOBILITY

We want to make transit more user-friendly with improved frequency and coverage, and ensuring better connections between the downtown and universities. All forms of transportation should be accessible to marginalized communities with safe, walkable, and bikeable infrastructure.

WELCOMING CITY

We want to strengthen neighborhood inclusion and address the needs of marginalized and immigrant communities. We want an immigrant community that feels as welcome and safe in Lowell as possible, including having the opportunities and resources they need.

How to Achieve the Vision

In addition to the Community Actions we will develop and build upon, the below represents common themes we see that we think the City, Businesses, Nonprofits, and Community Members need to do to achieve our evolving vision. This might evolve into a presentation to City Council, Lowell Plan, or other stakeholders that can help guide the “big picture.” This ties into the City’s other civic documents such as Lowell Forward.

Downtown Revitalization, Culture, and Economic Development

- **Small Business Support:** There is a strong emphasis on supporting small businesses, revitalizing vacant storefronts, and promoting cultural events to enhance downtown vitality. This includes encouraging businesses to stay open later and addressing challenges such as rent control and landlord accountability.
- **Public Spaces and Infrastructure:** Improving public spaces to attract businesses, cultural events, and better pedestrian access. This also includes working on infrastructure issues like sidewalk maintenance, ADA accessibility, and enhancing transit connections between the universities and downtown.
- **Collaboration:** Encouraging collaboration between local businesses, nonprofits, and the city to create cohesive branding and promotional efforts for downtown events, markets, and public spaces.
- **Cultural Programming:** Expanding multicultural and artistic programming to enhance the city’s identity and foster community engagement. This includes promoting the arts, cultural events, and providing opportunities for cultural institutions to collaborate with local businesses and the city.
- **Post-Graduation Retention:** A focus on how to better integrate and retain students and young professionals in the area post-graduation, ensuring that there are job opportunities, affordable housing, and community engagement initiatives to keep them in Lowell.

Affordable Housing and Homelessness

- **Housing Affordability:** Addressing the affordability of housing is a central concern, particularly in terms of encouraging policies that make housing more accessible for residents, especially vulnerable populations.
- **Homelessness Support:** There is continued focus on providing adequate facilities for vulnerable residents, including shelters, restrooms, and services for those experiencing homelessness.
- **Developing Housing Strategies:** Long-term strategies aim to revitalize housing by blending business, culture, and residential areas to ensure the availability of affordable housing.

Public Transit and Infrastructure

- **Improving Public Transit:** Enhancing the LRTA service to make transit more user-friendly with improved frequency and coverage, and ensuring better connections between the downtown

and universities. This includes making transit more accessible for marginalized communities and promoting safe, walkable, and bikeable infrastructure.

- **Pedestrian and Bicycle Infrastructure:** Improving pedestrian and bicycle lanes and increasing safety in downtown areas to make the city more accessible to all residents.

Communication, Civic Engagement, and Inclusion

- **Improving Transparency and Communication:** Multiple discussions around increasing transparency, improving civic engagement, and ensuring better communication between the city government and residents. This includes creating multilingual resources to reach diverse populations and using centralized communication platforms (like websites and social media) to engage the public.
- **Civic Participation:** Engaging diverse communities in decisions that affect them and promoting greater civic participation through digital tools and better outreach efforts.
- **Inclusion:** Strengthening neighborhood inclusion and addressing the needs of marginalized and immigrant communities. Efforts include providing support for immigrant services, creating a more welcoming environment, and advocating for resources like legal aid and multilingual "Know Your Rights" campaigns.
- **Clarifying Immigration Policy:** Focusing on clarifying the city's position on federal immigration enforcement and ensuring that resources are available to immigrant communities, including legal support and access to city services.
- **Multilingual Outreach:** Strengthening outreach efforts for immigrant communities and ensuring that information is accessible in multiple languages to reach all residents.

LET'S TALK LOWELL MEETINGS

Our Monthly Agenda

Each fourth Thursday, we'll have an agenda that is the following:

5:45 pm Doors open, free networking

6:00 pm Welcome Presentation

DIY Lowell presents what we learned so far and about today's topics.

6:20 pm Community announcements

Community members can announce upcoming events, 1 minute per member.

6:30 pm Session 1 Breakouts

Breakouts into four topics related to community actions with at least three "prompt" questions – a fifth table is reserved for new business. Twenty minutes, with a five-minute report out at the end.

6:55 pm Session 2 Breakouts

Identical to session 1, people are encouraged to move to a new table to develop new ideas. Twenty minutes, with a five-minute report out at the end.

7:20 pm Closing Comments

MC synthesizes what they've heard in the two breakouts, this will be the basis for the summary.

7:30 pm Free networking and snacks until 8 pm

We'll keep the room open for networking until 8. At 8, you don't have to go home, but you can't stay here!

The welcome presentation, community announcements, five-minute report outs, and closing comments will be recorded at each session and shared online to prompt additional community conversation. The agenda could be modified as needed.

Our Floor Rules

Our goal is for Let's Talk Lowell to be...

- A facilitated meeting designed to spark dialogue, cultivate relationships, and inspire collaborative growth.
- A platform to explore themed topics, share ideas, and drive collective impact.
- A place to turn concerns into hope, and hope into action.

To achieve that goal, we'll affirm our floor rules at the beginning of each session. Those rules are...

1. Share the Space

Everyone's voice matters. Take turns speaking to ensure all perspectives are heard.
Keep your comments brief so others have time to contribute.

2. Stay on Topic

Focus on the theme of the discussion.
Avoid unrelated side conversations.

3. Be Respectful

Listen actively without interrupting.
Challenge ideas, not people.

4. Think Creatively

Be open to brainstorming and new ideas.
There are no bad suggestions – all input is valuable.

5. Help the Facilitator

Follow the timeframes and prompts provided.
Help summarize key ideas for the group.

Thank you for your participation! Together, we're building a brighter future for Lowell.

POSSIBLE COMMUNITY ACTIONS

To achieve our vision, we capture possible community actions that are brainstormed at every meeting. These community actions each advance one or more focus areas, which are listed underneath the action.

Our first objective is to identify existing efforts and resources, as almost everything has a plan, a study, or even a group working on that very action. Those efforts and resources will be shared, and if possible, invited to Let's Talk Lowell. If the efforts are open, we will encourage Let's Talk Lowell participants to connect with them.

Our second objective is to learn. We've already developed many unanswered questions for each community action. It could simply be case studies or learning how other cities do things. It may also be learning more about our own laws, policies, and history. This could be done through online research or connecting with experts.

Our third objective is to connect with people who could help advance the action, especially as inviting them to Let's Talk Lowell as special guests. These special guests can share what they know and bring what they've learned back to their organizations. They can connect us with the knowledge and resources we need, or even spearhead the action at their organization.

Our fourth objective is to act. Each Community Action has a number of actions that volunteers could undertake themselves. They could undertake them between Let's Talk Lowell meetings or as special subcommittees. They might even tie into a DIY Lowell Project Team project if they have to do with public space. It could even be advocacy: speaking to City Council or a board or committee – not as an individual, but as a collective.

This document lists community actions, and brainstormed lists for each of the four objectives. Most of information in this document comes from Let's Talk Lowell participants. However, DIY Lowell board members have also contributed their expertise to this living, evolving document.

Note: Should we launch a community engagement survey? Continue community engagement with surveys and discussions to identify specific challenges and opportunities.

Community Action Index

Business, Economy, Downtown	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Improve Marketing and Communication with a Communication Hub Coalition.....	8
The Market Millyard/Machine Shop Square Hub: Create an outdoor space with weekly events.....	10
Support the planned BID, including enhancing City operations downtown	11
Learn about and possibly change historic, development, commercial rent control, and small business program policy.....	12
Encourage a downtown hotel.....	13
Advocate for the preservation of Smith Baker or its facades.....	16
Welcoming, Immigrants, Support.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Enhance City Communication and Inclusion.....	22
Immigrant Support – Advocacy and Volunteerism.....	23
Expand family recreation programs including utilizing the library and “demystifying” the library	24
Youth Group	25
Welcome Wagon.....	26
Transportation, Infrastructure	17
Improve Transit through inviting LRTA to the table	19
Advocate for Better Traffic Patterns and Infrastructure Maintenance.....	20
Enhance our Neighborhood Parks and Places	21
Culture, Arts	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Artist meet-ups, education, job fairs, etc.....	13
Support a new black-box theatre space downtown.....	14
Housing	17
Create short-term actions such as warming centers, drop in center, outreach workers, or restrooms	17
Advocate for policy such as rent control, housing first models, shelter beds, and renovating upper floors for housing.....	18

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION, CULTURE, AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Create a Downtown Vision Master Plan

HOMES FOR ALL

DOWNTOWN VITALITY

COMMUNITY CONNECTION

WELCOMING CITY

SAFE AND SECURE MOBILITY

Develop a revitalization strategy for downtown blending housing, business, and culture. Expand cultural programming to enhance the city's identity and attract visitors and residents. Create cohesive branding for markets and events. Improve signage, infrastructure, and beautification. Partner with UML and MCC to enhance student engagement with downtown. Improving public spaces to attract businesses, cultural events, and better pedestrian access Encouraging collaboration between local businesses, nonprofits, and the city to create cohesive branding and promotional efforts for downtown events, markets, and public spaces.

Existing Resources or Efforts

- Lowell Forward City Master Plan

Possible Research Topics

- How can the city encourage businesses to stay open later, support unique businesses, and ensure landlords aren't raising rents too high?
- How does LINC (Lowell Innovation Network Corridor fit into this?
- What is the potential for increased collaboration between the city, nonprofits, and businesses to improve public communication, transit, and downtown vitality?

Possible Special Guest(s)

- LINC

Possible Volunteer Actions

Improve Marketing and Communication with a Communication Hub Coalition

DOWNTOWN VITALITY COMMUNITY CONNECTION WELCOMING CITY

We should develop a communication hub coalition that helps market downtown and Lowell broadly – both inside and outside Lowell. This could include traditional media and new media, all with a focus on multilingual, targeted advertisements for events, nonprofits, businesses, and our major business district. The hub might include:

- install electronic community boards and enhance signage.
- Streamline the process for posting materials in public spaces.
- Develop shared marketing strategies for regional outreach and multilingual content.
- TikTok influencer center
- Podcasts
- Paper guides
- Visitor Center for Downtown

Existing Resources or Efforts

- GMV CVB Visitor Center

Possible Research Topics

- How can the city better communicate policies and events, and how do we reach a diverse, multilingual community?
- What tools and platforms work best?
- What are the rules and processes for using public poster cases in Lowell?
- How can downtown events and cultural activities **be better coordinated** and promoted?

Possible Special Guest(s)

- Greater Merrimack Valley Convention and Visitor Bureau

Possible Volunteer Actions

- Create a nonprofit guide with Nicholas's template

The Market Millyard/Machine Shop Square Hub: Create an outdoor space with weekly events

DOWNTOWN VITALITY

Dedicate a space utilizing one of our strength areas – Market Street near Pizzelle, Lala Books, and the NPS Visitor Center – as a spot for regular programming in the spirit of Mill No. 5. Enhance that area with unique branding, beautification, signage, quirky and memorable marketing, and other amenities and continue growing outward from there if successful.

Existing Resources or Efforts

- POSSIBLE START: DIY **LOWELL PED ZONE PROJECT**

Possible Research Topics

- Downtown Vitality: How can we address vacant storefronts and make downtown more vibrant with businesses, cultural events, and improved public spaces?

Possible Special Guest(s)

- Lowell Business Council
- NPS

Possible Volunteer Actions

- Develop a “pitch” for the Market Millyard & Machine Shop Square

Support the planned BID, including enhancing City operations downtown

DOWNTOWN VITALITY

The Business Improvement District is a potentially game-changing organization if the downtown votes for it. But we don't know what it plans, how likely it is, what support it needs, or anything at all, really. Let's change that.

Existing Resources or Efforts

Possible Research Topics

- Learn about the BID and how to advocate for it

Possible Special Guest(s)

- City of Lowell DPD
- Business Coalition (Ethan visited)

Possible Volunteer Actions

Learn about and possibly change historic, development, commercial rent control, and small business program policy

DOWNTOWN VITALITY HOMES FOR ALL

We've heard anectdotally that city policies hinder business development. Let's find out if that's true and, if so, advocate for change. That includes policies that might incentivize empty storefronts – can we add carrots and sticks to encourage filling vacant storefronts? We also need to promote and expand small business incentive programs.

Existing Resources or Efforts

Possible Research Topics

- Talk to owner of Pizzelle to learn about the various difficulties
- Develop a white paper about the historic district and what it really says
- How can we better support and retain small businesses in downtown Lowell?

Possible Special Guest(s)

- City DPD
- Historic Board representative
- Historical Society

Possible Volunteer Actions

- Advocate for policy changes such as better landlord accountability, rent control, and improvements to zoning and regulations that may hinder business growth.

Artist meet-ups, education, job fairs, etc.

DOWNTOWN VITALITY COMMUNITY CONNECTION

Expand multicultural events and artistic programming citywide.

Existing Resources or Efforts

- MOSAIC LOWELL

Possible Research Topics

Possible Special Guest(s)

- Western Avenue Studios
- Mosaic Lowell
- COOL
- Cultural Council
- etc.

Possible Volunteer Actions

Support a new black-box theatre space downtown

DOWNTOWN VITALITY

Existing Resources or Efforts

- Smith Baker
- Kerouac Center

Possible Research Topics

Possible Special Guest(s)

- MRT
- Living Theatre
- Dramatically Incorrect

Possible Volunteer Actions

Encourage a downtown hotel

DOWNTOWN VITALITY

Existing Resources or Efforts

Possible Research Topics

Possible Special Guest(s)

Possible Volunteer Actions

Advocate for the preservation of Smith Baker or its facades

DOWNTOWN VITALITY

A group wants the Smith Baker Center to become a dynamic hub for performing arts, community programming, and innovation, honoring Lowell's diverse cultural heritage while shaping its future as a thriving, inclusive city. It is their vision to transform the historic Smith Baker Center into a vibrant, multi-use facility that fosters arts, culture, entrepreneurship, and civic engagement. Can this vision be achieved? If not, can we keep one or more historic facades on this very important block while achieving other goals, such as housing goals?

Existing Resources or Efforts

- Save Smith Baker

Possible Research Topics

- Precedents for preserving churches

Possible Special Guest(s)

- Save Smith Baker
- Developers
- Nate Robertson/TDI District

Possible Volunteer Actions

- Advocate for achievable RFP standards
- Fundraising

AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

Create short-term actions such as warming centers, drop in center, outreach workers, or restrooms

DOWNTOWN VITALITY
HOMES FOR ALL

Expand facilities for vulnerable residents (restrooms, shelters).

Existing Resources or Efforts

- DIY LOWELL RESTROOM REPORT
- LOWELL FORWARD HOMES & HOUSING

Possible Research Topics

- What policies or investments are needed to make housing more affordable and address homelessness?
- What steps can be taken to improve housing affordability, manage homelessness, and provide adequate facilities for vulnerable populations?

Possible Special Guest(s)

- LTLC
- CTI

Possible Volunteer Actions

- Create a nonprofit guide with Nicholas's template

Advocate for policy such as rent control, housing first models, shelter beds, and renovating upper floors for housing

DOWNTOWN VITALITY HOMES FOR ALL

Addressing the affordability of housing is a central concern, particularly in terms of encouraging policies that make housing more accessible for residents, especially vulnerable populations. There is continued focus on providing adequate facilities for vulnerable residents, including shelters, restrooms, and services for those experiencing homelessness.

Existing Resources or Efforts

- LOWELL FORWARD HOMES & HOUSING
- Lowell Alliance work in this area

Possible Research Topics

- What steps can be taken to improve housing affordability, manage homelessness, and provide adequate facilities for vulnerable populations?

Possible Special Guest(s)

- Winn Development
- Greater Lowell Community Foundation,

Possible Volunteer Actions

- Create a nonprofit guide with Nicholas's template

What policies or investments are needed to make housing more affordable and address homelessness?

- **Housing Affordability:** Addressing the affordability of housing is a central concern, particularly in terms of encouraging policies that make housing more accessible for residents, especially vulnerable populations.
- **Homelessness Support:** There is continued focus on providing adequate facilities for vulnerable residents, including shelters, restrooms, and services for those experiencing homelessness.
- **Developing Housing Strategies:** Long-term strategies aim to revitalize housing by blending business, culture, and residential areas to ensure the availability of affordable housing.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Improve Transit through inviting LRTA to the table

DOWNTOWN VITALITY

SAFE AND SECURE MOBILITY

Enhancing the LRTA service to make transit more user-friendly with improved frequency and coverage, and ensuring better connections between the downtown and universities. This includes making transit more accessible for marginalized communities and promoting safe, walkable, and bikeable infrastructure. Improve walkability and transit between UML and downtown. Advocate for increased LRTA service frequency and improved pedestrian infrastructure.

Explore partnerships to pilot shuttle programs and enhance bike/pedestrian lanes.

Existing Resources or Efforts

- GoLowell Plan

Possible Research Topics

- What transportation improvements are needed to increase access and safety?
- How do we improve transportation and connectivity between UML and downtown?
- How can we make public transit (LRTA more user -friendly, with improved frequency and coverage?

Possible Special Guest(s)

- LRTA
- UML Transit
- City Planning & Development
- MeVa
- NMCOG

Possible Volunteer Actions

- Develop and Design Visioning Session
- Advocacy toward LRTA, UML Transit

Advocate for Better Traffic Patterns and Infrastructure Maintenance

DOWNTOWN VITALITY SAFE AND SECURE MOBILITY

Pedestrian and Bicycle Infrastructure: Improving pedestrian and bicycle lanes and increasing safety in downtown areas to make the city more accessible to all residents. • Fix traffic patterns, making them safer and more efficient

Enhance downtown safety (lighting, traffic,. Improve walkability and transit between UML and downtown. Explore partnerships to pilot shuttle programs and enhance bike/pedestrian lanes.

Improving public spaces to attract businesses, cultural events, and better pedestrian access. This also includes working on infrastructure issues like sidewalk maintenance, ADA accessibility, and enhancing transit connections between the universities and downtown.

Existing Resources or Efforts

- GoLowell Plan

Possible Research Topics

- Understand how the City prioritizes repair and fix and improve our sidewalks and trails (potholes, lighting, etc
- What can be done about sidewalk maintenance and ADA accessibility?

Possible Special Guest(s)

- City DPW
- City DPD
- NMCOG

Possible Volunteer Actions

Enhance our Neighborhood Parks and Places

COMMUNITY CONNECTION

Study our parks and places and make sure all neighborhoods have access

Existing Resources or Efforts

Possible Research Topics

Possible Special Guest(s)

Possible Volunteer Actions

COMMUNICATION, CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, AND INCLUSION

Enhance City Communication and Inclusion

DOWNTOWN VITALITY
COMMUNITY CONNECTION
WELCOMING CITY

Multilingual Outreach: Strengthening outreach efforts for immigrant communities and ensuring that information is accessible in multiple languages to reach all residents.

Improving Transparency and Communication: Multiple discussions around increasing transparency, improving civic engagement, and ensuring better communication between the city government and residents. This includes creating multilingual resources to reach diverse populations and using centralized communication platforms (like websites and social media) to engage the public.

Civic Participation: Engaging diverse communities in decisions that affect them and promoting greater civic participation through digital tools and better outreach efforts.

Centralize city communication (website, kiosks, social media). Explore city governance reform for transparency and accountability. Learn more about why our government is set up the way it is and change it if it isn't working for us.

Existing Resources or Efforts

Possible Research Topics

- Should Lowell consider a governance restructure (e.g., strong mayor system)?
- How can the city improve communication, transparency, and civic engagement?
- What initiatives can strengthen neighborhood inclusion and cultural engagement?

Possible Special Guest(s)

Possible Volunteer Actions

Immigrant Support – Advocacy and Volunteerism

COMMUNITY CONNECTION WELCOMING CITY

Clarifying Immigration Policy: Focusing on clarifying the city's position on federal immigration enforcement and ensuring that resources are available to immigrant communities, including legal support and access to city services.

Clarify Lowell's stance on ICE and federal enforcement.

Launch multilingual "Know Your Rights" campaigns.

Centralize immigrant services and legal aid resources.

Existing Resources or Efforts

Possible Research Topics

- What is the city's position on federal immigration enforcement (ICE,
- how can resources be improved for immigrant communities?

Possible Special Guest(s)

- Immigration advocacy organizations (e.g., RISE, HAMEA, USAID

Possible Volunteer Actions

Expand family recreation programs including utilizing the library and “demystifying” the library

DOWNTOWN VITALITY
COMMUNITY CONNECTION
WELCOMING CITY

This was a suggestion in one of the groups.

Existing Resources or Efforts

Possible Research Topics

Possible Special Guest(s)

Possible Volunteer Actions

Youth Group

DOWNTOWN VITALITY COMMUNITY CONNECTION WELCOMING CITY

Work with youth groups, UMass Lowell and others to strengthen the bonds between young people and the City and evaluate whether all schools are meeting needs Strengthen youth workforce development and educational pipelines.

Survey UML Students about desired activities

Create jobs for teens and workforce training.

Post-Graduation Retention: A focus on how to better integrate and retain students and young professionals in the area post-graduation, ensuring that there are job opportunities, affordable housing, and community engagement initiatives to keep them in Lowell.

Existing Resources or Efforts

- POSSIBLE START: YOUR VOICE MATTERS

Possible Research Topics

- How do we better integrate and retain students and young professionals post-graduation?

Possible Special Guest(s)

- MassHire
- UMass Lowell (UML)
- MCC
- Greater Lowell Tech
- Boys & Girls Club

Possible Volunteer Actions

- Survey UML Students about desired activities

Welcome Wagon

COMMUNITY CONNECTION WELCOMING CITY

A resident campaign to welcome new residents – whether they are new to our city or new to our country

Existing Resources or Efforts

Possible Research Topics

Possible Special Guest(s)

Possible Volunteer Actions