



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

March 27, 2025 - 6pm to 8pm | Venue: LTC - 246 Market St Lowell MA

Participants were broken into four 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 Let's Talk Lowell goals, tables were assigned topics:

- Lowell Communications Hub
- Transit & Transportation
- Immigrants & Welcoming Communities
- Downtown Revitalization

After one "session," participants shifted tables to have a new mix of people discussing the same topics. These notes start with high-level recommendations, then summaries of each topic. Full transcripts of each table are at the end of the notes.

NEXT STEPS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Enhance Communication Infrastructure

- Install electronic community boards and improve signage in parks and walkways.
- Clarify and streamline the process for posting flyers in public display cases.
- Convene a working group to explore shared community marketing boards with representatives from nonprofits, businesses, and city departments.
- Coordinate city messaging strategies that include regional outreach and multilingual formats.

Strengthen Transit Access & Safety

- Advocate for increased LRTA service frequency, broader coverage, and evening routes.
- Collaborate with MassDOT and NMCOG to:
 - Enhance pedestrian infrastructure
 - Improve winter sidewalk and bridge maintenance
 - Expand and connect bike lanes
- Pilot programs for downtown activation tied to transit corridors (e.g., Riverwalk).

Support Immigrant Communities Through Policy & Resources

- Publicly clarify Lowell's position and protocols regarding ICE and federal enforcement agencies.
- Launch multilingual "Know Your Rights" campaigns through diverse platforms including schools, social media, radio, and canvassing.
- Centralize immigrant services information online with updated contacts, legal aid, and emergency support.

Reinvigorate Downtown with Events, Culture & Wayfinding

- Create cohesive branding and scheduling for markets, cultural events, and downtown experiences.
- Improve signage, including printed maps and self-guided tour resources (e.g., red line tour).
- Invest in beautification: flowers, murals, banners, and improved garage safety.
- Partner with UML and MCC to connect students with downtown via volunteer ambassadors, internships, and shuttle access.

Sustain Collaboration Across Sectors

- Schedule follow-up sessions for cross-table topics (e.g., immigrant access to transit, communications for events).
- Build inter-institutional partnerships with UML, MCC, nonprofits, city departments, and business leaders to align efforts and resources.
- Explore funding mechanisms such as CPA, grants, or pilot initiatives to test community-generated ideas.

SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

Communication Hub

Session Highlights

- **Lack of posting spaces in parks:** Parks lack bulletin boards or clear communication hubs.
- **Need for pre-event promotion:** More emphasis is needed on getting the word out before events.
- **Event impact tracking:** Attendees want to better measure and communicate community event outcomes.
- **Unclear poster case usage:** Questions arose around how to post flyers in city-approved display cases.
- **Potential partners:** Greater Lowell Chamber of Commerce identified as a collaborator.

Key Questions

- What are the current rules and processes for using public poster cases?
- Who manages community communication spaces, and how can access be expanded?
- How can city messaging reach beyond Lowell's borders to regional audiences?

Stakeholders

- City of Lowell communications and planning departments
- Greater Lowell Chamber of Commerce
- Local nonprofits and neighborhood groups
- UML, MCC, and arts/culture organizations

Transit & Transportation

Session Highlights

- **Service gaps:** Limited LRTA coverage in key areas (e.g., Pawtucketville, Highland St.).
- **Accessibility concerns:** Confusing signage, poorly maintained sidewalks, limited evening transit.
- **Underused garages:** Street parking prioritized despite available garage space.
- **Walkability goals:** Community desires bike/pedestrian-friendly infrastructure that supports business.

Key Questions

- How can we make transit schedules and systems easier to understand and use?
- What are the barriers to increasing LRTA frequency and evening coverage?
- Can city-led or nonprofit partnerships pilot shuttle programs or parking incentives?

Stakeholders

- LRTA (Lowell Regional Transit Authority)
- NMCOG (Northern Middlesex Council of Governments)
- MassDOT
- Downtown businesses and cultural institutions
- Gallagher Station / MBTA
- UML, especially commuter students and staff

Immigrants & Welcoming Communities

Session Highlights

- **ICE presence concerns:** Fear and confusion over which agencies operate in Lowell and under what authority.
- **Lack of multilingual materials:** A need for more language-accessible info on rights and services.
- **Unclear city position:** Questions about Lowell's official stance on immigration enforcement.

- **Communication channels:** Desire for broader outreach using radio, canvassing, school newsletters, and multilingual social media.

Key Questions

- Is Lowell a sanctuary city, and what policies are in place around federal cooperation?
- How can we centralize and update immigrant-focused resources and services?
- What legal and mental health supports are available to immigrant families?

Stakeholders

- City of Lowell leadership and law enforcement
- Immigration advocacy organizations (e.g., RISE, local mutual aid groups)
- HAMEA (verification needed), USAID, Lowell Public Schools
- Ethnic media and radio stations

Downtown Revitalization

Session Highlights

- **Events lacking cohesion:** Desire for more unified branding and scheduling across markets and festivals.
- **Underutilized assets:** Hidden or disconnected downtown gems like Western Avenue, Hive Market, Project State, and the Riverwalk.
- **Parking friction:** Debate over meters vs. garages and their impact on accessibility and business.
- **Kerouac tourism potential:** Interest in leveraging local history through better signage and visitor materials.
- **Student disconnect:** UML students feel excluded from downtown culture and activity.

Key Questions

- What is the city's long-term vision for downtown vibrancy?
- How can Lowell better support artists, entrepreneurs, and small businesses downtown?
- Is there funding (e.g., CPA) that could be more actively used for park, signage, or infrastructure upgrades?

Stakeholders

- Downtown businesses and artists
 - Lowell Office of Cultural Affairs & Special Events
 - UML & MCC students and leadership
 - National Park Service
 - Local cultural organizations and neighborhood associations
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TABLE: LOWELL COMMUNICATIONS HUB

Session 1:

- Parks have no where to post communications and flyers
- Pre-event coverage, not necessarily post-event coverage
 - Are we aware of events in time
 - What were the outcomes from the event
- Chamber of Commerce as stakeholder
- What is the process to post in the new poster cases in Lowell?
- Electronic board with events would be a great addition
- City kiosks
- Multi-language capabilities
- Park/walkway signage
- Connecting with UML/MCC
- How to promote outside of city

Session 2:

- Visitor Center would be helpful
 - GMVCVB will have a visitor's center downtown
 - "What's up Lowell" / "Things to like in Lowell"
- Marketing geared toward visitors vs. residents
- City government might be restricted
- Nonprofits might not have marketing dollars
- Education on marketing
- How do we organize marketing boards

TABLE: TRANSIT & TRANSPORTATION

Session 1:

- LRTA
 - Confusing to ride
 - Highland St/Thorndike to South Campus
 - Cars not working / morning rush is not easy
 - Combined routes - potentially usable
 - Emission - smaller buses
- Parking Garage
 - Why are there so many?
 - Promote its use though
 - Ban street parking?
 - Gallagher Street is quite full with commuters
 - Train station
 - Ticket validation
 - Do we actually need free parking downtown?
 - There is too much parking already and there is nothing bringing people in
- NMCOG Pedestrian & Cycling Plan
- MassDOT

Session 2:

- LRTA
 - Once an hour only; and ends way to early
 - Commuters and LRTA do not sync out
 - Downtown vs train station
 - Downtown to Pawtucketville
- Bike Lanes
 - If there are bike lanes we could use it to go to work
 - E-bikes on sidewalks
- Riverwalk
 - Not connected to anything
 - Benefit of businesses on it or something that bled into it
 - The bridge on the canal walk is not fully pedestrian friendly
 - Or pathways are broken so you cannot use the sidewalk
 - How do we change ice / snow cleaning so pedestrians are safe?

TABLE: IMMIGRANTS & WELCOMING COMMUNITIES

Session 1 & 2:

- ICE
 - Watchers
 - Lowell Rapid Response Training
 - Hotline
 - LPD, FBI, DEA vs ICE
 - What is the city policy?
 - Public Spaces
 - Info and Advice - Resources
 - Communication / Education
 - City Newsletter
 - School Info
 - Radio, Flyers, Canvassers
 - Know Your Rights Resources
 - Social Media
 - Websites
 - Safe Haven
 - RISE
 - USAID
 - HAMEA?
 - Largest Migrant Populations
 - TPS
 - Work Permits

TABLE: DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

Session 1:

- Could there be a hub of market activity on Market St.
 - Around Lala Books
- Mill Yard / Market Street Hub
 - Signage
 - Brochures
 - Literature
 - Collaboration
 - Info from Employees
 - Not Siloed
- Little Bazaar was at Overlook and now is at Taffeta
 - Would see other shops and coffee when it was at Overlook
 - Now it is at Artist Studio
 - Could something similar be outdoor at one of the parks
- Combine and expand the CTI Farmers Market / Sunday Farmers Market
- Loss of Mill No 5 - could springboard to rest of Lowell
 - Loss of community center / space
 - Keep cohesiveness
 - Empty spaces present opportunity
 - Connect businesses with downtown spaces
- Other Assets
 - National Park Service
 - Western Avenue Studios (not in downtown; only open occasionally)
 - Hive Market at Hildreth Building
 - Urban Tribe at former Zeitgeist/Gallery Z
 - Project State in Pop Up
 - Pop Culture at Former Wine Cellar
 - Lala Books
 - Kerouac

Session 2:

- Questions
 - What vision are we working towards?
- Markets
 - Winter Market
 - Farmers Market
 - Arts Market at Lucy Larcom
 - "Cultural Improvement District"
- Other
 - Print maps

- Red Line
- Compare to Salem
- Marketing
- Kerouac Memorial in Keroauc Park needs repair
- No applications for CPA funding for open space
- Small blackbox theatre
- Community Preservation Fund
 - What is the source of the funding
- Streetscape Improvements
 - Flowers
 - Beautiful
- Red Antler could support further build out of Market St.
- Parking Meters
 - Extending time is detrimental
 - Was the goal to promote downtown Lowell
 - It is inhibiting
 - Question: What is garage utilization rate?
 - Make garages cheaper
 - Decouple paying for garage and parking fees
 - Make garages feel safer
- Connect to UML
 - Events to Downtown Lowell
 - There is no easy way to get from UML to Downtown Lowell
 - Shuttle in the city
 - Volunteer Ambassador to survey students
 - What is the draw to Downtown Lowell
 - Nightlife attractions
 - Bus Model
 - Combine UML and LRTA
 - Fix up Father Morrisette path
 - Sidewalks, bike lanes, safety
 - Add interest