



# 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

April 24, 2025 - 6pm to 8pm | Venue: LTC - 246 Market St Lowell MA

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Participants were broken into three 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, tables were assigned topics:

### Session 1

- Lowell Communications Hub
- Machine Shop Square/Millyard
- Immigrant Volunteerism and Advocacy

### Session 2

- Downtown Revitalization
- Transportation
- Homes and Housing

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

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## NEXT STEPS & RECOMMENDATIONS

### General Topics

**Downtown Revitalization:** Key takeaways included:

- Need to strengthen coordination between existing efforts and events
- Need to coordinate trash pick-up to create a cleaner downtown
- Opportunity to utilize alleys by cleaning them up, decorating them, and adding string lights
- Possibility of extending string lights across streets to create tunnels of lights
- Inviting City economic development and experts in the Business Improvement District

**Housing:** Key takeaways included:

- We need to learn more about on Accessory Dwelling Units, eventually developing a resource guide related to ADUs, including permitting, financing, accessibility, and requirements, possibly updating existing resources
- We also need to learn more about the bill “Yes in God’s Backyard,” including the possible benefits and concerns
- Lowell’s Zoning is an additional research need
- ADU experts and advocates could be a possible opportunity to be a special guest, along with elected officials who supported efforts such as ADUs or YIGBY

**Transportation:** Key takeaways included:

- One of the key missing areas is improvement in pedestrian/walking
- Idea to do a walking audit to identify areas of unsafe staircases on sidewalks and paths, possible a “volunteer weekend” to do group walk audits with a report on which are the worse
- Learning about what happened to the Veoride Bicycle Project and how we can use those lessons learned to create a bicycle system
- Need to improve the bus rider application
- Possible opportunity to invite traffic engineer

## **Community Action Ideas**

**Communication Hub:** To improve communications, we should continue to learn how we can use the new Merrimack Valley Convention and Visitor Bureau Visitor Center as a spot to share information and market Lowell, including promoting their Ambassador program. Working with this group, we can share information about Lowell events outside of Lowell, and share the other communities’ events within Lowell, both at the Visitor Center and with a regional calendar. We could invite stakeholders who work on community calendars to join future events such as Lowell Cultural Affairs and Special Events and Mosaic Lowell to our next meeting.

**Immigration Advocacy:** The next steps include research about needs around job authorization, access to information, and rights and resources for immigrants – including training opportunities. Lists of nonprofits and churches can be shared and built upon. A number of key stakeholders could be invited including MIRA, Northeast Justice Center, RISE Coalition, and others.

**Machine Shop Square:** The goal is to create a special downtown outdoor area that could replicate the successes of Mill No. 5 – including marketing, sense of place, and regular programming – while avoiding the challenges of Mill No. 5 – such as physical disconnection from downtown and a cultural disconnect from Lowell. First steps toward this goal could be to research ownership and feasibility of programming various open spaces around Market Mills, creating a temporary “trail” with stenciled chalk/spraypaint icons leading from the HCID garage to or beyond Market Street, researching history for pop-up signs, and researching how well businesses did in Mill No. 5 and how well other efforts such as the CTI farmer’s market is going. The trail could be spraypainted at the same “volunteer weekend” as the walk audit described in the transportation group.

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## Session 1

### Lowell Communications Hub:

- Connected Community
- CVB – Welcome/visitor guide
- CVB Ambassador Program
  - Volunteer for shifts
  - Spread the word
- Large group – City wide events
- Medium Group – Nonprofit meetup
- Small group – Backyard sale
- How to connect all our calendars
  - Mosaic Lowell
  - Lowell CASE
  - CVB
- Events at local Staples

### Machine Shop Square/Millyard:

- **Idea to replicate Mill No 5's success in downtown**
  - **Was it successful? Talk to shops?**
  - What it did well
    - Great marketing
    - Atmosphere in the mill
    - Regular events every weekend
  - Don't do
    - Lack of connectivity (**to Downtown**)
    - Physical and otherwise (**Didn't "feel" like Lowell**)
- What can we do?
  - Develop way to link HCID thru the Millyard to Market Street
  - Freedom Trail spray paint
  - Develop pop-up historical signage
  - Make a pitch document (What do we do, how often does it occur?)
  - Make a budget
- What to learn?
  - Who owns what? How easy is it to use those spaces?
    - For permission?
  - Who is on the LCC?
  - Explore if space inside HCID Garage can be used
  - How is CTI Farm Market doing?
  - How well did Mill No. 5 shops do?

- Who to invite?
  - Peter Crewe, CASE
  - Lowell Cultural Council
  - Potential Sponsors
- Parking Lot (not related to Millyard)
  - Connect Gallagher Terminal to DTL through South Common
  - Banners around DTL to create stronger branding
  - Programming S. Common

## **Immigrant Volunteerism and Advocacy:**

- Research, Train/Prep, Invite
- Identify work opportunities (for those without work permits)
- Ensure access to information and resources to support the process of work, housing
- Basic rights; work permits; housing; multilingual support
- MIRA – Organization has resources/info existing
- Online demand due to concerns
- Rep Howard put together list of churches in city
  - Perhaps identify immigrant friendly churches
    - Build relationships with those churches
  - Look into friendly organizations/businesses as well
  - Existing policies that are welcoming
    - With policies in response to ICE
- Public education resources for parents (i.e., financial classes, language)
- Concern: information access
  - Hand out info/resources
  - Ensure local churches/orgs provide/have access to resources
  - Social media – signal
  - Safe community members volunteer to become knowledgeable and assist (i.e., download brochures/info from MIRA; be trained on resources)
  - Safe place for healthcare (i.e., Is greater Lowell Community Healthcare safe, etc.)
  - Is there anywhere safe?
  - Food pantries – Dwelling House?
  - Church – Fusion Church?
- Invite
  - MIRA
  - Northeast Justice Center
  - Identify religious leaders
  - Key orgs Lowell based working with immigrants
  - Bring a friend/invite your network
  - RISE Nancy Coan (Thurs. noon meeting)
- Note: Brad will email things for next meeting to be printed
- Get everyone together having similar conversations to ensure we're not duplicating efforts

- What other info do we need to include: Basic rights, domestic violence, legal, housing, food, health

## Session 2

### Downtown Revitalization:

- What's Happening?
  - Downtown Business Group
  - Canalway Cultural District **Regular Meetings of Committee**
  - Ped Zone Event
  - Business Improvement District (BID)
  - New businesses
    - 1 Urban Tribe
    - Café Eclipse
  - CASE: Experience Mill City may
  - Town and the City
  - Doors Open Lowell
  - Proleung Khmer @ LCHC
- What are your favorite ideas?
  - Dumpster coordination business trash
  - Enhancing parking garage/Parking advocacy including Turnover (**Cost of parking deters business visitors, but without turnover, residents or employees block all the parking spots meant for shoppers.**)
  - Decorate alley, untapped gem, do cleanup -> Activate
  - Light tunnel on Market Street
    - Seasonal?
    - Like Philly
  - BID Advocacy
- Who to invite?
  - City Economic Development
  - BID
- Parking lot
  - Billboards LED about events
  - Parking: why was it extended – hurt business?

### Transportation:

- Speed bumps
- 25 MPH Ticket
- Train to Boston
  - DT -> Train
  - Thorndike Problems
  - Bus strip for Bus lane our TD

- TD Light too fast
  - More weekender
- Bus connections
  - App not welcoming
  - Bike carriers
  - Transit App
- Ped lights that WORK
  - Too fast
  - Button???
  - Right of way
  - How many cycles before I can walk
- BFRT
  - Make it connected to Downtown
  - AA signage
- Rental Bikes
  - What went wrong?
  - So it better now
  - Lowell 5 Bikes?
  - Where has it worked?
  - Stops at historic places
  - Need to be SAFE
- What can we do?
  - Stairs – Locate stairs around Lowell
    - Create a report showing them to ask why
  - Volunteer weekend
    - Spring Path
    - ID Problem spots
- Who can help?
  - Can we talk to a bike person
  - Traffic Engineer
  - Tree inventory

## **Homes and Housing:**

- Dwelling Units (Accessory) ADU
  - State has passed regulations
  - Do not know if Lowell has adopted/creating regs
- Toolkit/Collection of resources – info
  - Permitting
  - Funding
  - Disability Access
  - Parking Restrictions not for ADU
  - Requirements (I.e. Venting, restrooms, size, location, etc.)

- Tara Hong – “In God’s Backyard” – could change churches into multi-family permitting (zone)
  - Concerns – where are limits; industrial zones, etc.
  - Research this
- Lowell’s zoning policies – reform to address homes being built
  - Space required, parking required, etc.
- ADU
  - What is the vision
  - What does it look like
  - Conversions
  - Existing information deficit
  - Could we take underutilized lots to create ADU communities
  - How do we educate property owners on ADUs
  - Village, backyard, basement
  - Challenges – why would we not support this (It’s not trailer/RV park)
- Tiny home – International building codes – Appendix Q in Massachusetts
- Invite
  - NMCOG – Chris Hayes
  - Research builders of ADUs
  - Tiny Home Activists/enthusiasts
  - City – Planning
  - City – Building (ADU friendly)
  - City Councilors that votes yes on ADU
  - “In God’s Backyard” – Tara Hong