



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

May 22, 2025 - 6pm to 8pm | Venue: LTC - 246 Market St Lowell MA

Participants were broken into three to 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, tables were assigned topics:

Session 1

- Downtown Revitalization
- Immigrants and Welcoming City
- Communication & Arts and Culture
- Active Transportation & Transit

Session 2

- Lowell Communications Hub (Tourism and Marketing)
- Machine Shop Square/Millyard
- Pedestrian Audit

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.

NEXT STEPS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Session 1: General Topics

Communication/Arts & Culture

- Look to Salem for a model for text alert system
- Generate ways to cross-promote
- Invite MassCreative to Let's Talk Lowell
- Highlight how art begins conversations in marketing, connecting to people, creating coalition
- Create resource/lists
- Develop advocacy strategies/guides

Downtown Revitalization

- Business Improvement District isn't well understood – help amplify city's messaging or create fact sheets/guides
- Business group doing a "Small Business Summer" card stamp program: Help amplify this
- Business group could explore collaboration with Greater Merrimack Valley Convention and Visitor Bureau (GMVCVB)
- Develop an idea for a "music czar" to use music to enliven dead areas of downtown, potentially bridging empty areas with the sound of music

Immigrants and Welcoming City

- Fear is currently a big issue among people of all statuses
- Several groups doing critical work including legal, education, ESL – could highlight these
- Promote hotlines, know your rights, and other similar program
- Possible opportunity to invite police to better discuss policy toward immigration

Active Transportation and Transit

- Key interest in pedestrian audit weekend (see session 2 notes)
- Discuss with groups involved in the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (BFRT) how to promote connection between it and other downtown trails
- Evaluate signage including making sure identification signage is at destinations and trailheads and make sure signage provides enough breadcrumbs to get from one area to another
- Explore larger safety issues, including a possible bridge near Western Avenue Studio, with City officials, Safe Routes to Schools, and others

Session 2: Community Action Ideas

Machine Shop Square/Market Millyard

- City of Lowell is enhancing the park near the HCID garage (we've been calling it Machine Shop Square due to it being the Lowell Machine Shop in the 1800s)
- Volunteers could help +1 onto what the city is doing, including thinking of monthly market themes and encouraging businesses in DTL to match the theme
- Could stencil from the Machine Shop Square to other businesses
- Invite Brush Gallery, CTI Farm Market, Mill City Grows, Mosaic Lowell, Cambodiatown Committee, and NPS

Communication Hub (Tourism & Marketing)

- Information about Greater Merrimack Valley Convention and Visitor Bureau shared – this could be amplified over DIY Lowell channels
- Discussion on how to collaborate on a rotating electronic billboard showcasing local events

Pedestrian Audit

- Pedestrian Audit scheduled for June 28 starting at LRTA
- Develop plans for marketing, etc.
- Reach out to groups such as Walk Massachusetts, bicycle groups, and others

SESSION 1

Communication / Arts & Culture

- I. Text alerts / phone calls
 - A. do not happen in Lowell for important announcements
 - B. Salem MA provides opt in on city website
 - 1. Includes trash delays, street sweeping, bad weather, road closures, yard waste, events, crime, etc.
 - 2. Translation services are also available for these notices
 - C. Lowell could model a system after the one in Salem because communication feels fragmented in Lowell
- II. Arts
 - A. Grant cuts are concerning
 - B. National Issues
 - 1. Caution to look beyond Lowell and also realize the devastation these grant cuts will have nationally and the impact from national cuts to smaller localities
 - C. Regional Promotion
 - 1. Learn to collaborate regionally
 - 2. Learn to cross-promote better
 - D. Competition
 - 1. Funding feels limited / how to better divide the pie
 - 2. Benefit of understanding the local level and benefit of understanding the systemic level
 - E. Mass Creative
 - 1. Advocacy arm of arts in Massachusetts statewide
 - 2. Invite to Let's Talk Lowell
 - F. Arts Funding
 - 1. Individual donors are not sustainable avenues
 - 2. Must advocate locally and discuss these issues with local and state representatives; and share real stories
 - G. Art Begins Conversations
 - 1. People want to experience arts and culture yet many do not know where to begin or how to begin
 - 2. Art can often "live" within its own silo - i.e. limited cross promotion, marketing, etc.
 - 3. Creation of coalition or joining existing coalitions to continue advocacy work
 - 4. Artists / creatives might not always be the best at advocating for themselves
 - 5. Artists + Community Advocates must work together to mobilize for local and state resources and support
 - H. Needs
 - 1. Resources / Lists
 - 2. How to advocate for art and culture
 - 3. Who to call / what to say / where to go to express these concerns (local/state reps)

Downtown Revitalization

- What is happening?
 - Business Improvement district
 - Small business group growing
 - Co-marketing
 - Small business summer - stamp cards to enter a raffle
 - Holiday stroll
 - Question: Do they work with the CVB? Not yet!
 - CVB works at regional level
 - They attract events to Tsongas Center
 - Working on things like bussing tourists to Lowell
 - Small business work with City a lot
 - No communication person until two years ago
 - Two retail incubators 3–6-month changeover
 - E for All
 - Town and City Festival
 - Question: What are some of Economic Development Office priorities?
 - Business improvement district
 - Commercial vacancy ordinance focusing on vacant office space
 - Design guidelines for retail
- What are ideas for improvements
 - E for All – Work more with
 - Could include stronger business planning
 - Consulting programs for restaurants and retail
 - Advertise Project Pop-Up more
 - Work with CVB on better way to include downtown Lowell
 - Learn from Town and City and Replicate
 - “Music czar” – advisor
 - Feel like a connected city
 - Add music in dead spaces to “connect the dots”
- Business Improvement District
 - Fostering grassroots effort
 - BID adds a small fee to most real estate owners in the district
 - Fee is collected to city and given to an independent nonprofit
 - Nonprofit can undertake various actions to improve downtown
 - Small business tenants like this because it will add more street life and customers
 - Real estate owners will like this because increased profits of small business means they can afford increased rent and still stay on top (it also could mean fewer vacancies/quicker fill when there is a vacancy)
 - Can’t replicate anything the city is already doing, is all “extra” stuff for DTL

- Done
 - Considering geography
 - Crunching numbers to find appropriate assessment
 - Property owners finding comfortable number to pay
 - Now talking to residential property owners
 - Nonprofit/public owners – exploring this
 - Exempt small owner, i.e., condos
 - Focus Groups
 - Create structure for board including neighborhood and small business representation
- What can LTL participants do?
 - Participate in outreach
- Business collective, coordinated group

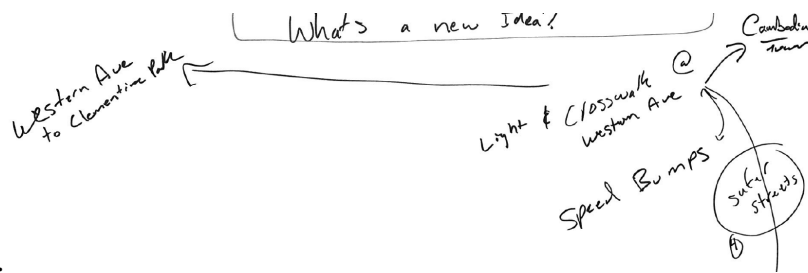
Immigrants and Welcoming City

- What's happening now?
 - Fear among citizens, immigrants of all statuses, everyone
 - Ecuadorians and roofing employees
 - Latino community
 - People afraid to call police
 - Programs and Paths to legal status
 - (Long term) International Institute – English, Legal
 - Library – English
 - Adult Education – English & GED etc.
 - MIRA – legal
 - Crisis response
 - Hotline to report ICE (617) 370-5023
 - Know your rights
 - MIRA
 - Solidarity Lowell
 - Lowell Police – Clarify Role
 - Invite, share position
 - Building trust

Active Transportation and Transit

- What's Already happening?
- Favorite ideas – what can we do next?
 1. Weekend event IDing...
 - Potholes
 - Crosswalk
 - Overgrowth
 - Stairs

- *Policies*
- Priority paths to ID
 - Train station
 - Downtown River path
- 2. Connecting BFRT
 - Behind Target -> 495
 - Use Strava for Heat Maps
- 3. Signs
 - Concord River Greenway missing sign
 - City trail signs
 - City >< signs
 - Don't say when you arrive



4.

Ticket information for speeding ticket

- Who do we need to talk to?
 - Western Ave bridge: Hope Green, Tracy Glain (4)
 - Bike Connector, Bill P (2/4)
 - BFRT Rep, City Trail (2)
 - Walk Mass Lowell Chapter? (4)
 - Liz O City Engineer (4)
 - Safe Routes to School (4)
 - LRTA

SESSION 2

Machine Shop Square/Market Millyard

- CTI Farmer's Market – HCID
 - June 20 – October each Friday, 1-5 pm
- Where is best activation?
 - Derby Park
 - Roy Garage
 - Park Folk Fest -> End year
- What would do in location
 - Food, string lights, etc.

- Program it
 - Fill gaps
- City is enhancing HCID park and wants to program it
 - General agreement: That's where volunteers could help +1 instead of trying something else
 - Concern it's far away from downtown businesses/cut off
 - What could we do?
 - Think of themes
 - Loop all businesses into themes, i.e., steam punk market at the Machine Shop Park, businesses could do steam punk stuff
 - Spray paint trail from Machine Shop Park to key DTL locations
 - Before/after QR code signs
 - Draw in the Brush Gallery
 - People to talk to
 - CTI Farm Market
 - MCG
 - Mosaic Lowell
 - Cambodiatown Committee
 - NPS

Communications Hub (Tourism & Marketing)

- Tourism
 - Regionally/statewide
 - GMVCVB
 - 21 cities/towns
 - Ambassador Program – 1 to 2 ppl per city/town to advocate and share current events, news, activities
 - Local advocacy
- Local people – local impact – community
 - Communication
 - How do people prefer to receive info?
 - Text
 - Phone
 - Email
 - Social Media
 - Word of mouth
 - Flyers
 - Community Outreach
 - How do we get people to SHOW UP
 - Tell everyone
 - GMVCVB is focused on this
 - Opt in for text reminders

- 1 of 16 CVBs
 - Rebranding June 4?
 - Tell people!
 - Encourage participation – Merrimackvalley.org
- Destination marketing organization
- Appreciation for the people that are here – welcoming city
 - How do you get people comfortable trying new things
 - Cultural events, cultural food and restaurants, art, music
- Route 3/Connector Billboard (around there)
 - 495/93 -> Build electronic billboard near 495 to rotate event updates
 - (Boston/Malden has this?)
 - Are there permitting issues?
 - Co-op advertising to reduce costs for individual orgs possible with GMVCVB
 - Individual billboard can be cost prohibitive
 - Electronic billboard might reduce costs
 - How can city support city marketing
 - City has new communications team (CVB has contacts) <- INVITE
 - Do they have authority to make decisions?
 - Do they have funding?
 - Do they actually have power to create action?
 - How willing are they to reach out to local events?
 - What does the communication team do to impact local business/orgs/events?

Pedestrian Audit

- What are we doing to do?
- Questions:
 - 1 big group or many small?
 - 1 central location or different areas?
 - Bikers own group – walkers own group
 - Huge bike group to travel
- Toolkit
- First event: Train the trainer
- Bikers community groups
- Google drive folders
- GIS Map
- Next steps
 - The 4
 - Needed crosswalks/sidewalks
 - Pothole
 - Overgrowth
 - Stairs
- Meeting at LRTA – move out from there into the city

- Creating a path from downtown from LRTA
- Making a path that people can ? about
- Neighborhood group
- More CORRECT bike routes
- Next people
- Marketing!!
- June 28 10 -2