

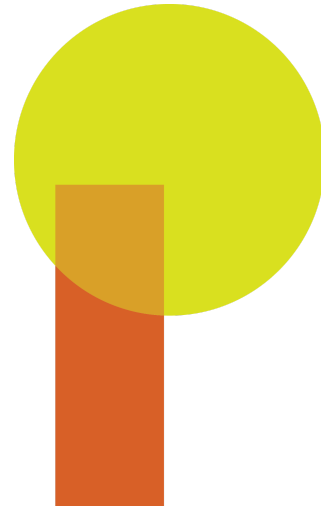
Attendees

Steering Committee Members

- Chris Hayes
- Rita M. Mercier
- Camilo Espitia
- Mona Tyree
- Narin Sinuon
- Perry Downs
- John Hamblet (Chip Hamblet)
- Jerry
- Joseph Boyle
- Adam Baacke
- George Deluca
- Melissa Desroches
- Allison Lamey
- Matt Lucas
- Felice Kincannon
- Ethan Yang
- Wayne Jenness
- Michelle Rivera
- Bopha Boutselis
- David Turcotte
- Sanary Phn
- Louisa Varnum
- Steven Oliver
- Beth Tripathi
- Neyder Fernandez
- Tania O. (Valerie)
- Yun-Ju Choi
- Austin Hill
- lala books
- Luciano Paskevicius
- Mary Wambui (Ciiru Ekop)
- Carl Howell (he/his/him)

Agenda

01. Plan Process Update
02. Key Takeaways from Listening Tour 1
03. Draft Vision & Goals
04. Breakout Rooms
05. Debrief & Next Steps



- Cormac Hondros- McCarthy
- Amada Gregory
- Claire V. Ricker
- John Hamblet
- Cormac Hondros- McCarthy
- Matt Lucas
- Wayne Jenness
- Ryan Gilday
- Louisa Varnum
- Allison Chambers

City Staff

- Francesca Cigliano
- Camilo Espitia
- Jess Wilson
- Dylan Ricker

Consultant Team

- Matthew Littell
- Will Cohen
- Andrea Baena
- Taskina Tareen
- Rahi Patel
- Avery Robertson
- Mercy Anampiu (Community Organizer)

Notes

01. Plan Process Update

- a. Second phase of projects, testing future visions that we have developed in the first phase
- b. Lowell Today released

02. Key Takeaways from Listening Tour 1

- a. Survey, community organizer network building, public workshop 1, steering committee feedback
- b. [insert numerical summary]

03. Draft Vision & Goals

- a. Taskina presented some general ideas for a set of values to include in a vision statement.
 - i. Wayne Jenness: Those top issues are what I've heard from neighbors across the city, so I do think that's what people are looking for. I think Rita would agree.
 - ii. Steven Thurston Oliver: I'm thinking about how the lower three themes, particularly innovation, connect with the top four. If you have a city known for innovation, that drives all the other points.
 - Taskina: Absolutely. Innovation came up a few times but not as much as the other topics. Maybe we prioritize that as part of economic development instead of having it as an overarching value.
 - Allison Lamey: I agree with Steven. The main idea is Lowell Forward, so those top four values are important but we should be exploring alternative ways of doing things. That's an important theme we should be considering.
 - iii. John Hamblet: I'm not clear on how this connects with the previous slide. The previous slide mentioned top goals. How are those top goals identified by the public translated here?
 - Taskina: So these themes are a higher level - not specific goals, but overarching themes.
 - John: I don't understand.
 - Taskina: Vision and values are broader statements. Our top goals, like improving transportation, follow from those visions.
- b. Taskina presented the draft top goals for each of the topic areas addressed by the plan.

04. Breakout Rooms

a. Taskina & Fran -

Participants: Allison Lamey, Rita Mercier, John Hamblet, Mona Tyree, Ron Gentle, Barbara Warren, Kerry Jenness

i. Land Use and Urban Form

ii. Mobility

- **K Jenness** said accessibility is important to her in conversations around transit/mobility. J. Hamblet asked if automobile travel was included. T. Tareen said yes - all modes of transport, multimodal.
- **R. Gentle** asked if the Thorndike project improved traffic flow. There's still a lot of construction going on. K. Jenness said the project is supposed to be finished in the fall. T. Tareen said land use would tie themes together. A. Lamey said a lot of people were involved in GoLowell - seeing it brought forward again helps continue the implementation of GoLowell.

iii. Economic Development

- **Rita Mercier** said every city has a heart. In Lowell that is downtown. Not only about businesses. It is a neighborhood. Have to concentrate on downtown. So many empty storefronts. Disheartening. We're doing everything as a council to revitalize. Opening discussions with owners of the building. Overall, the city, as a council, is lucky to have \$74 million in ARPA funding. We are addressing issues. Lowell Neighborhood Improvement plan for parks to revamp the structures, playgrounds in each neighborhood. So much that will go on. Important neighborhood subcommittee meeting on April 3. The Planning Department is second to none. We have Elizabeth Oltman, transportation engineer. Yovani. Do a tremendous job in DPD. Covers a lot of what we're talking about.
- **Mona Tyree:** I think this is really important. Hopefully it will be worked on. I live in Centralville and work downtown. It is very discouraging. Needs a facelift. Needs people, business. Needs to be clean. Good public transportation is important. I walk everywhere. We have a car, but I walk everywhere. I think the accessibility. Downtown used to have a bus hub. No longer have that. Good location, but still think we should have some type of hub downtown again. Community and businesses - need to support each other and things can get better.
- **Barbara Warren** supports bringing in more businesses downtown. Small businesses down there like Lala books. Don't have enough of it. For those of us that do live in Lowell - seeing restaurants open again is something I hear all the time that is missing. Very walkable. So much to offer, would be great to see some of that coming back.
- **J. Hamblet** said downtown is very discouraging. Just came from Elliott church. Driving to church is one of the most depressing drives.

Strongly support focusing on the downtown area. Live on the north side of the Merrimack and generally can't get downtown. Took 30 minutes to get home. Would like to see the ability to get downtown improved. I choose to go to Dracut which is 10 minutes away for food instead of 30 minutes to downtown.

- **A. Lamey** said that considering the commercial neighborhood districts is critical. Glad that's in here. Under commercial/industrial opportunities - critical that whenever we think of large scale commercial, we think of diversity among uses. Lowell has seen issues with all eggs in one basket. Thinking of not putting all efforts in one area. Job creation. Opportunities for Lowell residents to gain new skills, gain wealth while staying in Lowell is critical. Job diversification and workforce development and business diversification.

iv. Housing

- **M. Tyree** said it is interesting to see this. Had a conversation this week about housing. Had a listening session. One of the things for me and a lot of people, not all- thinking city should have a rent cap. Found out how to go about that. The last couple years things have changed a lot. Everything that you touch to buy has gone up double. There's a lot of things that come into play. Making sure that you're able to live somewhere.
- **Barbara Warren** said she is glad to see housing security is one of the top 3 goals. Work with homelessness at CTI. See this first hand at CTI. Difficulty year after year. Difficulty in rents. Difficult to move any family or individual out of shelter on their own because they've been priced out. Caused a lot of stagnation. Across the state. Finding solutions that will have multiple types of housing is so important. Have to have enough housing to match diverse needs.
- **A. Lamey** asked if quality of housing fits into any of these. Housing not up to code, still has lead paint. Other barriers/challenges can be a problem.
- **J. Hamlet** said a lot of housing is rentals not owner occupied. Someone else is managing quality. Not sure how healthy that is. Have been talking a lot about affordability with the Housing Choice Coalition. Two things that bother me: 1) cost of housing has risen so drastically vs salaries. My theory is that housing has become an investment. When I was growing up you bought to own rest of life. Now people investing and make changes because ROI. I'm concerned about factors driving housing costs even higher. The other concern: 2) according to NMCOG we have the lowest rentals in region, cost of condos, cost of SF in region, and we have second lowest cost of rents, second is Pepperell. We don't think Pepperell has any rentals. Are we attracting a value seeking market segment that is only interested in Lowell because of its low cost? How do you manage that market segment? What implications does that have? We are one of the cheapest place to live-

rent or own. Love to see that issue addressed. No idea how to address it. If we want to do that, how do we do it well?

- **Mona Tyree** said she heard that as well. She doesn't really believe it. That's just me because that's part of my thought process with rent control. Please share data with me. J. Hamlet said he would find it and send it to Mona.
- **K. Jenness** said we aren't "choosing" to provide lower rents/housing costs - it is the market, supply and demand. B. Warren noted that the price is increasing faster than income.

v. **Open Space, Environment, and Public Realm**

- **J. Hamblet** said Pawtucketville has lots of open space. Rollie's farm is a huge piece of open space. Connect forest to the river to create a wildlife corridor. Pleased about open space. Only complaint - because we have to share the waterfront in summer from nonLowell events.
- **K. Jenness** said she lives downtown. Loves downtown, does not think it is empty. Needs more usable open space. Brought out in the pandemic. When everything was shut down, there was nowhere to go. A lot of neighbors have mobility challenges and can't get in their car and drive to the beach. Adding trees is important for environmental reasons. Adding open space in the city is a key goal.
- **B. Warren** added open spaces along the river. Riverwalk during lunch is great. IT is beautiful.
- **M. Tyree** said open space , there is a lot of it but it needs improvement. In the downtown area, I love downtown, but there is south common. That's open space. But needs a lot of cleaning up. Different areas within the city - there are a lot of things coming about in the centralville neighborhood. Doing the riverwalk in Centralville - there's going to be art pieces/banners. So many things that are being worked on.

vi. **Arts and Culture**

- Did not get to this section in time to discuss.

b. **Rahi & Dylan**

Participants: Steven Thuston Oliver, George DeLuca, Perry Downs, Louisa Varnum, Maxine Farkas

i. **Land Use and Urban Form**

- Did not get to this section in time to discuss.

ii. **Mobility**

- **George:** Need to focus on implementation, lots of this was addressed but no follow through, e-scooters on sidewalks, especially trails- details really matter, funding is hard to come by
- **Steven:** I agree with George's point. Goals around public transit are important to me. When you take the train into Lowell, you are a 20 minute walk at least into downtown so that's a problem. Similarly, with the bus network- bringing people to the train. I'm doing a 30 minute walk to the trian station from downtown. There's not a bus that I can

take that's convenient and reliable. A stop closer to the downtown core - is that possible? The bus hub used to be more downtown and that funneled a lot of foot traffic to downtown businesses. I wonder if those business challenges could be attributed to moving that hub out of downtown. Ongoing work with Lord Overpass - it seems to have made getting in and out of the city more challenging than it was before- in service of the new justice center, but not in

- **Perry:** train downtown is crucial, revitalizing downtown is critical

iii. Economic Development

- **Steven:** Is there information on demographics? Love the goal of activating neighborhood commercial centers. A Cambodian restaurant won a James Beard award and that should be more celebrated here. I'm struck that there are many different Lowells. I don't know if there's a way to represent some of those needs
- **Maxine:** I've been here for 25 years and we've been talking about revitalizing downtown. Bus hub moving hurt the businesses for sure. Until the City can help landlords bring the upstairs of those buildings to code, it will be difficult. That and bringing the bus hub back downtown. I wanted to point out that back in the day, there were business owners complaining about kids from the high school hanging out downtown. The kids were discouraged by police officers from hanging out in Downtown. They moved the bus stop by the high school - basically taught a whole generation that they're not welcome downtown. That lack of engagement by that generation needs to be addressed. Until you do so, you're not going to get the viability of the downtown that you're looking for. Again, getting the buses. I cannot take the bus downtown. If I go over the tracks, I'm 8 minutes from downtown. Maybe a mile and a half walking. So there has to be careful consideration of who potential riders are. How to funnel people into the areas that we want to develop.

iv. Housing

- **Steven:** I want to know about demographics. I see diversity and affordability overlapping. I was drawn to Lowell by the arts. The uniqueness of the housing stock represented by the mill buildings is also great. I was listening to a podcast recently. He made the case that Lowell is a working class city. I don't have a sense of the demographics of Lowell - in terms of what we need to serve everyone's needs. Do you want a mix of housing? Or would that drive gentrification? I don't have a grasp of all of who's here.
- **Maxine:** Lowell has always been a working class city. I came before artists were encouraged to come. But we came here not because of the art - that came later - we came because we had the opportunity to find space to work. Artists are working craftspeople. That's who we are. I think we really need to look at how to best sustain low-income housing in a time when we are considered a choice location to move to because

Boston is so out of control in housing costs. Unfortunately, a lot of housing stock was destroyed. Now, there's not much place to put a lot of housing. ADUs could be the answer in some respects. Tiny houses for the unhoused could be part of the solution. I think rental units are the way to go first. If you're low-income, unless you're getting it built by a nonprofit, as soon as you have that, you have the possibility. Buying your own home is not an option if you're low-low income. So focusing on affordable rentals is crucial. Homeownership is really difficult for those starting out or without a steady income. At Western Ave, we were purchased by a nonprofit that's helping keep this affordable for artists.

v. **Open Space, Environment, and Public Realm**

- **Perry:** Finding space for new rentals - there's almost no buildable space within the city itself. My family has stayed for generations because it's affordable. You can still get to Boston, but it's actually affordable.

vi. **Arts and Culture**

- Did not get to this section in time to discuss.

c. **Andrea & Sophie**

Participants: Ethan Yang, Tania Ormonde, Austin Hill, Levenia Furusa, Mary Wambuii, Enrique Vargas, Wayne Jenness

- **Tania:** all great goals, but the priority should be to maintain, enhance, and follow through with existing plans
- **Wayne** makes note that a lot of these goals are interconnected and feed into each other. He adds that maintenance needs to be a priority at the forefront of the plan (ex. Canals, sidewalks, infrastructure).
- **Ethan** notes that UMass Lowell is a large presence and asset in the City, and Lowell should consider what role the school plays in the Master Plan in terms of implementation.

ii. **Land Use and Urban Form**

- **Austin** finds that the current goals are valid and encompass many of Lowell's priorities, he was surprised that the river was not mentioned more in terms of its importance to the City as an asset and the priority to preserve and protect it.
- **Wayne** adds that the river and canals are a feature of Lowell that does not exist in other cities. These should be used to the City's advantage.

iii. **Mobility**

- **Ethan:** happy to see that transit as a whole is being highlighted in the plan, but he recognizes that transforming the City's transit is a big task. Lowell is currently very car-dependent, and infrastructure favors cars. While people will always need cars, the City should strive to be more transit-oriented rather than car-oriented.
- **Austin** adds there should be some kind of marketing campaign to improve the perception of using public transportation. Having a more

reliable bus service would also naturally increase usership of the public bus system.

- **Wayne** adds that Downtown has suffered from the loss of the bus depot. Having both the bus depot as well as the train system in conjunction and closer to Downtown would make public transportation more accessible.

iv. Economic Development

- **Austin:** Lowell seems to have oriented itself as more of a commuter City that is attractive to people who work in Boston. This most likely contributes to the degradation of Downtown and overall lack of economic growth. Lowell should look for ways to bring more economic growth and activity within the City while maintaining its current population.
- **Tania** adds that Lowell is not necessarily appealing as a place to spend time for commuters (those who live in Lowell but work elsewhere). There are many islands of resources and development but the City feels somewhat disjointed.
- **Austin** shares that there are several different “hubs” around the City, and it does not seem to be emphasized in the Plan so far. There are also other nearby Cities like Lawrence that Lowell could work closer with for their mutual benefit.

v. Housing

- **Austin:** This is a great goal, but it’s hard to know how to address the issue of housing ownership and landlords who continue to charge high rents for profit.
 - a. **Wayne** agrees that this is a complicated problem, and the first step is to make smart housing policies and revise zoning that limits opportunities for housing development which would drive rents down and increase affordability. The biggest roadblock to housing people who are unhoused is the availability of affordable housing.
 - b. **Austin** shares that in other Cities there are laws that dictate that a proportion of new housing development needs to be affordable.
 - c. **Mary** adds that the issue is inclusionary development
- **Ethan** adds that there should be more incentives for developers to build mid-tier housing. There is a lot of luxury housing, and some affordable/subsidized housing (although there should be more), but there are few options that are middle-of-the-road.
- **Tania:** tiny houses are a great option! They are affordable, energy efficient, and require little space. However, there seems to be some misconceptions about the appearance of tiny houses (some people find they look like trailers).

vi. Open Space, Environment, and Public Realm

- **Mary:** The plan feels somewhat disconnected from the reality of Mass's future climate ambitions. Decarbonisation is a huge part of that which is missing from the existing goals. This issue is not captured in the way that it affects Lowellians now and in the future.
- **Mary** notes that when budgets and policies are made, environment and energy should be addressed as two separate things. Bundling these two topics together is not a realistic way to address either problem. While they are interlinked it is not the same thing.
- **Wayne** shares that Lowell has an aggregation plan that allows Lowellians to get a portion of their energy from renewable sources. This greatly reduces the City's overall use of fossil fuels. While it is only a small piece of the puzzle, it is one example of ways the City is addressing energy.
- **Enrique** shares that urban agriculture would help to improve local food sources, bring economic growth to the City, and help to address some of Lowell's environmental issues as well.

vii. Arts and Culture

- Did not get to this section in time to discuss.

d. Camilo & Avery

- **Participants:** Ryan Gilday; jfrechette (Gerard Frechette); Mercy Anampiu; David Turcotte; Neyder Fernandez; Adam Baacke

ii. Goals

- **Neyder** - student at UMass Lowell
- **Ryan:** these are very broad and 'stock' who would oppose any of these? All the info in the presentation was derived from past work? Was the data published how many people responded to the survey?
- **Camilo:** They may seem a little broad, **how do we ensure this isn't a copy-paste master plan.** With your help, Mercy, will take it to a detailed understanding. Still a little bit raw but little by little as we talk to the community more that's how we arrive at more specific implementation strategies.
- **Mercy:** it's not just from the listening session, it was a survey of over 700 individuals from diverse places as well as stakeholder interviews that were speaking on behalf of a larger group of people.
- **Jf:** would like to know what the groups are that are speaking to. Put some context to the information. Everyone has priorities.
- **Camilo:** will share this info before the next meeting. Who specifically we spoke to.
- **Jf:** would like to share prior to meetings.
- **Adam:** all of this is attractive or fundamental, I'm still searching for the engagement point that will excite people about the plan. What is the description of the Lowell at the end of the period that people will discover? How do we describe the city of Lowell to differentiate it from other cities, so that we can hold it up and say "we really achieved

something special.” All of these are ways to get there in a fair and responsible way (and the survey didn't really ask but also probably couldn't). Before we define specific goals within these areas, we need to know what success would look like. Lowell has really established things that differentiate it: **historic preservation as economic development tool; arts and culture to promote housing; embrace of minor league sports in the 1990s** – Lowell did these and other communities copied. I'd be much more excited and make good choices if it begins with a description of what that successful Lowell is and what sets it apart?

- **Camilo: is arts and culture more than just a grey area** or will it set Lowell apart? Part of the process? Arts and culture can be very specific to Lowell – is it the food scene, murals, local artists, etc. What does the community of Lowell think about, what will it be recognized for in 10-15 years. What is it that will define Lowell as different and special from other places?
- **David:** This could be premature, is that further down the road in the process?
- **Camilo:** I just see goals and not a single slide about what the vision is
- **Adam:** there was no mention of higher education here on any of these slides. Was that intentional? It's a significant asset and there's no discussion of how to leverage that and make Lowell more successful than other areas. We need someone to be able to pick this up and say this is about Lowell.

iii. **Land Use and Urban Form**

- Did not get to this section in time to discuss.

iv. **Mobility**

- **Jf:** bus service - gap between the routes and how frequent the buses are going. One thing this doesn't address is that Lowell is a city of neighborhoods. I hope that becomes part of what we are discussing here. If we were looking for big items and action plans, what would we like to see that's within the city's control? Downtown versus some of the neighborhoods.
- **Camilo:** We need to understand what the city can control. Even though it's separate from how city hall functions, LRTA should respond to some of the concerns that are on the table.
- **Neyder:** from a student perspective these themes do resonate. A lot of the students do want the transportation to be safe, sustainable, and multimodal. More connections with Gallagher terminal and connections to greater Boston. This area is known for tech sector. Reliability is a concern.

v. **Economic Development**

- **David:** The word equitable should be in here somewhere. There is tension between downtown and neighborhood commercial centers.

- **Neyder:** The creative economy needs to be on this slide. Mosaic had a robust plan. This is Lowell's strength.
 - **Jf:** Im happy to see commercial and industrial on there and involving startups and smaller self employed individuals. Can't forget other larger industries that create larger jobs and opportunities for people that graduate universities.
 - **David:** Also job training, outside
 - **Jf:** How to plan for growth without negatively impacting the very nature and character of the city. Provide for growth without redefining some of the neighborhoods.
- vi. **Housing**
- Did not get to this section in time to discuss.
- vii. **Open Space, Environment, and Public Realm**
- Did not get to this section in time to discuss.
- viii. **Arts and Culture**
- Did not get to this section in time to discuss.

05. Next Steps

- a. Andrea presented what to expect for Listening Tour 1
- b. Andrea presented a list of the focus groups and neighborhood meetings that the City and NMCOG will be leading during Listening Tour 2.
- c. Final note from Steering Committee member: Pocketwatch - selected Lowell one of best cities to live in in the US.

