

Steering
Committee
Meeting #3



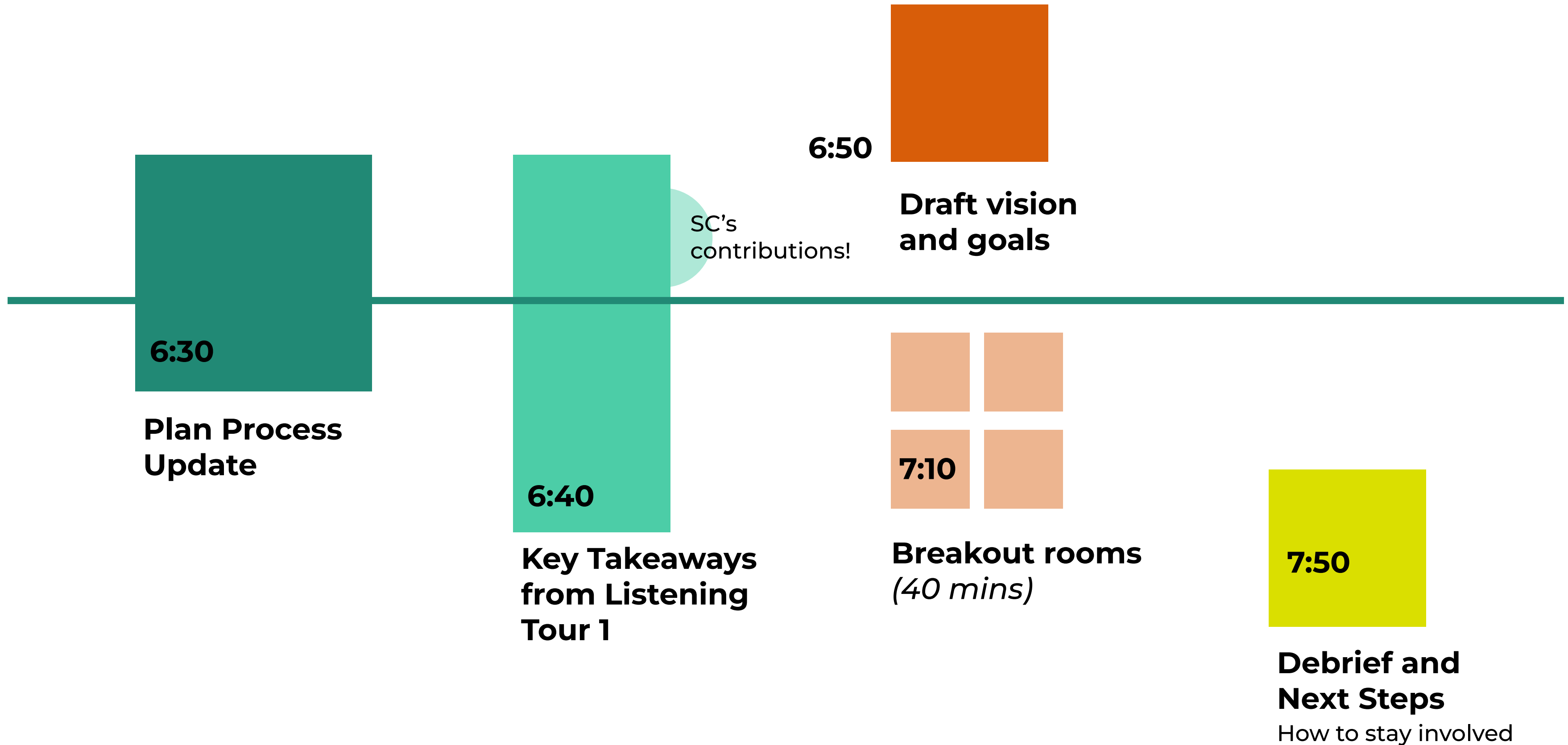
FORWARD

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AVANZA

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Agenda

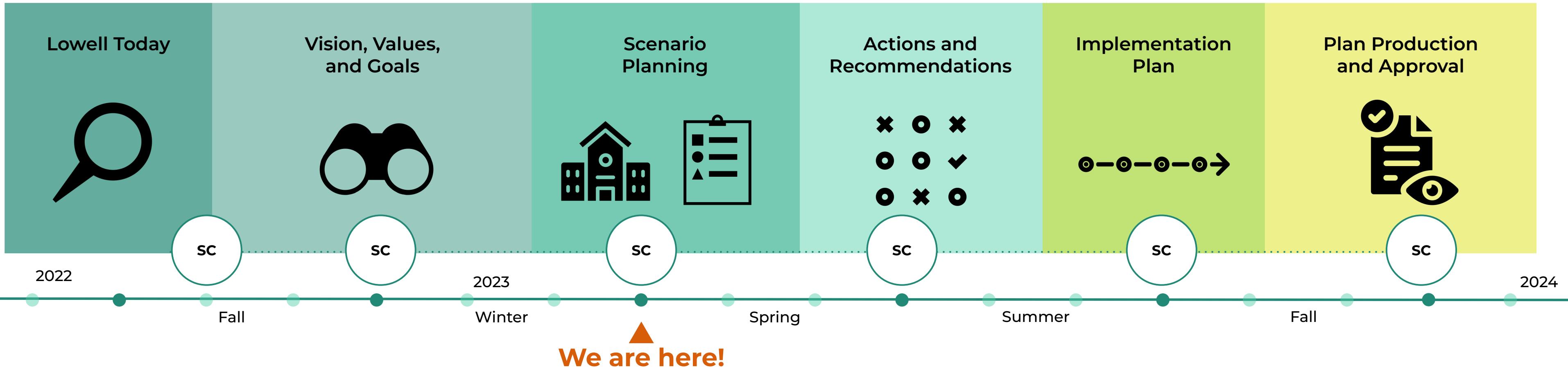


Process Update



Plan Steps/Phases

Learning and visioning → Testing future visions → Developing the plan →



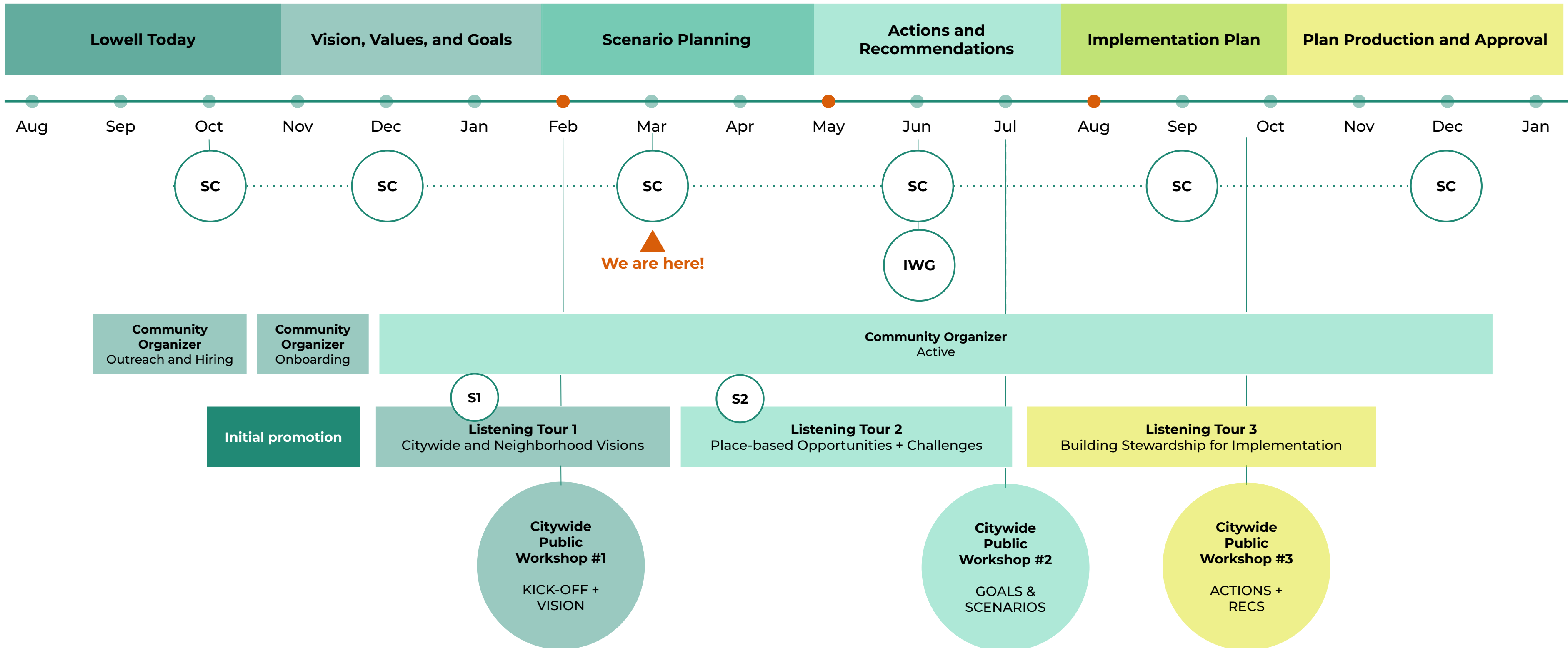
Where are we today?

Where do we want to go?

How do we get there?

Timeline

Learning and Visioning → Testing Future Visions → Developing a plan →



SC = Steering Committee, IWG = Interdepartmental Working Groups, S = Survey Launch

What does a Comprehensive Plan include?

Vision and Values



A shared vision for the city and its neighborhoods

- Past and ongoing planning efforts

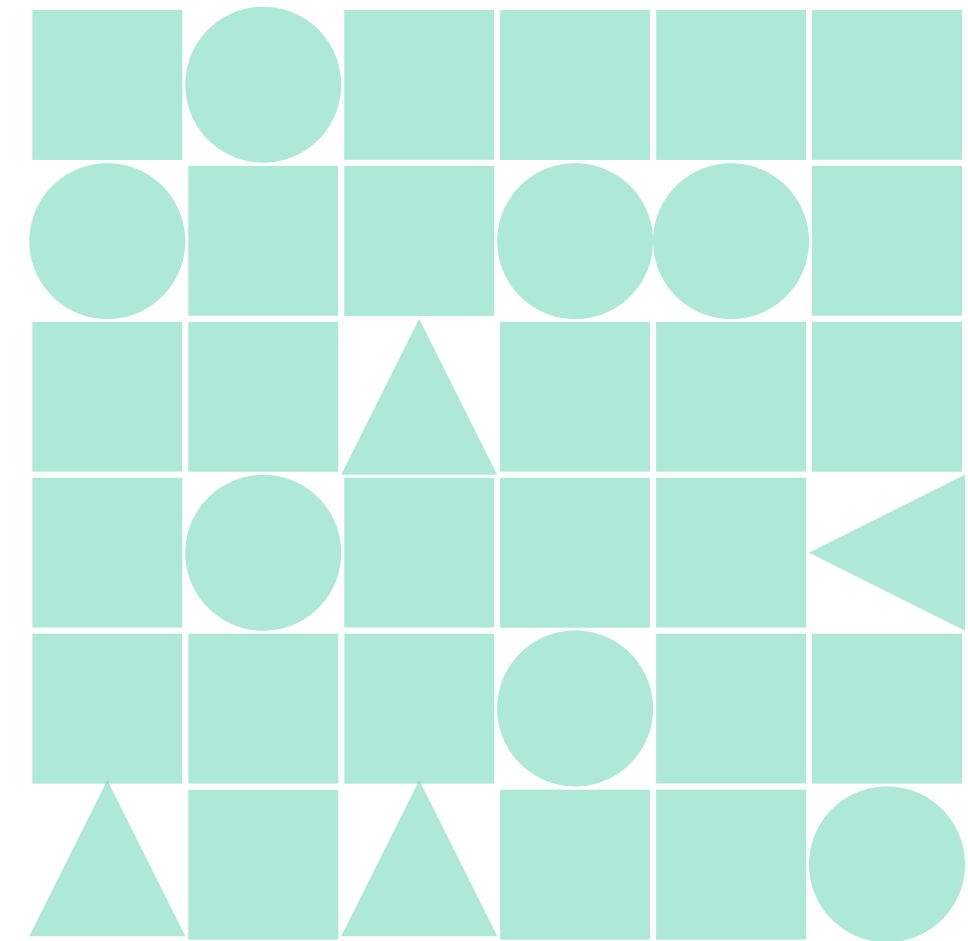
Goals and Objectives



Coordinated goals that support the vision

- City Departments

Actions and Strategies



A guide for policymaking and investments in the near future

- Grants and Funds
- Stakeholders
- Existing initiatives

Community Engagement

Key Takeaways from Listening Tour 1



We're listening!

Overall Takeaways from Phase 1

Poll #2: Which activities would be most successful in engaging your community? (Multiple Choice)

1.

	# of Votes	% of Votes
Collective mapping (digital and in person)	20	10%
Street teams	20	10%
Pin up board or flyers at convenient locations	14	7%
Social Media	30	15%
Focus groups (digital and in person)	32	15%
Pop up events	24	12%
Science fair style meeting	11	5%
Pilot projects	17	8%
Surveys (mostly digital)	17	8%
Citywide public workshop	22	11%

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding



LT1 Learning and Visioning: Outreach Channels

LOWELL FORWARD

Join the team!
Community Organizer for Lowell's Comprehensive Master Plan Process

We are seeking a passionate and experienced part-time community organizer to join the planning team and support us on building equitable local engagement for this process.

If your skills and experiences are a fit for the role, we'd love to hear from you!

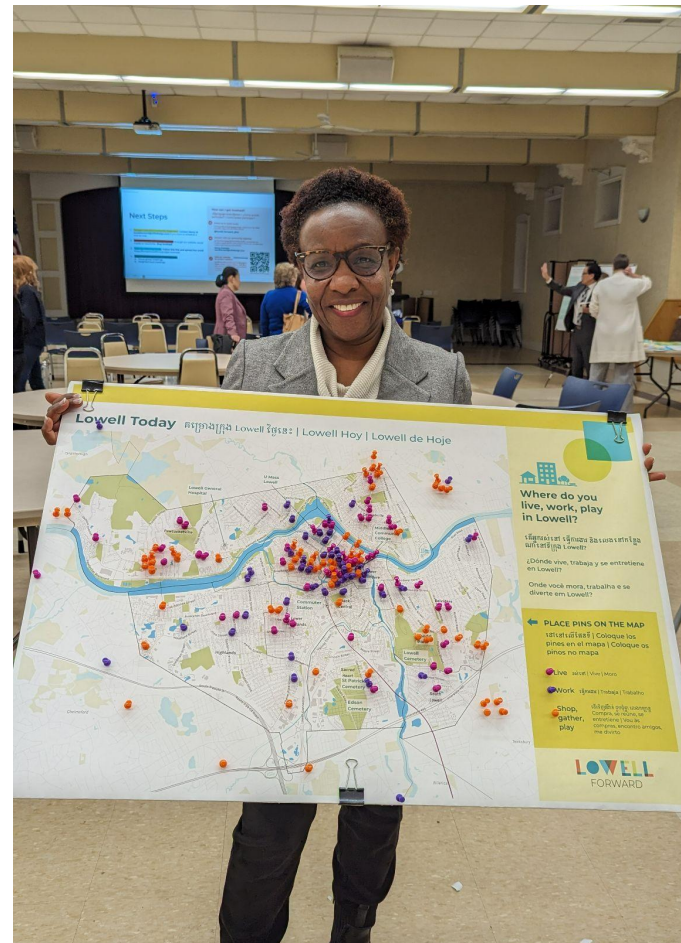
Initial Promotion:
Social Media, Website, Word-of-mouth

Take our visioning survey

What do you want for the Lowell of the future? Tell us what you like about the city and what could improve.

Access the survey:
forward.lowellma.gov/get-involved

Visioning Survey (digital and in-person):
Vision and Themes



Community Organizer/Network Building:
Neighborhood and Community outreach



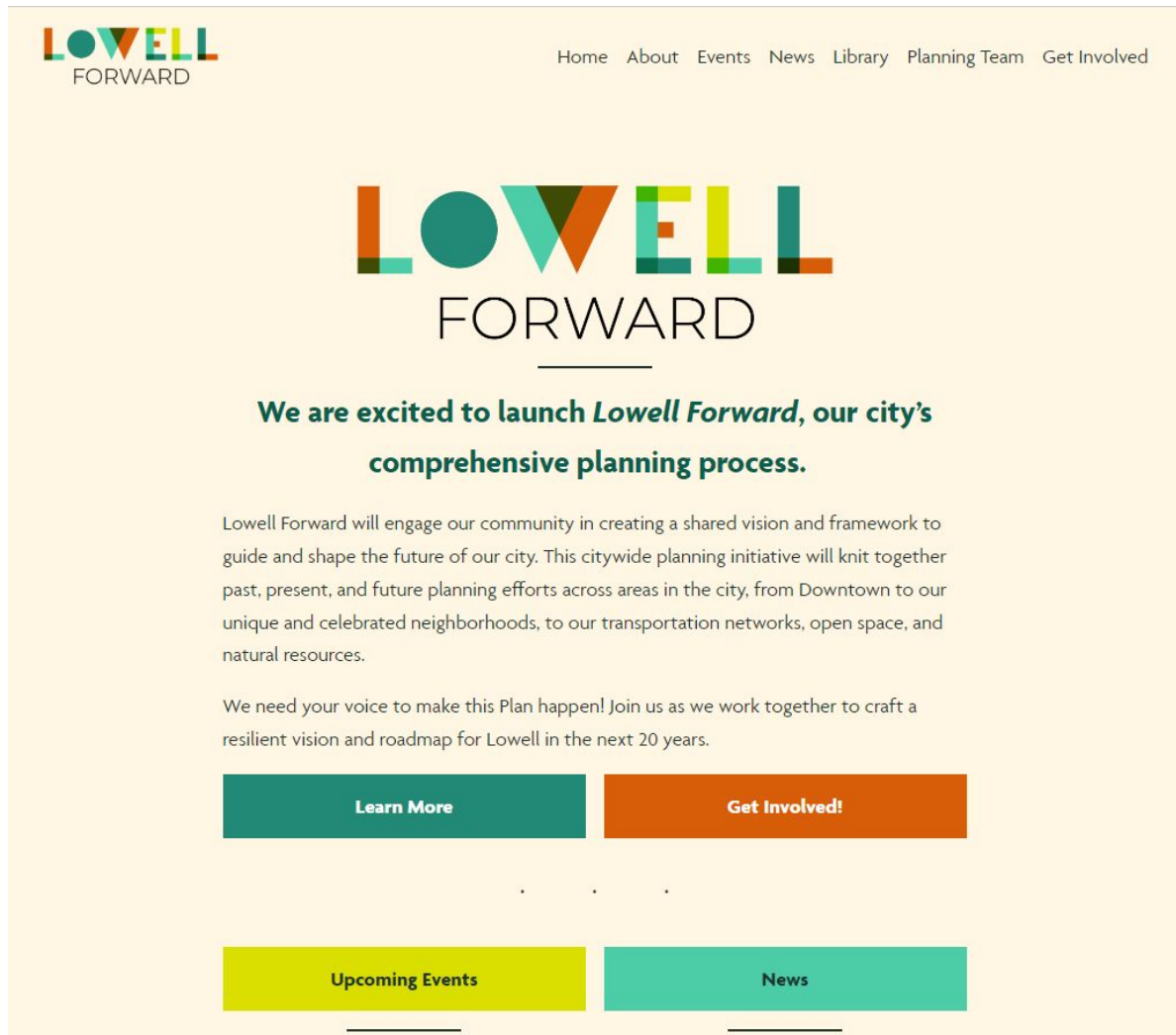
Public Workshop 1:
Existing conditions insights and feedback, Vision and Themes



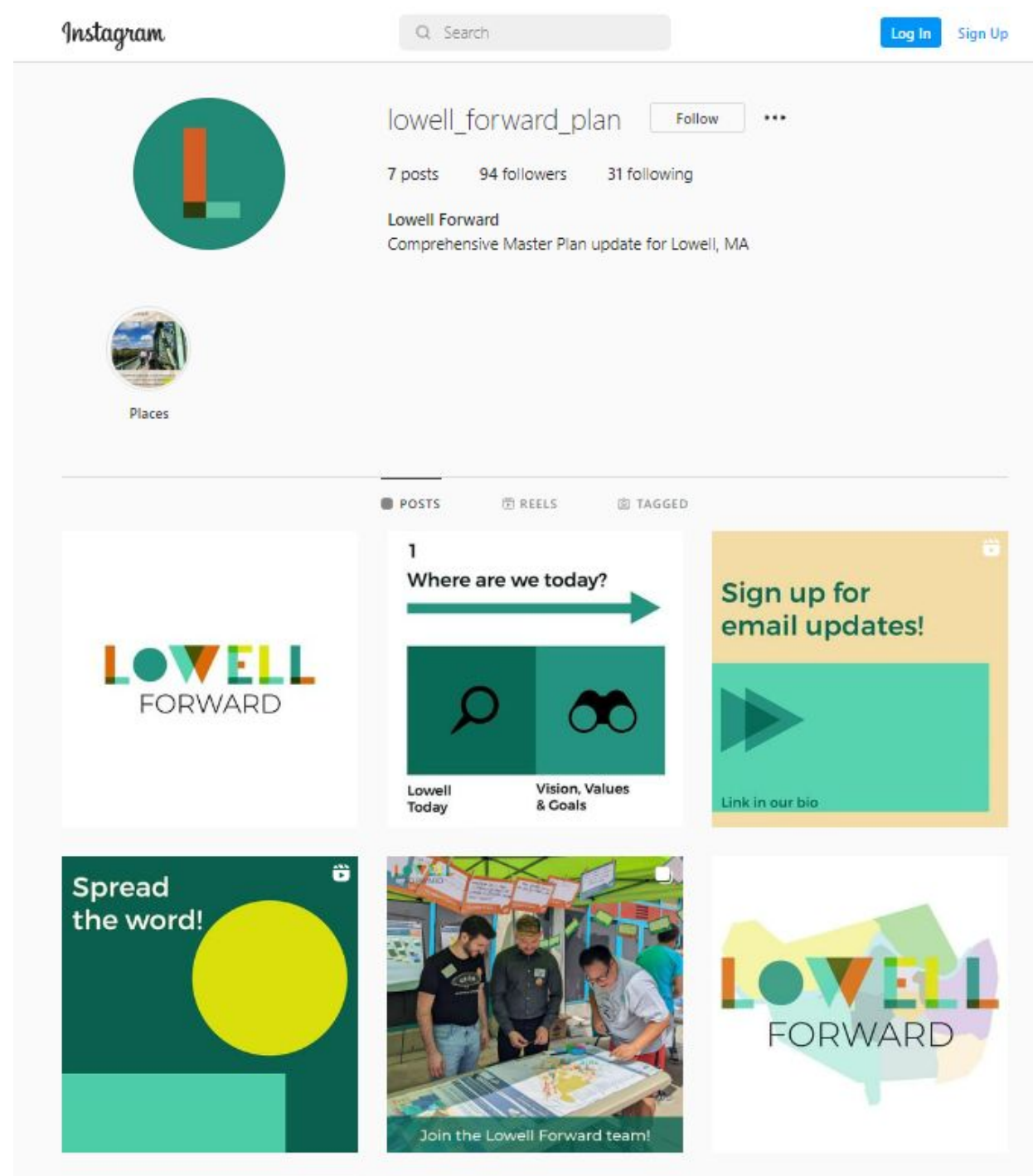
Steering Committee Feedback:
Plan process and feedback

Initial promotion and update channels

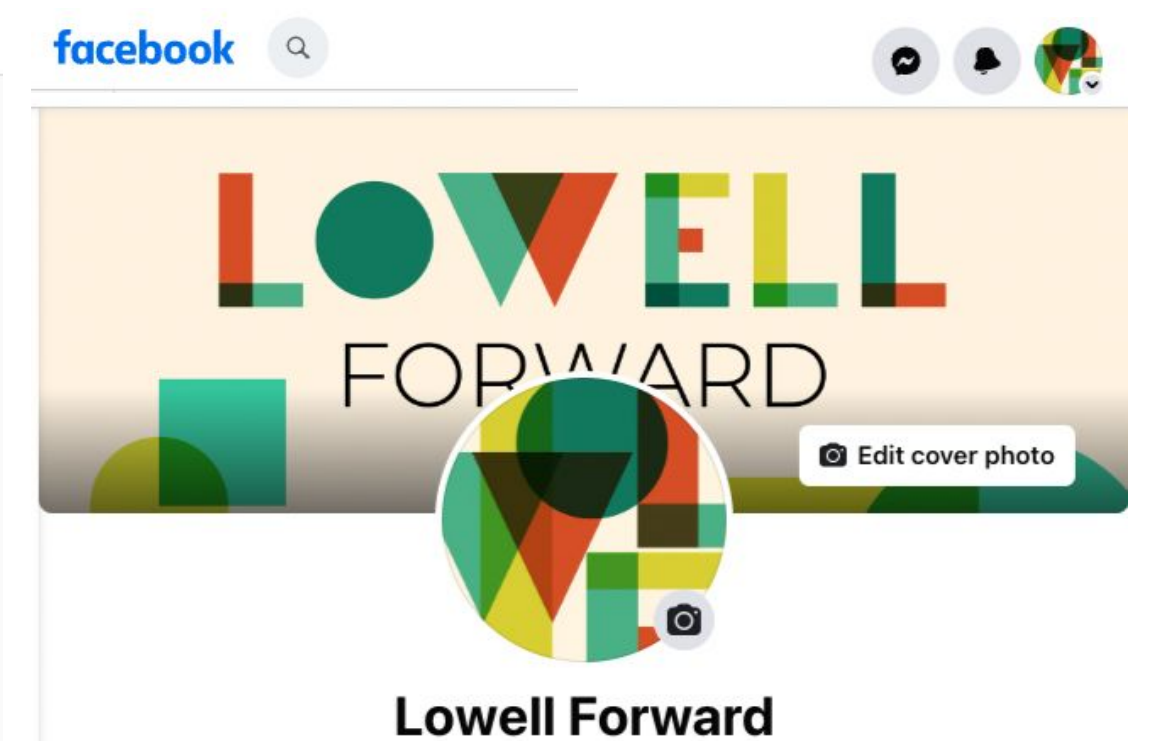
forward.lowellma.gov



@lowell_forward_plan



Lowell Forward



Follow us for updates, actively participate on comment sections, and help us spread the word!

Lowell Today is on the website!

Economic Development

Business and Real Estate Context

Businesses in downtown continue to experience the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As Lowell continues to recover from the economic, health, and social consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, residents and business owners have called attention to the state of downtown businesses. The Rapid Recovery Plan identified vacant storefronts and surveyed downtown business owners, who reported revenue decline, reduced operating hours, additional expenses, and temporary or permanent closures as major impacts of the pandemic. 79% of downtown businesses surveyed had fewer on-site customers in 2021 than in 2020. 60% of downtown businesses were operating at reduced hours or capacity in April 2021.

Despite these trends, office and retail rents in Lowell have grown more in the past six years than countywide rents. However, vacancy rates that are slightly more volatile than countywide rates are better indicators of the difficulty that Lowell commercial uses have experienced. Lowell office vacancy jumped from 5% to 9% from 2020 to 2021.

These results emphasize a need to further understand the obstacles faced by downtown businesses in the coming years. These results also indicate a need to understand Lowell's larger entrepreneurial ecosystem and the steps the City and its partners can take to support local, small-scale businesses.

79% Downtown businesses have fewer on-site customers after COVID-19

5.7 Million Total Office Square Footage in Lowell

3.9 Million Total Retail Square Footage in Lowell

Employment Analysis & Growth Sectors

Jobs have grown slightly less in Lowell than statewide in the past decade.

Jobs in Lowell grew by 7% between 2010 and 2020, lagging slightly behind the Commonwealth, which experienced 9% job growth in the same period. However, Lowell is well-positioned to benefit from regional and statewide trends in employment and job training. As is the case in the Boston region and Massachusetts overall, healthcare is one of the fastest growing sectors in Lowell. Lowell healthcare employment grew by almost 50% between 2010 and 2020, adding 758 jobs. Other growing industries include management, finance, construction, and arts/entertainment. The average earnings within each of these industries, which ranged from approximately \$40,000 to \$77,000 in 2020, exceeded Lowell's median household income of \$30,241, indicating that the city is attracting and retaining high-paying occupations.

Lowell's institutions are critical to the city's growing role in the regional economy. The largest institution of higher education in the city, UMass Lowell successfully provides training that aligns with key in-demand jobs, such as those in healthcare-related occupations. Among the programs with the most number of degrees or certificates conferred at UMass Lowell are healthcare-related occupations, management, architecture and engineering, computer sciences, and protective services. However, UMass Lowell does not offer programs for other in-demand occupations, such as those in legal professions, social services, and construction. Lowell has an opportunity to capitalize on its strong position as a regional education hub by continuing to provide job training and degree programs that align with high-demand industries. Middlesex Community College and the Greater Lowell Technical High School may offer other programs that do support some of those industries.

7% Lowell job growth between 2010-2020 as compared to statewide job growth (9%).

\$30,241 Median Annual Income in Lowell (2020)

Office Rents and Vacancy (2015-2021)

Retail Rents and Vacancy (2015-2021)

Job Growth by Occupation (2010-2020)

Occupation	Jobs
Architecture & Engineering	132
Cleaning and Maintenance	998
Transportation	1070
Maintenance & Repairs	448
Production	33
Food Prep & Serving	76
Administrative Support	85
Physical & Social Science	9
Healthcare Practitioners	82
Computer	45
Education & Library	597
Protective Services	95
Legal	39
Social Services	165
Personal Care	124
Arts & Entertainment	143
Financial Management	135
Healthcare	586
Healthcare	1341
Healthcare	758

Fastest Growing Occupations in Lowell in 2020

Occupation	2020 Jobs	Avg Annual Earnings (2020)
1) Healthcare	2,373	\$40,558
2) Management	3,990	\$42,447
3) Financial	2,704	\$96,749
4) Construction	1,090	\$73,408
5) Arts & Entertainment	1,358	\$77,624

Housing

Housing Types + Density

67% of Lowell's residential land contains single-family housing, mainly in the city's outer neighborhoods. Housing density also tends to be highest in Lowell's downtown and inner neighborhoods, with lower densities in predominantly single-family neighborhoods such as Pawtucketville and Belvidere. However, a number of larger-scale multifamily housing developments have been constructed on larger parcels along the Merrimack River and at the edges of the city.

Housing Age

Much of Lowell's housing stock is historic. 77% of Lowell's housing was built before 1960. Some of the oldest housing stock is located where communities of color reside, and where some of the lowest household incomes are present.

Older buildings can be more affordable to buy or rent than new construction, but older buildings also tend to be less energy efficient than newer structures. Older buildings are also less likely to meet modern standards for safety and accessibility than newer homes. These challenges make older buildings more costly to maintain and renovate.

LOWELL FORWARD

Read *Lowell Today!* An interim report from the Lowell Forward Process

[Click Here to Read](#)

Link:

https://forward.lowellma.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/230323_Lowell-Today_Final_Spreads.pdf

Listening Tour 1 Stats



- **Public Citywide Workshop 1**

- 100+ attendees
- 36 comment cards (English, Spanish)
- 284 sticky notes (English, Spanish, Swahili)

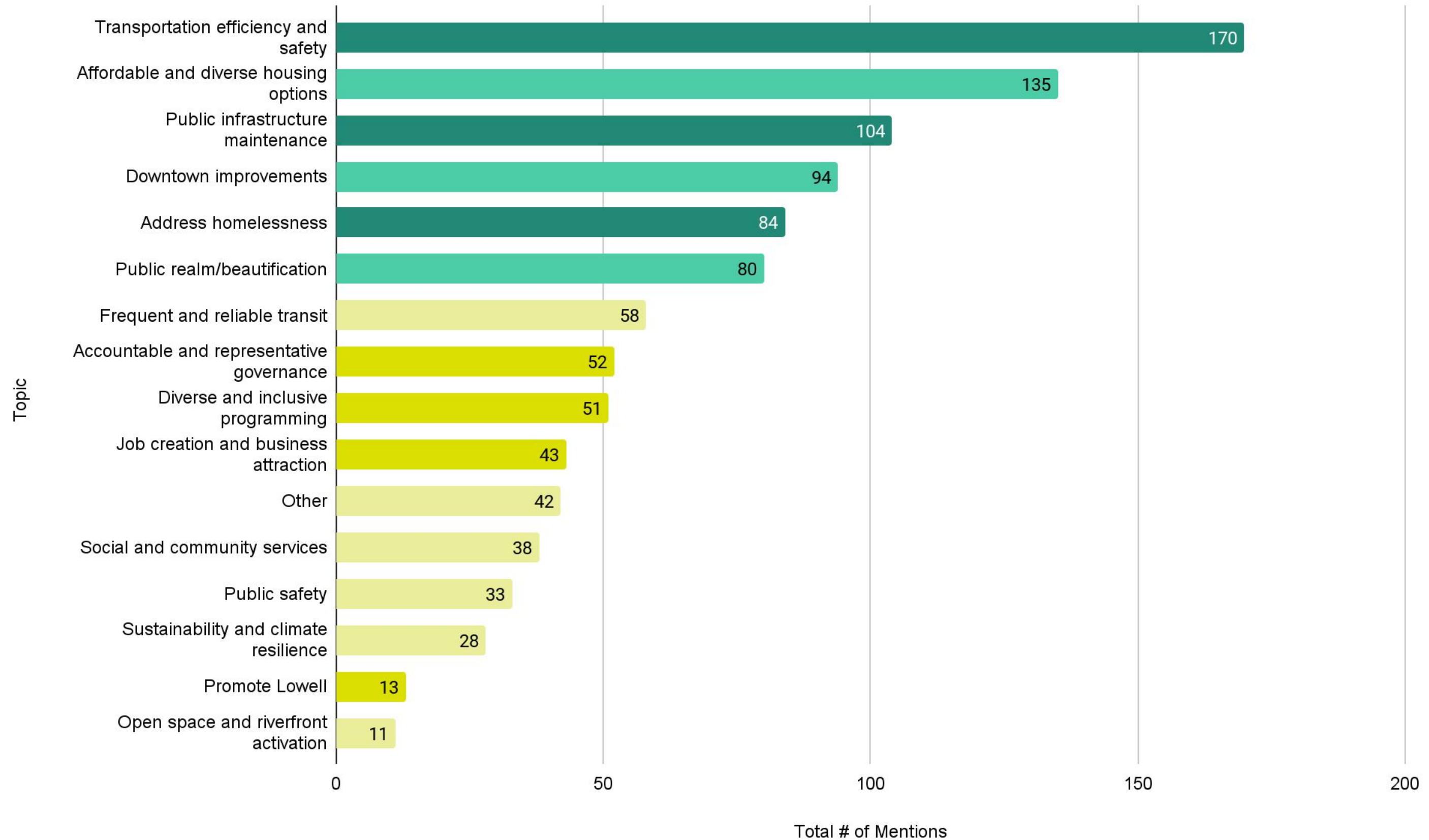
- **Visioning Survey**

- 708 responses (English)
- 17 responses (Spanish)
- 4 responses (Khmer)
- 15 responses (Portuguese)

- **1:1 Stakeholder Conversations**

- 21 conversations
- 40 comment cards

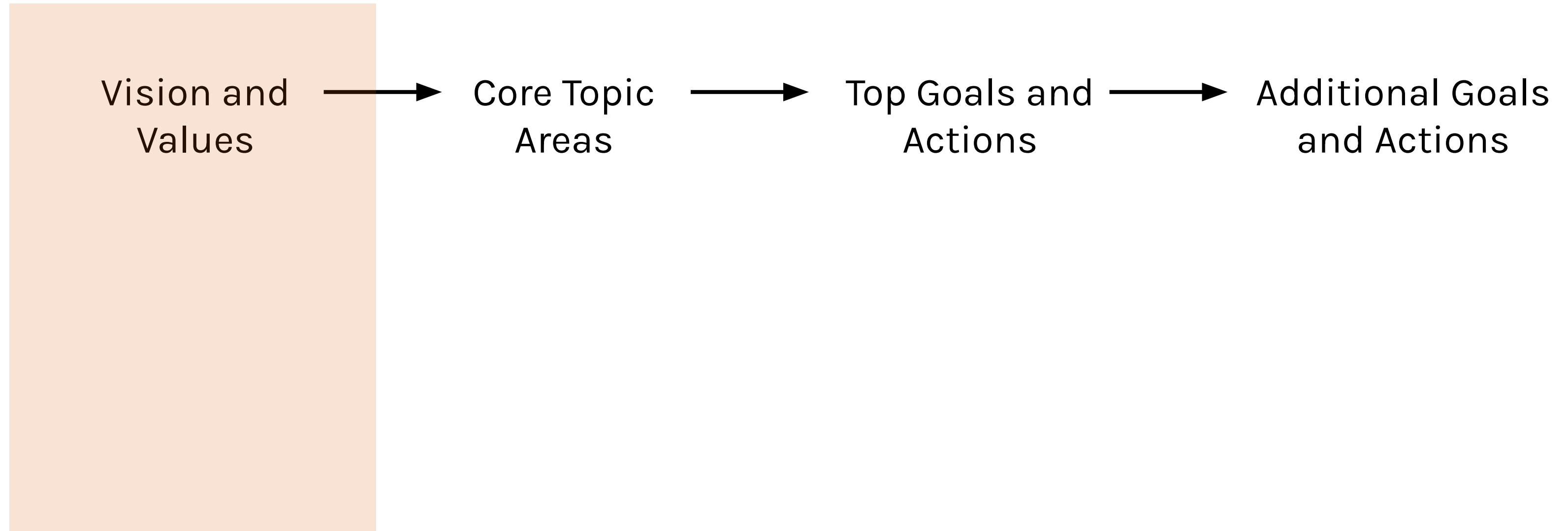
Overall Themes - LT1



Draft vision and goals



Plan Framework



Vision and Values

Vision: Aspirational statement(s) expressing what we want to accomplish as a city and community. The vision reflects the ideal quality of life we aspire to have in Lowell.

Values: Fundamental community principles that guide the Comprehensive Plan, link various elements together, and reinforce decisions and actions

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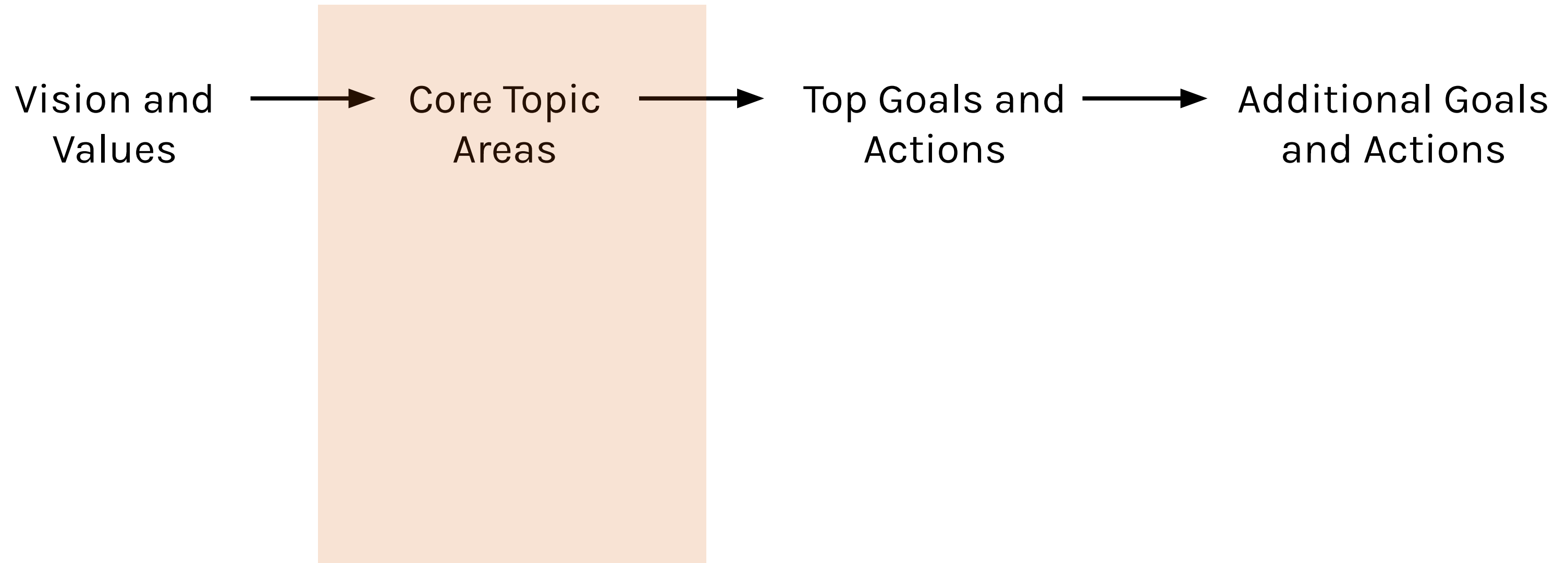
Tentative words to stitch (reoccurring themes we've heard):

1. **Diverse:** *inclusive, welcoming, vibrant, heritage, authentic*
2. **Affordable:** *equitable, livable, economic opportunity, stability*
3. **Connected:** *accessible, integrate, safe, convenient, complete*
4. **Maintain:** *sustain, resilient, responsible, sustainable, nurture, support, quality, manage, protect*

Other themes/values:

- Community Health and Wellbeing: support, active, strength, connected
- Climate Protection: environmental stewardship, resilience, adapt,
- Innovation: creative, forward-thinking, progressive, grow, advance, invest

Plan Framework



Plan Elements

Land Use and Urban Form

Housing

Energy, Climate, and Environment

Mobility

Open and Public Space

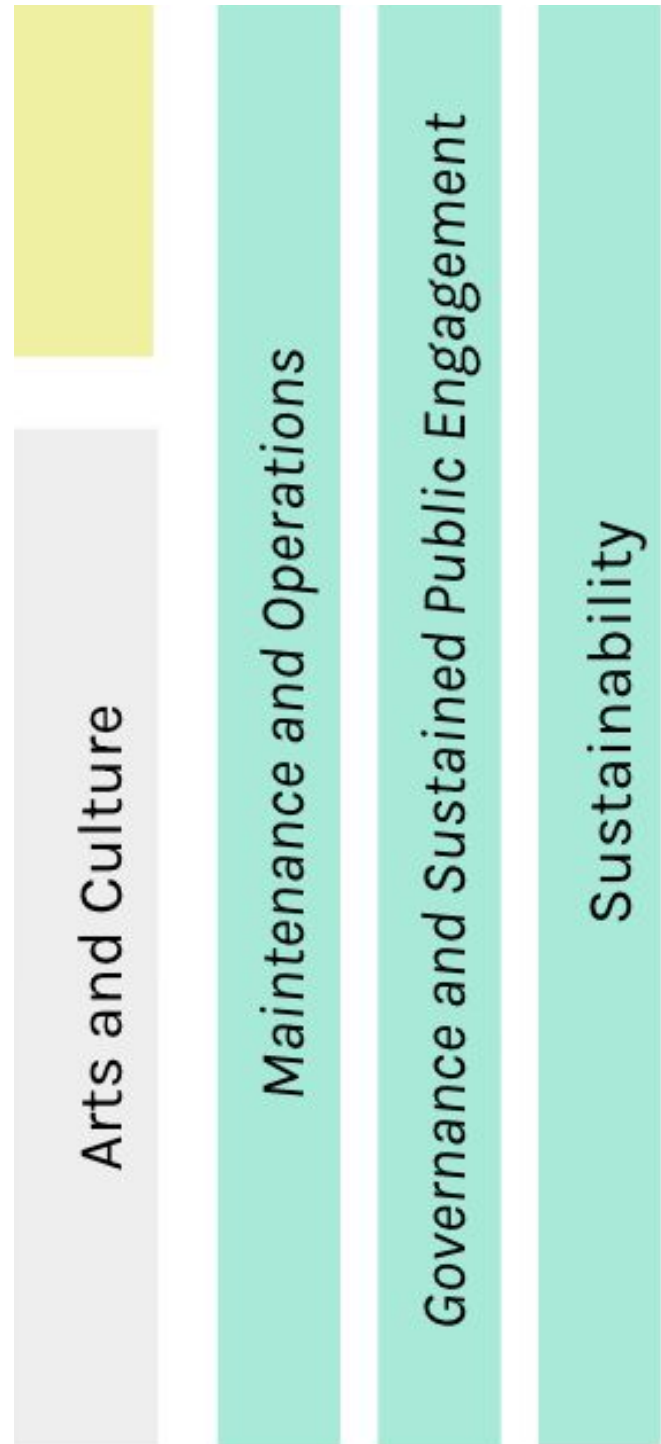
Economic Development

Arts and Culture

Foundational Principles:

- *Sustainability and resilience*
- *Proactive maintenance and effective operations*
- *Accountable governance and community stewardship*

Integrated Topics considerations:



Arts and Culture

- Leverage the arts and support creative placemaking in Lowell
- Support Lowell's economic vitality through arts, culture and creativity.

Maintenance and Operations

- Maintenance of public infrastructure
- Operations and capacity considerations

Governance and Sustainable Public Service and Engagement

- Social and community services (youth, senior, addiction, mental health, etc)
- Accountable and transparent governance
- Representative and inclusive governance

Sustainability - social, economic and environmental

- Sustainable policies
- Climate resilience - mitigation and adaptation, Green infrastructure
- Environmental justice
- Sustainable practices and networks (ex: local food systems, etc)
- Energy efficiency (ex. Green buildings, EV, etc)

Plan Framework



Rather than create an exhaustive list of to-dos, we want to use the master plan to collectively determine the most important goals the city should prioritize over the next 15-20 years

Draft Top Goals - framework

How are we defining top goals?

- These are broad and aspirational citizen-centered outcomes that the City aspires to realize over time
- Prioritized for each core plan element/topic area
- The draft goals you will see today were informed by a combined understanding of existing conditions, trends analysis, survey results, past and current city planning efforts, stakeholder interviews, what we heard at the kick-off public workshop, social media. Your feedback is welcome!
- Goals will frame the next steps of the planning process, where the planning team develops growth strategies, actions and implementation priorities

**We will use
tonight's breakout
rooms to workshop
these with you!**

Draft Top Goals - Core Topic Areas

Land Use and Urban Form

Land Use and Urban Form

- Growth and Redevelopment Opportunities: *in progress*

Mobility

Mobility

- Safe, equitable and connected multimodal network
- Frequent, high-quality and reliable transit network

Housing

Housing

- Housing affordability
- Housing diversity
- Housing security

Open Space, Environment and Public Realm

Open Space, Environment and Public Realm

- Open Space Improvements (activation and access)
- Public realm improvements (beautification and maintenance)

Economic Development

Economic Development

- Downtown revitalization
- Activate neighborhood commercial centers
- Commercial and industrial opportunities
- Promote, support and grow Lowell's local businesses

Draft Top Goals - Core Topic Areas

Land Use and Urban Form

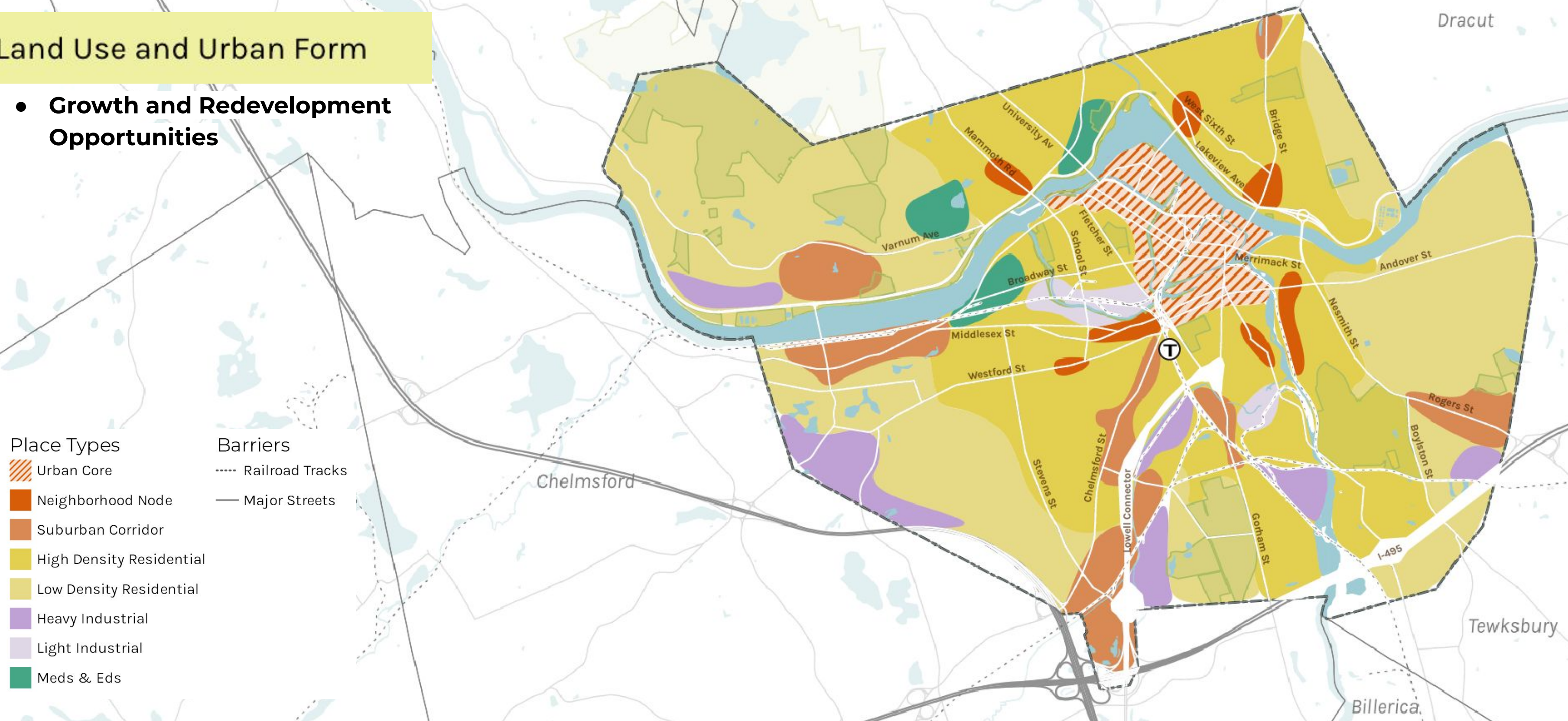
- **Growth and Redevelopment Opportunities**

Place Types

- Urban Core
- Neighborhood Node
- Suburban Corridor
- High Density Residential
- Low Density Residential
- Heavy Industrial
- Light Industrial
- Meds & Eds

Barriers

- Railroad Tracks
- Major Streets



Draft Top Goals - Core Topic Areas

Mobility

- **Safe, equitable and connected multimodal network**
 - Prioritize the implementation of transportation-focused investments that enhance safe and accessible conditions for walking, biking, and public transit for all ages and abilities.
- **Frequent, high-quality and reliable transit network**
 - Ensure everyone in the community can easily connect to work and other activities through an efficient transit network.

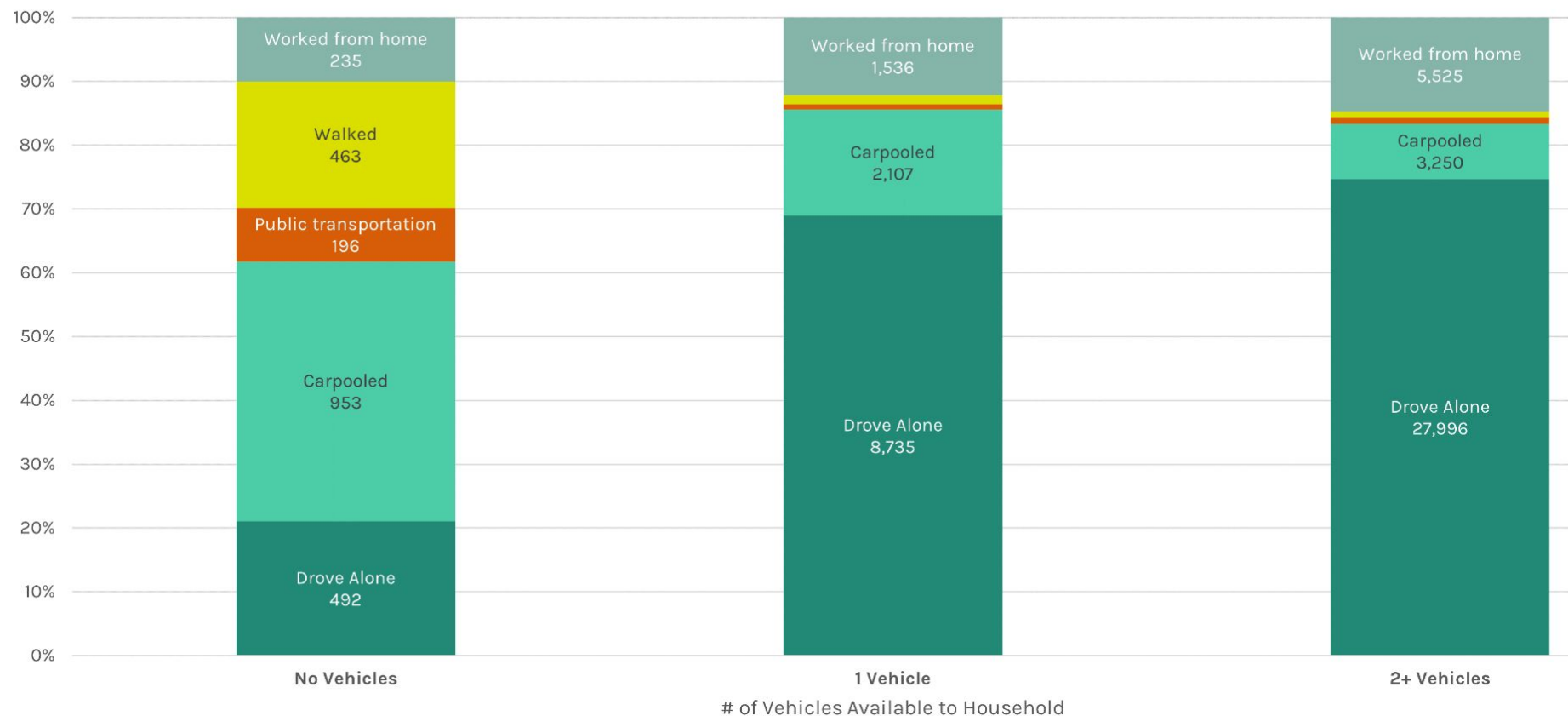
“Better bus schedules throughout city”

“Quality of roads, too many potholes especially in winter”

“Slow down traffic on through streets, make sidewalks connect with minimal obstruction by cars, snow banks and utilities”

“Cars shouldn't be parked on sidewalks - it's not accessible”

Means of Transportation to Work in Lowell by Number of Vehicles Available



Draft Top Goals - Core Topic Areas

Economic Development

- **Downtown revitalization**
 - Address vacancy in Downtown
 - Make Downtown a destination
 - Support existing businesses and attract new businesses
- **Activate neighborhood commercial centers**
 - Promote appropriate development in neighborhood development centers
 - Support existing businesses in these nodes
- **Promote, support and grow Lowell’s local businesses**
 - Ensure local businesses of different types, sizes, and growth stages are able to start, grow, and prosper in Lowell
- **Commercial and industrial opportunities**
 - Increase commercial and industrial tax base to ensure a diversified revenue stream over time (to help pay for city services, and promote the creation of a range of jobs in the City’s core and emerging sectors)

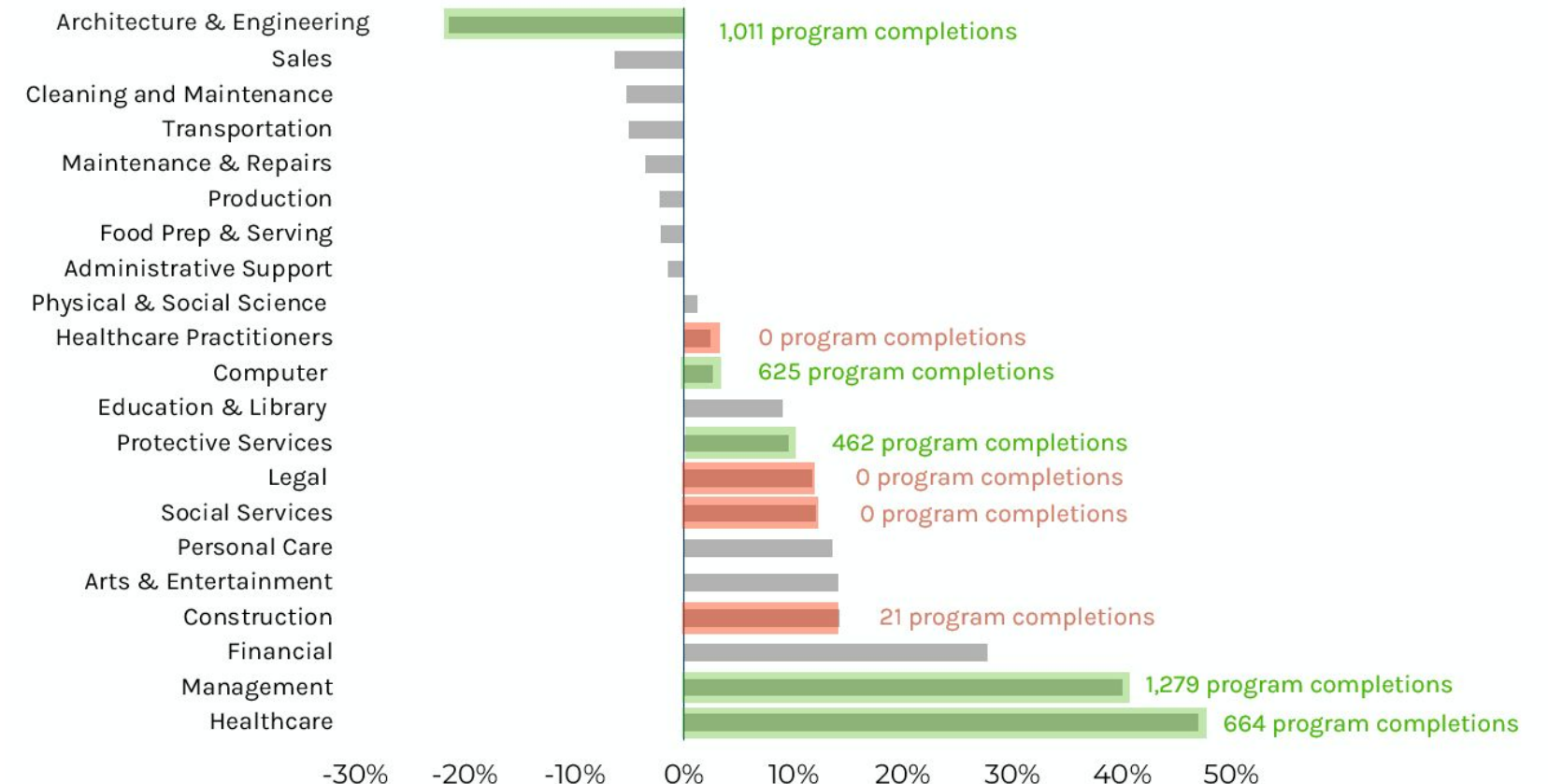
“Promote small businesses and expand business opportunities for minority groups.”

“Bring back Downtown, there are too many empty storefronts!”

“Build a better economic bridge between [UMass Lowell] and the city”

“Provide opportunities for skill building, training and innovation.”

Job Growth by Occupation 2010-2020



Draft Top Goals - Core Topic Areas

Housing

- **Housing affordability**

- Preserve and expand existing affordable housing tools and continue to develop housing that is affordable to residents of all income levels.

- **Housing diversity**

- Provide a greater mix of housing options to serve residents across a range of incomes, ages and needs

- **Housing security**

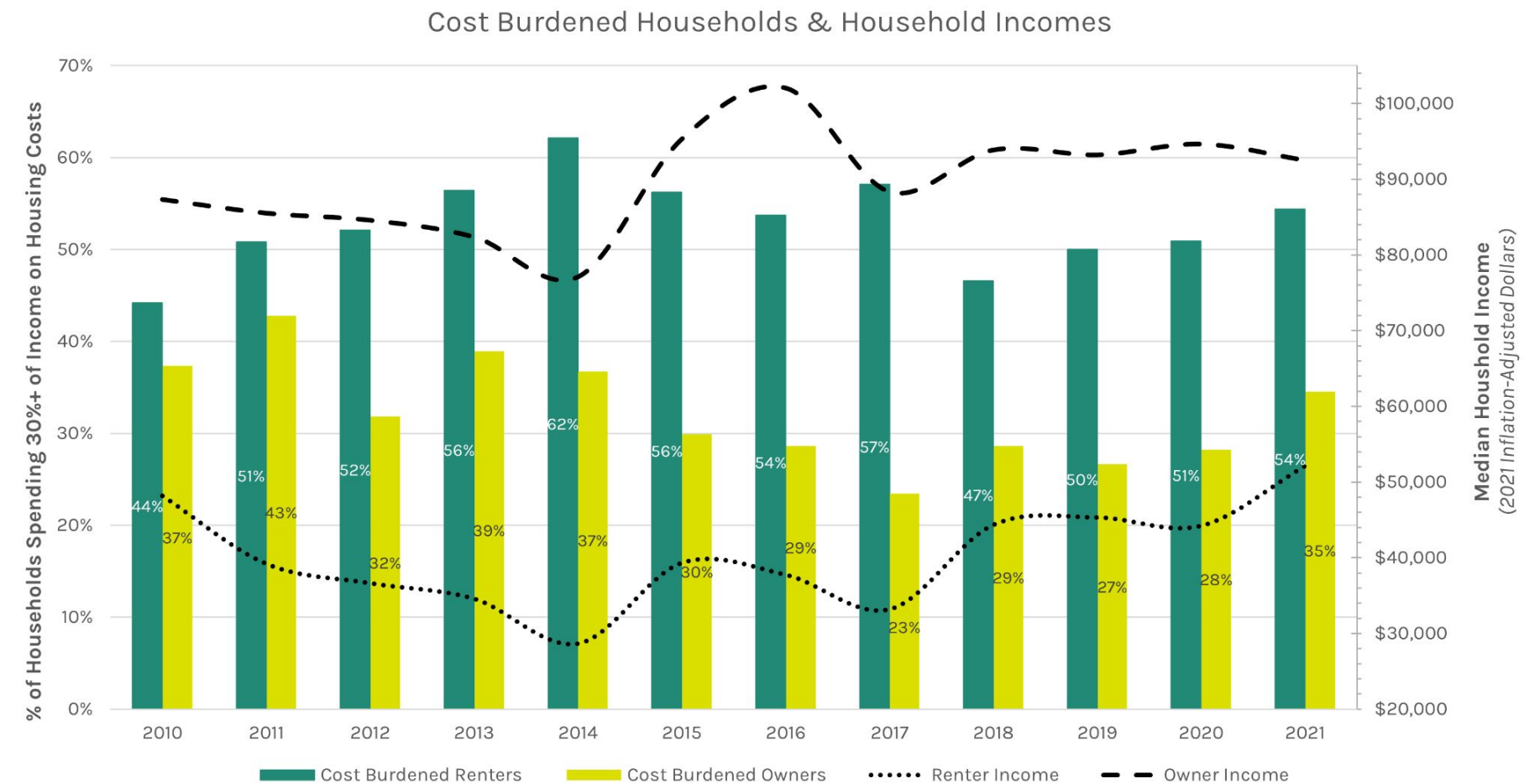
- Provide and increase housing options for Lowell's most vulnerable populations including those experiencing or transitioning out of homelessness

"We need to provide housing for the unhoused."

"Housing is too expensive, and there are many empty buildings."

"Make homeowners and landlords more responsible for property upkeep"

"Develop mixed use properties to create more affordable housing options"

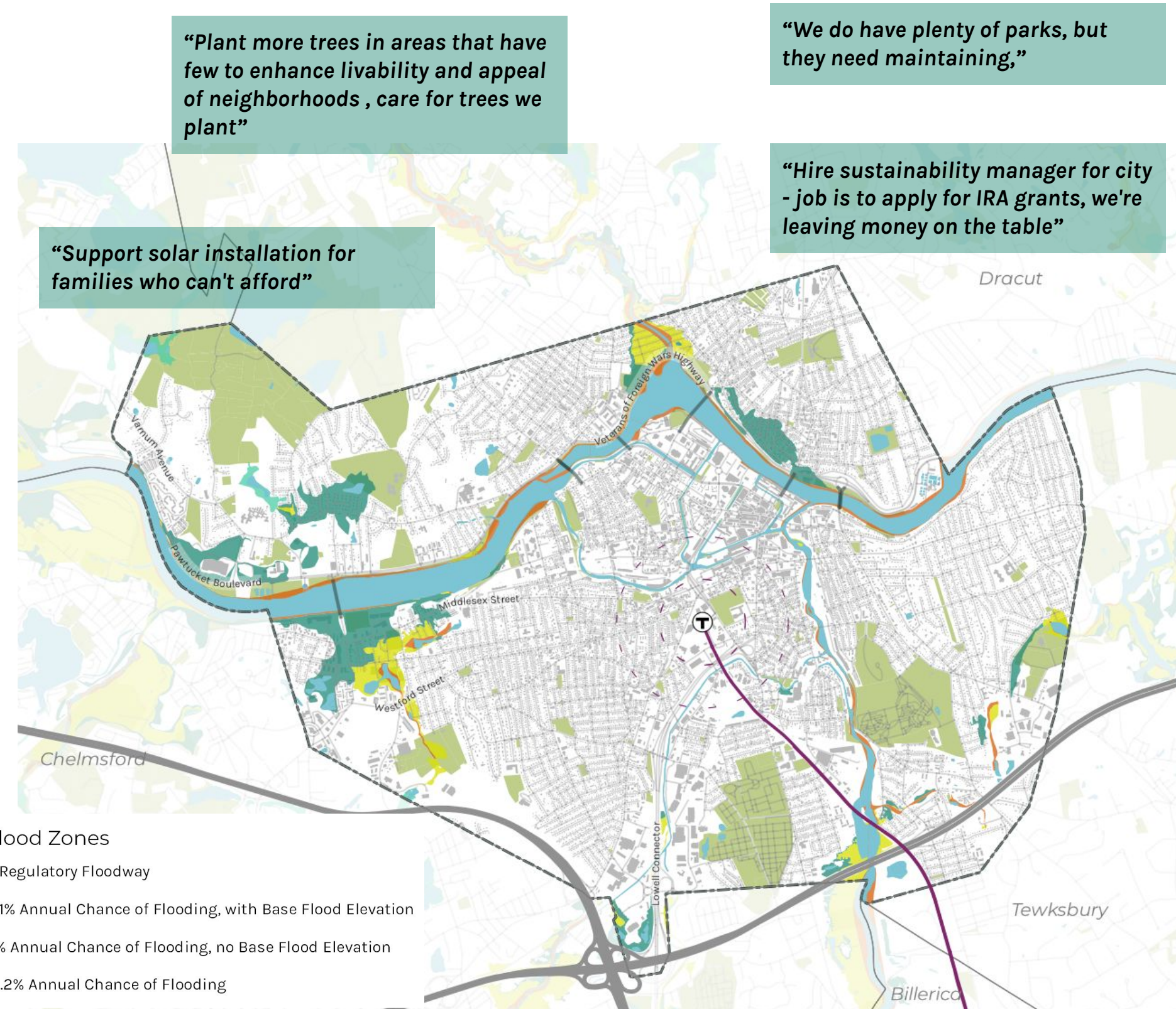


Draft Top Goals - Core Topic Areas

Open Space, Environment and Public Realm

- **Open Space Improvements (activation and access)**
 - Enhance existing open space assets including the Riverfront through community programming, infrastructure improvements and climate adaptation planning.
 - Improve public access to open space, recreational areas, and natural resources, equitably across Lowell's neighborhoods

- **Public realm improvements (beautification and maintenance)**
 - Maximize the public right-of-way to create vibrant and beautiful places for the community incorporating good urban design and green infrastructure elements
 - Prioritize public infrastructure enhancement and maintenance (*parks, streets, sidewalks, green infrastructure*)



Draft Top Goals - Core Topic Areas

Arts and Culture

- Leverage the arts and support creative placemaking in Lowell
- Support Lowell's economic vitality through arts, culture and creativity.

“More youth programs for kids in each neighborhood”

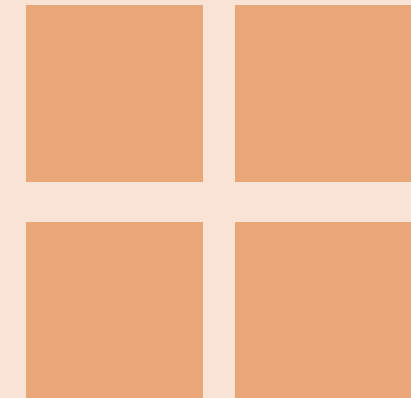
“Street sign in different languages”

“Support for all cultural festivals - funding”



Breakout Rooms

- We are seeking input this evening on crafting top goals for Lowell together, which we will continue to workshop with the community in Listening Tour 2.
- Defining and prioritizing core topic goals - these are draft goals and not final. We want to work together tonight to develop a comprehensive list of top goals that represent Lowell's vision.
- We will break out in smaller groups to have an open, collaborative, and robust discussion and share our takeaways with the larger group after.
 1. **Do you think the top goals capture the most important needs and aspirations of our community?**
 2. **What are we missing?**



Debrief and Next Steps



What to expect for Listening Tour 2

1. **Focus groups and neighborhood meetings** led by the city and NMCOG
2. **Community organizer continued engagement** including: focus groups, event pop-ins, and survey distribution.
 - a. Engage key informants (untapped stakeholders) - youth, seniors, Southeast Asian community and Brazilians
3. **Survey 2:** feedback on draft vision and top goals
4. **Public Workshop 2:** towards the end of June to review vision and goals, and growth strategies with the community

Listening Tour 2 - Focus Groups

Open Space/Sustainability

Friends of Tyler Park
Clemente Park Committee
DCR
Mill City Grows
Lowell Parks and Conservation Trust
Lowell Parks Department
350 Mass
Lowell Sustainability Council

National Park Service

Economic Development Organization

E for All
Chamber of Commerce
CTI E-Center
TDI Fellow
MassHire

Misc. Non-Profits

Clarendon
Merrimack Valley Food Bank
Merrimack Valley Housing Partnership
UTEC
Habitat for Humanity

Local Banks

Enterprise
JDCU
Lowell 5
Align
Washington Savings

Major Employers

UKG
Markley
Fred C. Church
Pridestar/Trinity
Ma/Com
Plenus
Verizon
IBM
Hannaford
Market Basket
TRC
Comscope

Lowell Police Department

Homelessness/Unhoused Services

House of Hope
Lowell Transitional Living Center
Eliot Church
Life Connection Center

For-Profit Developers

Winn Development
Lupoli
Princeton
Crosspoint
John Power
Dean Jenkins
Leo Monteiro
Brian McGowan
Justin McFarlane, Trinity

Health Organizations

Lowell Community Health Center
Lowell Health Department
Lowell Health Alliance
Lowell General Hospital
Lowell Association for the Blind

Infrastructure

Lowell DPW
Lowell Engineering Division
Lowell Regional Wastewater Utility

Higher Education

UMass Lowell
MCC

Primary/Secondary Schools

Lowell Public School
Greater Lowell Voke
Charter Schools (2)

Human Service

Alternative House
Megan's House
Lowell House
Senior Center
Council on Aging

Arts/Culture Organizations

DIY Lowell
CASE
Mosaic Lowell
Whistler House
Merrimack Reperatory Theater
Mill No. 5

Community Teamwork Inc

Lowell Housing Authority

Greater Lowell Community Foundation

Statewide Housing Orgs

Lowell Regional Transit Authority

Cultural/Ethnic Organizations

Lowell Plan

Listening Tour 2 - Neighborhood Meetings

Centralville

CNAG (Centralville Neighborhood Action Group)
Centralville Community Coalition

Back Central

Back Central Neighborhood Association

Acre

ACTION (Acre Coalition to Improve Our Neighborhood)
Coalition for a Better Acre - CBA

Pawtucketville

Pawtucketville Citizen's Council
West Pawtucketville Citizen's Council

Downtown

LDNA (Lowell Downtown Neighborhood Association)

Highlands

Highlands Neighborhood Association
Lower Highlands Neighborhood Group
Highlands Circle Neighborhood Group

South Lowell

South Lowell Neighborhood Group

Belvidere

Belvidere Neighborhood Association

Next Steps

1. **Public Workshop 2** will take place towards the end of the summer.
Spread the word!
2. **Listening Tour 2. Stay tuned for more details on how you can participate!**
3. **Stay in touch with the Community Organizer! Contact Mercy at lowellforward@utiledesign.com** if you want to schedule a one-on-one.
4. **Want to learn more about Lowell Forward's insights so far?** Take a look at the complete [Lowell Today report](#) and [Listening Tour 1 takeaways](#) on our website.

Thank You!

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