

LOWELL

FORWARD
AVANZA

ឆ្ពោះទៅថ្ងៃខាងមុខ

AVANÇA

April, 2024



Letter to the Community

Dear Lowell Community,

I am incredibly excited to share Lowell Forward, the City of Lowell's new comprehensive plan.

Lowell Forward has been profoundly shaped by the voices of hundreds of Lowellians. The year-long community engagement process was anchored by the invaluable contributions of our dedicated Steering Committee, which included over fifty long-time and newer residents from all Lowell neighborhoods, local business owners, elected and appointed City officials, and non-profit and institutional partners.

Over the past year, six steering committee meetings helped to guide the overall direction of the plan, shape our public outreach strategy, and refine content. The engagement process also included four public workshops attended by hundreds of community members, three surveys, and many focus group conversations as part of a citywide listening tour led by our community organizer and the staff of the Department of Planning and Development.

During these community conversations, we heard all the things you love about Lowell—its cultural diversity, incredible world-class cuisine, and tightly-knit neighborhoods. We also heard your calls for safe, reliable transportation, housing affordability and access, climate resiliency, public infrastructure maintenance and beautification, and downtown improvements. These priorities, your priorities, shaped Lowell Forward's vision and resulted in the plan's six main topic areas: housing, mobility, energy climate and environment, open and public space, economic development, and arts and culture.

Lowell Forward will serve as the City's blueprint helping my administration inform our budgeting and capital planning, guide the work of City departments across all levels, and result in City plans and policies to assist us in achieving the goals set forward in this plan. The robust implementation plan will serve as an actionable, practical guide outlining the actions the City and its community partners can take to realize the vision crafted by the community through Lowell Forward.

Lowell Forward truly would not have been possible without the contributions of so many Lowellians. I am deeply grateful for your time, commitment, and love for the City of Lowell. My administration looks forward to working closely with the City Council to implement this plan and continue to make Lowell a place we are all proud to call home.

Sincerely,
Thomas A. Golden Jr.
City Manager

Acknowledgments

City Council

- Mayor Daniel Rourke, District 1
- Vice Mayor Paul Ratha Yem, District 7
- Sokhary Chau, District 6
- John Descoteaux, District 8
- Erik Gitschier, At Large
- Wayne Jenness, District 4
- John J. Leahy, District 3
- Rita Mercier, At Large
- Vesna Nuon, At Large
- Corey Robinson, District 2
- Kimberly Scott, District 5

Planning Board

- Thomas Linnehan, Chairman
- Gerard Frechette, Vice Chair
- Sinead Gallivan, Second Vice Chair
- Richard Lockhart, Member
- Caleb Cheng, Member
- Allison Dolan-Wilson, Member

City Staff

City Manager's Office

- Thomas A. Golden, Jr., City Manager
- Shawn Machado, Assistant City Manager
- Conor Baldwin
- Austin T. Ball
- Doreen Burgess
- Melissa Desroches

Assessing Department

- Ellen Brideau, Chief Assessor

Cultural Affairs and Special Events

- Peter Crewe, Director
- Diandra Silk, Communications & Marketing

Health and Human Services

- Lisa Golden, Director
- Kim Gagnon, Senior Center

Department of Planning and Development

- Yovani Baez-Rose, DPD Director/ Assistant City Manager
- Camilo Espitia, Deputy Director
- Francesca Cigliano, Project Manager
- Sarah Brown
- Allison Carter
- Everlidis Desmond
- Maria Dickinson
- Philip Ferreira
- Kimberly Hayes-Hackett
- Catherine Kennedy
- Jorge Martinez
- Susan Murphy
- Elizabeth Oltman
- Dylan Ricker
- Sandra Swaile
- Stephen Stowell
- Jessica Wilson

Department of Public Works

- Paul St. Cyr, DPW Commissioner/ Assistant City Manager
- Ting Chang, Engineering
- Joseph Cady, Engineering
- Shannon Cohan, Parks
- Aaron Fox, Wastewater
- Katherine Moses, Sustainability
- Michael Stuer, Wastewater

Management Information Systems

- Miran Fernandez, Chief Information Officer
- Joseph Donovan

Police Department

- Greg Hudon, Superintendent of Police
- Mark LeBlanc, Deputy Superintendent
- William Florence
- Christopher Panagiotakos
- John Sheehan

Consultant Team

Utile: Urban Design and Planning, Community Engagement

- Matthew Littell
- Andrea Baena
- Taskina Tareen
- Rahi Patel
- Avery Robertson
- Kevin Chong
- Alessandro Ricciardi
- Kyle Jonasen

Community Organizer

- Mercy Anampiu

HR&A: Economic Development

- Claire Summers, Harman Dhodi

Nelson\Nygaard: Transportation and Mobility

- Alyson Fletcher

Brown, Richardson + Rowe: Open Space and Parks

- David Andrews, John Latham

Tetra Tech: Infrastructure and Civil

- Jason Hellendrung

Steering Committee

The Lowell Forward Steering Committee comprises individuals deeply connected to the Lowell community, with extensive experience working with and advocating for Lowell neighborhoods. Each member represents a diverse set of voices across the city. The Steering Committee collaborated closely with the planning team to oversee and offer direction regarding the plan's content, while also broadening community outreach throughout the Lowell Forward process.

- Adam Baacke, Assistant Vice Chancellor of Campus Development at UMass Lowell
- Bopha S. Boutselis, Resident & Educator at Lowell Public Schools
- Joseph Boyle, Resident & Project Manager at Coalition for a Better Acre
- Leslie Briones, Resident
- Allison Chambers, VP of Finance and CFO at Middlesex Community College
- Yun-Ju Choi, Resident & Executive Director of Coalition for a Better Acre
- George DeLuca, Resident
- Melissa Desroches, Resident & Educator at Lowell Public Schools
- Jackie Doherty, Resident & School Committee Member
- Perry Downs, Resident & Conservation Commission Member
- Maxine Farkas, Resident
- Neyder Fernandez, Student Body President at UMass Lowell
- Gerard Frechette, Resident & Planning Board Member
- Suzanne Frechette, Resident & Development Director of Habitat for Humanity of Greater Lowell
- Levenia Furusa, Resident
- Valerie Galvao, Resident
- Ron Gentle, Resident
- Ryan Gilday, Resident
- Amada Gregory, Resident
- John Hamblet, Resident
- Christopher Hayes, Resident & Housing and Economic Development Planner and Northern Middlesex Council of Governments
- Austin Hill, Resident
- Cormac Hondros-McCarthy, Resident & Lowell Sustainability Council Member
- Vaughn Horn, Resident
- Carl Howell, Chief Operating Officer at Community Teamwork, Inc.
- Dean Jenkins, Local Developer
- Kerry Jenness, Resident, Lowell Historic Board Member, & First Assistant City Solicitor at City of Lowell
- Wayne Jenness, Resident & City Council Member
- Belinda Juran, Resident
- Felice Kincannon, Resident
- Luran Lamarre Anderson, Resident & Business Owner of Lala Books
- Allison Lamey, Resident & Executive Director of the Lowell Plan/Lowell Development and Financial Corporation
- Matt Lucas, Resident
- Dennis McCarthy, Resident & Zoning Board of Appeals Member
- Rita Mercier, Resident & City Council Member
- Dennis Mercier, Resident & Chair of the Pawtucketville Citizen Council
- Vivan Merrill, Small Business Owner of E&V Merrill Insurance Group
- Steven Thurston Oliver, Resident & Professor at Salem State University
- Tania Ormonde, Resident
- Luciano Paskevicius, Resident
- Sanary Phen, Resident & Program Coordinator at Coalition for a Better Acre
- Michelle Rivera, Resident
- Juan Carlos Rivera, Director of Operations at Boys and Girls Club of Greater Lowell
- Narin Sinuon, Resident
- Craig Thomas, Director of Sustainability, UMass Lowell
- Beth Tripathi, Resident
- Bobby Tugbiyele, Resident & CEO of The Leap Network, LLC
- David Turcotte, Resident & Research Professor at UMass Lowell
- Mona Tyree Harris, Resident
- Enrique Vargas, Resident & Associate Director at Mill City Grows
- Louisa Varnum, Resident & Conservation Commission Member
- Mary Wambui-Ekop, Resident
- Barbara Warren, Division Director of Housing and Homeless Services at Community Teamwork, Inc.
- Ethan Yang, Resident

Executive Summary

Lowell Forward is our city's comprehensive plan for the future. It captures a 20-year vision and roadmap for supporting growth and investment in our Downtown, neighborhoods, communities, open and natural spaces, and infrastructural networks. This plan is a collective endeavor driven by the vision and dedication of our community leaders and citizens, and reflects a great deal of effort from countless individuals, all determined to propel their city into the future.

Community Engagement page 41

The Lowell Forward team engaged the community in inclusive dialogue to identify shared community priorities and establish a vision for Lowell's future. Community engagement was built into every step of the process, with substantial investments of time and resources, including a full-time community organizer, a series of city-led focus groups, three citywide public workshops, two citywide surveys, and social media outreach.

Intended audience for this chapter: **all community members**

Our Vision page 42

Looking forward, we envision Lowell as a city that:



Equitably connects our communities to the housing and resources needed to live a fulfilling life



Embraces, celebrates, and elevates our diversity and unique heritage



Conveniently transports us to where we need to go whether by car, transit, walking, biking, or rolling



Takes care of our public spaces, natural resources, and each other



Cultivates educational and economic opportunity for everyone to thrive



Prepares for and responds to the impacts of climate change

Our Guiding Values page 44



Priority Goals and Actions page 81

Intended audience for this chapter: **action takers**

Land Use and Urban Form

1. Comprehensive zoning review
2. Downtown growth
3. Growth in neighborhood activity centers and partnerships with institutional anchors
4. Redevelop underutilized industrial or heavy commercial areas

Housing

1. Plan for equitable and accessible growth
2. Develop homes for all
3. Increase housing quality
4. Eliminate homelessness and reduce housing insecurity
5. Provide housing options for households that make low- and very low- incomes
6. Expand and create new opportunities for affordable homeownership
7. Ensure fair housing policies and practices

Mobility

1. Safe, equitable and connected mobility network that accommodates all users including walkers, riders, drivers, bikers and rollers
2. Provide convenient access to, and navigation toward, transportation options
3. High-quality, reliable transit, and incentives for utilizing transit options

Economic Development

1. Downtown revitalization
2. Promote, support, and grow Lowell's local businesses
3. Expand commercial and industrial opportunities and increase job opportunities for Lowell residents

Energy, Climate, and Environment

1. Achieve carbon neutrality by 2050
2. Building Resilience
3. Promote clean energy economy
4. Energy Equity: ensure that decarbonization goals do not result in a disproportionate increase in energy burdens for our most vulnerable residents

Parks, Open Spaces, and Trails

1. Strengthen social resilience, equity, access, and maintenance to and of parks, open spaces and trails
2. Strengthen climate resilience and sustainability in parks, open spaces and trails

Arts and Culture

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

Implementation Framework

page 165

The Lowell Forward implementation framework identifies timeframes for goals and actions to aid **action takers**—like city departments, local organizations, anchor institutions, and the community—in the prioritization of tasks and next steps.

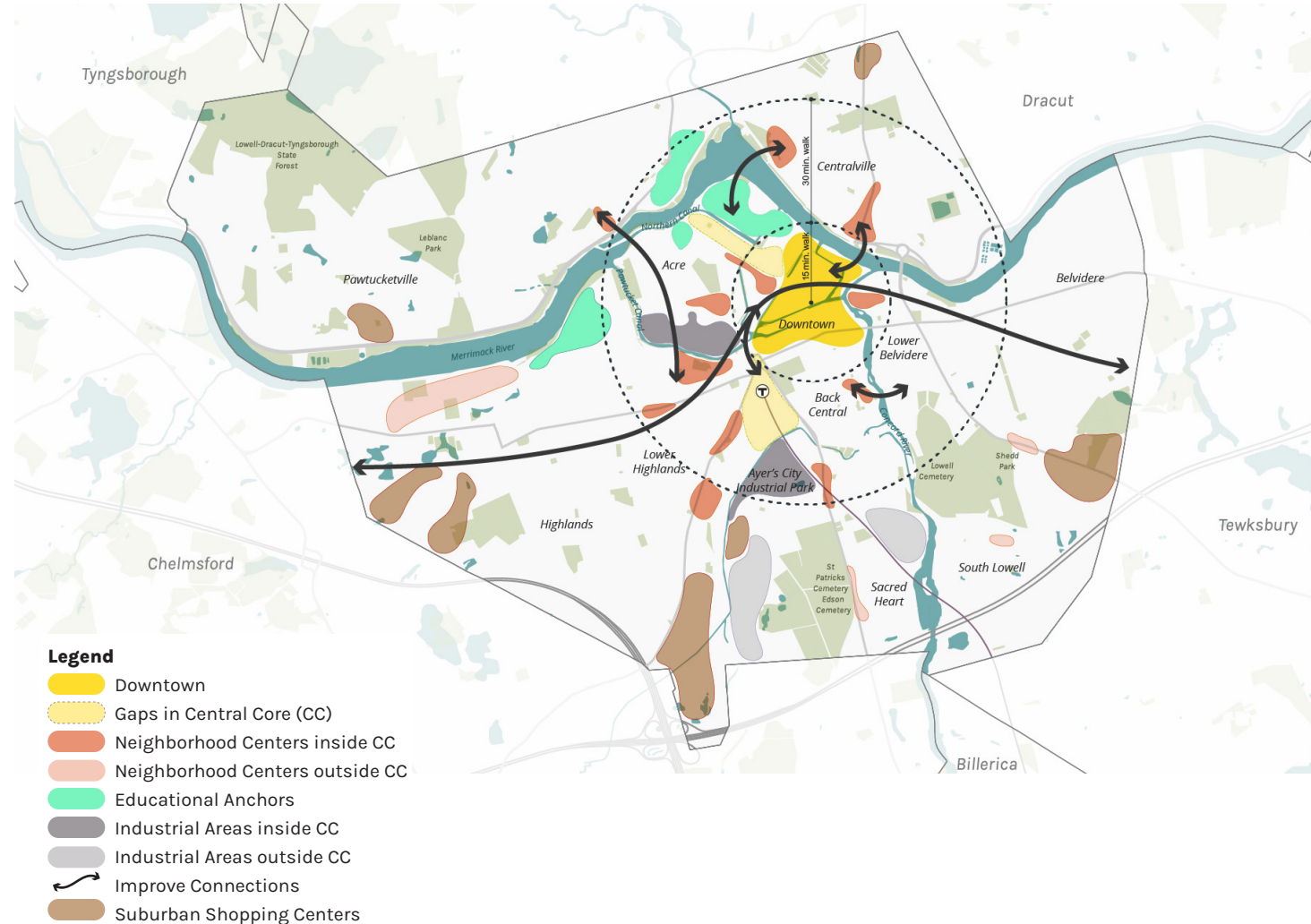
See next page for Strategies for Growth and Change →

Strategies for Growth and Change page 55

As Lowell evolves, it will encounter new opportunities and challenges that shape its growth and transformation. This plan provides a significant opportunity for the City and community to prioritize the specific enhancements we value for our neighborhoods and to determine the extent of change we are comfortable with. Chapter 3 outlines strategies aimed at guiding and shaping sustainable and equitable growth and development in Lowell. These strategies were created in collaboration with the community and informed by many conversations and feedback received throughout the Lowell Forward engagement process.

Intended audience for this chapter: **action takers**

1. Grow and Activate our Downtown
2. Build on our Unique Strengths: Neighborhood Centers and Institutional Anchors
3. Create Opportunity in Strategic Industrial Areas



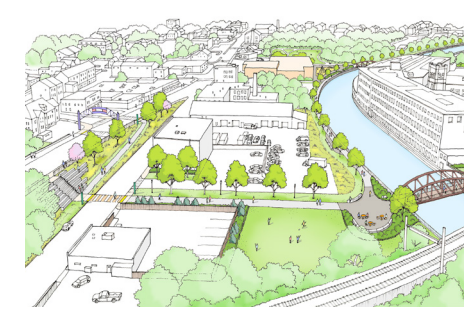
1. Grow and Activate our Downtown

1.1: Density, Activate, and Connect Downtown



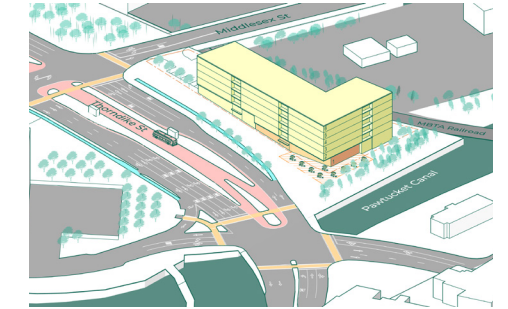
Support a vibrant, 24/7, mixed-use Downtown district that appeals to a broad range of users and bring several benefits to our larger community.

1.2: Activate the Riverfront and Canals



Maximize the potential of our canals and waterways to become a connector, an experience, and an identifier of Lowell.

1.3: Fill Gaps in the Central Core



Increase residential density in and around Downtown and potential infill areas for compact, mixed-use, and walkable neighborhoods.

2. Build on Lowell's Unique Strengths

2.1: Enhance Neighborhood Centers



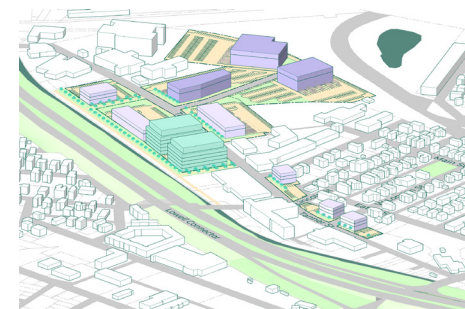
Promote contextually sensitive development that enhances neighborhood vitality, improves connectivity, and celebrates each neighborhood's distinct identity.

2.2: Leverage Institutional Anchors



Create strategic partnerships with anchor institutions to support small businesses, provide jobs, and boost the city's economy and built environment.
Photo Credit: City of Lowell.

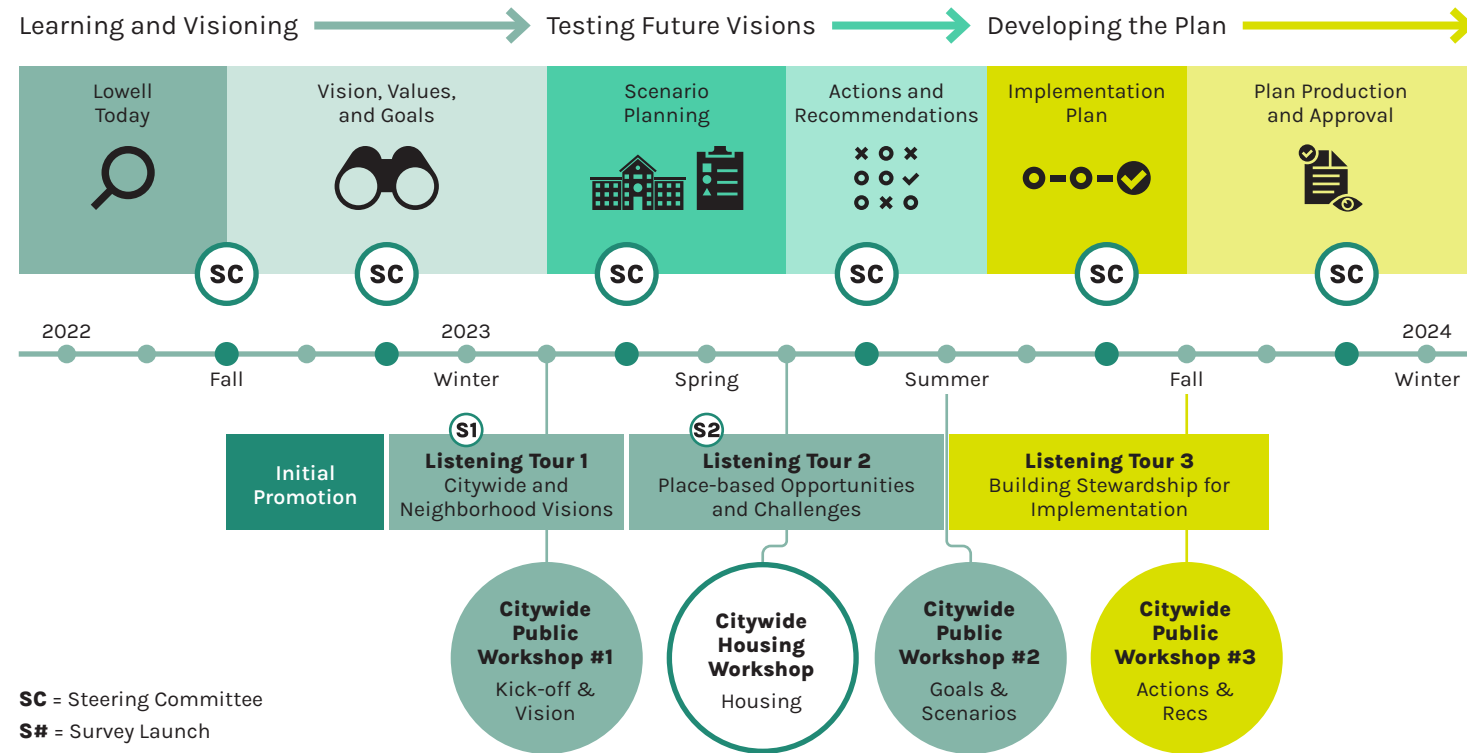
3. Create Opportunity in Strategic Industrial Areas



There are a number of opportunities to redevelop older industrial sites across Lowell for new economic development and job creation efforts. These include the Ayer's City Industrial Park or Tanner Street Corridor and the area along Western Ave and Pawtucket Canal in Acre neighborhood.

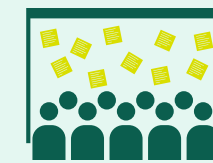
Community Engagement page 41

Community engagement consisted of three phases illustrated below:



Phase 2: Testing Future Visions

Public Workshop 2:



with more than **40** attendees and more than **178** written comments or sticky notes

Citywide Vision and Goals Survey 2:



more than **366** responses

Community Organizer:



more than **8** conversations or focus groups

City-led focus groups:



7 topic-specific focus groups and **8** neighborhood specific focus groups

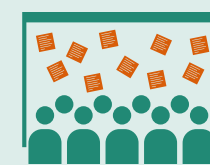
Steering Committee Meetings:



2 meetings

Phase 1: Learning and Visioning

Public Workshop 1:



with more than **100** attendees and more than **300** written comments or sticky notes

Citywide Vision and Goals Survey 1:



more than **700** responses

Community Organizer:



21 conversations, **40** comment cards

City-led focus groups:



10 topic-specific focus groups

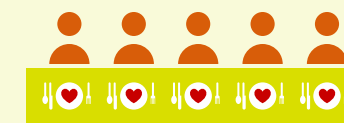
Steering Committee Meetings:



2 meetings

Phase 3: Developing the Plan

Public Workshop 3:



partnership with CHOP Dinner, **140+** participants, and more than **700** sticker reactions on boards.

Community Organizer:



10 conversations focused on topic-specific goals and actions including:

- The Merrimack Valley Housing Partnership
- Small Business Owners
- Project Learn
- Coalition for a Better Acre
- Lowell Litter Krewe
- Greater Lowell Community Foundation
- Lowell Public Schools
- Mill City Grows
- Greater Lowell Health Alliance
- Mary Wambui
- Mosaic Lowell

Steering Committee Meetings:



2 meetings



Contents

1. Introduction	17
What is Lowell Forward?	17
Lowell Today	26
Implementation Framework	36

2. Community Engagement	41
Our Vision and Values	42
Engagement Process	46

3. Strategies for Growth and Change	55
1: Grow our Downtown	64
1.1: Density, Activate, and Connect Downtown	64
1.2: Activate the Riverfront and Canals	66
1.3: Fill Gaps in the Central Core	70
2: Build on Lowell's Unique Strengths	73
2.1: Enhance Neighborhood Centers	73
2.2: Leverage Institutional Anchors	75
3: Create Opportunity in Strategic Industrial Areas	77

4. Topic-specific Goals and Actions	81
Land Use and Urban Form	86
Housing	98
Mobility	112
Economic Development	124
Energy, Climate, and Environment	136
Parks, Open Spaces, and Trails	146
Arts and Culture	156

5. Implementation Matrix	165
---------------------------------------	------------

6. Glossary	201
--------------------------	------------



1. Introduction

What is Lowell Forward?

Lowell Forward is our city's comprehensive plan for the future. It captures a 20-year vision and roadmap for supporting growth and investment in our Downtown, neighborhoods, communities, open and natural spaces, and infrastructure. This plan is a collective endeavor driven by the vision and dedication of our community leaders and citizens, and reflects a great deal of effort from countless individuals, all determined to propel their city into the future.

Intended audience for this chapter: **all community members**

Lowell Forward was shaped by you!

Many thanks to all the residents, community leaders, businesses, students, stakeholders, and passionate supporters of Lowell who contributed their input and feedback to shape this plan. Learn more about Lowell Forward community engagement on pages 41 – 53.



Citywide Housing Workshop



Citywide Public Workshop 1



Focus groups and pop-up events led by Lowell Forward's Community Organizer: Mercy Anampiu



Citywide Public Workshop 2

Take the top goals & vision survey
Help us make sure that we're heading in the right direction in establishing top goals for Lowell!
Access the survey (link in bio)

Meet our new...
Community Organizer
Mercy Anampiu brings decades of experience within the Lowell community engaging with Lowell residents around issues of public health and equitable outcomes.

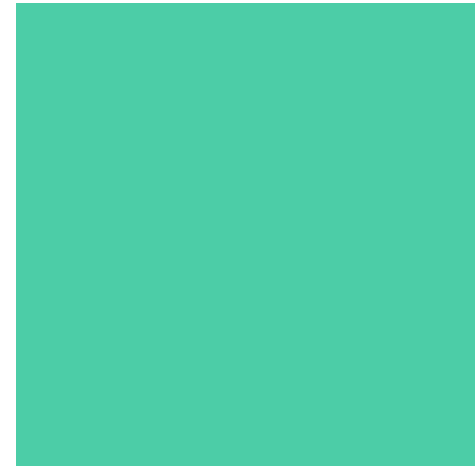
How we've heard from you:
Public Workshop 1
100+ attendees
36 comment cards (English, Spanish)
284 sticky notes (English, Spanish, Swahili)
Attend our next workshop!
Place: Lowell Senior Center
Date: Wednesday June 21 at 6:30 pm - 8:00 pm

LOWELL LOVE Community Highlights
Lowell Litter Krewe
Addressing the systemic issue of littering through volunteer community clean-ups and beautification.



Citywide Public Workshop 3

What Does Lowell Forward Include?



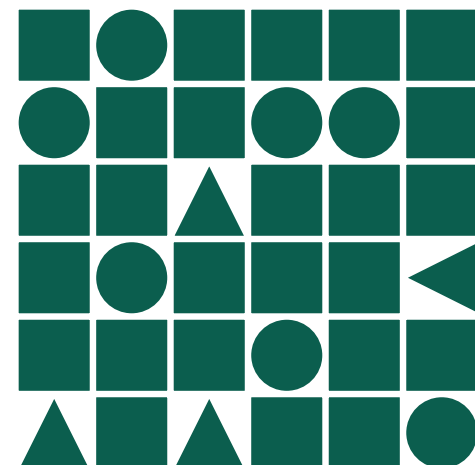
Vision & Values

A shared vision for the city and our neighborhoods



Goals & Objectives

Coordinated goals that support the vision



Actions & Strategies

A guide for implementation and investments in the near future

Moving Forward Means Many Things for Our Community

Lowell forward understands the need to adapt and evolve as a city, embracing change as an opportunity rather than a challenge. It means adopting forward-thinking policies that will help create places for our communities that are not just functional, but also beautiful and inspiring.

► Learn more about strategies for growth on page 55

Moving forward is not only about physical development but also about social and cultural enrichment of our city. It means continuing to celebrate Lowell's unique diversity in fresh ways, and fostering creativity and innovation through education, entrepreneurship and job creation while preserving the traditions and aspects of Lowell that we love.

► Learn more about what we heard from the community on page 41

Most importantly, planning for Lowell Forward does not mean starting from scratch. It means building off of a long legacy of proactive planning in our city. It involves taking stock of our past and current goals as a community, and affirming priorities for the future. It does not necessarily entail big change, but is about smart, and strategic growth that looks to improve, expand, and enhance our social, physical, and economic infrastructure.

► Learn more about past and current planning efforts on page 24

A City Moving Forward is Not without its Challenges

Lowell, like many urban areas, faces the imperative task of tackling and addressing multifaceted challenges. We must ensure that housing remains affordable and accessible for all residents while fostering fair economic growth and job opportunities. We must address growing mobility concerns in the city, including the need for more convenient and efficient public transportation, managing traffic congestion, and maintaining and taking care of our existing public infrastructure. We must address long-standing social inequities throughout the city, breaking down various barriers that have inhibited equal opportunities for all residents to thrive and succeed. We must collectively do our part as a community to prepare for and respond to the effects of climate change.

Addressing these challenges won't be swift or simple. It requires a concerted effort from local government, community organizations, businesses, and residents. A comprehensive plan like Lowell Forward serves as a unified blueprint, facilitating multiple stakeholders in actively pursuing community-centric goals. Beyond shaping a long-term vision, Lowell Forward incorporates specific goals and actions that will guide future policies and programs, land use and development decisions, and community investments over the next 10 to 20 years.

By considering Lowell's urban ecosystem holistically—including housing, mobility, economic growth, energy, climate, environment, open spaces, and arts and culture—Lowell Forward provides tools and frameworks for future decision-making around growth and development. While there are numerous goals to achieve, Lowell Forward strives to prioritize implementation steps that generate simultaneous impacts across various aspects of city planning while fostering coordination among different departments and stakeholders.

Learn more about:

- Important challenges facing Lowell today on page 26



What is a Comprehensive Plan?

Lowell Forward is a planning tool known as a comprehensive plan. Comprehensive plans are long-range, strategic plans that serve as roadmaps for guiding a community's growth and development across various planning topics. They are essential tools for local governments and planners to make informed decisions that align with the long-term vision of the community. They also serve as a gateway for other communities to learn about who we are and what we envision for our city in the next 20 years.

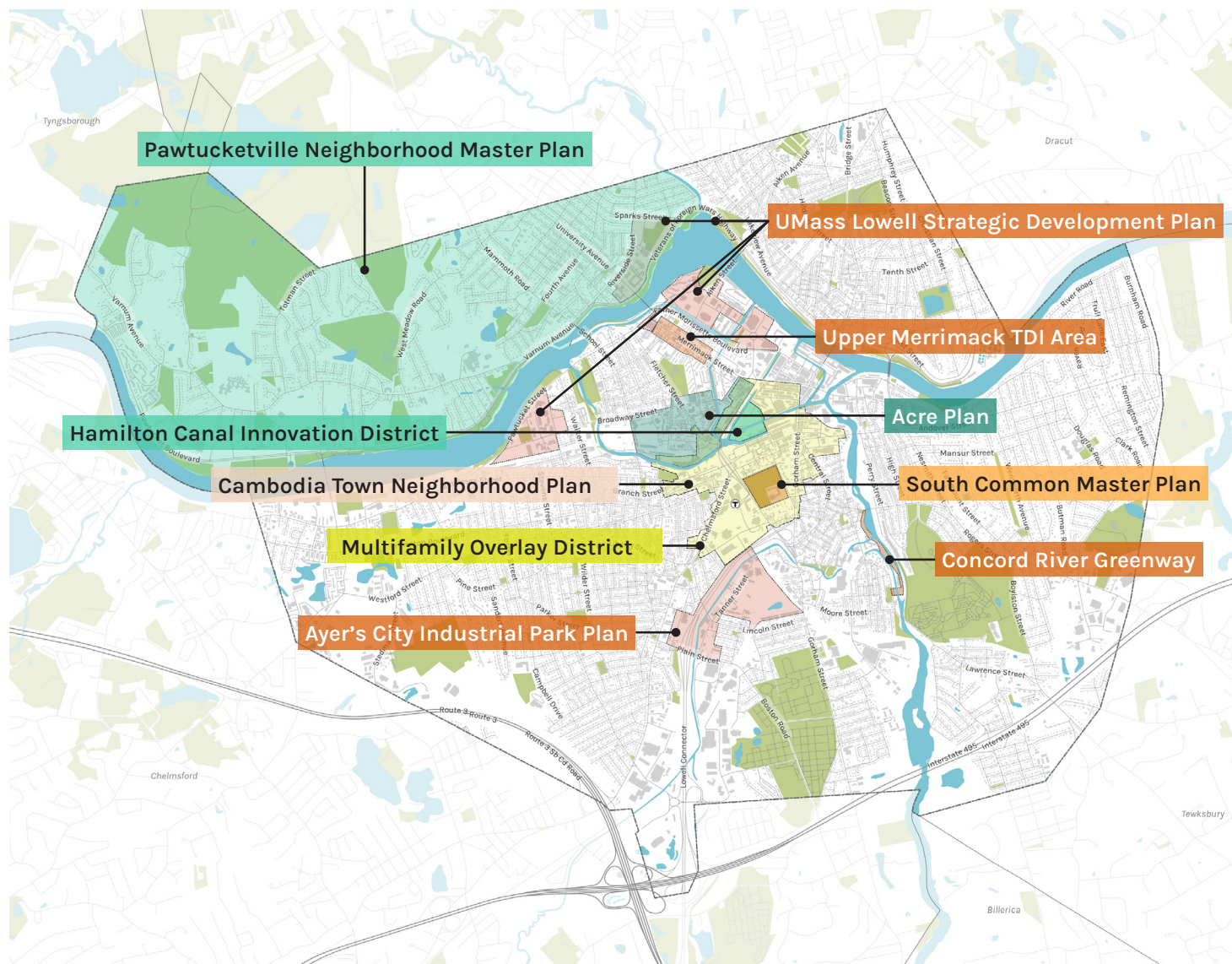
Transparency and Accountability

Comprehensive plans are dynamic in nature! The process engages in community-wide discussion to achieve a more well rounded perspective on key policy decisions facing the city. The plan establishes clear roles and responsibilities for achieving community goals, and requires periodic review to facilitate feedback and continual learning, ensuring relevance and effectiveness overtime. Regularly monitoring, tracking, and sharing the progress towards the plan's implementation is important to ensure accountability that local government is taking action.

← Photo Credit: Marte Media

Building on and Coordinating Planning Efforts

As a comprehensive citywide plan, Lowell Forward builds on other citywide, topic-specific and area-specific plans by integrating their insights and goals into a unified framework. It aims to ensure continuity and alignment in addressing various topics, fostering better coordination between stakeholders and various city departments.



A suite of other citywide and area-specific planning initiatives advance and inform the vision, principles, and strategies outlined in this plan through detailed goals, actions and recommendations.

Sustainable Lowell 2025

A wave of changes in the decade since the publication of Lowell's previous comprehensive plan, Sustainable Lowell 2025, prompted our community to prioritize the creation of this updated plan, Lowell Forward. The name change reflects a shift in discourse away from static ideals of sustainability (sustaining or maintaining things as they are) toward more dynamic ambitions of moving forward to:

- Reassess and implement the relevant goals we set before
- Identify new goals and priorities that address the current challenges and opportunities within the community

Many of the goals and priorities identified in Sustainable Lowell 2025 have already been implemented, others have been rendered obsolete or are no longer priorities, and there are many others that are still relevant, that have been carried forward, expanded upon, and advanced in the Lowell Forward plan.

Other Citywide Plans

Certain goals in Lowell Forward are directly informed by recent plans such as the 2018 Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) which is about to be updated, and the soon-to-be completed 2024 Housing Production Plan (HPP). The Lowell Forward team has been actively communicating and coordinating with various ongoing efforts, to ensure alignment with a shared long-term vision and framework for the city.

Past and Ongoing Citywide and Area-Planning Efforts

Throughout this document, we highlight and reference important connected citywide and area-specific planning efforts in sidebars called **“Where to learn more.”**

Below is a list of past and ongoing major citywide and area-planning efforts with year indicated. Note that this list is not exhaustive.

- Sustainable Lowell 2025 (2013)
- Housing Production Plan (ongoing)
- GoLowell Multimodal Complete Streets Plan (2021)
- Lowell Parking Study (2021)
- Lowell Regional Transit Authority Comprehensive Transit Plan Update (2021)
- Gallagher Terminal Transit-Oriented Development Study (2020)
- Urban Forestry Master Plan (ongoing)
- Open Space and Recreation Plan (2018, soon to be updated)
- Lowell's Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness/Hazard Mitigation Plan (2020)
- Small-Scale Manufacturing & Place-Based Economic Development (2017)
- Ayer's City Industrial Park Urban Revitalization & Development Plan (2013)
- Hamilton Canal District Master Plan (2008)
- Mosaic Lowell (2022)
- Downtown Lowell Rapid Recovery Plan (2021)

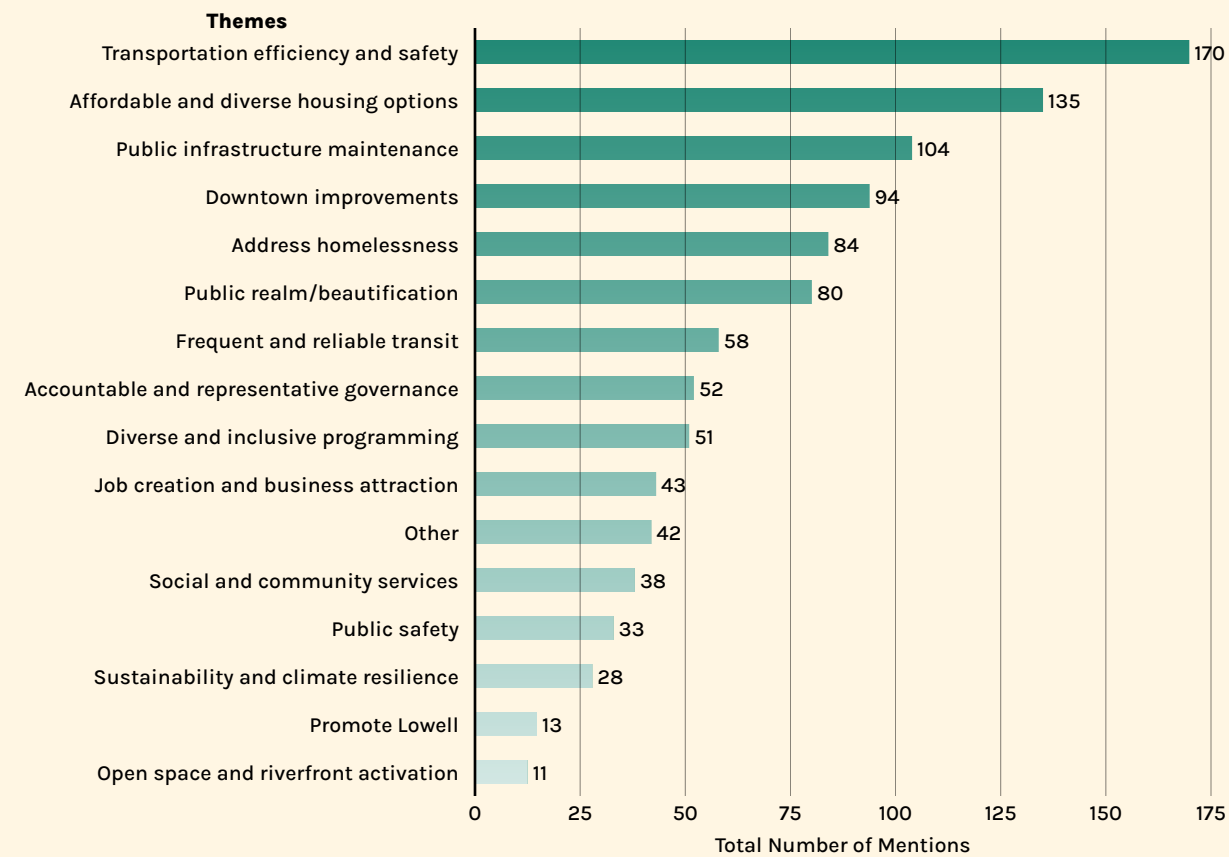
Lowell Today

Within major topics concerning city planning and development in Lowell, key pieces of information stand out as important. These takeaways were shared with the community and aligned with the primary needs highlighted during engagement. These insights informed the goals and actions outlined in Lowell Forward, further refined through direct community discussions. The following pages provide summary highlights of these takeaways. For more in-depth information on Lowell’s existing conditions and trends in specific topics, refer to Chapter 4, pages 81 – 163, and the Lowell Today Interim Report.

Community Engagement Takeaways

Challenges and needs related to housing affordability, transportation safety and efficiency, and public infrastructure improvements were the main topics consistently brought up by the community throughout the Lowell Forward engagement process. The graph below summarizes community input during “Listening Tour 1”—a combination of responses from surveys, public workshops, individual and group meetings with our community organizer, and online comments received in the early stages of the planning process.

Listening Tour 1 Theme Summary



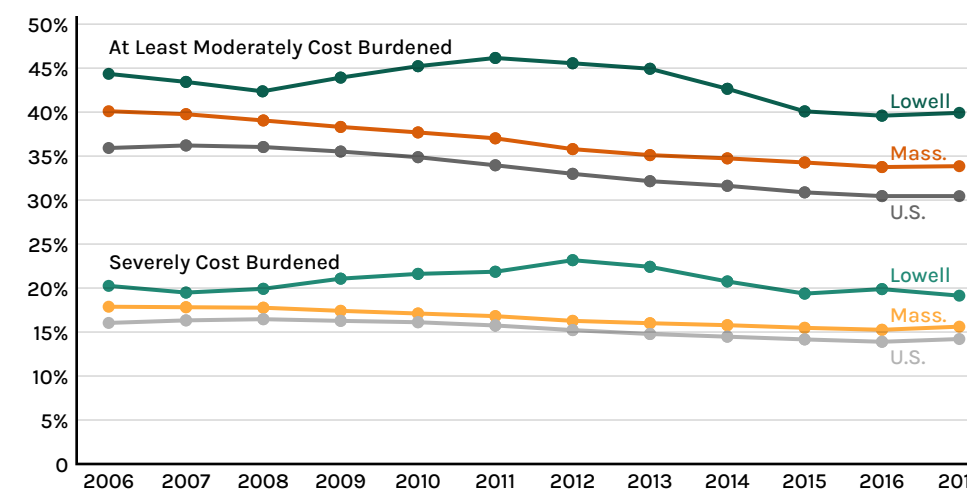
Access to affordable and diverse housing options remains a top priority for Lowellians

Feedback from the community during Lowell Forward and the Housing Production Plan (HPP) emphasized the need for increasing affordability and housing diversity. This includes offering additional options for low and moderate-income households, creating housing for those without homes, and broadening the overall range of housing with diverse price points. The HPP’s research and analysis uncovered significant data and insights that the City must take into account when addressing housing challenges in Lowell.

Densify, make housing affordable by building more, keep Lowell a diverse home by making sure there’s enough homes for everybody.

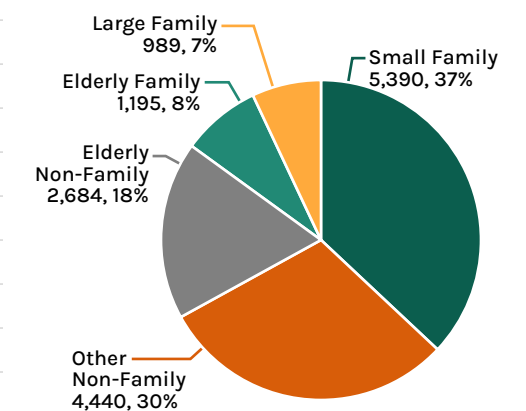
Public Meeting 1 participant

Housing Cost Burden, Selected Geographies, 2006 – 2017



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS Five-year data 2006 – 2021,

Cost-Burdened Households by Type, Lowell, 2015 – 2019



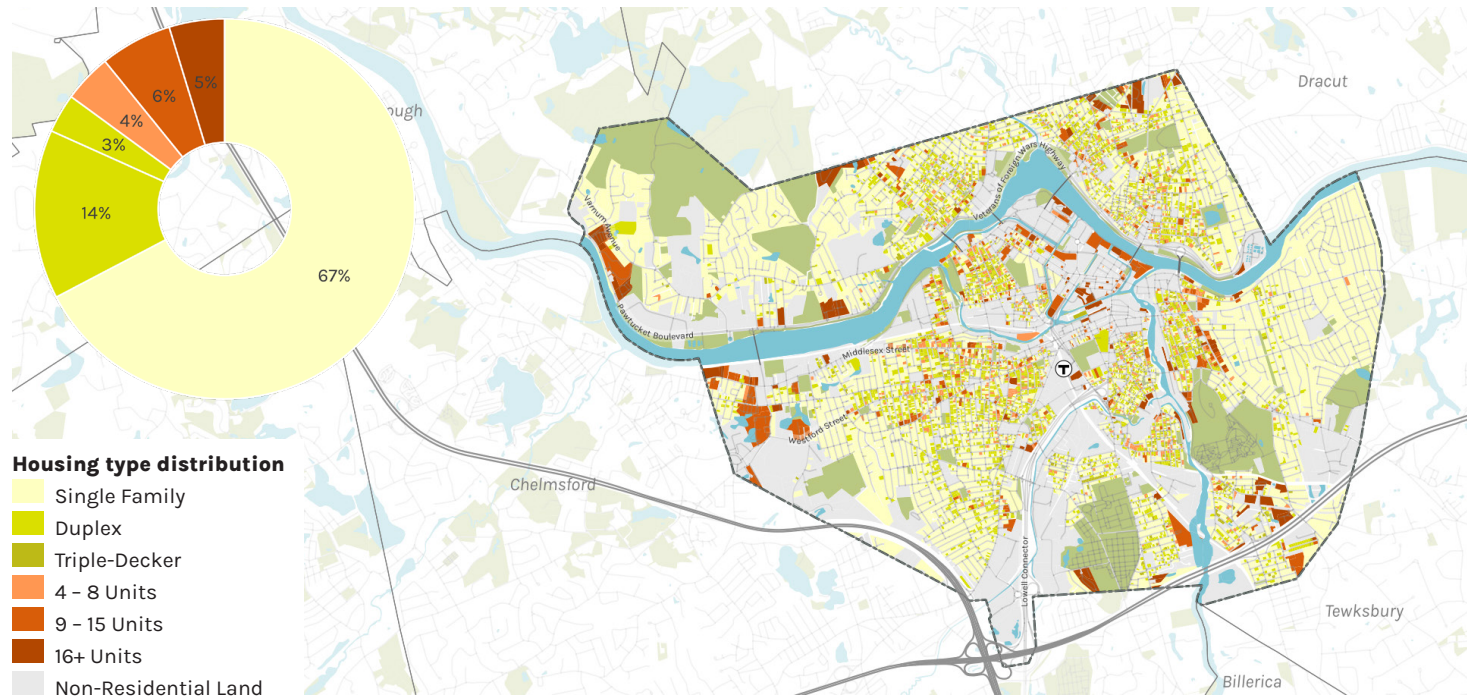
Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

40% of Lowell households are considered Housing Cost Burdened

- 20% of Lowell’s households pay more than half of their income on housing, and 40% are considered Housing Cost Burdened
- 37% of cost-burdened households are small families (4 people or less) and 30% are non-elder non-family households
- Housing Cost Burden and other housing issues disproportionately impacts households identifying as Black or African American, as a race other than White or Asian, and as Hispanic or Latino/a

What is Housing Cost Burden?

Housing cost burden is a common measure of whether a community has enough affordability. The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) considers housing “affordable” if housing costs do not exceed 30% of a household’s gross annual income. When a household pays between 30% and 50% of its income on housing-related costs, HUD considers it “moderately housing cost burdened.” Households spending 50% or more of their income on housing are considered “severely housing cost burdened.”



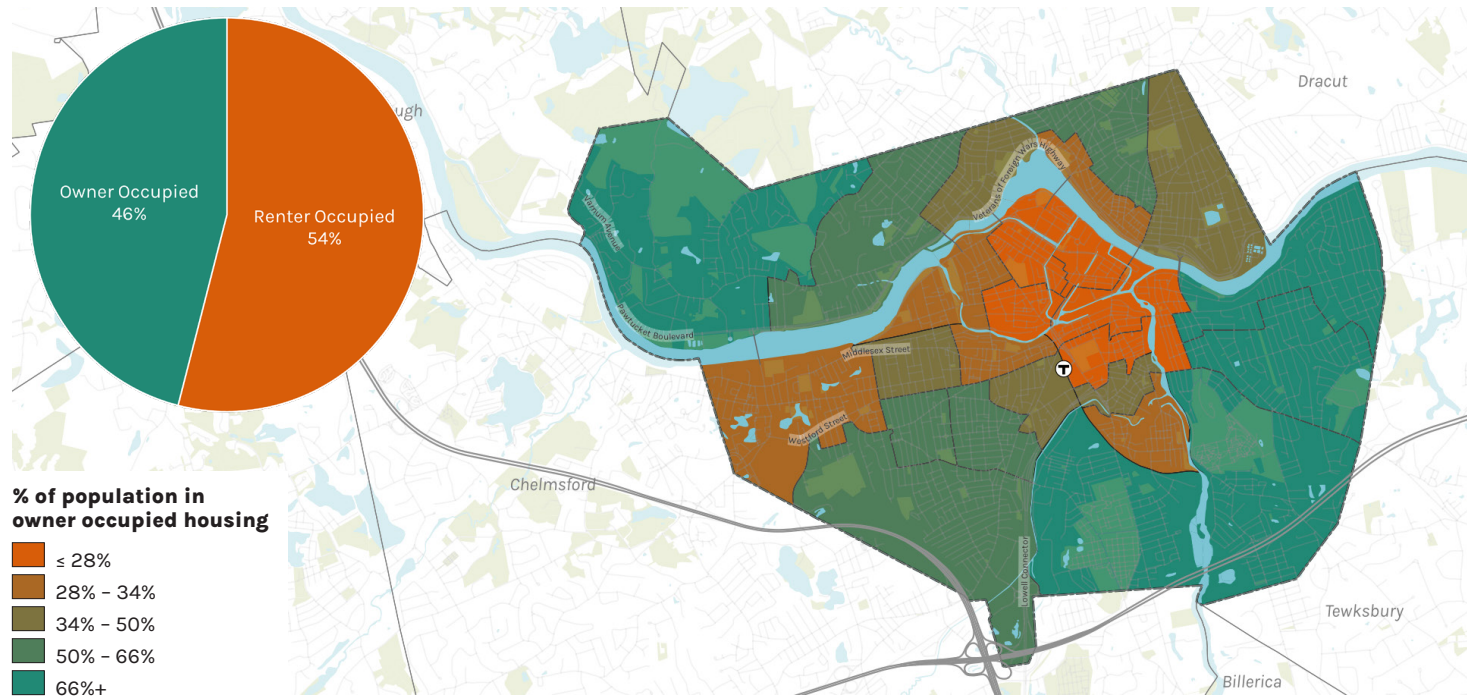
Housing type distribution

- Single Family
- Duplex
- Triple-Decker
- 4 - 8 Units
- 9 - 15 Units
- 16+ Units
- Non-Residential Land

A majority of Lowell’s residential land—67%—contains single family housing, mainly in the city’s outer neighborhoods

Source: Metropolitan Area Planning Council data (MAPC), 2020.

There are not many options for alternatives to single family housing near neighborhood centers. Based on initial analysis of residential zoning conducted through the 2024 Housing Production Plan, the easiest type of residential development to build in Lowell by far is the single family house. Current zoning in Lowell favors single family housing development, as a third of the city is zoned Suburban Neighborhood Single Family, which only allows that type of development, and just over two thirds of land area allows single family homes by right.



% of population in owner occupied housing

- ≤ 28%
- 28% - 34%
- 34% - 50%
- 50% - 66%
- 66%+

Lowell’s rental units are concentrated in central Lowell and Middlesex Village

Source: American Community Survey (ACS) 2020, 5-Year Data.

Renters have less access to the southeastern and northwestern areas of Lowell, including Belvidere, South Lowell, Sacred Heart, and western Pawtucketville. Rental housing is most concentrated in Downtown, Back Central, and the Acre. These are areas where some of the oldest housing stock is located, where communities of color reside, and where some of the lowest household incomes are present.

Housing considerations:

Lowell’s racial demographics correlate with housing type distribution

Areas with fewer multifamily and rental opportunities have a higher proportion of White, non-Hispanic or Latino households. Historically, income disparities have blocked people of color from ownership opportunities and have reinforced segregated patterns.

Lowell’s rental units are not distributed throughout the City

Providing a distribution of tenure opportunities throughout a community is important. Rentals provide access to neighborhoods to lower-income households, while ownership units provide wealth-building opportunities and stability. Apartments, townhomes, or single family can all include ownership and rental opportunities.

Lowell needs to reassess zoning barriers to enable affordable residential development

Lowell is very diverse, but inequities create fair housing concerns. Lowell is segregated by race, and areas with lack of multifamily or affordable housing may perpetuate this segregation. Complying with fair housing law means more than avoiding intentional discrimination, such as determining whether zoning creates unintentional disparate impacts. Many zoning policies have been found to cause disparate impact, such as policies that only allow single family houses and require large lot sizes. These policies make the process of housing development extremely inflexible, and assume a one size fits all approach to addressing housing needs.

Lowell has a growing population priced out of the market entirely

Post-pandemic, the count of unsheltered individuals has surged, alongside a continued rise in families seeking emergency shelter. The sparsity of basic data post-2019—including consensus estimates on sheltered and unsheltered demographics, and insufficient insight into shelter capacity and available units for extremely low incomes—hinder the creation of effective short- and long-term plans to tackle homelessness and pose challenges in evaluating equity in approaches.

Additional takeaways from the 2024 Lowell Housing Production Plan Needs Assessment:

Housing Demographics

- The number of households at the highest income distribution is growing, but households at the lowest end is holding relatively steady despite median income growth
- Lowell has 7,350 households (17.4%) in poverty, concentrated among working-age households
- The number of households with heads 65+ years old has consistently grown for the last ten years, but more recently the number of young households has also grown
- The households with 2 or more adults and no children rose by nearly 3,000 from 2010-2020 and is projected to continue to grow

Housing Affordability

- Lowell needs deeply subsidized units to meet the needs of its population
- 2,502 units are needed by 2030 based on growth projections, particularly units affordable to lower incomes or filling an untapped mid-income market

Housing Quality

- Population per housing unit figures indicates possible overcrowding and suggests that creation of housing units has not met pace with population growth
- Nearly a third of Lowell’s homes were built before 1900, and another third were built 1900-1940, with only 4% built after 2000
- In Lowell, 1,028 units may be considered overcrowded, up to 958 units lack kitchen or plumbing, and almost a third were built before 1900

Lack of safe and efficient mobility options is a major challenge facing Lowell

Diverse transportation modes are vital for linking residents to employment, community amenities and recreational opportunities within and beyond their neighborhoods. Community feedback and existing conditions analysis revealed several needs for transportation improvements:

Safe, reliable and frequent transit

Lowell's current transportation system prioritizes driving convenience. Low transit frequencies and longer transit travel times, as well as lagging investment in pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, pose a disproportionate burden for the one in six Lowell households who do not own vehicles. Lowell's current transit operates mainly on a hub-and-spoke model, requiring transfers between neighborhoods, with some routes having hourly bus schedules, further discouraging and limiting non-car use.

Safe and convenient pedestrian and bike infrastructure

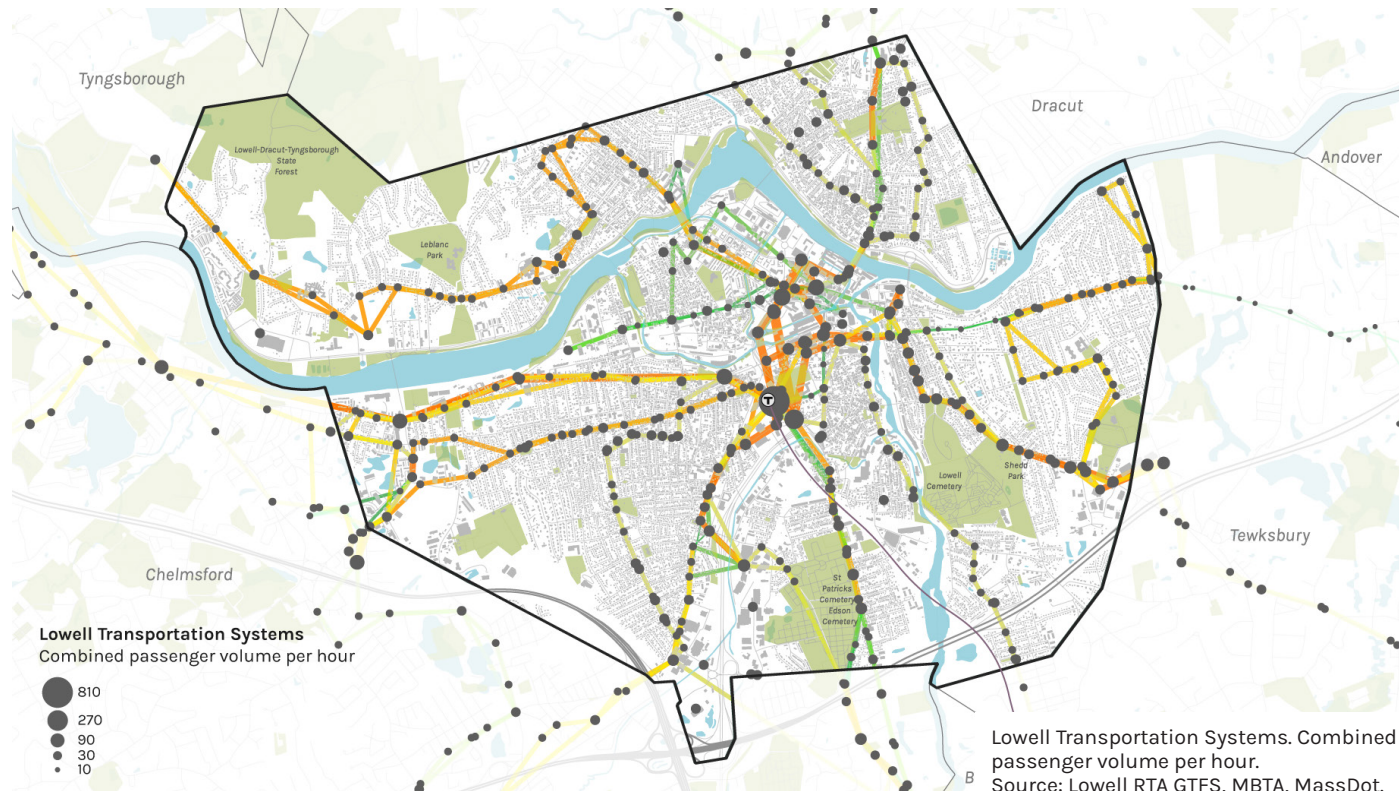
Lowell has many recreational trails and greenways, but does not have a complete network of connective biking facilities designed for the comfort of people of all ages and abilities. Lowell's streets, like those of many other American cities, have been built to prioritize the movement of vehicles over the safety of road users. Those who walk and roll—pedestrians, cyclists, and mobility aid users—are more vulnerable to serious injury and death than motorists in the event of a crash. Learn more about transportation and mobility existing conditions in Lowell on pages 113 – 117.

Not enough routes throughout the day and the transit system is hard for residents to understand

Community Organizer interviewee

What's a hub and spoke transportation model?

Hub-and-spoke models center transportation operations around a main hub, such as the Gallagher Terminal bus station, with multiple routes branching out like spokes. This setup, while efficient due to centralized operations and economies of scale, leads to longer travel times, often involving layovers and transfers and limited direct connectivity between destinations.



Lowell needs to upgrade and better maintain its public infrastructure

The need for better public infrastructure including sidewalks, park amenities, and general public realm improvements in Downtown and neighborhood centers, was frequently brought up by the community. Rather than simply building new infrastructure, many residents and business owners emphasized the need to enhance and maintain existing infrastructure in Lowell.

New growth in property taxes can help fund services

One of the key tools Lowell has to grow its revenues to pay for new infrastructure and maintenance services is to add new growth to the tax base. The majority of Lowell's tax revenue comes from its property tax base. Investments in development, infrastructure, and amenities can support property values, and in turn, generate greater resources for public services. See map below.

Proactively shaping future development

May Lowellians expressed a desire to see more public realm beautification including vibrant sidewalks, active and walkable streets, and trees and landscaping. Alongside growing the City's budget to fund these services, Lowell can explore ways to catalyze private development and public investment to maximize multiple opportunities and benefits through developer incentives and setting appropriate development design standards.

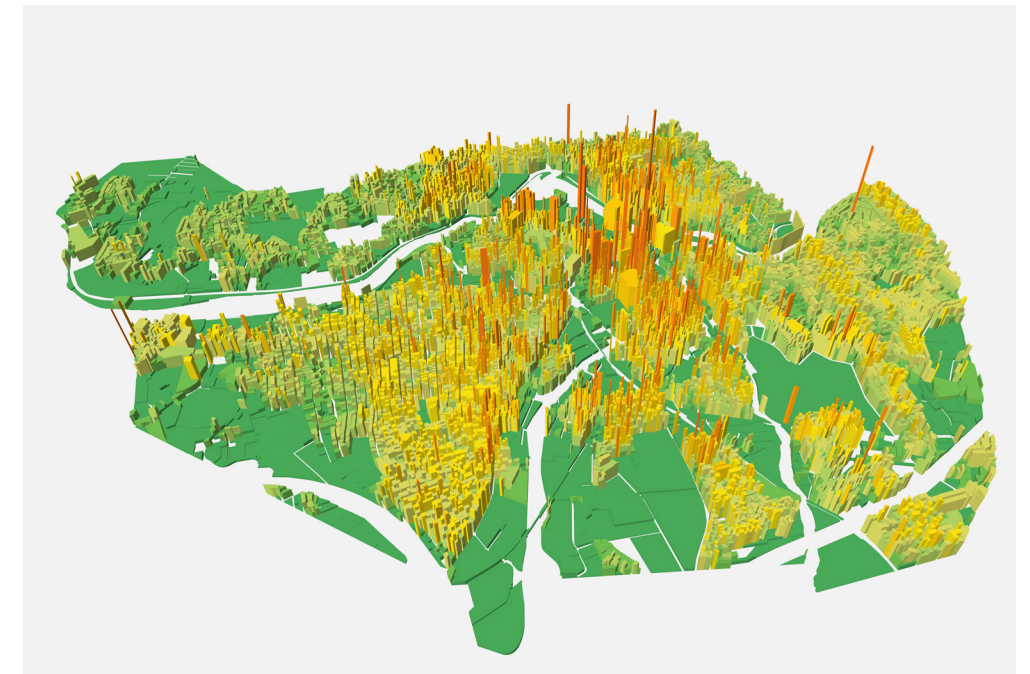
Slow down traffic on through streets, make sidewalks connect with minimal obstruction by cars, and improve snow banks and utilities.

Public Meeting 1 participant



North Common Park with poor path condition. Photo Credit: City of Lowell.

Various property types exert different influences on the tax base. The map displays each parcel's value in Lowell divided by its acreage. Darker orange and taller parcels signify higher assessed value per acre. Bright green zones contribute less value and may have minimal development. Development in Lowell's Downtown and central neighborhoods yields greater value per acre. However, certain green areas within the central core present potential for improved utilization in future development. Enhancing these pockets could aid in neighborhood connectivity, density concentration, and increased activity.



New growth in property taxes can help to fund city infrastructure and maintenance services at expected levels. In particular, commercial development is important for supporting the City's fiscal health, as commercial properties are taxed at a higher rate and generate fewer demands on City services. Source: Assessors' Tax Parcels, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, December 2023. Accessed in MassGIS.

Lowell has many inherent strengths and assets that can serve as foundations for guiding and fostering growth

The community identified various strengths and assets in Lowell that they love and would like to see enhanced and maintained. These present important opportunities to guide and support the city's growth while addressing challenges related to housing affordability, transportation, and infrastructure.

Lowell is a growing and diverse city with neighborhoods of unique heritages

Lowell is growing, outpacing growth seen in most other gateway cities in Massachusetts. From 2000 to 2020, its population grew by almost 6%, from 105,000 to 115,000 residents. This growth in Lowell is accompanied by increasing diversity in both race and language. Non-Hispanic white residents have decreased from 77% in 1990 to 41% presently. Embracing and honoring Lowell's diverse heritage and backgrounds is a central objective that threads through every aspect of this plan. Furthermore, the recent shift to a neighborhood-based City Council representation system formalizes the roles of each neighborhood within city governance. This shift emphasizes a heightened focus on equitably distributing open spaces and other resources among neighborhoods.

Rich ecosystem of institutional anchors and locally owned businesses

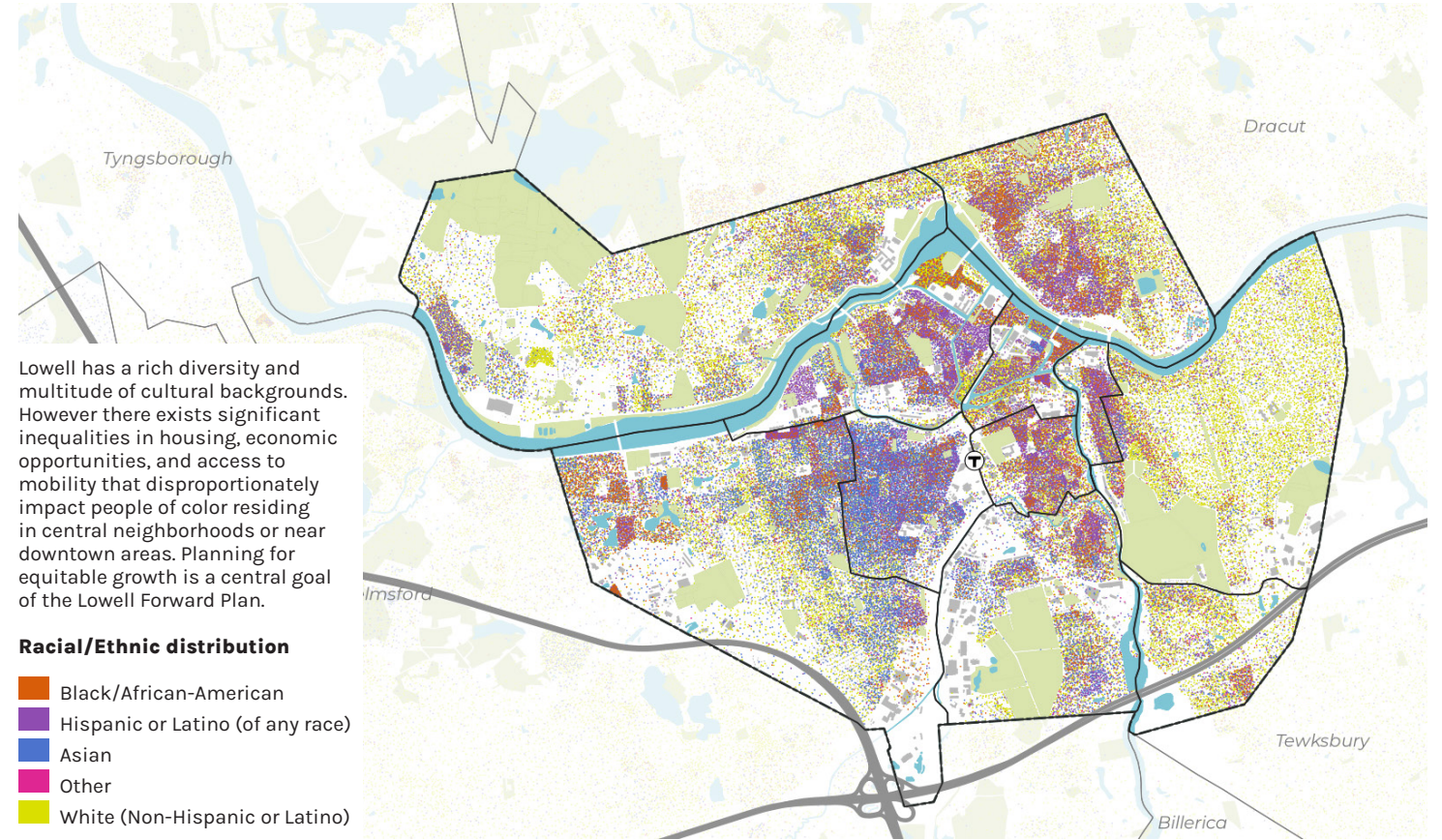
Lowell's anchor institutions including universities and hospitals, and minority-owned businesses provide a strong basis to empower jobs, education, innovation, and overall economic growth. However, Lowell's small businesses face many ongoing challenges including low foot traffic with limited and irregular business hours, lack of experience, knowledge and support to run a business, language barriers, and safety and security concerns. Partnering with anchor institutions to support small businesses can boost the city's economy while creating new jobs and adding a rich character to Lowell businesses.



Photo Credit: Marte Media.



Photo Credit: City of Lowell.



Lowell is home to vibrant open spaces, parks, greenways, and off-street multi-use paths

Lowell's unique natural and manmade assets such as the Merrimack River, the Concord River, and the canals and trail networks anchor the city's open space to its culture and history. However critical gaps still exist in community access and connections, availability of recreational amenities, and quality of maintenance across open space assets. Because city-owned public parks and open spaces are already located throughout the city, the focus on improvements in open spaces in Lowell should relate to the programming offered in each space and the implementation of an appropriate maintenance program.

Growing value on promoting and supporting arts and culture throughout the city

Lowell is a city that takes great pride in celebrating its history, historic landscapes, diverse communities and neighborhoods, cultural resources, and arts. Promoting Lowell as a regional hub for history, culture, and arts is an important goal outlined in the previous master plan, Sustainable Lowell 2025, and continues to be a priority for Lowellians across the city. The City's Office of Cultural Affairs & Special Events (CASE), non-profit organizations, such as the Lowell Plan and Greater Lowell Community Foundation, have placed a growing value on promoting and supporting arts and culture throughout the city through initiatives such as the Like Lowell campaign and Mosaic Lowell.



Photo Credit: City of Lowell.



MIDDLESEX COMMUNITY COLLEGE
Dr. Carole A. Cowan Center

KZOZ

SUN

Implementation Framework

Lowell Forward is all about getting things done! **Chapters 4 and 5** present specific goals and actions related to each planning topic area and outline a clear implementation framework. The chapters are designed with the “action-takers” in mind—such as City departments, policymakers, elected representatives, community leaders and organizations, and state and federal partners—these chapters serve as guiding documents, fostering collaboration toward shared long-term objectives. They also function as an assessment tool, tracking advancements and evaluating progress toward community-centered goals.

Creating an implementation framework that sets clear goals and proposes ways of measuring success is important because it allows Lowell to:

- **Know Where We’re Going:** Set achievable goals that align with the shared vision that was developed with the community
- **Focus on What Matters:** Prioritizing goals will help figure out what to work on first, and stay on the long-term path
- **Use Resources Wisely:** City budgets are limited, and goal prioritization will help decide where to spend money and time on projects that matter most
- **See How We’re Doing and Adapt:** A flexible framework that includes attainable metrics or benchmarks to track progress, but also adapt and make changes if needed
- **Gain Support and Keep People Informed:** People and organizations are more likely to help if they can see clear goals and results; being clear about goals and progress helps the public understand what’s happening and builds trust



Tracking Progress

To assess whether we are moving towards achieving our goals, we need to create an evolving system that allows us to track our progress and make data-driven decisions. Page 39 outlines a set of indicators or key metrics the planning team have established to help us track progress towards our goals.

Maintaining Trust with the Community

The City should ensure that community participation remains accessible for actions and implementation steps that follow this plan. The City should have a method of regularly checking in with the community through a Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee and issue an annual update of implementation tracking.

Strategic Partnerships

Lowell Forward has worked very closely with our local community organizer to identify local organizations and nonprofits, and other local and regional entities who can play a role in the plan implementation. This is a starting base for a network of partnerships that will continue to evolve and grow during the implementation process, through a focused outreach strategy.

Land Use and Zoning

The City will carry this plan forward through zoning and development regulations, directing investments, creating new programs and systems, and conducting new plans or studies where necessary. Land use policy in particular is one of the most important and impactful mechanisms for shaping sustainable and equitable growth by directing where, when, and how land gets used in the city. Many of the actions across all topic areas in this plan informs future land use policy directly and ties different functions of the city together. For example, advocating for more multifamily housing near transit means that more people have convenient access to services and other transportation modes in the city. While an important tool in comprehensive planning, land use code and zoning practices should be thoughtfully coordinated with other citywide initiatives, policies, and capital investments, and they should be adaptive to change.

Successful Precedents

Envision Cambridge Dashboard, Cambridge, MA

The Envision Cambridge Dashboard serves as an ongoing and interactive progress report, detailing the status of actions and indicators outlined in the City of Cambridge Comprehensive Plan, Envision Cambridge. Offering insights into the progress made since the plan’s release in 2019, this dashboard provides a transparent overview of accomplishments within a few short years. It not only showcases the City’s achievements but also highlights areas requiring improvement, enabling City departments and staff to identify specific areas for enhancement and make necessary course corrections. City staff continually update the reporting for these indicators (organized by topic area) and residents and the community-at-large are encouraged to explore the interactive tool, accessible at cambridgema.gov/Envision.

Master Plan Implementation Committee, Arlington, MA

The Arlington Redevelopment Board established the Master Plan Implementation Committee (MPIC) to implement the recommendations outlined in the 2015 Arlington Master Plan, “Your Town Your Future.” Collaborating with various ongoing planning initiatives, the MPIC comprises leaders or subcommittees focused on specific topics such as housing, historic resources, and zoning. This key implementing committee convenes quarterly to assess the implementation table, which categorizes actions into in-progress, ongoing, annual reporting, to be assigned or reassessed, on hold indefinitely, and completed. The table details the lead entity, approximate timeline, Town Meeting action necessity, and resource status.

System for Assessment and Data-driven Decision Making

Lowell Forward covers many topic areas with various goals. Monitoring the status of each and every goal on a regular basis would be a very time consuming task for city staff, and likely not the best use of available resources. Instead, the Lowell Forward team worked with city departments to identify key indicators, targets, or benchmarks for each topic area that we can use to track and assess progress towards meeting our goals over time.

While these indicators cannot fully capture what it means to achieve any specific goal, they serve as a marker for how well or not we're progressing towards our overall vision laid out in this plan. More importantly over the long run, they will represent a transparent dashboard for the community that shows when things are getting done!

It is important to note that not all goals for the future can be measured by quantifiable metrics or need an assigned target to indicate success. The key here is to identify a set of high-level, specific benchmarks which relevant City departments can use to devise systems that track data and report out progress on a regular basis. The City will collect baseline data and track these indicators over time. Some City departments already have, or are in process of developing, tools to measure these indicators, while others will have to create new tools.

The City should also make sure that actions are leading towards more equitable outcomes. Additional indicators around housing affordability, risk of displacement for vulnerable populations, and equitable development should be tracked.

An initial set of indicators of progress to track are illustrated on the next page:

Land Use and Urban Form

- Create 2,500 new housing units within the MBTA Community multifamily zoning overlay districts by 2040
- Increase production of new housing units in the upper stories of downtown buildings (goal of 800 new units by 2040)
- Increase downtown's street tree inventory by 25% by 2040
- Increase the use of ground-floor commercial spaces with businesses that increase foot traffic.

Economic Development

- Increase number of locally-owned businesses
- Increase number of minority- and women-owned businesses
- Increase proportion of minority- and women-owned businesses participating in grants and consultation programs
- Obtain pedestrian traffic software; track pedestrian activity downtown and in all neighborhood nodes with goal of increasing by 50% by 2040

Parks, Open Spaces, and Trails

- Number of playgrounds upgraded to be universally accessible
- Linear feet of multi-use paths built
- Dollars invested in open space per neighborhood
- 15% or more tree canopy in each of Lowell's eleven neighborhoods

Mobility

- Decrease the share of Lowellians who drive alone to work from 74% single occupancy to 60% of total trips by 2040
- Increase utilization of public parking garages to 85% by 2040
- Reduce serious/fatal crashes of all types (vehicular, motorcycle, bicycle, pedestrian) to zero crashes by 2040
- Build 36 linear miles of on-street bicycle infrastructure by 2040
- Repair, replace, or construct 65 miles of sidewalks throughout the city by 2040

Arts and Culture

- Increase number special events permits for usage of parks and parking garage revenue related to these
- Number of new or added publicly accessible art pieces in each neighborhood
- Increase revenue generated from state 6.5% meal tax

Housing

- Increase total number of housing units to 46,950 (or +3,150) by 2030, and to 47,950 (or +4,150) by 2040
- Produce 800 new affordable housing units by 2030, and 1,050 by 2040
- Reduce total number of households lacking kitchens and lacking plumbing from 958 to near zero by 2040
- Reduce percentage of cost-burdened households to 32% by 2040
- Reduce percentage of severely cost-burdened households to 16% by 2040
- Achieve a healthy housing unit vacancy rate of 6%

Energy, Climate, and Environment

- Reduce carbon emissions from buildings citywide by 50% vs. 1990 baseline levels by 2030
- Reduce carbon emissions from buildings citywide by 75% vs. 1990 baseline levels by 2040
- Increase publicly available EV charging infrastructure by 50% vs. FY 23 baseline
- Increase the total installed solar infrastructure by 50% vs. FY 23 baseline
- Increase the number of households utilizing decarbonized energy sources

Note: This is not an exhaustive list. The Lowell Forward team fully expects that the nature and content of indicators will evolve over time to respond to changing needs and priorities. As the plan evolves, the City might need to adjust these indicators or come up with additional benchmarks to measure progress, and this will require departmental coordination. The City should also develop a process to report regularly on changes in these indicators to help the public and elected officials judge the effectiveness of the Plan and the City's actions to implement it.