



2. Community Engagement

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 is 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 and Values

The **vision** that guides the goals and actions in this plan was shaped by the community. It reflects not one singular viewpoint, but the collective aspirations of our communities in Lowell, fostering a sense of ownership and pride in the shared future we are building together. The vision has six elements, each tied to a set of broader, long-term topic-area goals for the city that you can find in **chapter 4**.

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



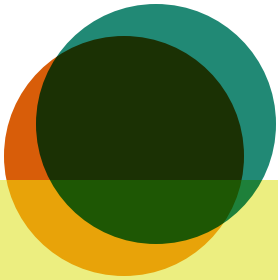
Cultivates educational and economic opportunity for everyone to thrive



Prepares for and responds to the impacts of climate change



In addition to the shared vision, certain community **values** came to the forefront as important overarching principles to guide and reinforce the planning process, its content, and the resulting outcomes, paving the way for the implementation stage ahead.



Sustainability and Resilience

We prioritize sustainability and resilience, acknowledging the importance of preparing our communities, both current and future, to effectively adapt to different types of changes—whether they're social, economic, or environmental.



- We are committed to responsible practices that balance the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs
- We understand that change is inevitable, and our planning efforts should include strategies to prepare our community against unforeseen challenges
- This resilience extends beyond physical infrastructure to encompass economic adaptability, and community well-being



Proactive Maintenance

We place high value on proactive maintenance, ensuring we have a well-defined plan for who, what, where, and how we provide ongoing care of our beloved city and its resources.

- This commitment involves careful consideration of “who” will be responsible for various aspects of maintenance, ensuring that roles and responsibilities are clearly defined among city authorities, community members, and relevant stakeholders
- The “what” aspect involves identifying the specific elements and infrastructure that require regular upkeep, such as public spaces, parks, sidewalks, public art, and other infrastructure
- The “where” pinpoints the locations and communities within the city that demand particular attention and resources
- The “how” component outlines the methodologies and approaches to maintenance, taking into account sustainable practices and community engagement strategies



Accountable Governance and Community Stewardship

We believe in accountable governance and community stewardship, fostering an environment where empowerment and connectivity between residents and the local government are central to decision-making processes.



- We hold a shared ethic of responsible and equitable decision-making, ensuring that the community's voice is not only heard but actively influences the direction and policies that shape our collective future



Photo Credit: Marte Media



Innovation and Creativity

We value our workforce, businesses, and students and recognize that innovation and creativity are catalysts for progress, driving economic development, enhancing quality of life, and building resilience in the face of evolving circumstances.

- We are committed to providing resources that nurture innovation at both the individual, business, and collective levels
- This includes creating spaces for collaboration, investment in education and training programs, entrepreneurial support, and establishing partnerships with local institutions and industries to facilitate knowledge exchange

Together the vision and core values provide the foundation for the goals and actions outlined in the Lowell Forward Plan. At the beginning of each topic area section in **Chapter 4**, we outline the key ways in which the vision and values above are reflected in the respective goals and actions.

Engagement Process

Lowell Forward embraced a people-centric planning and engagement approach which involved meeting residents where they are, actively connecting with established community groups and organizations, and overcoming barriers to engagement faced by underrepresented groups across Lowell. Where feasible, the planning team prioritized engagement in languages that residents speak at home. Additionally, the planning team ensured community involvement in every phase of the process—from initial visioning and identifying opportunities and challenges to fostering ownership for the implementation phase.

A long-time community resident was hired to lead our grassroots engagement and organizing efforts for Lowell Forward. The Community Organizer’s main objective was to ensure that the engagement addresses unique and diverse neighborhoods that feature residents who do not typically participate in local government in Lowell, with a particular focus on its immigrant communities, low-to-moderate income residents, BIPOC residents, and communities of color. The plan aimed to create intentional pathways to equitable community participation that accounts for the lived experiences of residents through varied and diverse engagement opportunities.

Meet Mercy!

As the Lowell Forward Community Organizer, Mercy Anampiu brings decades of experience within the Lowell community as an immigrant, woman of color, and expert in the field of engaging with Lowell residents around issues of public health and equitable outcomes. Throughout the Lowell Forward process, she has ensured that ongoing insight and feedback from residents is incorporated into real-time analysis and design of the master planning process.

Throughout this document, look out for key community insights and takeaways under **“Conversations with Mercy”**

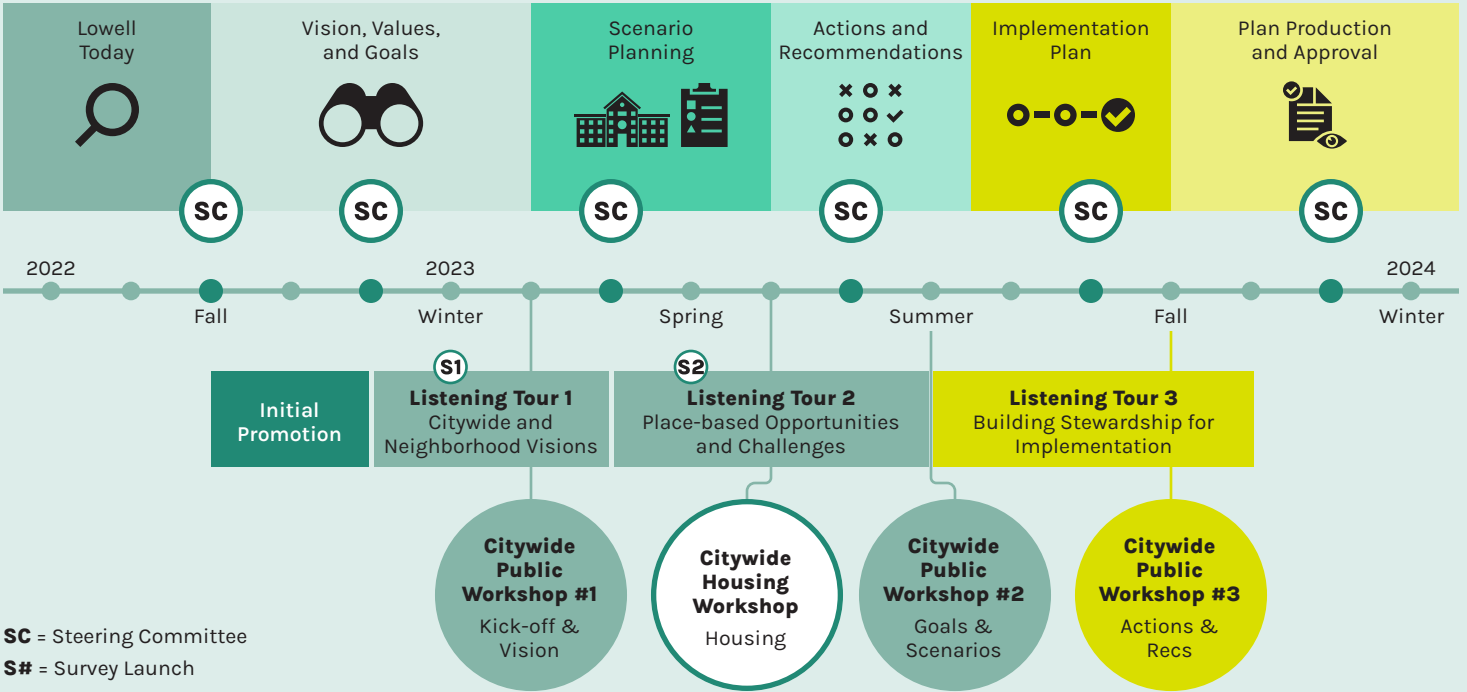
✉ Email Mercy at: lowellforward@utiledesign.com





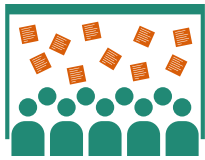
Community engagement consisted of three phases illustrated below:

Learning and Visioning → Testing Future Visions → Developing the Plan →



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

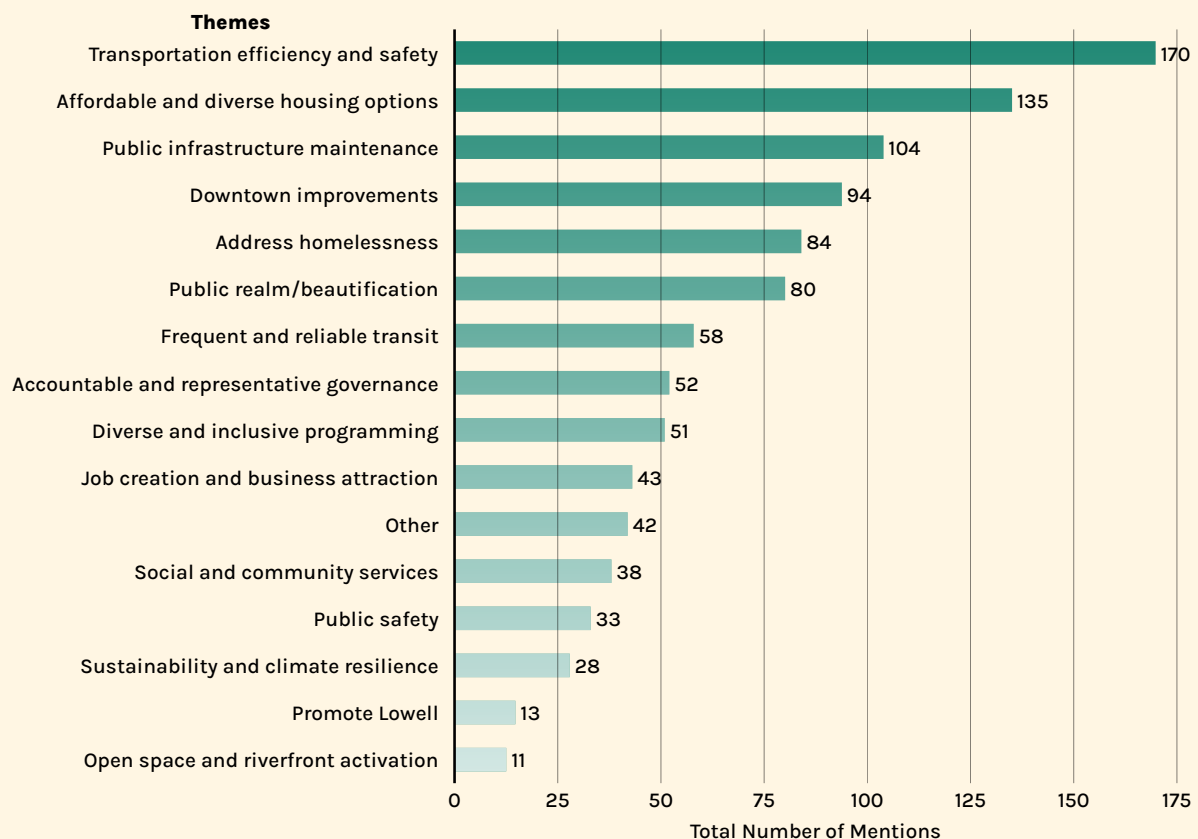
Steering Committee Meetings:

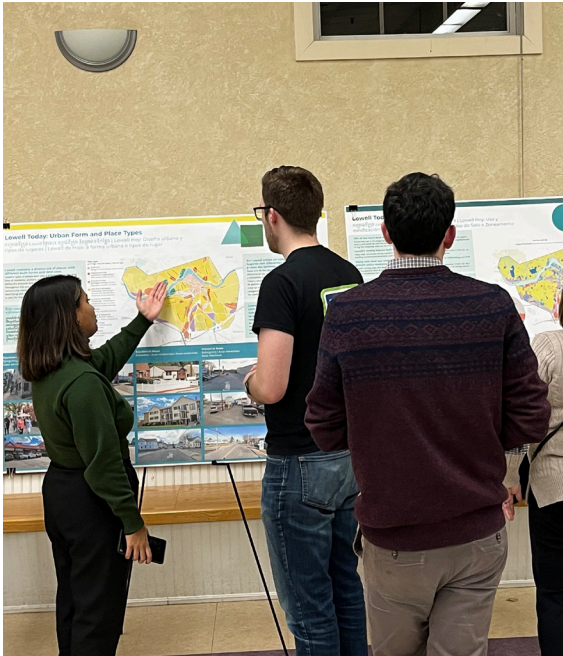


2 meetings

Phase 1 focused on building a shared citywide vision by collaborating closely with many community members. During this phase, learning and visioning was achieved through different types of interactions with the community including the Citywide Public Workshop, gathering feedback through the Citywide Vision and Goals Survey, conversations facilitated by the Community Organizer, and focus groups led by the City staff. Below are the main themes that emerged during this first phase of engagement.

Listening Tour 1 Theme Summary



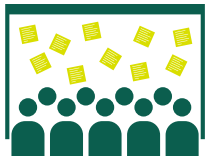


“ We need safer sidewalks in all neighborhoods
 Public Workshop 1 Participant

“ We would like to see a variety of different types of affordable housing, low-income tax credit and ADUs.
 Public Workshop 1 Participant

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:



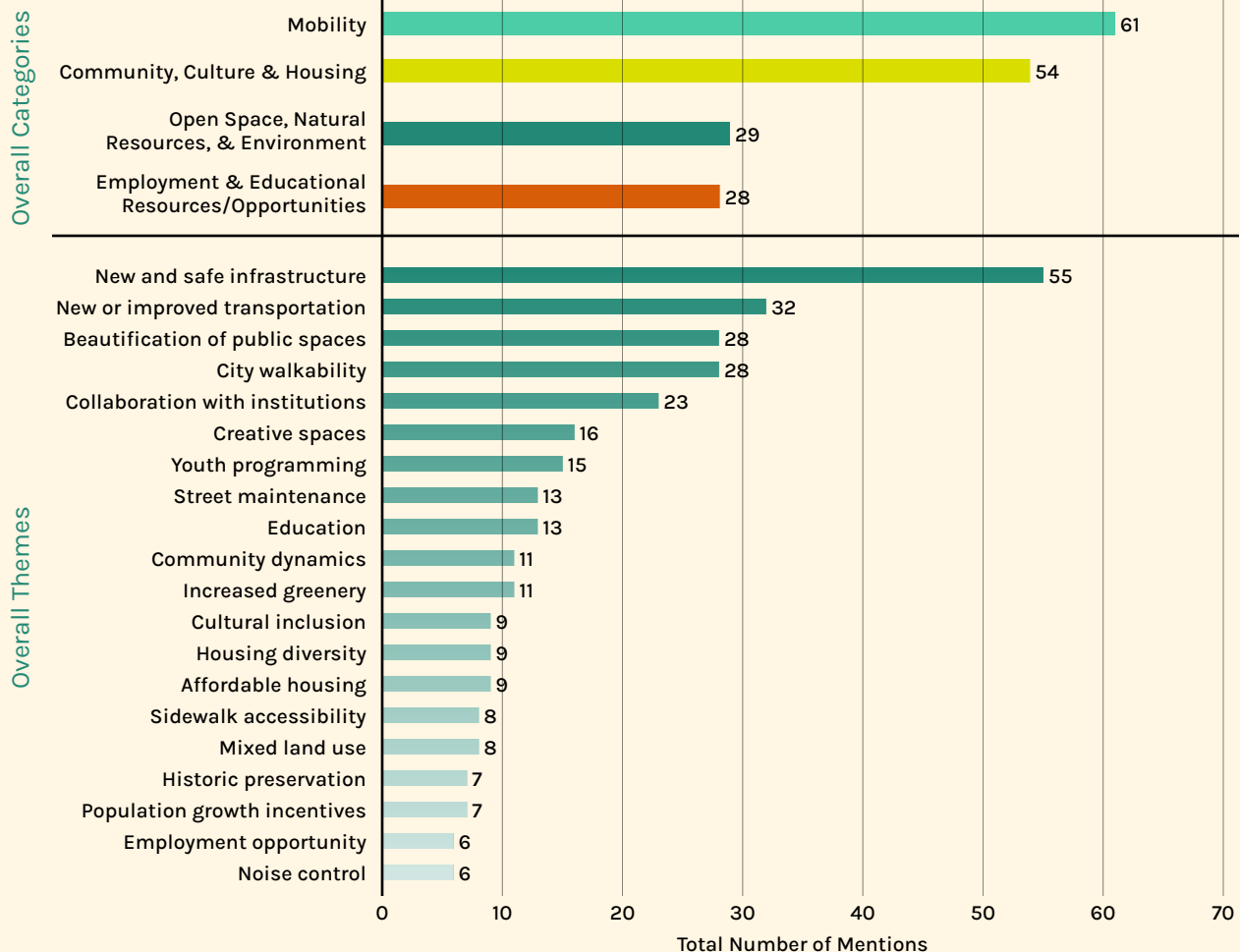
7 topic-specific focus groups and **8** neighborhood specific focus groups

Steering Committee Meetings:



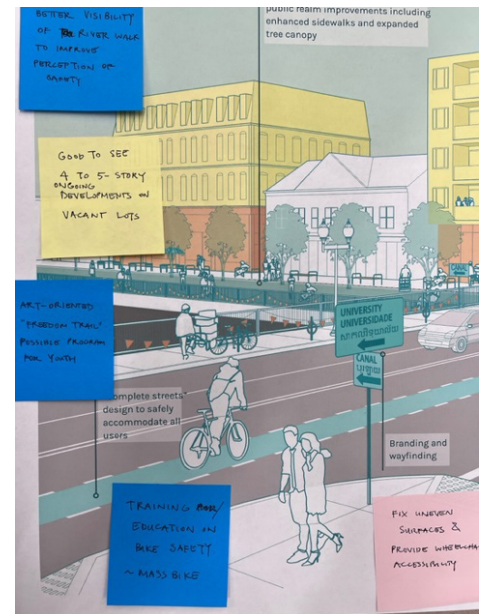
2 meetings

Phase 2 focused on testing out the vision established during phase 1, and building strategies for growth and change in Lowell that align with that vision. Feedback was gathered from the community at the second public workshop, the citywide Vision and Goals Survey, conversations with the Community Organizer and City-led focus groups.



“ We need walkable and secure streets with thoughtful planning. ”

Citywide Workshop participant

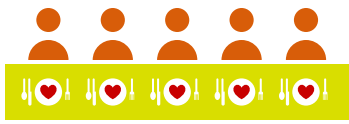


“ Rent prices are very high in Lowell which affects the ability of residents to find housing for their families. After kids go to college, they are unable to find housing that they can afford in Lowell so they move away to different cities/states where housing is more affordable. ”

Focus Group participant

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

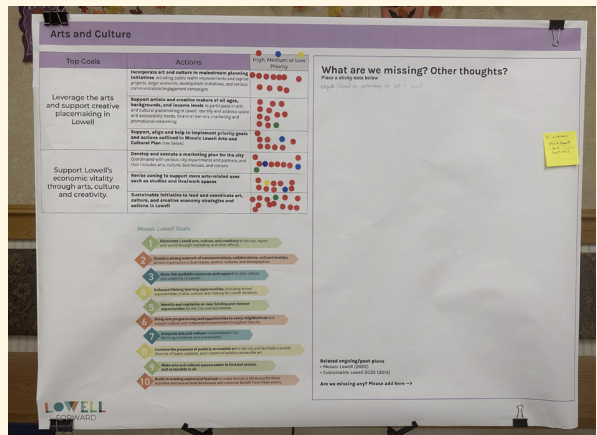
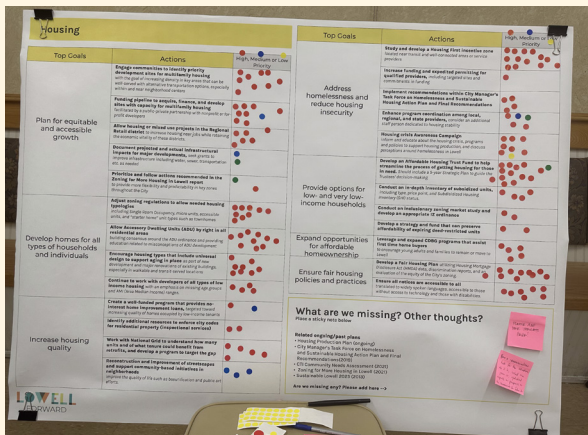
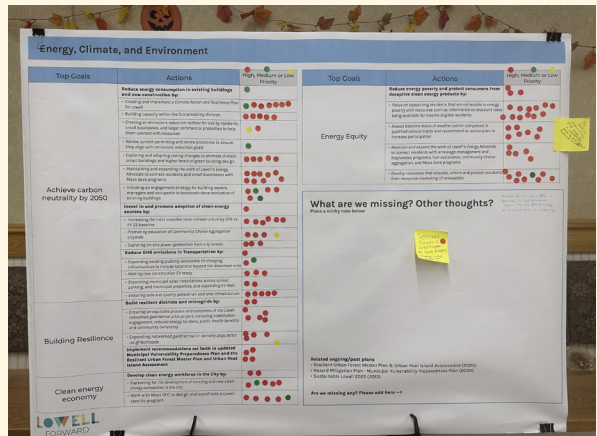
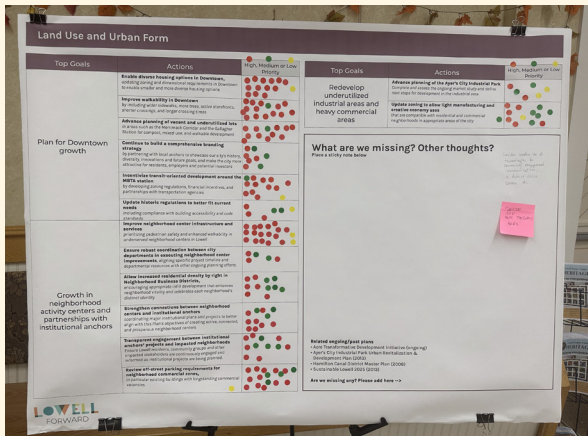
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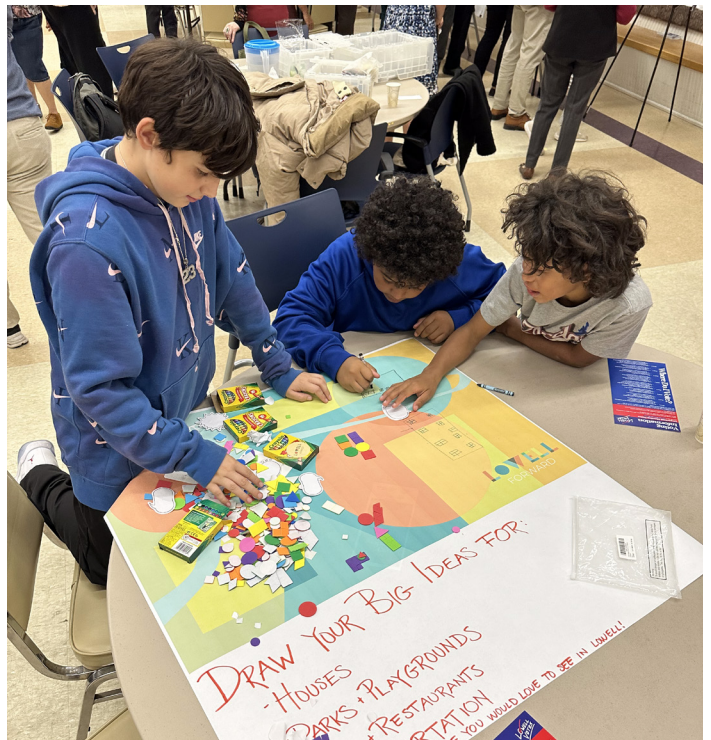


2 meetings

Phase 3 focused on building stewardship and support for the implementation of the comprehensive plan. The public had the opportunity to weigh-in on the goals and actions framework during the Public Workshop. The Community Organizer met with key local organizations and individuals, who provided valuable feedback on the implementation framework.

Public Workshop 3 Boards





“ I would want to feel comfortable promoting public transportation, I wouldn't want to promote it unless I feel safe. ”

Conversation with Mercy

“ We need to work on education around mobility and communicate associated health benefits. ”

Conversation with Mercy