

4. Topic-Specific Goals and Actions

This chapter presents our city’s priority goals and actions, organized by topic area. It outlines key actions, and policy recommendations to advance our community vision and guide future growth and change in the city. The goals and actions are informed and shaped by extensive community engagement and insights uncovered from the comprehensive Lowell Today existing conditions and trends analysis. The chapter also identifies timeframes and “action takers” (including city departments, local organizations, anchor institutions, and the community), aiding in the prioritization of tasks and implementation of next steps.

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

What's in this chapter?

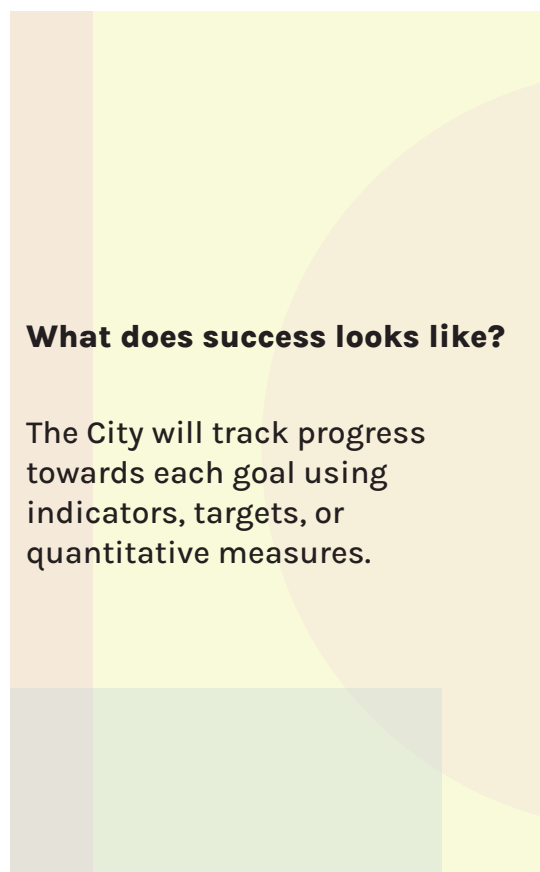
Topic Specific Goals and Actions

Top Goals organized by Topic Area

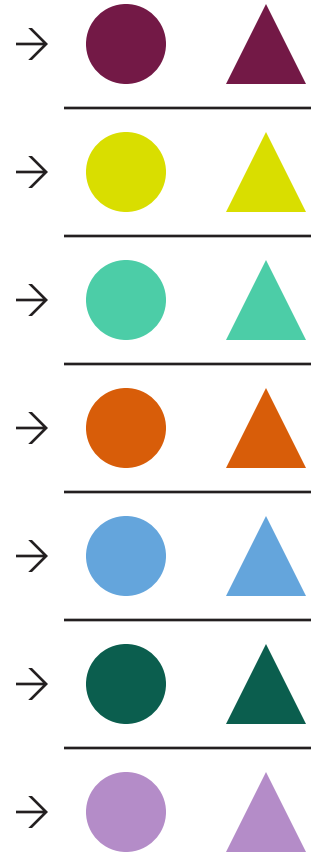
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|---|---|
|  | Land Use and Urban Form |
|  | Housing |
|  | Mobility |
|  | Economic Development |
|  | Energy, Climate, and Environment |
|  | Parks, Open Spaces, and Trails |
|  | Arts and Culture |

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Progress Indicators

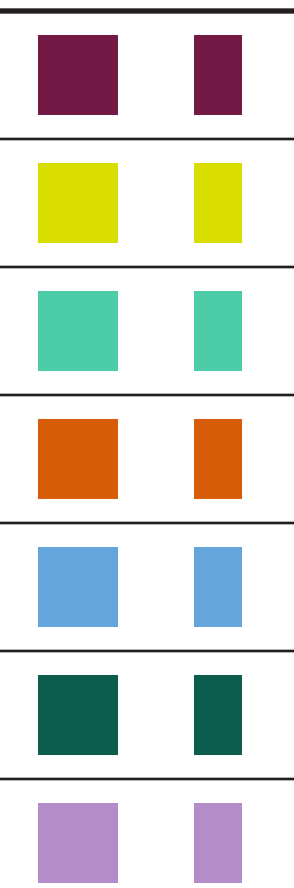


Actions



Each topic section in this chapter begins with:

- **A list of all topic-specific goals**
- **Connection to Guiding Values:** Sustainability and resilience, Proactive maintenance, Accountable governance and community stewardship, Innovation and Creativity
- **Indicators of Progress:** Key metrics identified by the planning team and City departments
- **Aligned Initiatives:** Related past, ongoing, and upcoming planning efforts
- **Lowell Today:** A summary of key existing conditions and trends informing the goals and actions



Implementation

How are these actions implemented?

- **People:** Who is responsible for the success of the actions? How can we improve communication between teams?
- **Resources:** What level of investment will be needed?
- **Coordination:** Are these new initiatives or expansions of existing initiatives? Should they be coordinated with other initiatives?
- **Timeframe:** Are these near-, medium-, or long-term actions?

Growth Strategies

How are these actions connected to physical growth strategies?

How to Time and Prioritize Actions

The power of a comprehensive plan, like this one, is that it considers various issues at the same time. This helps us understand how one thing we do can impact other things. It lets us make decisions while keeping the bigger picture in mind.

Comprehensive plans tend to result in a long list of actions, creating uncertainty about where to begin. Lowell Forward recognizes this challenge and proposes a framework for **action takers**—like City departments, local organizations, anchor institutions, and the community—to prioritize next steps.

Don't know where to start? This framework is designed to identify high-leverage actions, where strategic and less time-consuming efforts can yield significant changes over the long term. This approach will enable us to advance towards our bigger goals as a community.

Here are four strategies to consider when deciding what action to take:

1. Impact Mindsets:

People often think one way about an issue, but approaching the same issue differently can bring benefits to them and the community. Impacting mindsets is about trying to help people see and make that shift.

Example:

Compact and walkable places with higher density housing provide many opportunities to create vibrant, connected, and healthy communities. When we collectively understand and appreciate these benefits, it simplifies future zoning and development processes, and builds support for transit improvements. Understanding these benefits helps shift mindsets about higher density housing.

2. Restructure Rules:

Rules play a big role in defining how a city can change over time. We need to pay close attention to how these rules are being restructured and by who, to make sure that these rules are benefiting all of the community members.

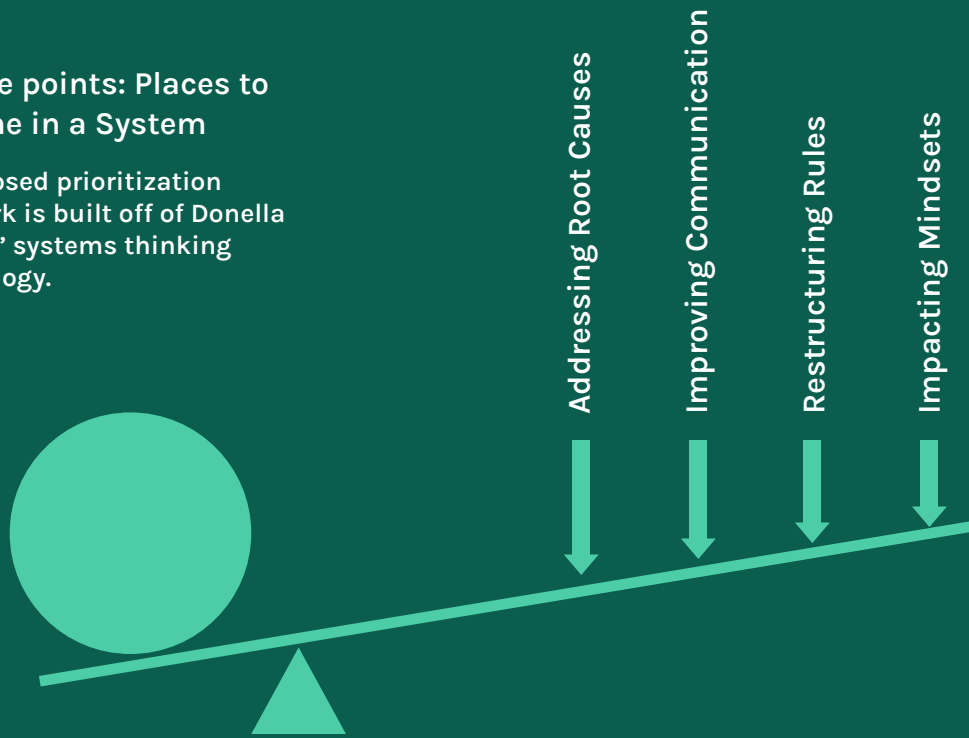
Example:

Think of zoning laws as the rules that decide how different parts of a city can develop. These rules were made a while ago, and it's crucial to make sure they get updated and that all community members are taken into account in the process. This way, rules can keep up with the community's changing needs and tackle new challenges in the environment.



Leverage points: Places to Intervene in a System

The proposed prioritization framework is built off of Donella Meadows' systems thinking methodology.



3. Improve Communication

In many cases it is less about building new things, and more about better communicating existing resources and ongoing plans to all members of the community through different channels and methods. Improving communication will help people take full advantage of available resources and opportunities.

Example:

Increasing accessibility to parks doesn't only mean building another park or building new amenities in existing parks. For example, improving how information on existing parks is communicated will empower the community to fully enjoy the parks, participate in community events, and take care of the spaces. Unlike building a new park, this strategy doesn't imply high costs, and can be implemented more easily and rapidly.



4. Address Root Causes

Our first instinct to resolve a problem is to focus on making symptoms go away. But usually, that is only a temporary solution. To really make a big and lasting difference, we need to deal with the main causes and patterns causing the problem in the first place.

Example:

Providing solutions for those currently unhoused is important, and it is also essential to prevent people from reaching homelessness in the first place. This can be done by identifying and changing trends, like noticing when there's less and less affordable housing available, and taking steps to make more affordable homes.



Land Use and Urban Form

Goals

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

Connections to our guiding values

Sustainability and resilience: *Lowell will plan for resilience and minimize environmental impacts.*
The City prioritizes development patterns that efficiently utilize urban infrastructure (see page 85 for call-out on sustainable development). By fostering collaboration among city departments and stakeholders, Lowell can ensure success with coordinated individual and citywide actions.

Proactive maintenance: *Lowell will take care and maintain its existing and future infrastructure, in a smart and responsible manner.*
Lowell will develop a well-defined plan for who, what, where, and how we provide ongoing care, allocate budgets, and create partnerships that guarantee the continual upkeep and improvement of public spaces, sidewalks, trails, bus stops, parks, and other amenities.

Accountable governance and community stewardship: *Lowell will ensure active involvement of all community members in decisions related to the places they inhabit.*
The community should have ongoing opportunities to actively participate in and contribute to the continuous development of a dynamic downtown and improved neighborhood activity centers.

Innovation and creativity: *Lowell will channel innovation and creativity into developing a more equitable, sustainable, and resilient city.*
Lowell will actively seek collaboration with local institutions, experts, community organizations, and regional partners. These collaborations will help Lowell tackle urban challenges in smarter ways.

Indicators of progress

- 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

Aligned ongoing planning initiatives

- Housing Production Plan (ongoing)
- MassDevelopment's Transformative Development Initiative (TDI) including the upper Merrimack and upper Market Street corridors (ongoing)
- Housing Authority Development Plan for Market Street Parcels
- Mosaic Lowell
- UML East Campus Development
- Neighborhood Plans (ongoing)
- Ayer's City Market Study

Lowell Today

A zoning update is needed

Lowell’s zoning code regulates land use (residential, commercial, industrial, mixed use, etc.) and the physical form of new development in different parts of the city. A key goal of a comprehensive plan is to assess the current zoning code and set the stage for a future zoning update. Lowell Forward incorporates community input, City staff feedback, and previous planning effort data to develop an understanding of how Lowell’s zoning code serves the city today and where the code may be updated to align with long-term community development priorities. Many key actions across topic areas are related to identifying appropriate zoning modifications.

Housing diversity is key to achieve equitable growth

Lowell needs a land use and zoning framework that allows for development of affordable and diverse housing types located close to existing and planned mobility networks, services, and other amenities. Currently, residential use is the single largest land use in Lowell, making up 39% of the city’s total land area, and 67% of Lowell’s residential land area. Only 6% of Lowell’s land is dedicated for commercial uses, which range from compact urban main streets nestled within neighborhoods to big box shopping malls on the city’s edges. More flexibility in local zoning will help develop more affordable, multifamily housing options that suit a larger variety of housing needs.

Guiding growth in areas with development potential

Lowell Forward recommends prioritizing investment in well-connected areas with development potential, including existing neighborhood nodes and locations suitable for commercial or industrial uses. These nodes are prime for growth due to their infrastructure and transit accessibility, making them ideal for expanding housing, jobs, and services. This approach promotes concentrated and sustainable development with a right balance between active uses such as retail and other neighborhood services, and surrounding residential uses.

Improving connectivity between places in Lowell

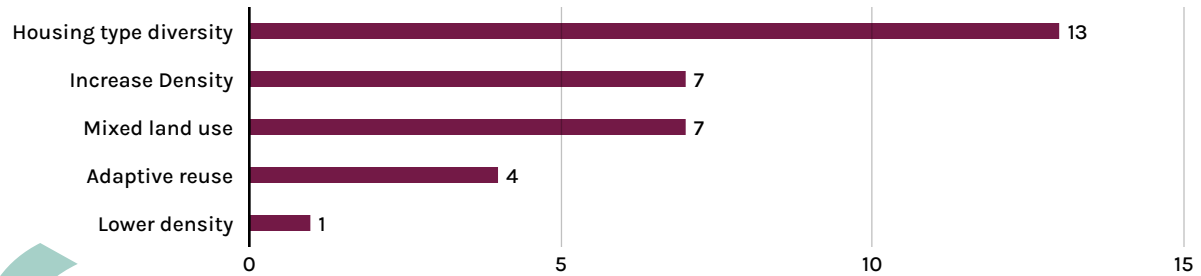
As a result of historic development patterns and new infrastructure development, there are many physical and spatial gaps (like vacant lots, industrial areas, non-walkable areas, highways, canals, and other infrastructure) present in Lowell’s fabric today that heighten disparities and connections between areas in Lowell. While many locations should ideally be within walking distance, the presence of these infrastructural barriers, coupled with inadequate sidewalk and bicycle infrastructure, poses challenges for people to get around the city without relying on cars.



Thoughts from the Community

Land Use and Urban Form Themes

Public Workshop 1



Buildings that are vacant can be transformed to mixed-use, providing low to middle income homes and shopping hubs.

Focus group with business owners led by Community Organizer

More mixed use buildings in every neighborhood.

Citywide workshop 1 participant

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

Citywide workshop 1 participant

Downtown needs to be more of a destination with more activities/things to do.

focus group with Community Development Corporations (CBA, CTI) led by City Staff

There is a desire for more modern forms of development in the city.

focus group with Community Development Corporations (CBA, CTI) led by City Staff

Conversations with Mercy

Mercy spoke with several community organizations in Lowell about land use. Some groups spoke about re-purposing vacant space in Downtown for mixed uses such as housing and community programs. They also recommend adding more amenities, such as a day recreation center that could draw locals and provide shelter for homeless people. Another idea that was brought up was creating places, such as a hotel, that would make the area a destination outside of lunchtime. Besides adding new spaces, community groups recommend focusing on better maintaining existing amenities by encouraging small businesses to transform on-street parking spots into patio space and by enforcing ADA compliance for old buildings that are not currently accessible. In her conversations, Mercy also heard great interest in keeping Downtown cleaner, with more trash cans, trash pick-ups, and litter cleanup crews.



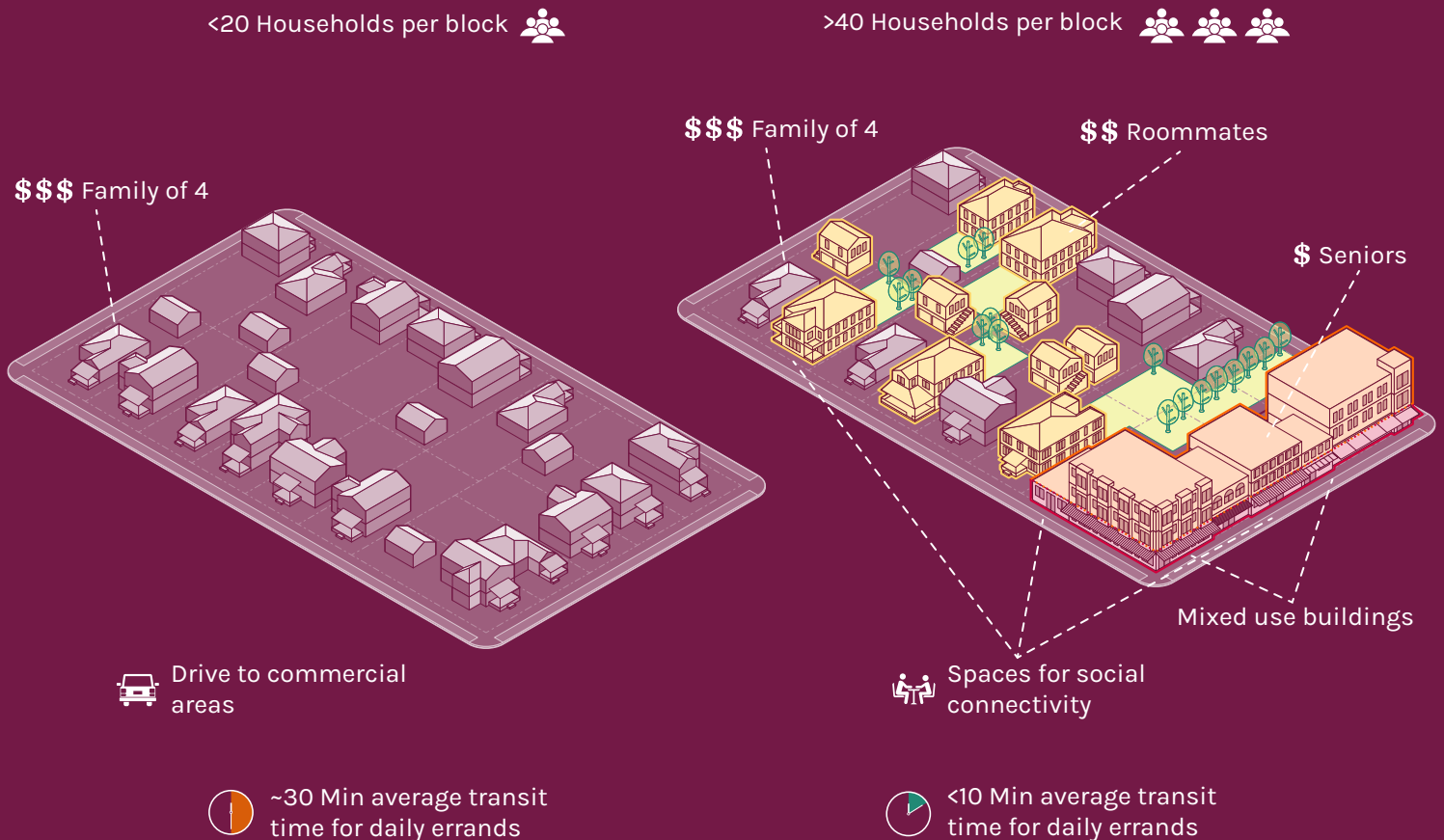
Sustainable development

Sustainable development focuses on protecting the needs of present and future generations, accounting for a changing climate, guaranteeing that all residents have access to city benefits, and ensuring a shared prosperity. Dense, infill development aligns with the principles of sustainable development by reducing the need for urban sprawl, using less resources, saving costs on infrastructure, decreasing reliance on private vehicles, increasing housing affordability, and by creating adaptable homes with potential for high social connectivity.

- **Land use efficiency:** reduces the need for urban sprawl, conserving natural spaces and promoting a more compact urban form
- **Resource efficiency:** multi-unit housing typically requires less land, water, and energy per capita compared to single family homes
- **Infrastructure Cost Savings:** providing services such as water, sewage, and utilities to a more concentrated area is often more cost-effective than spreading them out over a larger area
- **Sustainable mobility:** reduce the reliance on private vehicles as people may have easier access to amenities and public

transportation—this can lead to a decrease in greenhouse gas emissions

- **Housing Affordability:** provide more affordable housing options by increasing housing diversity
- **Adaptability to changing demographics:** provide a variety of housing options suitable for individuals, families, and seniors
- **Social Connectivity:** create mixed-use developments with diverse housing types that encourage interaction among residents and foster a sense of community.



Note: the example above is meant to illustrate the differences between two types of development patterns: predominantly single family and a mix of single family and small multifamily. Numbers above are approximate.

Community Highlights

Numerous community organizations, spotlighted in this document, are already addressing urban challenges within Downtown, neighborhood centers, and industrial areas. Collaborating closely with these organizations not only enhances the efficiency of the implementation process but also ensures that the evolving urban landscape truly reflects the needs and aspirations of the community.

Where to learn more:

Hamilton Canal District Master Plan (2008)

The Hamilton Canal District Master Plan envisions a vibrant, mixed-use district that is well-connected to transit. Development in the area will support additional tax revenue and create opportunities for economic development and affordable housing production. Since the plan was set out in 2008, various projects such as the HCID Parking Garage, the Lowell Justice Center, and the UMass Lowell Innovation Hub, have already been completed. Currently, the City is working to build two new streets and associated utility infrastructure in the northern part of the district. As part of this current project, the City will also improve the Dutton and Broadway bridge for pedestrian and vehicular use, plus finish constructing the new Signature Bridge over the Pawtucket Canal.

Ayer's City Industrial Park Urban Revitalization & Development Plan (2013)

The Ayer's City Industrial Park Plan charts a course to revitalize a traditional industrial area in the heart of Lowell. Recent efforts, such as the ongoing cleanup of the Silresim superfund site, aim to bring this vision to reality. The plan calls for brownfield cleanup, new zoning to support redevelopment, new parks and a greenway, improved access, and enhanced street design.



Land Use and Urban Form

Goal 1: Conduct a comprehensive zoning review

While zoning recommendations play a role in various goals and actions within this plan, it is important for the City to initially undertake a thorough review of existing zoning. This review aims to identify necessary revisions to align most effectively with the vision, growth strategies, and goals outlined in the Lowell Forward Plan. Planning staff should consider how to allow multifamily units at scales and typologies that meet the needs of the Lowell community and encourage more mixed-use, transit-oriented development. The recommendations outlined in both Lowell Forward and the upcoming Lowell Housing Production Plan, should serve as the guiding framework for new zoning measures.

Action 1:

Conduct a comprehensive zoning review assessing the city’s desired growth and development patterns against existing zoning



Address Root Causes

Action Type(s): Zoning Change
Status: New Initiative
Timeframe: Near Term
City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD

Action 2:

Develop educational tools around housing policy and zoning to improve public understanding of how zoning influences the built environment.

Action Type(s): Community Outreach
Status: New Initiative
Timeframe: Medium Term
City Steward: City of Lowell - DPD; NMCOG

Is zoning a barrier to affordable housing development?

Though implementation of zoning overlays has increased the allowable density of housing development, much of the higher density development is restricted to Downtown and the middle of Lowell. Current zoning prefers 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. Not even a third of the City’s land area allows small scale mixed-use development (1-2 units with a ground floor non-residential use) by right.

Zoning should be more flexible to allow for multi-unit developments. Allowing duplexes, triplexes, quadplexes, and other types of missing middle housing development, particularly in suburban and traditional neighborhood districts, will add a lot to the local supply of housing stock. Allowing accessory dwelling units, even by special permit, in more zoning districts besides the Urban Neighborhood Single Family District, can also expand flexibility in housing development.



Goal 2: Downtown growth

Action 1:

Enable diverse housing options in Downtown. Update zoning in the Downtown Mixed-use District by creating appropriate dimensional requirements to enable smaller/compact and more diverse housing options.



Restructure Rules

Action Type(s): Zoning Change, New Study and Plan
Status: New Initiative
Timeframe: Near Term
City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD (planning/zoning)

Action 2:

Advance and coordinate departmental efforts to improve walkability and vibrancy in Lowell’s Downtown street network including wider sidewalks, increased tree coverage, ground floor activation, shorter crossings, and longer crossing times.

Action Type(s): City Program, Capital Investment
Status: Modified or Expanded Initiative
Timeframe: Medium Term
City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD (economic development)

Action 3:

Advance planning of vacant and underutilized lots for infill, especially Merrimack Corridor and the Gallagher Station area, for compact, mixed-use, and walkable developments that appeal to a broad range of users.

Action Type(s): Zoning Change, New Study and Plan
Status: New Initiative
Timeframe: Medium Term
City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD (planning/zoning, economic development)

Action 4:

Continue to build a comprehensive Downtown branding strategy. Elevate Lowell’s city “brand” through a more comprehensive branding strategy that includes local partnerships, highlights Lowell’s history and current diversity, and improves wayfinding strategies to make the city more attractive to residents, workers, employers, and potential investors and developers.



Improve Communication

Action Type(s): Local Partnership, Capital Investment
Status: Modified or Expanded Initiative
Timeframe: Near Term
City Steward: City of Lowell—CASE, Local Anchor Institutions (ex. UML, MCC, Lowell Hospital, etc)

Action 5:

Incentivize transit-oriented development around the MBTA station through financial incentives and partnerships with transportation agencies.

Action Type(s): Regional Partnership
Status: Existing/Ongoing Initiative
Timeframe: Near Term
City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD, LRTA

Action 6:

Update regulations related to historic preservation to better fit our needs and goals today. Review and update the Downtown Historic District guidelines, where necessary, to support current building and development needs including compliance with accessibility and code standards. Review Historic Board signage regulations to assure that they are compliant with Reed v. Gilbert standards and Lowell’s upcoming newly revised sign code.



Restructure Rules

Action Type(s): Other Regulatory/Policy, New Study and Plan
Status: Modified or Expanded Initiative
Timeframe: Near Term
City Steward: City of Lowell—LHB, DPD, NPS

Where to learn more:

Gallagher Terminal Transit-Oriented Development Study (2020)

This study assessed the feasibility of Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) in the vicinity of the Lowell Gallagher Transportation Terminal and explored what government actions might be necessary to achieve feasible TOD. The Lowell Planning and Development Department identified eleven example TOD sites within a five-minute walk/quarter-mile radius of the Terminal. These sites represent a variety of challenges and opportunities developers might face when considering projects with density appropriate for TOD.

Downtown Lowell Rapid Recovery Plan (2021)

Downtown Lowell is ripe for reinvestment, revitalization, and new life. The COVID-19 Pandemic has exacerbated existing challenges and uncovered new problems. The City of Lowell applied to the Local Rapid Recovery Planning Program (LRRP) with six specific goals:

Short Term

1. Address vacant and underutilized storefronts
2. Support streetery program and other economic development programs
3. Support businesses to develop online presence

Mid/Long Term

1. Business assessment and inventory
2. Permanent streetery program and instructure plan/physical design standards
3. Encourage upper-level office to residential conversion



Goal 3: Growth in neighborhood activity centers and partnerships with institutional anchors

Action 1:

Improve neighborhood center infrastructure and services. Improve and build sustainable public realm infrastructure and neighborhood services, prioritizing pedestrian safety and enhanced walkability in underserved neighborhood centers in Lowell.

Action Type(s): New Study and Plan, City programs and operations

Status: New Initiative

Timeframe: Near Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—City Manager’s Office

Action 2:

Ensure robust coordination between city departments in executing neighborhood center improvements and aligning specific project timelines and departmental resources with relevant ongoing area planning efforts and projects.



Improve Communication

Action Type(s): Local Partnership

Status: Existing/Ongoing Initiative

Timeframe: Near Term

City Steward: City of Lowell, Local Anchor Institutions (ex. UML, MCC, Lowell Hospital, etc)

Action 3:

Allow increased residential density by right in neighborhood business districts. Incentivize appropriate infill development that enhances neighborhood vitality and celebrates each neighborhood’s distinct identity.

Action Type(s): Capital Investment, New Study and Plan

Status: Existing/Ongoing Initiative

Timeframe: Medium Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD, DPW

Action 4:

Strengthen connections between neighborhood centers and institutional anchors. Coordinate major institutional plans and projects to better align with Lowell Forward’s objectives of creating active, connected, and prosperous neighborhood centers.

Action Type(s): Local Partnership, New Study and Plan

Status: New Initiative

Timeframe: Medium Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD

Action 5:

Require transparent engagement between institutional anchors' projects and impacted neighborhoods. Ensure Lowell residents, community groups, and other impacted stakeholders are continuously engaged and informed as institutional projects are being planned.



Improve
Communication

Action Type(s): Community Outreach, Local Partnership

Status: New Initiative

Timeframe: Near Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD

Action 6:

Review off-street parking requirements for neighborhood commercial zones, particularly for existing buildings with longstanding commercial vacancies.

Action Type(s): Zoning Change

Status: New Initiative

Timeframe: Near Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD, City Manager's Office

Action 7:

Create design guidelines in mixed-use corridors and neighborhood nodes to ensure new development promotes best practices in urban design.

Action Type(s): Zoning Change

Status: New Initiative

Timeframe: Medium Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD

Where to learn more:

UMass Lowell Strategic Development Plan (2022)

This document highlights UMass Lowell's long-term goals and strategies for the future of the campus. Key areas of interest include the promotion of alternative transportation options for commuting students and faculty, energy efficiency in new construction, and increasing supply of on-campus housing. UMass Lowell is also dedicated to environmental sustainability, expanding academic courses in sustainability-related issues and practices, implementing a green cleaning policy for campus facilities, and creating new policies for paper purchasing, printing, and new electronics purchasing.

Moving forward, UMass Lowell plans to increase their supplies of both on-campus student housing and recreation facilities. To address the increasingly residential nature of the campus and to reduce the need for driving, UMass Lowell is offering a housing subsidy to staff and faculty to purchase or rent housing within the City of Lowell known as the "Live in Lowell" Program. Such policies serve to further the University's long-term "One Campus/One Community" goal. Ensuring that housing is affordable for university staff and faculty is a key part of addressing housing affordability city-wide.



Goal 4: Redevelop underutilized industrial areas or heavy commercial areas

Action 1:

Advance planning of the Ayer’s City Industrial Park. Complete and assess the ongoing market study and define next steps for development in the industrial area.

Action Type(s): New Study and Plan

Status: Existing/Ongoing Initiative

Timeframe: Near Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD

Action 2:

Update zoning to allow light manufacturing and creative economy uses compatible with residential and commercial neighborhoods in appropriate areas of the city.



Restructure
Rules

Action Type(s): Zoning Change

Status: New Initiative

Timeframe: Medium Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD

Small-scale manufacturing, creative maker spaces and neighborhood revitalization

Technological and economic shifts have opened new opportunities in small-scale manufacturing and the “maker” economy, offering communities a chance to address various economic development issues. While local economic development strategies commonly focus on supporting retail shops and professional services, small-scale manufacturing is often overlooked despite holding significant potential for entrepreneurship, small business growth, and downtown revitalization. Small-scale manufacturers add a distinctive attraction that can draw people to a new location. Beyond traditional amenities like retail, restaurants, and cultural venues, the presence of small-scale manufacturers, creative makers, and artists provides residents and visitors with additional reasons to spend time in a neighborhood. In Lowell, the Western Ave Lofts and Studios by Pawtucket Canal exemplify the successful integration of small-scale manufacturers and artists within a historic fabric mill building, showcasing the importance of providing built-out space to retain these businesses and jobs within the community.

Source: “Made in Place,” Smart Growth America, 2017

Photo Credit: UML →





Housing

Goals

1. Plan for equitable and accessible growth
2. Develop homes for all types of households and individuals
3. Improve 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

Connections to our guiding values

- **Sustainability and resilience:** *Lowell will build a resilient community and evolve as a city in equitable and sustainable ways.*
Lowell will promote housing affordability and stability for all types of households including young families, seniors, people living with roommates, and more, while fostering social resilience. The City will also prioritize housing connected to sustainable transportation options.
- **Proactive maintenance:** *Lowell will proactively maintain existing housing.*
Since the majority of Lowell's housing stock is old, a key focus will be on supporting the community with home improvement and energy-efficiency upgrades. In parallel, the City will proactively maintain public infrastructure supporting housing, including sewers and streets.
- **Accountable governance and community stewardship:** *Lowell celebrates diversity and will aim to ensure access to affordable housing choices for all.*
The City will aim to ensure accessibility and transparency for all community members. Efforts will focus on simplifying navigation of the housing system especially for non-native English speakers and newcomers to Lowell or the United States. The City will also collaborate with local organizations actively supporting the community with housing programs, finance tools, and resources.
- **Innovation and creativity:** *Lowell will embrace continuous innovation and creativity to support housing stability, increase housing quality and provide options to low to very low-income households.*
Lowell will partner with local and regional organizations to come up with innovative and creative solutions to housing challenges.

Indicators of progress

- 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 from 40% to 32% by 2040
- Reduce percentage of severely cost-burdened households from 19% to 16% by 2040
- Achieve a healthy housing unit vacancy rate of 6%

Aligned ongoing planning initiatives

- Housing Production Plan (ongoing)
- City Manager's Task Force on Homelessness and Sustainable Housing Action Plan and Final Recommendations
- UMass Lowell Strategic Development Plan
- City Staff's Zoning Analysis

Lowell Today

Lowell needs a flexible housing stock that can change along with the City's demographics

Lowell's population is continuously changing, and it's anticipated to both grow and age while average household size is anticipated to decline. Lowell is projected to grow by 2,205 households (5.3%) between 2020 and 2030, which is a slower growth rate than three of four of its peer gateway cities. The number of households with heads of household 65 years or older has consistently grown for the last ten years, and is projected to grow from 25% to more than 30% of total households by 2030. Households that consist of a single person living alone are projected to rise from 12,000 to nearly 14,000, or roughly 17%, between 2030 and 2040.

Lowell's housing prices are growing increasingly out of reach for those who call the city home

A constrained market is driving these high housing costs, which is partially an effect of Lowell's housing policies, including restrictive zoning. In addition, high construction and land costs create a gap between the cost of building a unit and the expected return, which demands consideration of new or expanded market-rate subsidy programs and the cost impacts of current policy. Finally, recent interest rate trends have drastically reduced turnover, further distorting the housing market. Affordability was among the greatest concerns cited in community research and was the largest barrier to those who wanted to move within or to Lowell. In addition, more than half of renters cited rent being too costly as a challenge.

The greatest needs are among residents who make an income at the lowest end of the spectrum

Affordable housing development is difficult due to lack of real estate opportunities within the city, and additional red tape related to state and federal funding sources and acquisition of city-owned properties. The need for affordable housing exceeds the supply. 5,127 units are listed on Subsidized Housing inventory (SHI), but 99% of the 7,345 households in Lowell that are severely cost burdened earn 80% AMI or less and would usually qualify for the most typical affordable housing. In addition, waitlists are reported to be more than five years. More than 80% of these severely housing cost burdened households are extremely low income.

There are gaps between Lowell's walkable and transit-oriented vision and actual zoning

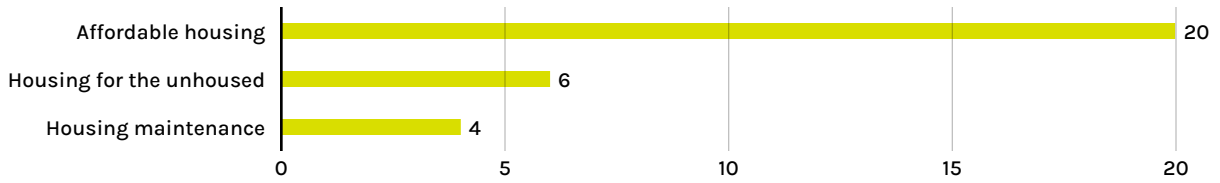
Developers of both market-rate and subsidized housing noted difficulties in creating dense developments near amenities or transit due to the unpredictable nature of necessary variances or special permits. In some cases, existing single family zoning does not allow the construction of new homes that are similarly sized and situated on similarly-sized lots to existing homes. These homes may be opposed by neighbors when developers seek variances. The new Multi-Family Overlay District (MFOD) is a possible opportunity area for new growth near Gallagher Terminal and in the Downtown and Acre neighborhoods, but other neighborhood centers could be similarly examined for increased density and less restrictive permitting processes.



Thoughts from the Community

Housing Themes

Public Workshop 1



There just aren't enough affordable housing units.
focus group with seniors led by Community Organizer

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 at the African Community Center led by City Staff

Homelessness issues have been a main concern of the police department in recent years.
focus group with Lowell Police Department led by City Staff

The homelessness problem is very serious in Lowell (as it is throughout the country) and permanent supportive housing is the solution. There needs to be political will to construct this housing. NIMBYism is a barrier. People are not able to collect themselves and exit poverty without a home and place they can regroup/rest.

focus group with Unhoused/Homeless Service Providers led by City Staff

Lowell needs to change its zoning code to allow more housing types in more places. 2/3 of the city's residential land is zoned for single family, and this constricts our ability to build the housing we need. Homeowners dominate housing conversations and speak in their self-interest, but so many Lowellians are renters. Renters and housing insecure people lack representation, which prevents the city from creating policies and programs that benefit these groups.

focus group with Community Development Corporations (CBA, CTI) led by City Staff

Shelter is a basic human need. Yet it has become almost unaffordable to even middle class families due to higher than average homeownership rates, overpriced rental rates, as well as limited rental housing.

Conversations with Mercy



Community Highlights

Numerous community organizations, spotlighted in this document, are already addressing housing challenges in Lowell. Collaborating closely with these organizations not only enhances the efficiency of the implementation process but also ensures that housing policies and programs reflect the needs and aspirations of the community.

Merrimack Valley Housing Partnership

- Home buyer/landlord trainings
- Downpayment assistance programs
- Lead paint abatement / rehab loans

Coalition for a Better Acre (CBA)

- Development and management of affordable housing within Lowell
- Assistance with self-sufficiency including job support
- Civic Engagement

Homeless Reform Project

- Guidance and Counseling

Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association.

- Civic Engagement
- Family Support
- Youth Programs
- First Time Home Buyers Training

Day Center Programs (Eliot Church, Life Connection Center, Living Waters)

- Meals programs
- Case support and guidance
- Harm reduction services
- Hygiene programs

House of Hope

- Emergency Shelter
- Development and management of affordable housing
- Job training programs

Lowell Transitional Living Center

- Emergency Shelter
- Case management
- Meals programs

Community Teamwork Inc. and Common Ground

- Fair Housing program
- Financial education
- Housing Consumer Education Center and Emergency Rental Assistance (HCEC)
- Rental Assistance/Subsidized Housing
- Programs
- Emergency Shelters
- Development and management of affordable housing

Thrive Communities

- Empower communities to welcome and support our neighbors transitioning from incarceration

NMCOG

- Community technical assistance program
- Education and trainings

Conversations with Mercy

Housing affordability is top of mind for many in Lowell. Most community members discussed the restrictively high cost for both renting and buying homes. People proposed ideas such as rent regulation policies, increasing affordable housing production, and supporting nonprofits that build and manage permanently low-income units. Community groups have shared that eligibility requirements for government funded housing, such as credit and employment base requirements, exclude too many low-income residents. For the City of Lowell, Mercy heard people say that it came down to zoning. In addition to recent efforts towards densifying downtown, the city needs more density further out. Community groups also brought up the need to address homelessness both through policy solutions that will get people off the street and through awareness campaigns that humanize the crisis.





Housing

Goal 1: Plan for equitable and accessible growth

Action 1:

Engage communities to identify priority development sites for multifamily housing with the goal of increasing density in key areas that can be well-served with alternative transportation options, especially within and near neighborhood centers.

Action Type(s): New Study and Plan

Status: New Initiative

Timeframe: Medium Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD, NMCOG

Action 2:

Develop a funding pipeline to acquire, finance, and develop sites with a high capacity for multifamily from parking lots to adaptive reuse. This could be facilitated by a public-private partnership with nonprofit or for-profit developers.

Action Type(s): City Program, New Study and Plan

Status: New Initiative

Timeframe: Near Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD, Local Property Owners/Developers

Action 3:

Allow housing or mixed use projects in the Regional Retail District to increase housing near jobs while retaining the economic vitality of these districts.

Action Type(s): Zoning Change

Status: New Initiative

Timeframe: Near Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD

Action 4:

Document projected and actual infrastructural impacts for major developments. Seek state and federal grants to improve infrastructure like water, sewer, and transportation as needed.

Action Type(s): City Programs and Operations
Status: New Initiative
Timeframe: Medium Term
City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD, DPW

Action 5:

Prioritize the sale of city properties to support the creation of housing at all income levels.

Action Type(s): City programs and operations
Status: New Initiative
Timeframe: Near Term
City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD; Law Department

Action 6:

Participate in regional initiatives such as At Home in Greater Lowell that include plan development, implementation, and community engagement activities and education

Action Type(s): Regional Partnership
Status: Ongoing Initiative
Timeframe: Near Term
City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD; NMCOG



Photo Credit: Coalition for a Better Acre (CBA).

Merrimack Valley Housing Partnership (MVHP)
mvhp.org



MVHP is a private, non-profit organization that promotes responsible and sustainable home ownership opportunities for low and moderate income earners. They provide comprehensive home buyer training and counseling, and they promote the use of special mortgage products and down payment assistance programs. The organization also focuses on landlord training, real estate, lead paint abatement and rehabilitation loans, and credit reports.

Community Teamwork (CTI)
commteam.org



CTI is a nonprofit community action agency, regional nonprofit housing agency, and a community development corporation that serves 63 cities and towns in the greater Lowell area. CTI mobilizes resources for low-income people, providing opportunities for them to have an active voice in the decisions that affect their lives, and helping them achieve stability and self sufficiency.

CTI owns and rents 71 transitional units in Lowell. Common Ground, CTI's development subsidiary, partners with municipalities to create affordable housing, having now created 129 units, 36 in Lowell.



Housing

Goal 2: Develop homes for all types of households and individuals

Action 1:

Adjust zoning regulations to allow needed housing typologies including Single Room Occupancy (SRO), micro units, accessible units, and adding bonus density for missing “starter home” unit types such as townhomes.



Restructure Rules

Action Type(s): Zoning Change, New Study and Plan
Status: Ongoing Initiative
Timeframe: Near Term
City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD, NMCOG

Action 2:

Expand housing choice in all residential areas by building consensus around an Accessory Dwelling Unit ordinance and identifying areas where contextually-appropriate mixed-use nodes could provide more diverse housing options and improve connectivity between residences and neighborhood businesses.



Restructure Rules

Action Type(s): Zoning Change, New Study and Plan
Status: Ongoing Initiative
Timeframe: Near Term
City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD



Photo Credit: Jessica Wilson.

Action 3:

Encourage housing typologies that include universal design to support aging in place as part of new developments and major renovations of existing buildings, especially in walkable and transit-served locations. Develop policies that specifically support senior populations, such as growing programs that add universal accessibility, aging in community, and accessibility to existing and new housing.

Action Type(s): Local Partnership

Status: New Initiative

Timeframe: Medium Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD, Council on Aging, Disability Commission, Senior Center

Action 4:

Continue to work with developers of all types of low-income housing with an emphasis on missing age groups and AMI ranges.

Action Type(s): Local Partnership, Other Regulatory/Policy

Status: Ongoing Initiative

Timeframe: Near Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD



Photo Credit: Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association (CMAA).

Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association (CMAA)



cmaalowell.org

CMAA is designed to support and improve quality of life for Cambodian Americans and other minorities throughout the Greater Lowell area. They promote community empowerment by providing citizenship assistance, english classes, youth programs, civic engagement opportunities, home ownership resources, and avenues for cultural preservation.

Coalition for a Better Acre (CBA)



coalitionforabetteracre.org/mission-values

As a membership based community development corporation, CBA is dedicated to resident empowerment and strives for Lowell's neighborhoods to be affordable, vibrant, and diverse places of choice where residents are engaged leaders, and where local stakeholders work in partnership to build family and community assets. They focus on workforce development, youth programs, civic engagement and leadership, real estate, community building and events, and health access.

CBA has built and renovated more than 556 residential units, and currently owns 486 affordable rental units in Lowell.



Housing

Goal 3: Improve housing quality

Action 1:

Create a well-funded program that could provide no-interest home improvement loans targeted toward improving quality of homes occupied by low-income tenants while preserving the affordability of those rentals. Identify key neighborhoods that are in danger of decline.



Address Root
Causes

Action Type(s): City Program
Status: New Initiative
Timeframe: Medium Term
City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD

Action 2:

Identify additional resources to enforce city codes for residential property (inspectional services). Enforce and enhance minimum housing requirements and building codes, including HOME-funded low-income housing and other types of housing.

Action Type(s): City Program
Status: Ongoing Initiative
Timeframe: Near Term
City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD

Action 3:

Work with National Grid to understand how many units and of what tenure could benefit from retrofits, and develop a program to target the gap, especially among rental units.

Action Type(s): Other Regulatory/Policy
Status: New Initiative
Timeframe: Medium Term
City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD, DPW (Sustainability)

Action 4:

Stabilize neighborhoods through reconstruction and improvement of streetscapes. Support community-based initiatives in each neighborhood that will contribute to and improve the quality of life such as beautification and public art efforts.

Action Type(s): Local Partnership
Status: Ongoing Initiative
Timeframe: Medium Term
City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD, DPW;
Local Partnerships (CBA, Neighborhood Groups)

Where to learn more:

HUD's Pro Housing Program

Communities nationwide are suffering from a lack of affordable housing, and housing production is not meeting the increasing demand for accessible and available units in many urban and rural areas, particularly areas of high opportunity.

Pathways to Removing Obstacles to Housing (PRO Housing) supports communities who are actively taking steps to remove barriers to affordable housing, such as:

- Barriers caused by outdated zoning, land use policies, or regulations
- Inefficient procedures
- Gaps in available resources for development
- Deteriorating or inadequate infrastructure
- Lack of neighborhood amenities
- Challenges to preserving existing housing stock such as increasing threats from natural hazards, redevelopment pressures, or expiration of affordability requirements

Learn more here:

hud.gov/program_offices/comm_planning/pro_housing

Federal Program: Commercial-to-residential Conversion

A new federal guidebook shows how federal tools have already been used to make conversions possible for the development of affordable housing. Several existing federal programs already support commercial-to-residential conversions. The Community Development Block Grant, which provides \$3 billion annually to support community housing and revitalization projects for low- and moderate-income families, and new actions make it easier to use these funds for acquisition, pre-development and construction associated with conversions. This compliments other actions, like HUD's recently announced \$860,000 in grant funds to study office-to-residential conversions undertaken since the pandemic. Similarly, new DOT policies unlock \$35 billion in available lending capacity for development projects at below market interest rates, which will make conversions easier to finance.

Learn more here:

whitehouse.gov/cea/written-materials/2023/10/27/commercial-to-residential-conversion-addressing-office-vacancies

Annual Action Plan for CDBG, ESG, HOME Programs (2022)

In applying its Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), HOME Investment Partnerships Program, and Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG), the City of Lowell is prioritizing a total of 21 priority needs, including decent affordable housing, suitable living environments, infrastructure improvements, providing childcare options, addressing code compliance-related issues, providing education and access to food and nutrition services, public services, and economic opportunities. In addition, the City of Lowell has adopted HUD's policy requiring energy star certifications for new construction and substantial rehabilitation projects to further its goal of providing more high-quality affordable housing stock. This plan recommends relaxing strict zoning and land use regulations that have been enacted in response to Proposition 2½, which has limited the rate of growth of local tax levies and discouraged communities from accepting additional housing development. In addition, the City should continue encouraging existing buildings previously used for public services and industrial work into multifamily residential uses. Ultimately, the city sees zoning for multifamily housing as a primary tool for addressing homelessness and the challenges of housing affordability.

Zoning for More Housing in Lowell (March 16, 2021)

This was an internal report presented at the City Council. It was recommended to be referred to the Zoning Subcommittee. It is unknown whether the Zoning Subcommittee discussed the report and whether any public comment was registered.

This report provides a menu of options for zoning changes that can help the City of Lowell increase its housing availability. The rate of new housing production is not meeting the needs of Lowell's growing population. There are also several strategies the City can pursue to allow for new missing middle housing without residents and developers needing to apply for a variance. Given that Lowell is the 4th most expensive city in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and 55% of Lowell renter households are rent burdened, it is vital that Lowell take action on making zoning policy more flexible for housing development.



Housing

Goal 4: Eliminate homelessness and reduce housing insecurity

Action 1:

Study and develop a Housing First incentive zone located near transit and well-connected areas or service providers.

Action Type(s): Zoning Change

Status: New Initiative

Timeframe: Medium Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD

Action 2:

Increase funding and expedited permitting for qualified providers, particularly those associated with targeted sites. Dedicate funding commitments, with a focus on leveraging HOME ARP funding if awarded, and identify additional funding sources.

Action Type(s): Other Regulatory/Policy, Capital Investment

Status: Ongoing Initiative

Timeframe: Near Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD

Action 3:

Implement recommendations within City Manager’s Task Force on Homelessness and Sustainable Housing Action Plan and Final Recommendations.

Action Type(s): Regional Partnership, Local Partnership

Status: Ongoing Initiative

Timeframe: Near Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—City Manager’s Office, DPD, Local Partnerships



Homeless Reform Project

homelessrp.org/about-us

HRP focuses on helping homeless community members by providing weekly meals, resources and other support. They believe that a complete solution to homelessness will involve issues of mental health, addiction, housing, and education. HRP focuses on those most at risk by providing direct aid in the form of food and clothes, in addition to providing advice and counseling through their many programs.

Action 4:

Enhance program coordination among local, regional, and state providers by creating a new staff position dedicated to housing stability.



Improve
Communication

Action Type(s): City Program
Status: New Initiative
Timeframe: Near Term
City Steward: City of Lowell—City Manager’s Office, DPD

Action 5:

Initiate a Housing Needs Awareness Campaign to inform and educate about the affordable housing shortage, share programs and policies to support housing production, and discuss perceptions around homelessness in Lowell.



Impact
Mindsets

Action Type(s): City Program, Community Outreach
Status: New Initiative
Timeframe: Near Term
City Steward: City of Lowell—City Manager’s Office, DPD

Where to learn more:

Partnership for Change: Action Plan to End Homelessness (2008 – 2018)

This report outlines a plan to coordinate efforts to address homelessness in the Greater Lowell Area, covering eight key components: preventing homelessness, ending individual and street homelessness, rapid rehousing for homeless families, ending youth homelessness, aging in the community in peace and safety, moving beyond shelter to housing, developing employment and education assets, and administration and oversight of the action plan. Representatives from local agencies throughout Lowell contributed to the strategy and procedure development of this plan.

City Manager’s Task Force on Homelessness and Sustainable Housing Action Plan and Final Recommendations (August 2019)

The Task Force was comprised of a cross-section of community leaders who work with, or are in some way impacted by, the escalating problems related to homelessness. The City Manager’s office hosted five full Task Force meetings, ten committee meetings, and many more Leadership Group meetings to create recommendations.

These “Housing First” strategies seek to develop and sustain permanent supportive housing and improve the overall response system to the homelessness crisis. Stronger collaboration among housing and homelessness-related organizations and improved daily housing and shelter operations are also discussed.

Continuum of Care Programs

A Continuum of Care (CoC) is a regional or local planning body that coordinates housing and services funding for homeless families and individuals. Across the Commonwealth there are 12 CoCs eligible to apply for money from HUD to help homeless people. The Balance of State CoC works to address homelessness in a number of ways including Permanent Supportive Housing, Rapid Rehousing and Transitional Housing, Supportive Services for those who are homeless, and by collaborating with the many organizations serving this population throughout our CoC geography.



Housing

Goal 5: Provide housing options for households that make low- and very low- incomes

Action 1:

Develop an Affordable Housing Trust Fund (AHTF) to help streamline the process of getting housing for those in need while also reducing red tape. This AHTF should include a 5-year Strategic Plan to guide the Trustees’ decision-making.



Address Root Causes

Action Type(s): City Programs and Operations
Status: New Initiative
Timeframe: Medium Term
City Steward: City of Lowell—City Manager’s Office, DPD

Action 2:

Conduct an in-depth inventory of subsidized units including type, price point, and Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI) status.

Action Type(s): New Study and Plan, other regulatory/Policy
Status: Ongoing Initiative
Timeframe: Near Term
City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD

Action 3:

Develop a strategy and a fund that can preserve affordability of expiring deed-restricted units, including continued use of the Housing Rehabilitation program, and that can create additional affordability with the First Time Home-Buyers Program (FTHB).

Action Type(s): City Program
Status: New Initiative
Timeframe: Medium Term
City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD

Action 4:

Conduct an Inclusionary Zoning (IZ) market study and develop an appropriate IZ ordinance including consideration of standards and/or an overlay.



Restructure Rules

Action Type(s): Zoning Change, New Plan or Study
Status: Ongoing Initiative
Timeframe: Near Term
City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD



Housing

Goal 6: Expand and create new opportunities for affordable homeownership

Action 1:

Leverage and expand federal community planning and development entitlement funds such as CDBG and HOME that assist first time home buyers to encourage young adults and families to remain in, or move to, Lowell. Work with banks for lower-interest loan programs for first-time low-income homebuyers.

Action Type(s): City Program
Status: Ongoing Initiative
Timeframe: Medium Term
City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD

Goal 7: Ensure fair housing policies and practices

Action 1:

Develop a Fair Housing Plan that utilizes and monitors Home Mortgage Disclosure Act (HMDA) data and discrimination reports, and then evaluates the equity of the City’s zoning.

Action Type(s): New Study and Plan
Status: Ongoing Initiative
Timeframe: Near Term
City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD

Action 2:

Ensure all notices are translated into all languages spoken broadly by the Lowell community, and ensure that they are accessible to those without access to technology and those with disabilities. Develop targeted marketing campaigns for specific groups, recognizing cultural and media consumption differences rather than a single campaign for all groups.



Improve Communication

Action Type(s): City programs and operations, Community Outreach
Status: Ongoing Initiative
Timeframe: Near Term
City Steward: City of Lowell—City Manager’s Office, DPD

Mobility

Goals

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

Connections to our guiding values

- **Sustainability and resilience:** *Lowell will reduce its environmental impact and grow as a resilient and strong community.*
Lowell will prioritize sustainable modes of transportation such as walking, biking, transit use, and shared mobility, and it will align new developments with this sustainable mobility network.
- **Proactive maintenance:** *Lowell will be proactive about taking care of mobility infrastructure.*
Prioritizing proactive maintenance of existing and new infrastructure is essential. Not only is it important to build new bus stops, the City also needs to maintain and equip stops with updated transit information.
- **Accountable governance and community stewardship:** *Lowell will make sure that everyone has access to a safe, accessible, efficient, and reliable mobility network.*
A better mobility infrastructure promotes healthy lifestyles, enhances public health, and supports access to economic opportunity and participation in civic life. Every community member should have a platform to advocate for a mobility network that meets their needs.
- **Innovation and creativity:** *Lowell will work in close collaboration with partners to support creative and innovative mobility solutions.*
The city will work on creative strategies that improve public information, and educational resources. The City will work closely with organizations that are advancing creative solutions around shared mobility.

Indicators of progress

- 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 lineal miles of on-street bicycle infrastructure by 2040
- Repair, replace, or construct 65 miles of sidewalks throughout the city by 2040

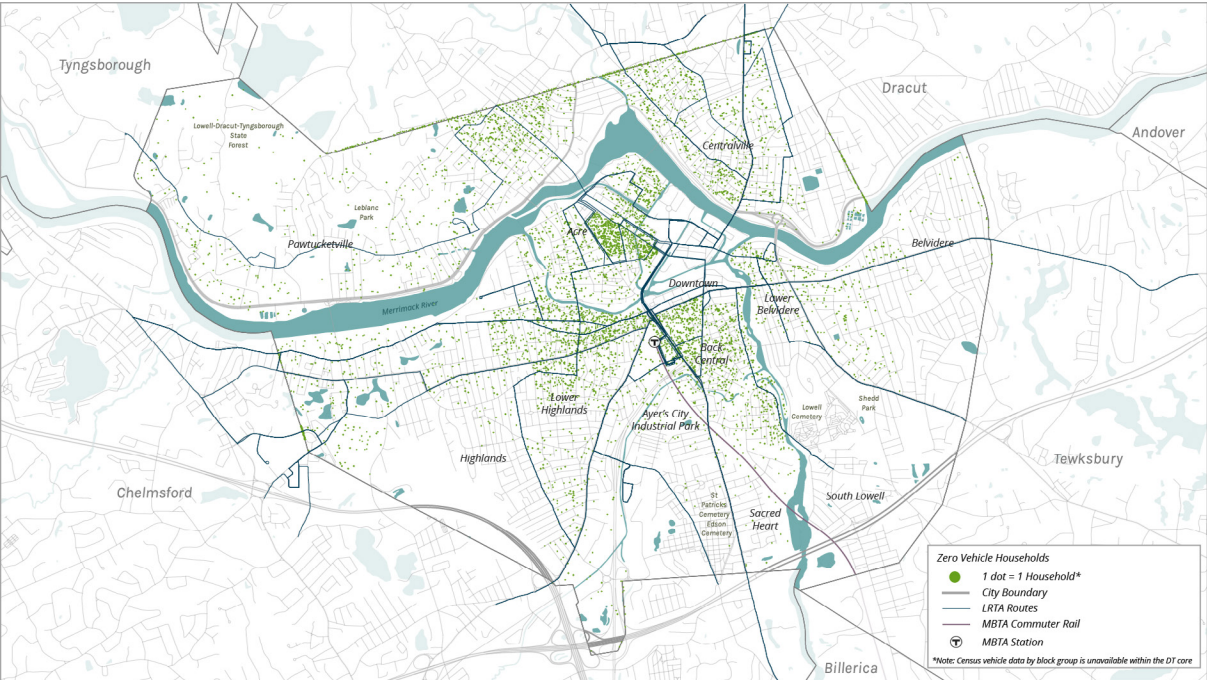
Aligned ongoing planning initiatives

- GoLowell Multimodal Complete Streets Plan
- Concord River Greenway
- Lower Locks
- Parking Study

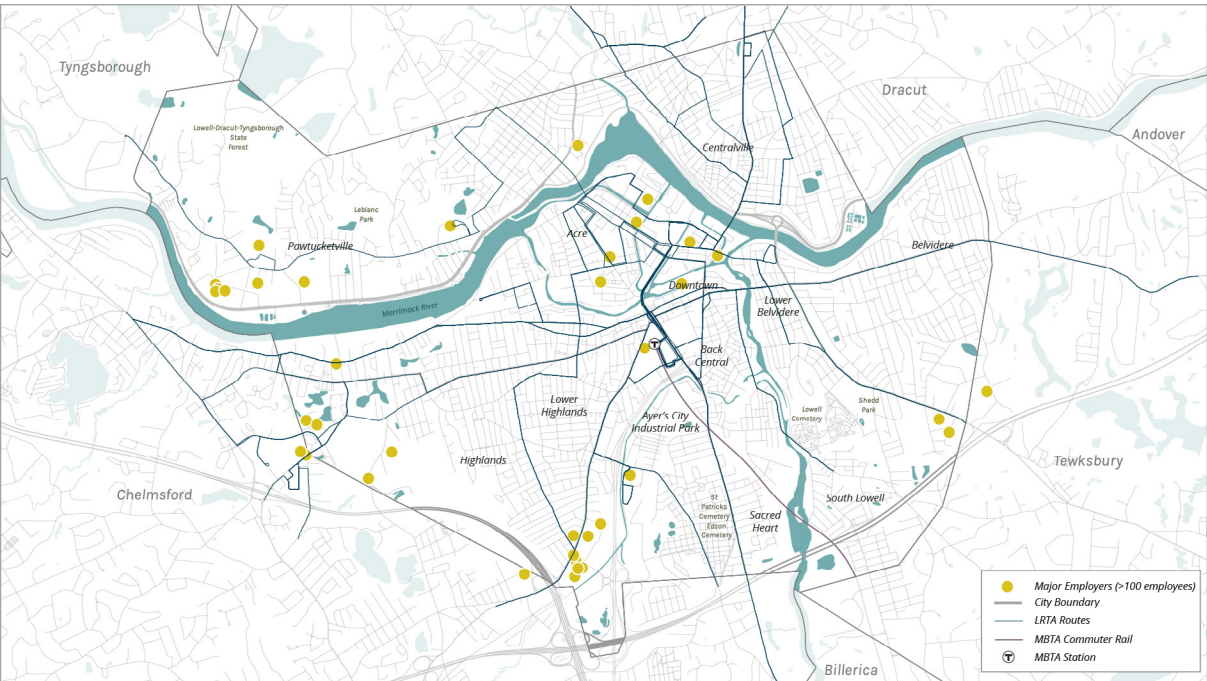
Lowell Today

Lowell has a transportation system prioritizing driving convenience

Low transit frequencies and longer transit travel times, as well as lagging investment in pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure poses a disproportionate burden for the one in six Lowell households who do not own vehicles. These Lowellians rely disproportionately on carpooling, walking, and public transit to get to work.



Location of zero vehicle households (ACS 2020) in relation to LRTA's existing transit network.



Location of large employers (>100 employees) in relation to LRTA's existing transit network.

There is a strong need for safe, reliable and frequent transit

Residents who take transit to work spend twice as much time commuting as drivers. Lowell Regional Transit Authority's (LRTA) buses typically only arrive at stops every 30 minutes to one hour and the latest route ends operation before 10pm. Lowell residents who take transit to work spend 50 or more minutes commuting on average, twice as much time as drivers.

Overall, most major employers are located along LRTA's fixed-route network. However, some aren't and development plans and/or TDM programs should consider this mismatch, as proposed in GoLowell. For example, further west, in Pawtucketville and in the Highlands, some major employers are not directly located and many of the employees that use transit for travel to and from work may experience first/last mile conflicts.

The greatest number of households without vehicles is found around Gallagher Terminal, the Acre neighborhood, and in Downtown along Merrimack Street and Salem Street. These areas with high concentrations of zero-vehicle households are fortunately served by routes operating every 20-30 minutes, unlike most LRTA routes that run hourly. While this is positive news, it's essential to evaluate other proposed strategies to ensure we are effectively connecting users who rely on non-motorized options. For instance, we should examine how these strategies align with the proximity of trails and bike infrastructure.



Photo Credit: VHB.

Sustainable Transportation

Lowell Forward aims to advance sustainable transportation options to enhance environmental protection, economic efficiency, and social equity. Recognizing the significant link between transportation and greenhouse gas emissions, the mobility actions in this plan focus on expanding access to sustainable travel choices for Lowell residents. Encouraging and promoting ride-sharing options are key strategies to mitigate emissions and enhance air quality.

There is a strong need for 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. And while many streets have compact grids and sidewalks, many streets could benefit from enhanced sidewalks and improved crossings.

Those who walk and roll are more vulnerable to serious injury and death than motorists

Lowell's streets, like those of other 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. A majority of crashes involving people walking and biking have occurred along arterials that carry higher volumes of vehicle traffic, such as Andover Street, Westford Street, and Route 38. The City's recent multimodal Complete Streets plan, GoLowell, assessed street safety throughout Lowell and analyzed safety trends at many key intersections and streets throughout the city. The plan included concept diagrams for street safety improvements and prioritized implementation for new pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure.



Photo Credit: Utile.

Go Lowell

GoLowell is Lowell's multimodal Complete Streets plan. The planning effort assessed transit use, walkability, and bicycle safety throughout the city. The final plan can be read in its entirety on the City of Lowell's website. GoLowell identified 10 high-priority corridors which will be assessed in detail for the safety and comfort of pedestrians and cyclists. GoLowell also proposed new bus routes and improved bus stop amenities:

- Crosstown Express route—connects Belvidere to Downtown & Gallagher Terminal to Highlands
- Downtown busway—Circulator from downtown to Gallagher Terminal
- New complete streets prioritization plan forthcoming

Finally, the GoLowell plan proposed a connected network of bicycle infrastructure, from onstreet protected lanes to off-street greenways and trails. The plan recommended projects at key locations, such as crosswalk safety improvements and separated bike lanes on Bridge Street. Read the full GoLowell plan here:

lowellma.gov/1340/GoLowell

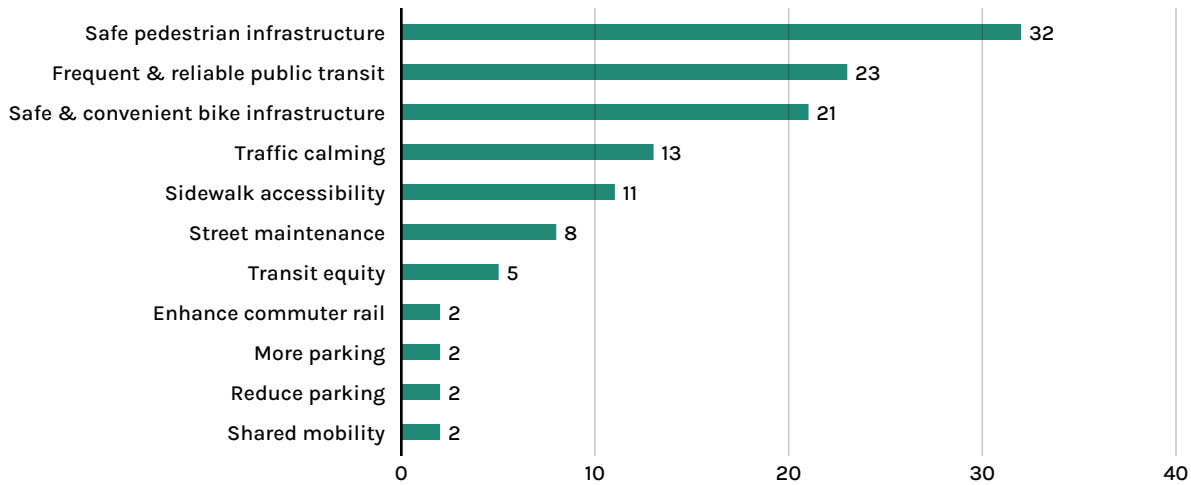
Citywide Parking Study

The City of Lowell's 2021 Citywide Parking Study recommended a selection of strategies designed to improve the parking experience throughout the city with a focus on fairness and equity. The study suggests updating parking prices so that they reflect the full environmental and social costs of parking, alongside new enforcement practices that use technology to ensure payment. The plan also recommends taking advantage of underutilized parking capacity by promoting parking garages, expanding residential parking programs, and broadening shared parking agreements between downtown private landholders.

Thoughts from the Community

Mobility Themes

Public Workshop 1



“A community college student in my household is a transportation rider. Based on her experience, I can say that transit in Lowell is highly unreliable. She needs to be at the bus stop 20 - 30 mins before just in case the bus arrives early, and sometimes stay 20 - 30 mins after the estimated time to wait in case the bus is late.

Interview with Community Organizer

We need the potholes and sidewalks to be fixed.

focus group with the Acre Community led by Community Organizer

There are so many parking garages downtown, there is a surplus of parking.

Interview with Community Organizer

Getting to downtown from here is not friendly or safe.

focus group with South East Asian Community led by Community Organizer

I do not shop in downtown because of the issues with parking and traffic.

focus group with seniors led by Community Organizer”

No Sunday bus service and limited connections to other cities/ suburbs that are major employers such as Burlington Mall, Merrimack Premium Outlet, and Pheasant Lane Mall.

converstion with City staff

Public transportation just doesn't run frequently enough for people to actually use it.

Conversation with Mercy



Conversations with Mercy

Conversations with Mercy highlighted concerns about mobility and transportation, emphasizing issues stemming from poor infrastructure and inadequate public transportation. Participants called for better sidewalks and bike lanes, more road maintenance, improved markings for walking and biking paths, and increased safety measures. Suggestions included rest areas, better path connections, and slower driving speed enforcement.

The city also needs enhanced public transportation infrastructure, with community groups advocating for improved bus stop signage, covered waiting areas, and seating. Concerns about Gallagher Station's inconvenient location were raised. In Mercy's conversations, people wanted to support public transportation more, but because service is so infrequent and unreliable, they felt like they could not. This brought out some creative recommendations such as collaborating with UMass Lowell to make their shuttle service public or looking into car sharing programs such as Q-Ryde.







Mobility

Goal 1: Safe, equitable and connected mobility network that accommodates all users including walkers, riders, drivers, bikers, and rollers

What is a Vision Zero Plan?

Vision Zero is a strategy aimed at eliminating all traffic fatalities and severe injuries while promoting safe, healthy, and equitable mobility. Originating in Sweden in the 1990s, it has seen success in Europe and is gaining traction in major American cities. The approach acknowledges that human errors are inevitable, emphasizing the need for road systems and policies designed to prevent severe outcomes. Vision Zero involves collaboration among various stakeholders, including traffic planners, engineers, policymakers, and public health professionals, recognizing the multifaceted nature of safe mobility and setting clear goals to achieve zero fatalities and severe injuries.

Traffic Calming Program (2022)

This program was developed to provide effective and consistent guidelines for the implementation of traffic calming measures throughout the city to decrease vehicle speeds and increase the safety and livability of the residents of Lowell. The Traffic Calming Program provides a clear process by which citizens of Lowell are able to request that their street or neighborhoods be evaluated for traffic calming.

Action 1:

Prioritize improving sidewalk quality and pedestrian crossing safety projects along key pedestrian routes of higher demand, higher levels of ADA need, and to/from higher ridership transit stops.



Address Root Causes

Action Type(s): Capital Investment
Status: Existing/Ongoing Initiative
Timeframe: Medium Term
City Steward: City of Lowell, LRTA

Action 2:

Adopt Vision Zero and create a Vision Zero Safety Action Plan for Lowell.

Action Type(s): City programs and operations
Status: New Initiative
Timeframe: Medium Term
City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD

Action 3:

Prioritize implementing 2021 GoLowell proposed bike network. Evaluate which projects require parking and sidewalk tradeoffs/considerations. Identify which projects require curb removal and additional funding.

Action Type(s): Capital Investment, New Study and Plan
Status: Modified or Expanded Initiative
Timeframe: Medium Term
City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD

Action 4:

Extend Bruce Freeman Rail Trail into Lowell. Begin process with abutters to engage and study feasibility.

Action Type(s): New Study and Plan
Status: New Initiative
Timeframe: Near Term
City Steward: MassDOT, City of Lowell—DPD, MassTrails



Mobility

Goal 2: Provide convenient access to, and navigation toward, transportation options

Action 1:

Implement policies and strategies from 2021 City-wide parking study to assure parking availability and incentives for modeshift.

Action Type(s): Capital Investment, New Study and Plan

Status: New Initiative

Timeframe: Near Term

City Steward: City of Lowell, DCR

Action 2:

Improve trails wayfinding signage to and from activity centers. Examine needs and make plans and designs to install signage in appropriate locations.



Improve Communication

Action Type(s): City programs and operations

Status: Modified or Expanded Initiative

Timeframe: Near Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD, Parking Department

Action 3:

Develop a multilingual, digital and non-digital, communication strategy for both wayfinding and informing people about transportation options and circulation routes.



Improve Communication

Action Type(s): New Study and Plan

Status: Modified or Expanded Initiative

Timeframe: Near Term

City Steward: LRTA, City of Lowell, and employer partners

2021 Shared Streets Pilots

In 2021, the City received a \$165,755 Shared Streets Grant from MassDOT to enhance safety for pedestrians, cyclists, rollers, and drivers. Utilizing this grant, the City implemented two temporary projects in 2020 and two in 2021, aligning with the goals of GoLowell. These projects served as pilots to test changes, gather feedback, and assess the potential for making them permanent. The 2021 Shared Streets Pilots included the Pawtucket Boulevard project, which narrowed the road with concrete barriers to enhance pedestrian safety, and the Merrimack Street project at Cardinal O’Connell Parkway, which featured crosswalk safety improvements and transit stop enhancements. Feedback and data collected from these pilots will inform decisions on making some or all of these changes permanent in the future.



Mobility

Goal 3: High-quality, reliable transit, and incentives for utilizing transit options

Action 1:

Collaborate with LRTA to implement GoLowell recommended Cross-town and Downtown Connector routes.

Action Type(s): Regional Partnership

Status: Existing/Ongoing Initiative

Timeframe: Near Term

City Steward: LRTA

Action 2:

Collaborate with LRTA to finalize bus reliability projects along Thorndike Street for getting service in and out of Gallagher Transit Terminal. Prioritize areas with high concentrations of zero vehicle households and neighborhoods where there are higher levels of transit dependency.

Action Type(s): Regional Partnership, Capital Investment

Status: New Initiative

Timeframe: Medium Term

City Steward: City of Lowell, MassDOT, LRTA

Action 3:

Coordinate with LRTA to make the Sunday bus service pilot permanent to help service worker commutes and non-commuters users of transit for errands, shopping, and entertainment.

Action Type(s): City Program, Local Partnership

Status: Modified or Expanded Initiative

Timeframe: Near Term

City Steward: City of Lowell, LRTA

Action 4:

Collaborate with LRTA to create a capital improvement plan to improve bus stop accessibility and comfortability. Study quality of bus stop amenities and their distribution across the city.

Action Type(s): Regional Partnership

Status: Modified or Expanded Initiative

Timeframe: Near Term

City Steward: LRTA

Action 5:

Implement TDM (Transportation Demand Management) program in the GoLowell Plan

starting with City staff and then expanding programs to large employers. Assure that new large employers have TDM programming, especially those further away from transit.

Action Type(s): New Study and Plan

Status: New Initiative

Timeframe: Medium Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD, LRTA

Action 6:

Initiate a public transportation education and awareness campaign to promote public transport usage and expand awareness of social, economic and environmental benefits that public transportation brings.



Impact
Mindsets

Action Type(s): City Program, Local Partnership

Status: New Initiative

Timeframe: Near Term

City Steward: DPD, City Manager's office

Transportation Demand Management

Transportation Demand Management (TDM) centers on understanding individuals' transportation choices and endeavors to influence behavior towards more efficient use of existing infrastructure. This involves reducing single-occupancy vehicle trips and promoting the utilization of transit, ridesharing, walking, biking, and telecommuting. TDM proves to be cost-effective by guiding the design of transportation and physical infrastructure, naturally encouraging alternatives to driving, and fostering a better-balanced transportation system.

Q-Ryde

The GET A \$2 RYDE pilot program will allow employees in the greater Lowell area to get \$2 car rides to and from their workplaces. MassHire, a workforce development nonprofit serving the greater Lowell area, has partnered with the Q-Ryde transportation software company to provide affordable rides to local employees. The pilot, which began in October of 2023 and will run for a full year, uses federal funds to subsidize Q-Ryde drivers to pick up and drop off employees. These rides function similarly to commercial ride-share apps like Uber or Lyft, the user can schedule shared rides between their home and their workplace through the Q-Ryde website or over the phone, with the biggest difference being the low price of \$2.



Economic Development

Goals

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

Connections to our guiding values

- **Sustainability and resilience:** *Lowell will reduce the city's impact on the environment and become a resilient community.*

To become a resilient and sustainable city, it is crucial to ensure economic stability for all members of the community. This involves implementing strategies to diversify employment opportunities, aligning them with effective training and education, and actively supporting small businesses and inclusive entrepreneurship.

- **Proactive maintenance:** *Lowell will care for existing organizations, infrastructure and programs that support economic activity.*

The City will work closely with organizations who are actively offering training and education programs, supporting small businesses, and employers who are providing diverse and low-barrier jobs. The City will also proactively maintain built infrastructure and public programs that connect people to jobs, enhance existing job centers and attract new employers.

- **Accountable governance and community stewardship:** *Lowell will include different voices in key decisions to achieve shared economic prosperity.*

Lowell's diversity is integral to its vibrancy. The City supports equity and inclusion initiatives and strives to eliminate all types of disparities in economic opportunity. Essential to this effort is the creation of opportunities for the community to participate in decision-making processes.

- **Innovation and creativity:** *Lowell embraces innovation and creativity that support economic opportunities for all.*

Collaborating with anchor institutions, the City will enhance accessibility to training and education programs, advance economic opportunities, and foster job growth for everyone.

Indicators of progress

- 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

Aligned ongoing planning initiatives

- Hamilton Canal District
- Ayer City Market Study
- Mosaic Lowell
- TDI (Transformative Development Initiative) at the Acre
- Rapid Recovery Plan

Lowell Today

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

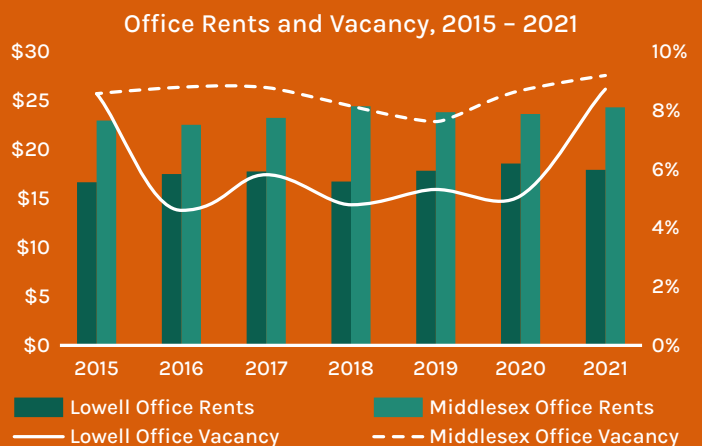
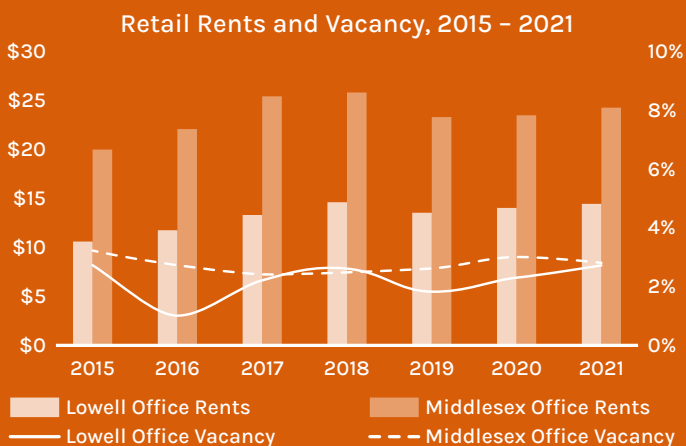
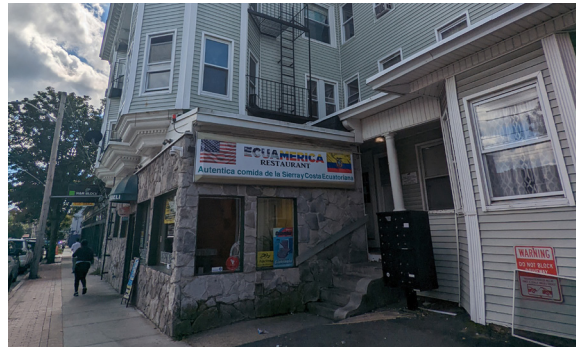
As Lowell continues to recover from the economic, health, and social consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, residents and business owners have called attention to the state of Downtown businesses. The Rapid Recovery Plan identified vacant storefronts and surveyed Downtown business owners, who reported 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.

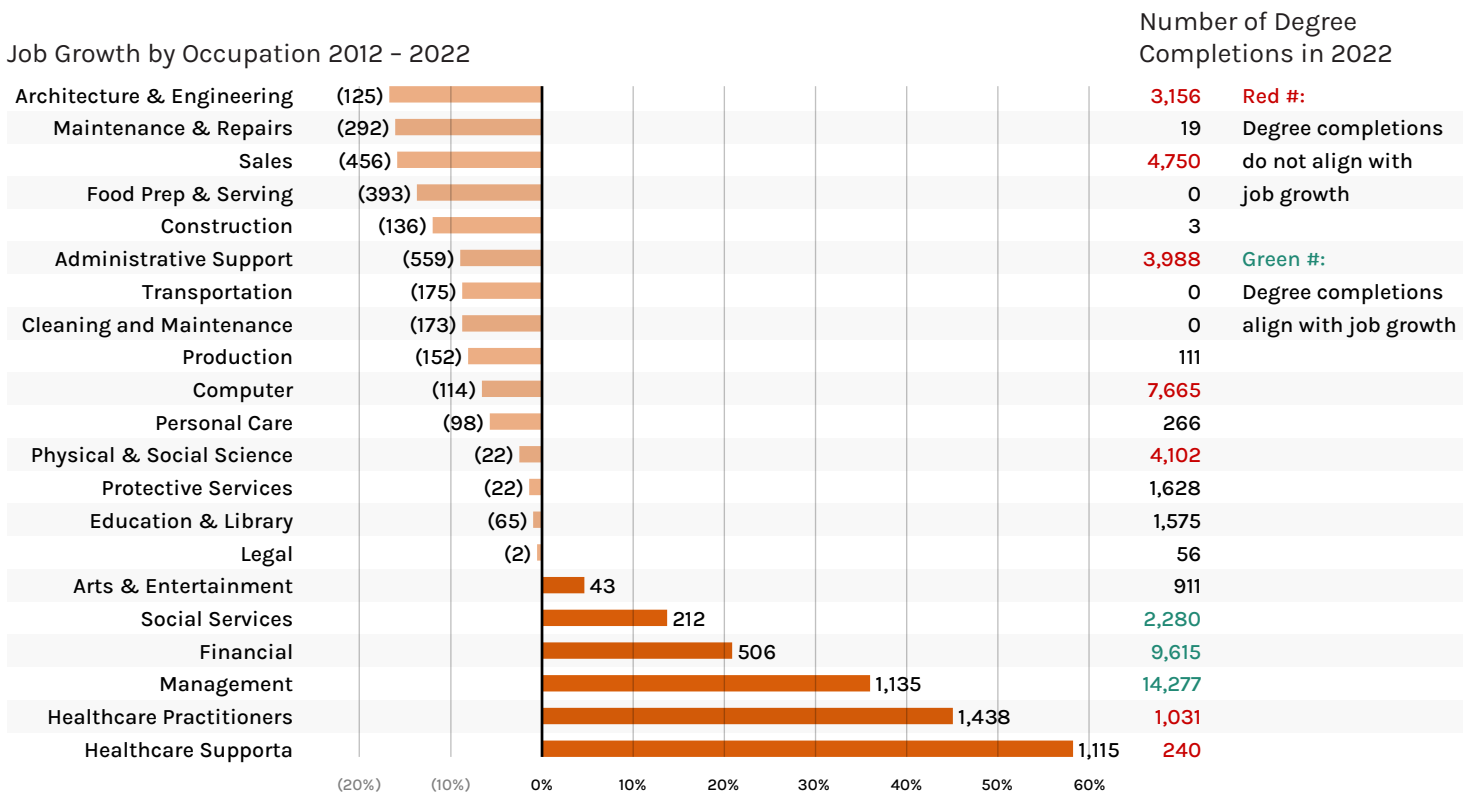


Photo Credit: Utile.



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 business and management, finances, computer science, sales, physical and social sciences, administration, and architecture and engineering. However, UMass Lowell does not offer programs for other in-demand occupations, such as healthcare support and healthcare practitioners. 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.



Completions refers to the number of degrees or certificates conferred for a specific course of study in a given year. Includes Associate, Bachelor, Master, and Doctorate degree completions from the University of Massachusetts Lowell.
Source: Lightcast

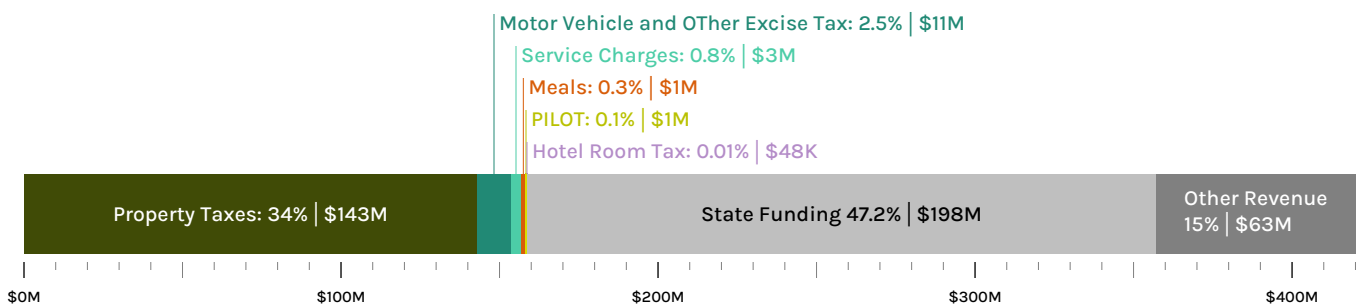
Lowell is well-positioned to benefit from regional and statewide trends in employment and job training

As is the case in the Boston region and Massachusetts overall, healthcare is one of the fastest growing sectors in Lowell. Jobs in healthcare support occupations—such as home health aides, occupational and physical therapy aides, and medical and nursing assistants—grew by 58% between 2012 and 2022, or by 1,115 jobs. Other growing occupations include healthcare practitioners, management, finance, and social services. The average earnings within each of these industries ranged from approximately \$43,000 to \$151,000 in 2022. Lowell’s median household income of \$73,008 lies in between this range, indicating that the city is attracting and retaining both low-paying and high-paying occupations, and in turn, generating greater resources for public services and major capital projects.

| Fastest growing occupations in Lowell in 2020 | 2020 Jobs | Avg. Annual Earnings (2020) |
|---|-----------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Healthcare Support | 3,027 | \$43,019 |
| 2. Healthcare Practitioners | 4,624 | \$110,247 |
| 3. Management | 4,293 | \$151,530 |
| 4. Financial | 2,928 | \$98,393 |
| 5. Social Services | 1,753 | \$64,030 |

Lowell has an opportunity to capitalize on strong growth to generate additional revenues for public services

Sound fiscal management is crucial to enable the City of Lowell to continue serving its residents and expanding the scope and quality of public services. Nearly half of the City’s revenue comes from state funding. Just 38% of the City’s revenue is generated from taxes and other fees. Nearly all tax revenue comes from property taxes on residences and businesses. Lowell’s strong development momentum provides an opportunity to capitalize on new streams of tax and fee revenue. Targeted public investment in development, infrastructure, and local amenities can support property values, and in turn, generate greater resources for public services and major capital projects.

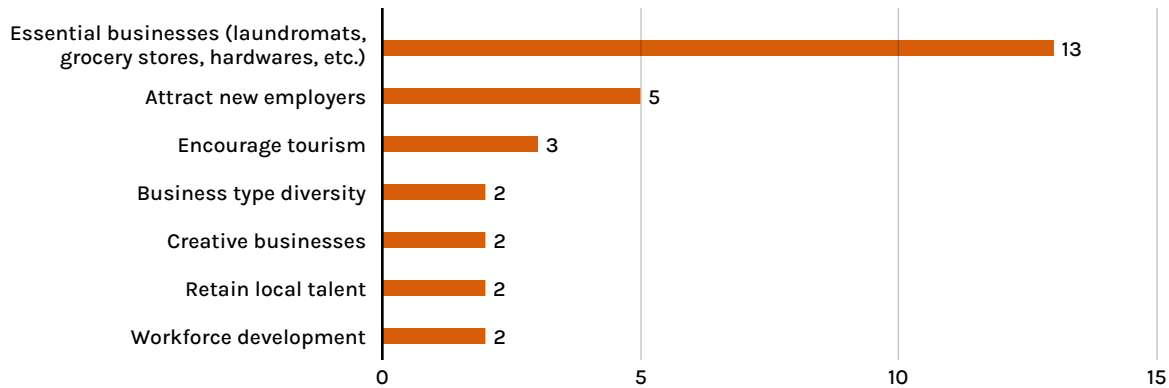


City of Lowell Revenues, FY 2021.

Thoughts from the Community

Economic Development Themes

Public Workshop 1



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

Public Meeting 1 participant

Attract people from whole regions with unique amenities and businesses (like canals).

Public Meeting 1 participant

Promote small businesses and expand business opportunities for minority groups.

Community Organizer interviewee

Provide opportunities for skill building, training and innovation.

Community Organizer interviewee

Bring back Downtown, there are too many empty storefronts!

Community Organizer interviewee”

Conversations with Mercy

In talking with small business owners, Mercy heard that the City has more work to do in supporting economic growth and development. One of the problems she heard discussed was the loss of young people moving away from Lowell to find success elsewhere. The city needs more early job opportunities in the form of internships, job shadowing, and apprenticeships that will keep young people local. Small businesses also need more support, especially when they first open. Such support could take the form of helping them own their own space. The city also needs to attract investors, which could be accomplished by having business incubators and leveraging currently vacant space.



Photo Credit: Marte Media. →





Economic Opportunity

Goal 1: Downtown revitalization

Action 1:

Identify space, design, and infrastructure needs by Downtown Lowell businesses; revisit regulations to allow for more modern and efficient commercial space designs; consider making outdoor seating a permanent initiative.

Action Type(s): City programs and operations

Status: Modified or Expanded Initiative

Timeframe: Near Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD (economic development)

Action 2:

Test and implement actions to reduce commercial vacancies in a way that both aligns with residents' desires and can increase foot traffic. Iterate tests based on feedback received.

Action Type(s): City programs and operations

Status: New Initiative

Timeframe: Near Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD (economic development)

Action 3:

Work in collaboration with our educational partners UML and MCC, to continue promoting Lowell's local businesses and incentivize students to frequent Downtown.



Action Type(s): Local Partnership

Status: New Initiative

Timeframe: Near Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD (economic development), MCC, UML

Action 4:

Create a 24-7 Downtown Plan that studies conversions of vacant office buildings into residential use, and continue to collaborate with other local, state, and federal economic development entities to identify funding opportunities to revitalize historic buildings.

Action Type(s): New Study and Plan, Local Partnership

Status: Modified or Expanded Initiative

Timeframe: Near Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD (economic development)



Photo Credit: Project Learn, Henry Marte.



Abisi Adult Center graduation ceremony.
Photo Credit: Lowell Sun.

Project Learn

projectlearninc.org



PROJECT LEARN

Project Learn is a 501(c)(3) organization that believes every young person in Lowell deserves the opportunity to learn, succeed, and thrive. They ensure all Lowell students have equitable access to high-quality educational experiences, expand access to high-quality experiential learning and pre-professional work experiences, and support both youth-led programs and youth adult partnerships. Project Learn also manages a sustainability charitable fund that supports innovative educational projects led by Lowell students and educators.

Abisi Adult Education Center

lowell.k12.ma.us/domain/1167

The Abisi Adult education center provides classes for every adult in the Greater Lowell area, so that everyone has the opportunity to earn high school credentials and/or to learn and improve their English. The center provides a setting where students can develop the literacy and math skills needed to qualify for further education, job training, or better employment.



Economic Opportunity

Goal 2: Promote, support, and grow Lowell's local businesses

Action 1:

Create a comprehensive branding and marketing program promoting local businesses. Coordinate with departments including Economic Development and CASE, and with producers and hosts of cultural events and programs. Emphasize support of local business community.



Improve
Communication

Action Type(s): Local Partnership, City Program

Status: Modified or Expanded Initiative

Timeframe: Near Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD (economic development), CASE, UML's Marketing and Social Policy professors and students

Action 2:

Establish partnerships and programming to support small businesses with provision of technical assistance, access to funding, and networking for small businesses, with targeted focus on supporting business owners in minority and immigrant communities and start-ups created by local educational institutions.



Address Root
Causes

Action Type(s): Local Partnership, Regional Partnership

Status: Modified or Expanded Initiative

Timeframe: Near Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD (economic development), UML, MCC

Action 3:

Fund retail incubators/pop-ups, not just in Downtown, but throughout the city.

Action Type(s): City programs and operations

Status: Existing/Ongoing Initiative

Timeframe: Near Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD (economic development)

Action 4:

Expand the City's Storefront Improvement Program to assist Lowell's local businesses in improving commercial spaces.

Action Type(s): Local Partnership, City Program

Status: New Initiative

Timeframe: Medium Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD (economic development), Office/Anchor Institutions

Action 5:

Increase funding and/or tax incentives for businesses looking to relocate to/within Lowell as they grow.

Action Type(s): Regional Partnership, City Program

Status: Modified or Expanded Initiative

Timeframe: Near Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD (economic development), Mass Supplier Diversity Office, Lowell-based businesses

Action 6:

Expand opportunities to become certified vendors for government procurement opportunities. Work with Mass Supplier Diversity Office and Lowell-based businesses.

Action Type(s): Local Partnership

Status: New Initiative

Timeframe: Medium Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD (economic development), Office/Anchor Institutions

Action 7:

Incentivize anchor institutions to purchase from local businesses to support small business growth and drive associated hiring.

Action Type(s): Local Partnership

Status: New Initiative

Timeframe: Medium Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD, Office/Anchor Institutions

Latinx Community Center for Empowerment (LCCE), Inc.



merrimackvalley.org/listing/latinx-community-center-for-empowerment-lcce-inc

The LCCE's mission is to empower members of the Latinx community by providing opportunities for education, employment, civic engagement, and meaningful decision-making. Their selection of social programs are designed to strengthen community assets and promote socio-economic development for the whole Latinx community.

African Community Center of Lowell (ACCL)



acclowell.org

ACCL equips African immigrants and refugees in the Greater Lowell area with the resources that allow them to be actively engaged community members, through educational, social, and cultural initiatives. They host events to promote learning, with documentaries and talks, and to promote cultural connections, where African music, costumes, and food are celebrated. ACCL also connects with the public school system to encourage locals of all ages to visit the center and learn about African heritage.



Economic Opportunity

Goal 3: Expand commercial and industrial opportunities and increase job opportunities for Lowell residents

Action 1:

Identify and create areas for redevelopment through the implementation of the Ayer City Urban Renewal Plan and Brownfields Program.

Action Type(s): Other Regulatory/Policy

Status: Existing/Ongoing Initiative

Timeframe: Medium Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD (project management)

Action 2:

Enhance workforce development initiatives. Build a pipeline of talent for jobs in industrial mixed-use districts and establish programs with anchor institutions to create an education-workforce pipeline.

Action Type(s): City programs and operations, Local Partnership

Status: Modified or Expanded Initiative

Timeframe: Near Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD (economic development), Anchor institutions

Action 3:

Development initiatives increasing the attractiveness of talent in Lowell in collaboration with anchor institutions.



Action Type(s): Local Partnership

Status: New Initiative

Timeframe: Near Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD (economic development), UML, MCC

Action 4:

Study space and infrastructure needs of new businesses and plan for how the City can accommodate these needs.

Action Type(s): City programs and operations, Local Partnership

Status: New Initiative

Timeframe: Medium Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD (economic development), UML, MCC



Photo Credit: Latinx Community Center for Empowerment (LCCE).



Photo Credit: The African Community Center of Lowell.

Masshire (Career Center)

masshirelowellcc.com/about



MassHire is part of the Massachusetts One-Stop Career Center System serving the communities of Billerica, Chelmsford, Dracut, Dunstable, Lowell, Tewksbury, Tyngsborough, and Westford. The Lowell Career Center operates under the direction of the City of Lowell and is chartered by the MassHire Greater Lowell Workforce Board. The career center provides job seekers with a range of work readiness services including youth job placement, technical training, and resume building. Out of school youth academic programs include HiSET preparation for ages 17+.



Energy, Climate, and Environment

Goals

1. Achieve carbon neutrality by 2050
2. Building resilience
3. Promote clean energy economy
4. Ensure energy equity

Connections to our guiding values

- **Sustainability and resilience:** *Lowell will address energy, climate, and environmental challenges at different scales through collective action.*
Lowell will build upon existing initiatives and plans, and initiate new efforts to diminish our environmental footprint. Lowell is committed to minimizing its impact on the environment and proactively preparing for, and mitigating the effects of, climate change. These initiatives span across various scales, from local, regional, and global.
- **Proactive maintenance:** *Lowell will proactively take support existing organizations, infrastructure and programs that are working towards energy, climate, and environmental initiatives.*
The City will work closely with organizations that are working on energy efficiency projects, mitigating impacts on climate change, and promoting environmental sustainability. In parallel, the City will focus on maintaining built infrastructure that uses clean energy sources and will promote sustainable mobility options.
- **Accountable governance and community stewardship:** *Lowell will take into account all community members' needs when addressing energy, climate, and environmental challenges.*
The City will focus on environmental justice and social equity to ensure that all members of the community are protected from environmental impacts and benefit equally from environmental resources.
- **Innovation and creativity:** *Lowell will embrace innovation and creativity to support resilience for all.*
The implementation of innovative and creative strategies is crucial for climate change actions and solutions. The City will collaborate with other stakeholders to address a spectrum of scales from hyperlocal to regional, and from individual to collective.

Indicators of progress

- 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

Aligned ongoing planning initiatives

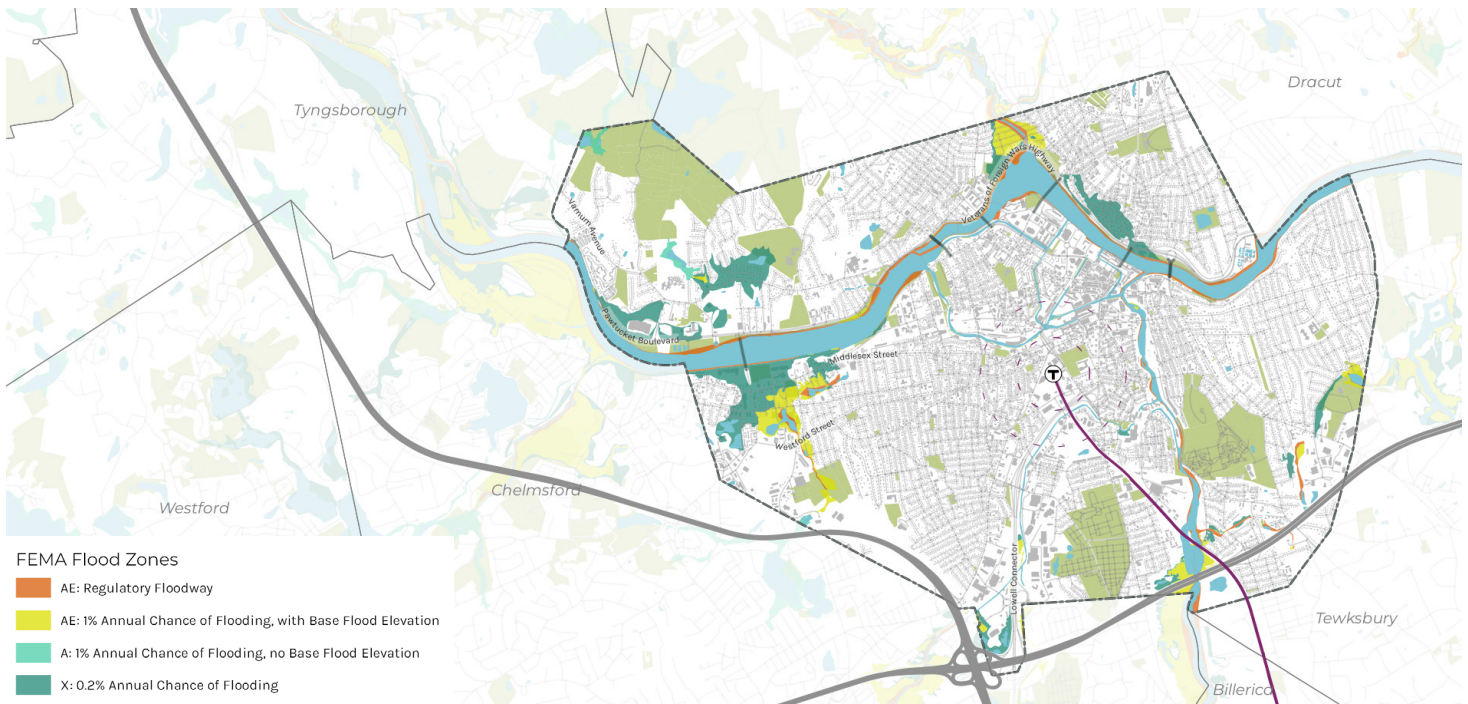
- Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness/Hazard Mitigation Plan (2020)
- Claypit Brook Climate Resilience Stormwater Management Capital Improvement Plan (2021)
- Resilient Urban Forest Master Plan
- Ongoing OSRP update

Lowell Today

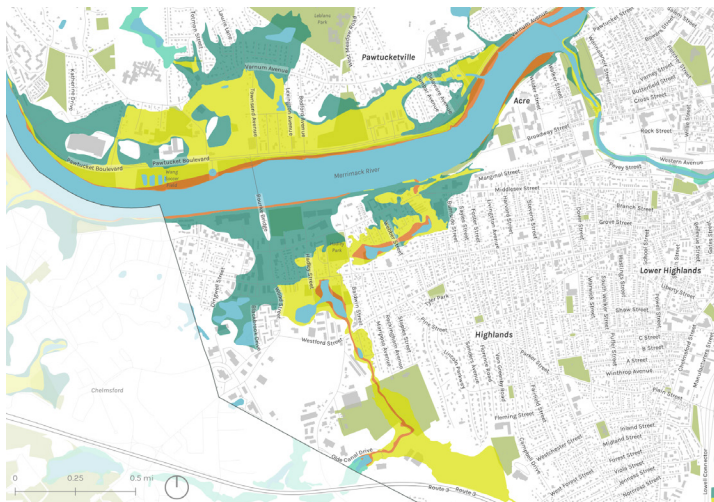
Communities near waterbodies in Lowell face a risk of flooding

Parts of the Highlands, Centralville, and Pawtucketville are at elevated risks for flooding. Much of Lowell’s flood risk is due to low lying land adjacent to an active river. Damage potential from floods will continue to rise as extreme weather events become more common due to climate change. We have an opportunity to adapt to the impacts of existing flood zones and set regulations for new development, infrastructure, and green infrastructure that could mitigate future flooding.

Flood Zones in Lowell



Source: Federal Emergency Management Agency.



Floodmap: Pawtucketville.



Floodmap: Centralville.

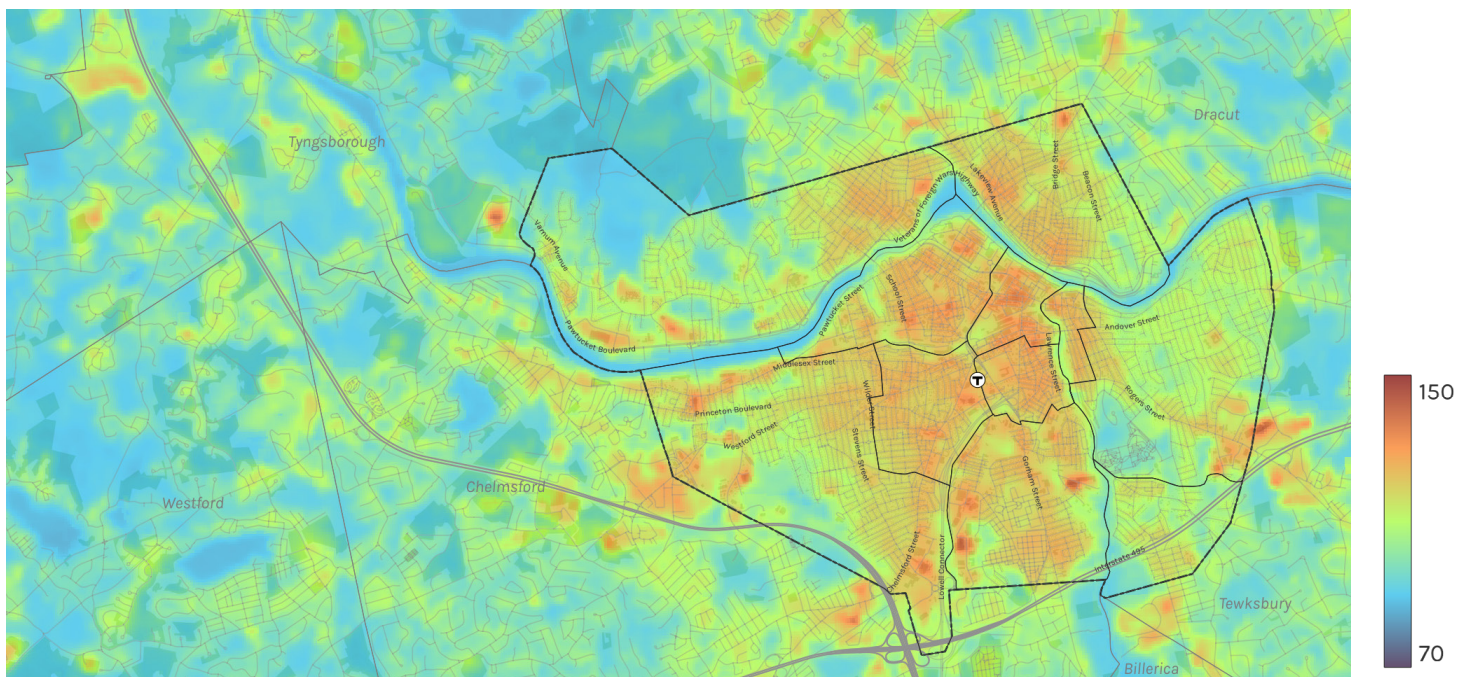
Heat islands pose an increasing public health risk

In addition to increased flooding, climate change will cause temperatures to rise in Lowell over the next few decades. Both the frequency and intensity of extreme heat events will increase. High temperatures can trigger health complications such as heat stroke and exacerbate existing cardiovascular or respiratory conditions. Extreme heat events are especially dangerous for small children, the elderly, outdoor workers, and people with chronic health conditions.

The built environment plays an important role in mitigating or exacerbating the effects of extreme heat. Places with lots of exposed pavement, such as parking lots, tend to retain heat the most. Places near water or tree cover can be dramatically cooler than most areas of the city on a hot day. For instance, on July 22, 2022, the surface temperature of the Centralville Market Basket parking lot reached 133 degrees Fahrenheit. Meanwhile, Rogers Fort Hill Park—a green space with substantial tree cover—reached just 92 degrees, a 41 degree difference!

As we prepare for more extreme heat events, developing a system of cooling infrastructure to mitigate heat stress, such as street trees, green infrastructure, drinking fountains, green roofs, open space, splash pads, pools, and public air-conditioned facilities will be crucial. Tree planting and retention of existing trees is a critical tool to mitigating heat island effect, thus developing a street tree program could be something to prioritize.

Surface Temperature (°F) in Lowell on July 22, 2022



Source: U.S. Geological Survey Landsat Data



Caption: Armory Park, which features a playground and community garden, will be getting a new splash pad as an additional cooling resource for neighborhood families to combat the effects of urban heat islands. Source: Kyle Zick Landscape Architects.

Lowell Resilient Urban Forest Master Plan and Urban Heat Island Assessment (2023)

This plan aims to improve Lowell’s urban forest and mitigate the effects of urban heat island effect throughout the city. The first step of the plan is to undergo a tree inventory to determine what tree cover the city already has, then to perform urban heat island assessments and gain community feedback to determine where trees are most needed. These actions will inform an equitable tree planting and maintenance plan that will reduce extreme heat, improve air quality, and mitigate flood risk.

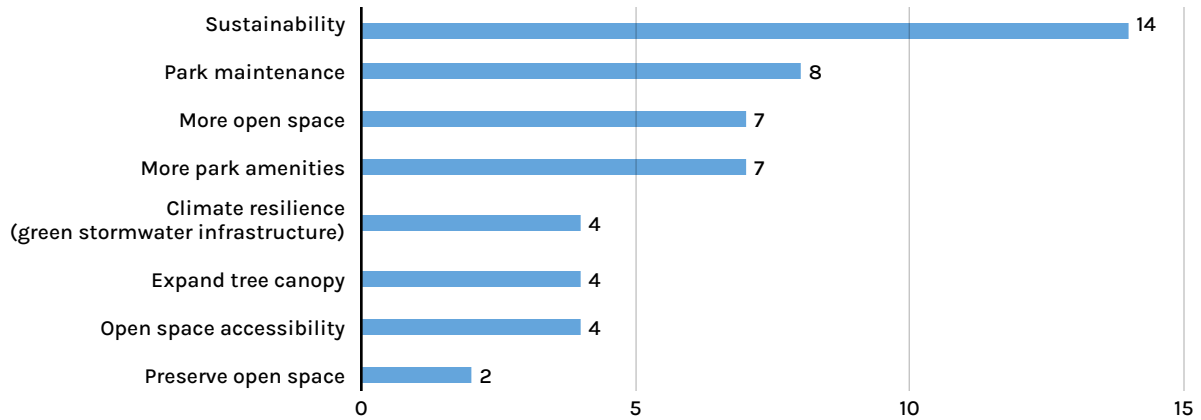
What is Green Infrastructure?

Green Infrastructure (GI) is a set of tools and practices that mimic natural methods of storing, infiltration and/or filtering stormwater. As more development occurs across Lowell, integration of these practices into new and redeveloped areas will help mitigate flooding, contribute to adaptation to increased rainfall, and where plants are present, will increase the filtration of urban stormwater before returning it back to groundwater reservoirs.

Thoughts from the Community

Energy, Climate, and Environment Themes

Public Workshop 1



Plant more trees in areas that have few to enhance livability and appeal of neighborhoods, care for trees we plant.

Public Workshop 1 participant

Recycling is an ongoing challenge due to cost and contamination levels. Lowell residents don't sort their trash for recycling.

Conversation with City staff

Support solar installation for families who can't afford.

Public Workshop 1 participant

Conversations with Mercy

Community groups want to see Lowell generate fewer emissions, grow more resilient, and advance energy equity. Mercy heard people say that there is room for more energy reduction tactics in buildings, that can be built to green standards, but also in ongoing education about weatherization and other energy saving strategies. Lowell can also do more to encourage the use of renewable energy, like solar and wind, through rebates for low energy consumption. Community groups have also called for auditing and improving the citywide recycling program, support for rain water catching infrastructure, and connecting low-income residents with resources on discounts and green cost-saving measures.



Photo Credit: Marte Media →





Energy, Climate, and Environment

Goal 1: Achieve carbon neutrality by 2050

Action 1:

Reduce energy consumption in existing buildings and new construction by:

1. Creating and implement a Climate Action and Resilience Plan for Lowell
2. Building capacity within Sustainability division
3. Creating an emissions reduction toolbox for use by residents, small businesses, and larger commercial properties to help them connect with resources
4. Review current permitting and review processes to ensure they align with emissions reduction goals
5. Exploring and adopting zoning changes to promote climate smart buildings and higher levels of green building design
6. Maintaining and expanding the work of Lowell's Energy Advocate to connect residents and small businesses with Mass Save programs
7. Initiating an engagement strategy for building owners, managers and occupants to accelerate decarbonization of existing buildings



Improve Communication



Restructure Rules

Action Type(s): City Program

Status: New Initiative

Timeframe: Near Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPW (sustainability)

Action 2:

Invest in and promote adoption of clean energy sources by:

1. Increasing the total installed solar infrastructure by 50% vs. FY 23 baseline
2. Promoting education of Community Choice Aggregation citywide
3. Exploring on-site power generation from city assets



Improve Communication

Action Type(s): City programs and operations

Status: Modified or Expanded Initiative

Timeframe: Medium Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPW (sustainability)

Action 3:

Reduce GHG emissions in Transportation by:

1. Expanding existing publicly accessible EV charging infrastructure to include locations beyond the downtown area
2. Making new construction EV ready
3. Expanding municipal solar installations across school, parking, and municipal properties, and expanding EV fleet citywide
4. Ensuring safe and quality pedestrian and bike infrastructure

Action Type(s): City programs and operations

Status: New Initiative

Timeframe: Near Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPW (sustainability)



Photo Credit: Utile

Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness/Hazard Mitigation Plan (2020)

Through this ongoing work, the City of Lowell will advance projects that mitigate the impacts of weather events, flooding, extreme heat, and other climate change threats. This process involves assessing and promoting resilient infrastructure, societal and economic well being, and preservation of environmental resources. The Massachusetts Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness program funds the Lowell plan, which will create future opportunities for work as the updated Hazard Mitigation Plan makes the City eligible to apply for federal FEMA grants.

Lowell Claypit Brook Climate Resilience Stormwater Management Capital Improvement Plan (2021)

Flooding, due to poor stormwater management and more storm activity, is an increasing problem in Lowell's neighborhoods. This plan focuses on Pawtucketville, near Claypit Brook, where the project team is working with local stakeholders to redesign culverts and identify nature-based supply drainage solutions that will protect local residents.



Energy, Climate, and Environment

Goal 2: Building Resilience

Action 1:

Build resilient districts and microgrids by:

1. Ensuring an equitable process and outcomes of the Lowell networked geothermal pilot project, including stakeholder engagement, reduced energy burdens, public health benefits and community ownership
2. Expanding networked geothermal in densely populated neighborhoods

Action Type(s): City programs and operations

Status: Modified or Expanded Initiative

Timeframe: Medium Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPW (sustainability)

Action 2:

Implement recommendations set forth in updated Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Plan and the Resilient Urban Forest Master Plan and Urban Heat Island Assessment.

Action Type(s): City programs and operations

Status: Modified or Expanded Initiative

Timeframe: Medium Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPW (sustainability)

Goal 3: Promote clean energy economy

Action 1:

Develop clean energy workforce in the city by

1. Supporting for the development of existing and new clean energy companies in the city
2. Work with Mass CEC to design and coordinate a Lowell specific program

Action Type(s): New Study and Plan

Status: New Initiative

Timeframe: Medium Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPW (sustainability)



Energy, Climate, and Environment

Goal 4: Energy Equity: ensure that decarbonization goals do not result in a disproportionate increase in energy burdens for our most vulnerable residents

Action 1:

Reduce energy burden and protect consumers from deceptive clean energy products by:

1. Focus on supporting residents that are vulnerable to energy burden with resources such as information on discount rates being available for income eligible residents.
2. Assess baseline levels of weatherization completed in qualified census tracts and recommend an action plan to increase participation
3. Maintain and expand the work of Lowell’s Energy Advocate to connect residents with arrearage management and forgiveness programs, fuel assistance, community choice aggregation, and Mass Save programs
4. Develop resources that educate, inform and protect residents from deceptive marketing of renewables, including misleading or unsubstantiated “green” claims made by companies to their customers.



Improve
Communication

Action Type(s): New Study and Plan

Status: New Initiative

Timeframe: Medium Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPW (sustainability)

What is deceptive green marketing?

Deceptive green marketing describes business practices that mislead customers by making promises that companies intend to break, claiming certain products or companies are more sustainable than they really are, and other harmful tactics. Unfortunately, renewable industries, like solar panel companies, sometimes engage in these deceptive practices, overpromising on cost savings, underdelivering with poorly done installations, and trapping customers with confusing and restrictive contracts.



Parks, Open Spaces, and Trails

Goals

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

Connections to our guiding values

- **Sustainability and resilience:** *Lowell will strengthen social and climate resilience and sustainability in parks, open spaces, and trails.*
Lowell is dedicated to building upon existing initiatives and plans while initiating new efforts to ensure that shared parks, open spaces, and trails provide benefits for all members of the community.
- **Proactive maintenance:** *Lowell will proactively take care of parks, open spaces, and trails.*
Lowell is committed to investing equitably in maintaining open space facilities and infrastructure in alignment with OSRP priorities, and ensuring inclusivity and accessibility for all members of the community.
- **Accountable governance and community stewardship:** *Lowell is committed to taking into account all community members' needs when addressing parks, open spaces, and trails.*
Essential to achieving social and climate resilience in shared parks, open spaces, and trails, is the establishment of accountability in governance and the creation of opportunities for the community to actively participate in decision-making processes.
- **Innovation and creativity:** *Lowell embraces innovation and creativity to strengthen social resilience, climate resilience, and sustainability in parks, open spaces, and trails.*
The City will partner with other local organizations to promote innovative and creative wayfinding initiatives, awareness campaigns, urban agriculture projects, tree-planting efforts, placemaking projects, and more to increase social and climate resilience throughout Lowell's open space network.

Indicators of progress

- 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
- Reilly Playground Upgrade
- O'Donnell Park Improvements
- North Common Improvements
- Father Maguire Park Improvements
- Hadley Park Improvements

Aligned ongoing planning initiatives

- Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) Update
- Lowell Resilient Urban Forest Master Plan
- ARPA Neighborhood Improvement Plan
 - Saint Louis Sponge Park Phase 1
 - Clemente Park Master Plan Phase 1
 - Jackson Street Playground/Park
- 2023 Construction Projects
 - South Common Phase 2
 - Crowley Park Playground Upgrade
 - Callery Park Playground Upgrade
 - Kittredge Park Playground Upgrade
- 2024 Construction Projects:
 - Armory Park Splash Pad
 - South Common Phase 3
 - Shedd Park Concession Building
 - Veterans Memorial Park
- 2025 Construction Projects:
 - McPherson Park Traffic Playground
 - Durkin Park Improvement project

Lowell Today

While most residents have a park or open space nearby, some neighborhood parks and open spaces have less amenities or are not consistently maintained.

As identified in the 2019 – 2026 Open Space and Recreation Plan, city-owned parks and open spaces are located throughout the city and close to most homes. However, the level of amenities and quality of maintenance can vary in each park or open space. The 2019-2026 OSRP outlined a Seven-Year Action Plan that highlights specific improvements at a variety of open spaces and parks across the city. The City should focus on implementing the remaining goals from this plan and when doing so prioritize improvements in parks and open spaces that are in need of the most repair or are in the densest or most underserved neighborhoods. As the City prepares to update the Open Space and Recreation Plan, future park and open space goals could be identified through the lens of strengthening social resilience, equity, access and maintenance, climate resilience, and sustainability.

Because city-owned public parks and open spaces are already located throughout the city, the focus on improvements should relate to the programming offered in each space and the implementation of an appropriate maintenance program. By gaining input from local residents, the City can identify desired activities suitable for each park and seek to provide a range of uses that will attract all age groups. Specifically, it has been mentioned that activities for teenagers and our older populations are needed in many parks. As part of any park improvements, the City should seek to ensure that all City parks and open spaces are universally accessible, ADA compliant, and provide ADA-compliant play equipment at each playground.

Community Spotlight: Lowell Litter Krewe

lowelllitterkrewe.org



The Lowell Litter Krewe is a volunteer based group committed to beautifying Lowell through litter clean-up and renovation projects. They are committed to creating volunteer clean-up opportunities in Lowell, being flexible enough to meet community needs, and providing tools necessary to get the job done. The group shares that “tomorrow there’ll be more of us, and anything you can dream, together we can build with the talent of our hands, the creativity of our minds, and the depth of our hearts.”



Photo Credit: Lowell Litter Krewe.

The physical and social connections to parks and open spaces can be improved

Safe street crossings, bicycle lanes, sidewalks, and off-street pathways provide important physical connections to parks and open spaces. Ensuring that this important mobility infrastructure is safe and welcoming is essential to improving the access to, and use of, neighborhood parks and open spaces. As part of any park or open space improvements project, upgrading the surrounding connections should also be considered.

Improving residents' awareness of and sense of connectedness to their local outdoor community spaces is a critical part of improving access and connections to the City's park and open space network. An improved city-wide wayfinding strategy can help guide residents to safe routes of travel to neighborhood outdoor spaces. Multi-language signage in each park and open space can help make residents feel welcome. Furthermore, incorporating culturally relevant amenities or programming within parks and open spaces can increase residents' feeling of connectedness to their local spaces.

The City's trail and greenway network is a unique asset, but some important connections are missing

The city is already home to some excellent greenways and off-street multi-use paths that take advantage of, and provide access to, the unique natural environment surrounding the city. Near the city center, these trails typically follow the rivers and canal networks. While these trails are extensive, critical gaps still exist, such as some segments of trails along the Merrimack River and the Pawtucket Canal area which is a missing link along the City's canalwalk network. The Concord River Greenway has three constructed segments, while the final missing segments are designed and funded.

As part of future public realm improvements, the City should consider completing the missing links in the downtown trail network, of which the Pawtucket Canal could be prioritized. The construction of canalwalks along the Pawtucket Canal could be a transformative project that would provide a major new greenspace in the Highlands neighborhood, provide a safe alternative travel route for residents, and link key parts of the city together.

Note: Go to the Energy, Climate and Environment section on page 136 to learn more about urban canopy, street tree planting, green infrastructure, and reduced impervious surfaces.



O'Donnell Park in Sacred Heart. Photo Credit: Jessica Wilson.

Ongoing OSRP Update

In order to access certain open space grant opportunities, the City is required to update its Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) every 7 years. The current Plan spans from 2019 - 2026. The City will be conducting extensive community engagement in 2025 to inform the next OSRP update. While the Lowell Forward master plan provides overarching open space goals and some big-ticket actions, the OSRP will dive deep into assessing the current state of the City's open spaces and providing prioritized recommendations to guide the next 7 years of open space investments and initiatives. The City has already implemented many of the actions from the 2019-2026 OSRP, such as installing a shade structure over the bocce court at Clemente Park, constructing South Common Phase 2, and installing an accessible playground at Hovey Park. Ongoing actions include renovating the playground and basketball court at Durkin Park, installing play equipment in Downtown, and building an improved dog park.



Photo Credit: Huntress Sports

OSRP Goals



Goal #1: Strengthen **pedestrian connections** throughout all neighborhoods to provide residents safer access to parks, open spaces, and the opportunity to walk for exercise and leisure.



Goal #2: Install **cycling infrastructure** across the City; prioritize non-vehicular modes of travel and recreational opportunities for residents.



Goal #3: Increase the types and availability of **water-based recreation** opportunities for residents.



Goal #4: Prioritize **improved maintenance, security, and preservation** of parks and open spaces across the City and enhance these spaces with the new amenities requested by residents.



Goal #5: Streamline **communication** to the public about parks, open spaces, amenities, and events to increase knowledge of and access to these offerings.



Goal #6: Increase **recreational opportunities** and modify existing parks and open spaces so that all residents regardless of age, ability, and neighborhood of residence can enjoy them.

Thoughts from the Community

We do have plenty of parks, but they need maintaining. Parks need to be clean and walkable.

Conversation with Mercy (Community Organizer)

One of my great wishes for public space in Lowell is that it belongs to everyone, but that each person feels like it's something that's theirs, like an extension of their backyard.

Conversation with Mercy (Community Organizer)

Parks could be more accommodating for all residents/ community needs.

Conversation with Mercy (Community Organizer)

We need to solve unkept parks, poor sidewalks, poor maintenance, insufficient lighting (reduce criminal activities).

Conversation with Mercy (Community Organizer)

One thing that always comes back to me is when immigrant gardeners talk about the community gardens being small slices of home.

Conversation with Mercy (Community Organizer)

Conversations with Mercy

Mercy heard many great recommendations when discussing Lowell's parks and open spaces. For one thing, many people said they wanted to see more parks with community amenities in more neighborhoods, specifically in the densest neighborhoods. They also want to see existing parks in better condition, with better lighting, painted basketball courts, sufficient parking near public open space, and less litter. To combat litter, community groups suggested fines for contractors that leave behind debris and using trail cameras to catch other litterers. In addition, community groups also talked about the importance of community gardens in parks and open spaces. Gardens can improve food sovereignty, improve users' health, and strengthen the community.



Photo Credit: Utile →

Goals and Actions





Parks, Open Spaces, and Trails

Goal 1: Strengthen Social Resilience, Equity, Access, and Maintenance to and of Parks, Open Spaces, and Trails

Action 1:

Equitably invest in and maintain open space facilities including recreational facilities, open spaces, and trails in alignment with OSRP priorities, and to ensure inclusivity and accessibility for all ages and abilities.

Action Type(s): Capital Investment

Status: Modified or Expanded Initiative

Timeframe: Medium Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD, Parks Department

Action 2:

Improve physical access to parks and outdoor programs by improving pedestrian and bicyclist infrastructure along key routes.

Action Type(s): Capital Investment, New Study and Plan

Status: New Initiative

Timeframe: Medium Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD, DPW

Rollie's Farm

Three organizations—Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust (LP&CT), Mass Audubon (MAS), and Mill City Grows—are working in partnership to protect Lowell's last farm, known locally as Rollie's Farm. The farm is located at 1413 and 1415 Varnum Avenue. The partnership will create an urban wildlife sanctuary and educational center dedicated to local agricultural and community-based environmental education. Mass Audubon and the Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust (LP&CT) will acquire these parcels which will have conservation restrictions placed on them. Both Mass Audubon and LP&CT are nationally accredited as land trusts committed to permanent land conservation and program excellence. Mill City Grows will establish a variety of programs on the space, including urban agriculture, community gardens, greenhouses, a food forest, farmer's markets, and educational programming.

Action 3:

Improve equitable communication about parks and outdoor programs by reducing barriers to participation. Examples include: developing a multilingual wayfinding strategy and a language access center.



Improve
Communication

Action Type(s): City programs and operations, Capital Investment

Status: New Initiative

Timeframe: Near Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD, Partners like UML, MCC, NPS, others

Action 4:

Prepare an open space master plan for the Pawtucket Canal and surrounding industrial/non-residential lands (from Pawtucket Street at the Merrimack River to the Thorndike Street Bridge), considering both sides of the Pawtucket Canal.

Action Type(s): New Study and Plan

Status: Modified or Expanded Initiative

Timeframe: Medium Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD, Parks Department, NPS



Photo Credit: Jessica Wilson

Community Spotlight: Mill City Grows

millcitygrows.org

Mill City Grows fosters food justice by improving physical health, economic independence, and environmental sustainability in Lowell through increased access to land, locally-grown food, and education. They focus on food justice advocacy, food access, community engagement, and healthy work environments.

Strategic Plan Priorities: Food Justice Advocacy, Food Access, Community Engagement, and Healthy Work Environment.





Parks, Open Spaces, and Trails

Goal 2: Strengthen Climate Resilience and Sustainability in Parks, Open Spaces, and Trails

Action 1:

Plant trees along priority corridors and within urban heat islands in alignment with the City's Urban Forestry Plan.

Action Type(s): City programs and operations

Status: Existing/Ongoing Initiative

Timeframe: Medium Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD, DPW, Parks Department

Action 2:

Reduce impervious surfaces and install green infrastructure, where applicable, to manage stormwater runoff and mitigate flooding, and create a maintenance plan.

Action Type(s): Capital Investment, Other Regulatory/Policy

Status: New Initiative

Timeframe: Long Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD, DPW, Parks Department

Action 3:

Initiate a public stormwater management awareness and education campaign, in partnership with universities and nonprofits, to inform businesses and residents about effects of stormwater pollution on Lowell's waterways and ways in which they can help reduce stormwater runoff.

Action Type(s): Local Partnership

Status: New Initiative

Timeframe: Near Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD, DPW, Partners like UML, MCC, others





Arts and Culture

Goals

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

Connections to our guiding values

- **Sustainability and resilience:** *Lowell is committed to strengthening resilience and sustainability in coordination with arts and culture.*

Lowell will build a strong and resilient community that supports diverse arts, cultures, and creative placemaking.

- **Proactive maintenance:** *Lowell will be proactive about taking care of existing arts and culture assets.*

The City will work with existing organizations to proactively maintain and promote existing arts and culture assets.

- **Accountable governance and community stewardship:** *Lowell is committed to taking into account all community members' needs related to arts and culture.*

A diverse and inclusive community must be welcoming to all, and ensure that everyone has the opportunity to participate in decision making processes, join in civic life, and foster a sense of belonging. The City will enhance public participation, remove disparities based on race and other factors, and work towards equity and inclusion for all members of the community.

- **Innovation and creativity:** *Lowell embraces innovation and creativity to leverage the arts, support creative placemaking, and support Lowell's economic vitality.*

Lowell celebrates diversity and will support arts and culture, which are essential to help us learn from each other and share our diverse traditions and histories. The City will collaborate with existing organizations that are celebrating our diverse arts and cultures.

Indicators of progress

- 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

Aligned ongoing planning initiatives

- Mosaic Lowell
- TDI Acre (Transformative Development Initiative)

Lowell Today

Lowell has many cultural, art, and creative assets throughout its unique neighborhoods

- More than 80 nonprofit organizations working in arts, culture, youth development, health, and education
- Over 150 food and restaurant options
- Over 30 festivals and events for food, music, art, and cultural celebrations

The recently completed Mosaic Lowell Cultural Economy Plan for Lowell outlines how a growing creative economy builds wealth in Lowell and the region by creating jobs, generating tax revenue, increasing tourism and consumer purchases, and attracting people to live and invest in the city.

In 2019, the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis reported that the arts and culture sector contributed \$25.5 billion to the Massachusetts economy, representing 4.3% of the state’s GDP and more than 140,000 jobs. This was more than other large industries, including construction, education services, and agriculture. In Lowell alone, the nonprofit arts and cultural industry contributed more than \$12 million to the economy in Fiscal Year 2015 (FY15). This supported the equivalent of 500 full-time jobs, paid out \$8 million in household income to residents, and generated nearly \$500,000 in revenue for both the local and state governments.

Promoting Lowell as a regional hub for arts, culture and history continues to be an important goal for the City

Entities such as the City’s Office of Cultural Affairs & Special Events (CASE), non-profit organizations like the Lowell Plan, the Greater Lowell Community Foundation, and Mosaic Lowell have increasingly emphasized the promotion and support of arts and culture. Initiatives like the Like Lowell campaign underscore Lowell’s longstanding commitment to the cultural sector as a valuable contributor to the economic development and overall appeal of Lowell for residents and visitors. The Lowell Forward plan is poised to further enhance and propel these ongoing endeavors, viewing them not only as an economic development strategy but also as a central element that contributes to the overall appeal of Lowell as a vibrant place to reside or explore.

Mosaic Lowell

Mosaic Lowell is a collaboration of stakeholders working to develop and implement an arts, cultural, and creative economy plan for Lowell to enhance the quality of life for all and elevate Lowell into an even more exciting place to live, work, and visit. To learn more, visit mosaiclowell.org

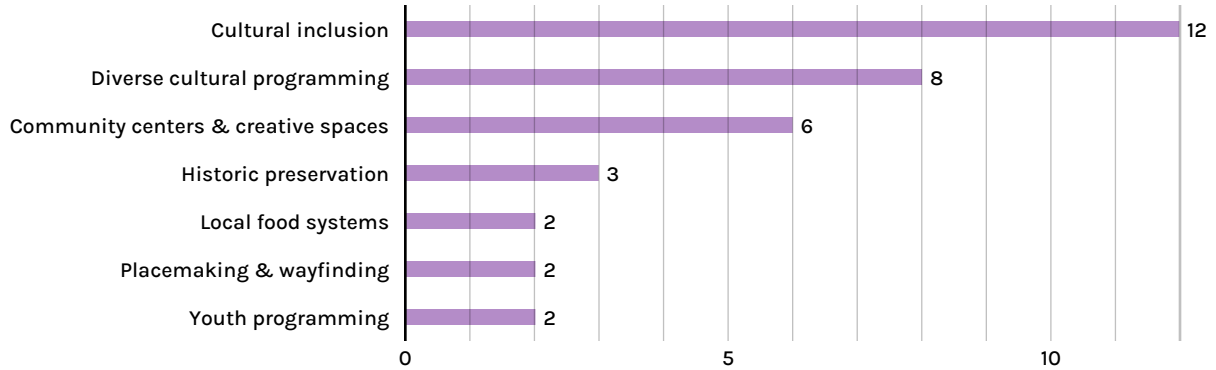
Mosaic Lowell Goals

- 1 **Illuminate Lowell arts, culture, and creativity** to the city, region, and world through marketing and other efforts.
- 2 **Create a strong network of communications, collaborations, and partnerships** across organizations, businesses, sectors, cultures, and demographics.
- 3 **Grow the available resources and support** for arts, culture, and creativity in Lowell.
- 4 **Enhance lifelong learning opportunities**, including school opportunities, in arts, culture, and making for Lowell residents.
- 5 **Identify and capitalize on new funding and revenue opportunities** for the City and businesses.
- 6 **Bring arts programming and opportunities to every neighborhood** and support culture and independent businesses throughout the city.
- 7 **Integrate arts and culture** in mainstream City planning initiatives and investments.
- 8 **Increase the presence of publicly accessible art** in the city and facilitate a greater diversity of types, subjects, and creators of publicly accessible art.
- 9 **Make arts and cultural spaces easier to find and access, and accessible to all.**
- 10 **Build on existing events and festivals** to make the city a showcase for these activities and ensure local businesses and creatives benefit from these events.

Thoughts from the Community

Arts and Culture Themes

Public Workshop 1



More youth programs for kids in each neighborhood.

Public Meeting 1 participant

Lowell spends a lot of time celebrating the past, but Lowell also needs to celebrate the present and the future.

Community Organizer interviewee

Make Lowell a destination and promote local artists.

Community Organizer interviewee



Conversations with Mercy

Great ideas related to arts and culture came up in conversations with small business owners. Some of these include: expanding on Summer Pop-Up Markets, utilizing the Lowell Auditorium for more acts of different types throughout the year, and adopting a MITS (Mariposa in the Schools) model to bring tradition-based performing art forms to students, educators and community groups.

Mercy also spoke with organizations like Project Learn who are leading ArtUp Lowell, a creative-placemaking initiative that brings together Lowell's diverse community of young people, artists, educators, and social entrepreneurs to create visual and performing arts that enhance public spaces throughout the city. Mercy and the City also co-hosted an artist focus group with Mosaic Lowell.



Photo Credit: Marte Media →





Arts and Culture

Goal 1: Leverage the arts and support creative placemaking in Lowell

Action 1:

Incorporate art and culture in mainstream planning initiatives including public realm improvements and capital projects, larger economic development initiatives, and various communication/engagement campaigns.



Improve
Communication

Action Type(s): Local Partnership, New Study and Plan

Status: New Initiative

Timeframe: Near Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—CASE, City Manager's Office, Mosaic Lowell

Action 2:

Support artists and creative makers of all ages, backgrounds, and income levels to participate in arts and cultural placemaking in Lowell. Identify and address space and accessibility needs, financial barriers, marketing, and promotional networking.



Address Root
Causes

Action Type(s): Local Partnership, New Study and Plan

Status: New Initiative

Timeframe: Near Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—CASE, DPD

Action 3:

Support, align, and help implement priority goals and actions outlined in Mosaic Lowell Arts and Cultural Plan.

Action Type(s): City Program

Status: New Initiative

Timeframe: Medium Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—Mosaic Lowell



Arts and Culture

Goal 2: Support Lowell’s economic vitality through arts, culture, and creativity

Action 1:

Develop and execute a marketing plan for the city coordinated with various City departments and partners, and that includes arts, culture, businesses, and visitors.

Action Type(s): New Study and Plan

Status: Ongoing

Timeframe: Near Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD (planning/zoning), CASE

Action 2:

Revise zoning to support more arts-related uses such as studios and live/work spaces.



Restructure Rules

Action Type(s): Local Partnership, Zoning Update

Status: New Initiative

Timeframe: Near Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—DPD, CASE

Action 3:

Create a sustainable initiative to lead and coordinate art, culture, and creative economy strategies and actions in Lowell.

Action Type(s): Local Partnership

Status: New Initiative

Timeframe: Near Term

City Steward: City of Lowell—CASE, Mosaic Lowell

National Park and Historic Board highlight

The Lowell Historic Board is the City of Lowell’s historic preservation agency, created in 1983 by special act of the Massachusetts Legislature and in response to Congressional requirements placed upon the city to preserve, protect, and enhance Lowell’s historic resources when the National Park was created. Working collaboratively with project proponents and partners including the National Park for forty years, nearly \$1 billion in development activity has taken place within the downtown while over 98% of 5.2 million square feet of mill space has been rehabilitated.

Established in 1978, Lowell National Historical Park preserves and interprets the historic structures and stories of the Industrial Revolution and its legacies in Lowell, serving as a catalyst for revitalization of the city’s physical and economic environments and promoting cultural heritage and community programming. This unique urban national park works collaboratively with a variety of partners and the local community to help tell, preserve, and commemorate the stories of Lowell, its diverse people, and its many cultures.

Folk Festival

For over three decades, the Lowell Folk Festival has been one of the country’s most popular celebrations of cultural arts and music. For three days each summer, the Festival features musicians from around the world on five stages, showcases folk craft areas and demonstrations, and shares regional and global food traditions. The Lowell Folk Festival attracts over 150,000 people each year and generates over \$7 million in economic impact, providing a major boost to the economy of Greater Lowell.

Next Steps

The vision, growth strategies, and specific goals outlined in Lowell Forward result from extensive community engagement, a thorough assessment of current city conditions, and well-informed foresight regarding future possibilities. The vision and goals serve not only as aspirations but function as a roadmap, providing tangible ideas that guide program and policy interventions, and influence future decision-making in the city. While the formal Lowell Forward planning process comes to a close, there is much to undertake proactively in the implementation phase.

Achieving our vision and goals, as highlighted throughout this plan, requires concerted efforts from various stakeholders and necessitates collaboration across the city, including the private development sector and non-profit agencies. The Lowell Planning Department (DPD) will spearhead efforts to ensure external stakeholders align with the established vision, values, and goals for envisioning the city's future. More importantly, the City commits to being accountable to the community's interests, recognizing that the city's and community's needs may evolve, requiring us to refine and realign priority actions accordingly.

While the complete and effective implementation of the plan will take several years, success should not be solely measured by an ideal end state but by how well we work towards achieving our goals. Continuous community involvement is essential to this process. The growth strategies and progress indicators will help incrementally track successful implementation. Our key to success lies in maintaining open communication with Lowellians, sustaining action in adopting the strategies and recommendations in this plan, and fostering the right partnerships and targeted investments needed to enhance the vibrancy, safety, prosperity, and equity of our neighborhoods.

