Master Plan
Public Opinion &
Existing Conditions Data
March, 2012
General Overview

• Master Plan Overview & Planning Process
• Public Opinion & Data Collection Process
• Public Opinion General Trends & Highlights
• Survey Importance, Performance & Resource Trade-offs
• Visioning Session Themes
• Online Participatory Planning Tool Themes
• Existing Conditions Data Highlights
• Next Steps
Master Plan Overview

• 20 year vision for the future
• Single chapter on sustainability

• Surveyed 1,000 residents
• Interviewed community leaders and business owners
• Held focus groups and forums
Master Plan Overview

2003 Master Plan Goals

- Neighborhood Quality of Life
- A Lifetime of Housing Opportunities
- Unique Waterfront Environments
- A Vibrant and Diverse Downtown
- Institutional and Cultural Development
- Economic Growth
- Regional Retail
- Transportation
- Sustainability
Master Plan Update/Sustainability Planning Process

- Bi-Weekly DPD Steering Committee Meetings
- 10 Interdepartmental City Staff Meetings
- Compilation of Data to Provide Snapshot of Lowell Today and Track Trends Over Time (Demographics, Housing, Transportation, etc)
- Public Participation Process (Survey, Visioning Sessions, Online Planning Tool)
- Draft Document
- Final Document
Public Participation Process

- **SURVEY** 800 households completed a telephone survey conducted by Research America, INC in 4 languages. Data was analyzed by DPD.

- **VISIONING SESSIONS** 160 stakeholders attended 5 sessions facilitated by DPD. Translation and transportation were provided.

- **ONLINE PARTICIPATORY PLANNING TOOL**

  175 participants, including 61 teens from 6 local youth organizations, shared over 1,000 comments through an online participatory planning tool launched for the first time in partnership with Emerson College.
Public Participation Process

Outreach Strategy

• 20 Public Presentations
• Email Newsletters to 2,000 Community Members
• Direct Invitation to 9 City Boards & Commissions
• Translated Flyers Posted in Downtown, Neighborhood Business Districts, & through 10 Institutions/Organizations
• Lowell Telecommunications Corporation Bulletin Posted in 4 Languages
• Facebook, Twitter & Local Blogs
• Radio Broadcasts
• Lowell Sun & Boston Globe Coverage
Public Opinion Trends

- Public Safety, Cost of Living, City Services, Neighborhood Character, Schools, and the Environment continue to be highly important
- Challenge of Maintaining Both City Services and Low Property Taxes
- Shift in Interest from Affordable Housing to Jobs
- Desired Support for a Vibrant Local Economy, Including More Diversity of Entertainment/Shopping Opportunities Downtown
- Some variation in City Performance Ratings by Age, Ethnicity & Neighborhood
- Bicycle, Bus & Pedestrian Improvements Requested
- Community Character & Pride and Information Access continue to also be of Importance

The City of Lowell
Survey Demographics

Participation By Neighborhood

- Acre: 10%
- Back Central: 16%
- Belvidere: 15%
- Centralville: 7%
- Downtown: 4%
- Highlands: 27%
- Pawtucketville: 10%
- South Lowell & Sacred Heart: 4%

Participation By Ethnicity

- Caucasian: 61%
- African & African American: 6%
- Latino: 18%
- Asian: 13%
- Other: 2%

Survey - Overall Satisfaction with Lowell

- 75% Rated Lowell a 7 or Higher Out of 10

- Latinos and Caucasians were Most Satisfied of All Ethnic Groups (7.6 and 7.5 out of 10, Respectively)

- As Age Increased, so did Overall Rating of the City. Those Under Age 30 Rated it 6.7, and those Over Age 70 Rated it 8.1.

- Belvidere, the Highlands, Centralville, and the Acre Rated Lowell Highest of all Neighborhoods (between 7.4 and 7.8)
Survey - Importance Category Rankings

At Least 70% of Participants Agreed that the Following were Most Important when Choosing a Community in 2011

Top Items of Importance in 2002
1. Public Safety
2. Schools
3. Neighborhood Character
4. Cost of Living
5. Environmental Quality
6. City Services

Top Items of Importance in 2011
1. Public Safety
2. Cost of Living
3. Neighborhood Character
4. City Services
5. Schools
6. Environmental Quality
Survey - Performance Category Rankings

65% Ranked the Following Items a 7.5 or higher out of 10 in 2011

Highest Performance in 2002
1. A city that preserves its historic places
2. Good trash removal
3. Plenty of public events and festivals
4. Plenty of cultural activities
5. Good recycling program

Highest Performance in 2011
1. A city that preserves its historic places
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**Survey - Performance Category Rankings**

The Following were Ranked as 7.5 or Higher out of 10 by just 1/3 of Participants in 2011

Least Favorable Performance Ranking in 2002

1. Lots of job opportunities for me in the city
2. A good variety of stores downtown
3. Reasonable property taxes
4. Enough parking
5. A good selection of housing that I can afford
6. Traffic that moves freely through town
7. Well-maintained roads and sidewalks
8. Downtown restaurants and cafes open later in the evening

Least Favorable Performance Ranking in 2011

1. Lots of job opportunities for me in the city
2. Traffic that moves freely through town
3. Well-maintained roads and sidewalks
4. Neighborhood stores that meet my needs
5. Streets and walkways designed to keep accidents from happening
6. Reasonable property taxes
7. *Convenient pathways for pedestrians/bikes
8. *Incentives for energy efficiency

*Not included in 2002 survey instrument

Survey - Performance Category Highlights

- **Public Safety** ratings improved with the age of residents (over age 70 at 7.8). Africans, African Americans (6.9), and Asians (6.8) rated it least favorably. Those earning over $100,000, rated it worst of all income levels (6.6).
- **Recycling and Trash** were rated an 8, 9 or 10 by at least 2/3 of respondents. **Recycling** was rated least favorably by Downtown residents (5.9).
- **Equity of Public Services** was rated best by Belvidere (7.5), the Acre (6.9), and the Highlands (6.8), and least favorably by the Sacred Heart and South Lowell (5.5).
- **Accessing Information** through the Lowell Sun was most common (52%), followed by word of mouth (18%), TV (12%), the city website (10%), and radio (3%).
- **Schools** were rated an 8, 9 or 10 by over 50% of participants and were ranked better by those with children in attendance (6.9) than those without (5.8).
- **Job Opportunities** were rated a 5 out of 10 on average.
- **Bike and Pedestrian Infrastructure** were rated similarly across ages, ethnicities, and income levels (6 out of 10 on average).
- **Parks & Recreation Areas** were rated least favorably by those under 30 years of age (5.9) and by those living in Back Central and the Acre (both 6.7).
- **Opportunities for Civic Engagement** was rated most highly by Caucasians (6.9) and older residents. Those over age 70 rated it a 7.6, where as those under age 30 rated it a 6.1.
# Survey - Resource Trade-offs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City Service Improvements vs. Property Taxes</th>
<th>% 2011</th>
<th>% 2002</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increasing city services, but increasing taxes to do so</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>35</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maintaining current city services, while controlling tax increases</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>60</td>
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## Survey - Resource Trade-offs

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transportation &amp; Mobility</th>
<th>% 2011</th>
<th>% 2002</th>
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<tr>
<td>Making it easier for cars to move through the city</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Making it easier and safer for bicycles and pedestrians to share streets and protect quiet neighborhoods</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>77</td>
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## Survey - Resource Trade-offs

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<th>Housing Options vs. Open Space</th>
<th>% 2011</th>
<th>% 2002</th>
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<td>Increasing housing options by building more housing, but with more people in each neighborhood</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>48</td>
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<tr>
<td>Encouraging more open space in neighborhoods, but reduce housing options</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>44</td>
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# Survey - Resource Trade-offs

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<tr>
<th>Neighborhood vs. Downtown</th>
<th>% 2011</th>
<th>% 2002</th>
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<tr>
<td>Make Lowell look more attractive by improving the downtown and city gateways</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>36</td>
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<tr>
<td>Make your neighborhood look more attractive by improving residential areas</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>60</td>
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## Survey - Resource Trade-offs

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<thead>
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<th>Recreation Improvements</th>
<th>% 2011</th>
<th>% 2002</th>
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<td>Add more swing sets and play equipment in parks for younger children</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>35</td>
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<td>Add more athletic fields in parks such as basketball and volleyball courts</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>35</td>
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<tr>
<td>Add more open space for trails, natural areas, and conservation land</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>26</td>
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# Survey - Resource Trade-offs

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<th>Neighborhood Character vs. Property Rights</th>
<th>% 2011</th>
<th>% 2002</th>
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<tr>
<td>Protect historic design and neighborhood character by regulating design and construction</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>63</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enhance private property rights by allowing an individual property owner to do what they want with their property</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>31</td>
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## Survey - Resource Trade-offs

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Economic Development vs. Neighborhood Character</th>
<th>% 2011</th>
<th>% 2002</th>
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<tr>
<td>Encourage job creation by bringing industrial and commercial development to more areas of the city</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protect residential areas by restricting industrial and commercial development in most areas of the city</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>46</td>
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## Survey - Resource Trade-offs

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<th>Local vs. Big Businesses</th>
<th>% 2011</th>
<th>% 2002</th>
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<tr>
<td>Help small, locally owned businesses to grow in Lowell</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attract familiar national companies to the city</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>-</td>
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## Survey - Resource Trade-offs

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<th>Environmental Considerations</th>
<th>% 2011</th>
<th>% 2002</th>
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<td>Pursue policies that protect the environment for long-term benefit even when there is an added short-term cost</td>
<td>81</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prioritize policies based on short-term cost even if they are not good for the environment and may not work in the long-term</td>
<td>14</td>
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Visioning Sessions

Housing
• Maintain a Diversity of Housing Options
• Increase % of Family Housing
• Maintain Affordability
• Encourage Owner-Occupancy
• Protect Historic Character
• Continue to Enforce Building Codes & Maintain Housing Quality
• Assist Home-Owners with Maintenance through Loan Programs Promote Opportunities for Energy Efficiency
• Educate about Green Building Practices & Fair Housing Rights
• Change Public Safety Perceptions, as High Auto Insurance is a Deterrent to Living in the City

Public Services
• Increase Public Safety Efforts
• Expand Recycling Initiatives
• Address Illegal Dumping & Trash Collection Concerns
• Improve Snow Removal
• Provide Translation Services
Visioning Sessions

Transportation & Mobility

- Make the City More Bike/Pedestrian Friendly (bike lanes, trees, lighting, benches, crosswalks, handicapped access)
- Extend Hours of Bus Service & Provide Shelters & Schedules
- Traffic Calming on Major Routes
- Expand Trolley System
- Introduce Opportunities for Park & Ride
- Transform the Connector into a Boulevard
Visioning Sessions

Open Space & Natural Resources

• Address Flooding/Storm Water Concerns
• Plant More Trees (Native Species)
• Adapt Public Spaces for Different Cultural Needs/Abilities/Ages
• Diversity Programming in Parks
• Expand Regional Networks of Trails
• Improve Maintenance/Cleanliness of Parks and Waterways
• Activate Waterfronts with Arts & Recreational Programming
• Increase Sustainability Education/Outreach/Promotion
Visioning Sessions

Economic Development & Institutional Partnerships

- Diversify Job & Shopping Opportunities
- Improve the Appearance of & Support Local/Family Businesses
- Promote Lowell as a College Town
- Retain Young, Talented Students & Artists
- Encourage Institutions to Share Space & Other Resources
- Refurbish Older Institutions for New Uses
- Solicit Increased Engagement of Business Community & Provide Incentives to Developers
- Increase Access to Training & Opportunities for Entrepreneurs
- Create More Parking Options & Utilize Empty Parking Lot Space Creatively
Visioning Sessions

**Community Character, Engagement & Identity**

- Invest More Resources in Neighborhoods
- Increase Engagement of Younger Residents & Ethnic Communities
- Establish Programming that Builds Community Pride & Fosters Social Interaction
- Improve Outreach/Marketing Through Technology & Other Means
Participatory Planning Tool: Community Planit

Arts, Culture & Entertainment
- Downtown Movie Theatre, Independent Bookstore, Retail Clothing Options
- Incubators & Cooperatively Used Spaces
- Neighborhood Arts Programming, Community Education, Young Artist Support & Artist-in-Residence Programs

Communication & Engagement
- Public Wifi in Parks, Downtown, & in Low-Income Neighborhoods
- Disseminate Information through Social Media & Other Sources

Housing
- 42% Would Like More Family Housing
Participatory Planning Tool: Community Planit

Transportation & Mobility
• Bike Lanes/Amenities Downtown & by UMass Lowell
• 50% would Utilize a Bike-share Program
• 31% would Use Bus System if Hours were Extended, 24% if Schedules were Accessible
• Lord Overpass/Limited Access to Gallagher Terminal was Significant Pedestrian Barrier

Parks & Recreation
• Community Gardens (22%), Pedestrian/Bike Paths (22%), Basketball Courts (36%) & Swimming Pools/Water Elements (15%)

Environmental Considerations
• Expand Recycling Options, Encourage Energy Efficiency & Enhance Education/Outreach

Highlight

**Ethnicity** - Minority Population Grew from 24% in 1990 to 47% in 2010

**Age** - Population of 50-69 Year-Olds Grew from 14% in 1990 to 19% in 2010, but Lowell’s population remains younger than the state average

**Downtown Growth** – Downtown population grew by 35.7% accounting for all of the City’s population growth over the decade, while many neighborhoods lost population.
Existing Conditions: Land-Use

Highlights

• Greater % of Lowell is Developed for Housing than Peer Communities (48% in Lowell vs. 41% on Average)
• 9 Historic Review Districts Created to Protect Neighborhood Character (2005 & 2011)
• Downtown Lowell Smart Growth Overlay District (2008)
• Reorganization of Development Services to Streamline Development Process, Enforcement & Planning (2010)
Existing Conditions: Build-out Analysis

Highlights

- 5,715 Potential Dwelling Units & 12,364 Additional Residents Projected
- Reduction in Projected ANR, Subdivision & Vacant Land Lots
- Increase Projected Lots in DMU & JAM Urban Renewal District
- Additional Redevelopment Options through Zoning Code Section 8.1 (Churches, Schools, Mills, & Fire Stations)
- Most Significant Growth Potential in Downtown, Pawtucketville, & the Acre
Existing Conditions: Transportation

**Highlights**

- 73% Commuted to Work Alone (2000) vs. 79% (2010)
- $22 Million Early Parking Garage – 900 Spaces and 17,500 Sq Ft Commercial Space Covered by Parking Dept. Revenue (2009)
- Parking Kiosk System Downtown
- Public Electric Vehicle Charging Station Installed
- 12% Downtown Parking Surplus (2010) vs. 6% deficit (2007) due to better balancing of day/night demand cycles and garage management
- Increased Traffic Volume to Capacity Downtown and near UMass Campuses due to growth
- 40% of Roads Need Structural Improvements & Base Rehabilitation
Existing Conditions: Economic Development

Highlights

• Economic Downturn: 10.8% Unemployed (2010) vs. 3.1% (2000)
• Employment in Lowell remains at pre-recession levels; job losses have been predominantly in the suburbs
• Shift from Manufacturing to Healthcare, Technology & Education Industries (LGH & UMass Lowell are Top Employers)
• UML Investments as Economic Driver
• Vacancy rates are high due to the recession but generally lower than surrounding towns
• Surplus in sales of Food/Drink & Motor Vehicles; Leakage in Purchasing of Electronics & Clothing/Shoes
Existing Conditions: Arts, History & Culture

**Highlights**

- 3 Million Tourists Visit Annually
- Appleton Mills & Western Avenue Lofts
- 400 Artist studios and live/work studios
- 209 Festivals, 23 Museums/Galleries, & 14 Performance Spaces/Theatres
- Creative Economy Plan: *On the Cultural Road*
- Partnerships with UML and MCC (Arts & Ideas, Riverfest, etc)
- Cambodia Town
- MCC Downtown Cultural District Designation
- 27 Properties Listed on National Register of Historic Places
- Designated a *Preserve America* Community
Existing Conditions: Housing

**Highlights**

- Housing Boom & Foreclosure Crisis
- Median Home Sale Prices changed from $140,000 in 2000 to $274,000 (2005) to $185,000 (2009)
- Need for Housing Stock Upgrades/Energy Efficiency Assistance with 50% of Lowell’s Housing Built Before 1940
- Lowell is one of only 51 Communities that have Met the State's Goal of 10% Affordability Under Chapter 40B (Appx. 13% are Affordable)
- Dramatic Increase in Market Rate Housing Downtown (78.8% affordable in 2000 to 52.2% affordable in 2011, with no displacement)
- UMass Lowell Student Population Increased 20% (from 2007-2010) With Approximately 2/3 Currently Living in Lowell
Existing Conditions: Recreation & Open Space

**Highlights**

- 13.3 Acres of Total Public Open Space Developed Since 2001
- 10 New Public Parks Established Since 2001 (ie: Olga Nieves, Jollene Dubner & Muldoon)
- Improvements to Parks & Squares (ie: Clemente, McPherson, Shedd)
- Shift from Tennis Courts to Skate Parks & Volleyball Courts
- 6,662 Linear Feet of Canal Walkway Restored/Constructed Since 2001; 11,360 Currently Underway
- Concord River Greenway (Total of 2,700 Linear Feet and 1.3 Acres of Open Space)
Existing Conditions: Greenhouse Gas Inventory

**Highlights**

- 1 Million Tons of CO2 Emissions in 2008
- Residential Buildings are Greatest Contributor of GHG Emissions (33%)
- Transportation is Second Greatest Contributor (31%)
- Municipal Emissions Accounted for 3.6% of Total Citywide
**Existing Conditions: Solid Waste & Recycling**

**Highlights**

- (2002-06) Lowell Averaged 45,000 Tons of Trash Annually
- (2007-08) Reduced to 40,000 Tons through Education & Outreach
- (2009-Present) Reduced to 30,000 Tons as a Result of Bin System for Collection
- Recycling has Increased Proportionally

**Annualized MSW (Ton/Month)**

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**Savings to date: $1.05 M**

**Avg Monthly Tonnage CY05-06 = 3,650T/m**

**Avg Monthly Tonnage CY10 = 2,500T/m**

**Reduction to date 14,700 Tons**

**2 Yrs of Automated Collection**

The City of **LOWELL** Alive. Unique. Inspiring.
**Existing Conditions: Water & Wastewater**

**Highlights**

- Merrimack River is Safe for Swimming & Drinking (Class B)
- 50% of Lowell’s Sewers Combine Stormwater & Sewage
- 50% of Sewer System is Over 100 Years Old
- Over $90 Million Spent on Improvements to Regional Wastewater Utility and Sewer Separation Projects Since 2001
- Energy Management Systems Reduce Energy Consumption by Over 33% (Green Roofs, PV & Heat Retention)
Next Steps

• Public Presentation of Draft Plan – Spring 2012

• Final Plan – Summer/Fall 2012

• Plan Implementation