

# City of Lowell



# Open Space and Recreation Plan

## Neighborhood Meetings Report

May 2018

## INTRODUCTION

On January 24, the City of Lowell Department of Planning and Development (DPD) hosted the first public meeting for a new Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) at the Lowell Senior Center. In February, DPD published a [Kick-Off Meeting Report](#) to summarize the information gathered during that meeting and launch the OSRP survey. The survey is live on the [city website](#) in English, Khmer, and Spanish. Lowell residents are invited to complete the survey through August 1, 2018.

To increase public participation in the planning process, DPD staffers attended several neighborhood group meetings in April. These meetings provided DPD an opportunity to go where residents already gather and to have focus group style conversations. Residents answered the same two questions at each meeting. DPD staff facilitated the conversation and took notes to capture comments from residents. Reaching out to people in locations and settings where they are comfortable provided an opportunity to gather information we may have missed if we relied solely on larger public meetings and the survey. Since priorities can differ by neighborhood, DPD prepared this report to share the feedback we received.

## ONGOING OUTREACH

DPD staff attended eight neighborhood meetings in March and April:

Neighborhood	Date
Lowell Downtown Neighborhood Association	March 26
Pawtucketville Citizens Council	April 2
Highlands Neighborhood Association & Highland Circle Neighborhood Group	April 9
Belvidere Neighborhood Group	April 11
Centralville Neighborhood Action Group	April 16
Acre Coalition To Improve Our Neighborhood	April 18
Back Central Neighborhood Association	April 19
Lower Highlands Neighborhood Group	April 25

DPD staff also discussed the OSRP and the survey at several other community events, including: the Mill City Grows Seed Swap, the EMPOWER Leadership Workshop Series, the Working Cities Challenge monthly CHOP Dinner, and the Jackson Appleton Middlesex Business and

### Next Public Meeting

Thursday, May 17 from 6-8pm

Lowell Senior Center

Residents Association monthly meeting.

As of the publication of this report, DPD has received 130 survey responses and several emails from residents with additional comments and questions. Outreach will continue throughout the spring and summer.

## WHAT RESIDENTS ARE SAYING

DPD focused the discussion at the neighborhood meetings on two questions designed to get a neighborhood-level perspective about open space and recreation priorities:

### 1. What is missing from your neighborhood today?

DPD staff heard at the first public meeting that the city has “destination” parks/open spaces that residents from all neighborhoods visit. During the tour of neighborhood group meetings, staff wanted to know what people feel they can’t do in their neighborhood or anywhere in Lowell and what kind of opportunities they want close to home. Residents understand better than anyone how their neighborhoods work and are a great source of information. As we plan ahead, we will continue to listen to people about the ways we can improve their neighborhoods.

### 2. In 5 years, what do you hope Lowell’s parks and open spaces will look like?

Many conversations with residents have focused on specific improvements or locations needing more attention, but less time has been spent discussing a more holistic view of the city. With this question DPD staff encouraged residents to think about the city as a whole and express their dreams for our parks and open spaces in general. We also wanted to better understand people’s priorities and how they would like to see the City approach plan implementation.

In the following pages are notes from each of the neighborhood meetings. Staff has lightly edited the notes to remove shorthand, provide more detail, and organize them into subcategories. These edits did not change the content of comments and were done simply to provide clarity for those unable to attend the meetings. The notes appear in the order in which staff attended the meetings.

We invite you to review this report, complete the [Open Space Survey](#), attend future public meetings, and send questions or comments to [OpenSpace@LowellMA.gov](mailto:OpenSpace@LowellMA.gov).

## Key Themes

Better Sidewalks and Crosswalks	Better Lighting
More Trees	Bike Lanes
Water-based recreation	Frequent Clean-up and maintenance
Clearer Signage	Events beyond downtown
Dog Parks	Activities for teens and kids

## Lowell Downtown Neighborhood Association Meeting | March 26

### 1. What is missing from your neighborhood today?

- Non-vehicular ways to get around the City
- Connection to Western Avenue Studios from Downtown
- Access to Vandenberg Esplanade from Downtown is awful; there is no safe way to bike there. Hazards, guardrails, and snow removal from sidewalks is non-existent
- Events to shut down a main street to vehicular traffic. It would be fun to have an event like that monthly around the city to get people outside
- More recreational space for children downtown
- More picnic areas (similar to area behind the Tsongas Arena)
- Large chess/checkers with seating
- Outdoor walking labyrinth
- South Common Soccer Pitch/artificial turf
- Daytime events like concerts in brick area between National Park Service (NPS) and LTC to activate areas at different times of day, like midday/lunchtime
- Better public furniture—some are in bad shape (e.g., benches at the Victorian Park)
- Bike racks—few are downtown. Could there be a public art project to design fun/attractive/functional racks?
- Living wall on garages—increase green cover
- Increase tree canopy—it's vital to our urban life/environment

There were several suggestions regarding maintenance and security issues within the neighborhood:

- Location of benches is critical—important to have them, but sometimes they cause issues with people loitering
- There were a lot of trees damaged this winter, would like to see them taken care of and if necessary replaced
- Snow removal on sidewalks and walking paths is terrible, especially leaving Downtown
- Better maintenance of trees and benches
- Better maintenance at Canal Place pocket park on Market Street. The small park is bad shape, it's a high traffic area, new plantings, and benches would accomplish a lot!
- Needles littered throughout Downtown need to be addressed
- Needles at South Common

- Central/Prescott/Market—greenspace needs improvement
- When the City is planning new projects, it's critical you plan for maintenance and security
- LIGHTING. Some areas still feel too dark, e.g., the end of Middle Street. Victorian Park at night is a scary place
- Deteriorating pavement—too much salt used during winter months, it's killing vegetation
- Stairs on the walkway near the locomotive has the bottom step missing. It's dangerous

## 2. In 5 years, what do you hope Lowell's parks and open spaces will look like?

- CONNECTING SPACES
- Informing each neighborhood what is going on in other neighborhoods. What is where?
- DOG PARK
- WATER ACCESS—boats, kayaks below the falls
- Bruce Freeman Rail Trail connection
- Cross country ski tracks and snow shoeing near river
- Smaller seesaw—children infrastructure in Downtown
- Improvements at park on Middle Street—bad lighting, geographically convenient
- Climbing structure—doubled as public art. Attractive to look at AND fun!
- Kerouac—bad walk through situation at night, better landscaping and maintenance needed at that location
- Better City investments and planning, there's money to build, but no money to maintain
- MASTER PLAN for preventive maintenance
- Expansion of Trolley System into neighborhoods. Take the trolley to LeLacheur Park?
- Would be great to be able to take a NPS boat to Vandenberg Esplanade
- Alternative ways to travel without cars
- Electric car charging stations at parks

## Pawtucketville Citizen's Council | April 2

### 1. What is missing from your neighborhood today?

- Boulevard is a GREAT asset for the neighborhood
- Lowell/Dracut State Forest used to have a warden—(10+ years ago)
  - Used to offer guided walks
  - Seems like people use it less now
  - Sometimes you can come across homeless people/it can feel unsafe
  - It's a jewel and people should feel more comfortable visiting it
- People want to know HOW to find information about what is available—if the information exists it is hard to find
- Open fields for youth sports. It seems like high school age kids (i.e., organized sporting events) take over everything. Programs have been cut back because of a lack of access to fields
- Bussing to other fields to transport teams across town
- Access to UML facilities for city residents-can residents walk the track, use the gym, use the pool? What are the rules?
- Flood Regatta Field to create an ice rink
- Walking and transportation to open spaces—there are accessibility issues getting to places
- Concerns about usage of property along the water, how are issues to be enforced (e.g., noise)?
- Better Department of Conservation and Recreation enforcement, or clarity about enforcement responsibility
- Wildlife Corridor—should be help open—easement should be enforced
- Plan to maintain Rollie's Farm—should be preserved as open space

### 2. In 5 years, what do you hope Lowell's parks and open spaces will look like?

- Form an Open Space Committee
- Signs at parking lots—"Don't Feed the Wildlife"—people bring bread to pigeons and ducks at Bellegarde Boathouse area—it's not good for them. Maybe a DIY campaign to educate people how unhealthy it is for the ducks/pigeons—to provide the public information
- Public golf course—Rollie's Farm as a possible location
- People are satisfied by the amount of activities and spaces, but want to see better maintenance and engagement of city's open spaces
- Dog park (including large dogs)—and opportunities for dogs to access water for swimming

## Highlands Neighborhood Assn. & Highland Circle Neighborhood Group | April 9

### 1. What is missing from your neighborhood today?

- An ice skating rink (mentioned more than once)
- Want more sledding opportunities
- Dog park (people often go to Chelmsford)
- Another splashpad (there is one Plain Street)
- Activities for senior citizens
- Chess sets
- Connections to places are really lacking
- Middlesex Village—people are willing to bike Stevens Street to Bruce Freeman Rail Trail but never in Downtown because it feels unsafe
- People go to other towns for retail because of bike access
- Can't walk across Middlesex Street to get to Sheehy Park along river
- No parking at Sheehy Park
- Group activities at parks for young kids (like arts and crafts, knitting, and painting)
- People are unaware about many details related to what kind of recreational programming exists for children and adults
- People want more activities to keep kids busy and off streets
- Neighborhood does have several green spaces, Tyler Park, Callery Park, and Hadley Park

There were several suggestions regarding maintenance and enforcement issues within the neighborhood:

- Callery Park needs to have tree branches removed—what is the timeframe for removal?
- Could City consider pickup at houses in the future?
- Too much trash and litter, so leave to walk elsewhere
- Sidewalks and crosswalk at Middlesex—nobody stops
- Drivers go too fast on Middlesex—but residents need to cross to get to Boulevard
- Hadley Park is too filthy, bottles, and broken glass
- Like skate park at Hadley, but too dirty; Callery is a little better
- Leahy: could hire a retired person to regularly clean trash
- Eagle Park (in Centralville) is trashy

## 2. In 5 years, what do you hope Lowell's parks and open spaces will look like?

- Exercise stations available across the city
- Dog Park
- Running/walking track missing in Highlands, good for Seniors
- Place with parking and walking track
- Walk along the River along esplanade is nice, parking is terrible (others say it's okay)
- Food trucks to different parks during summer months
- Tyler Park hosts concerts June, July, and August, could they include food trucks?
- Dinner cruises on the Merrimack
- Bumper boats on ice, or on water (possibly at Regatta field/canals)
- Tweens that are too old for recreational programming and too young for work don't have many opportunities to accessing recreational programming to keep them busy

## Belvidere Neighborhood Association | April 11

### 1. What is missing from your neighborhood today?

- Hiking trails—can use the cross country path at Shedd
- TREES! Is there a replacement plan for trees when they are taken down/damaged? The neighborhood is losing a lot of trees to storms, etc. There doesn't seem to be equal replacement
- Donated trees don't seem to last a long time—they aren't great quality
- Sidewalks are in BAD shape, need more upkeep—Andover and other streets.
- A lot of people do use Andover for walking, but it's hazardous in places
- Sidewalks are not ADA compliant
- Dog Park—people leave Lowell for a better Dog Park in communities like Chelmsford
- Bike Lanes—bike/pedestrian planning
- Regional trail connections
- Bike lanes on Andover Street
- Bike lanes through Belvidere
- Fort Hill Fountain—possibly damaged and in need of repair
- People use Kitteridge Park/Reilly School playground because they are quieter than Shedd

### 2. In 5 years, what do you hope Lowell's parks and open spaces will look like?

- Bike connections to Freeman and other rail trails
- Bike connections through Belvidere, i.e., getting from Belvidere to the Boulevard
- Public art that is interactive, (e.g., Make Way for Ducklings in Boston)
- Running track with a park in the middle, parents can exercise and watch their kids
- More events at parks (i.e., things to keep people aware of these public spaces)
- Expanding programs like the canal lighting throughout the neighborhoods
- Terrible connections to walk through Lowell—pedestrian connections and canalways need more activity (e.g., San Antonio)
- More walking activities along canal ways, activate them to make them have a more park like atmosphere

## Centralville Neighborhood Action Group | April 16

### 1. What is missing from your neighborhood today?

- Gage Field and McPherson Park serve Centralville well—for organized sports and for folks looking for open space
- Reservoir on Beacon Street provides great passive recreation space
- Benches along water at Reservoir are deteriorated—should have more granite benches
- More lights at all fields and playgrounds
- Lights at Gage for football and lacrosse games
- More maintenance—needles at parks—clean ups sometimes needed before games can happen
- Splashpad or some kind of water feature at Hampshire Street/Keenan Park
- More basketball courts near Hampshire Street—existing ones are always very busy
- Places for people to sit/have picnics
- City isn't taking advantage of the river like is done in other parts of the world—e.g., Budapest/Ukraine—beer gardens, artwork off the beaten path to encourage people to walk to discover it, opportunities to eat and drink on the river, family activities
- More access to water without having to interact with homeless camps and debris (needles) left behind
- More access/entry points to water below the falls—for canoeing and kayaking

### 2. In 5 years, what do you hope Lowell's parks and open spaces will look like?

- Riverwalk similar to San Antonio and Chicago—with vendors, food, seating, and lighting
- Events like Providence's WaterFire on river or canals
- Canals should be lit more, expand on lighting of Lucy Larcom
- More events like Lantern Festival on Ecumenical Plaza
- Canoeing on the canals
- Ice skating on the canals
- Flood the Commons (North and South) and Shedd for ice skating in winter

## Acre Coalition to Improve Our Neighborhood | April 18

### 1. What is missing from your neighborhood today?

- Playgrounds—not enough
- Places to walk dogs
- Dog park
- Crosswalks—tough to access Franco/Riverwalk
- Street signs
- Benches to sit on along canalways
- Fletcher/Broadway (Francis Gatehouse)—beautiful greenspace that no one uses
- More trash cans: regular trash and doggie bag trash stations (could these be incorporated into some kind of public art project)
- Splashpad
- Bike lanes/biking trails
- TREES
- Signage to encourage people to clean up after themselves/dogs
- Exercise equipment
- Skate park (one at the Bartlett is too far for people at N. Canal area—some people were unaware there was one at that park)
- Better lighting at North Common

### 2. In 5 years, what do you hope Lowell's parks and open spaces will look like?

- Expansion of public art in the neighborhoods/public art incorporated into open spaces
  - Small murals
  - Electrical boxes/transformers
  - Can encourage people to walk through areas (Decatur Way)
  - Using litter to create sculpture/art
- Continuous bus loop/circulator
- Better non-vehicular access to places
- Artistic bike racks—functional but interesting to look at—could even create an “unofficial trail” of people walking to see various racks
- More things beyond Downtown—making the neighborhoods more visually interesting
- More places like the connection at Franco American property—public/private partners ownership
- Outdoor marketplace

- More small places for neighbors to congregate—seating/cafes
- Better availability of parking at parks. In the Acre, the presence of UMass Lowell has created a crunch on the access/availability of street parking
- The City of Philadelphia doing a Healthy Living Initiative which utilizes public/park spaces for workout activities—Harvard Challenge group that does group exercises like sprints on the steps every morning—Lowell should create a program like that here
- More enforcement of parking issues like cars on sidewalks
- Canal walks—get more people on them—activate the walkways—increase traffic on them—sometimes they feel a little isolated
- Pawtucket Boulevard—stage area is boring unless an event is happening—can there be a playground there? Adult exercise equipment? Or a splashpad?

## Back Central Neighborhood Association | April 19

### 1. What is missing from your neighborhood today?

- Street trees, specifically on Central Street, only one tree left on Wamesit/Central
- City Orchard—(possibly at Oliveria Park)
- Youth engagement in general (specifically at orchard) for cleanup and activities
- Concord River Greenway expansion/completion
- Concord River Greenway would be used more if it was more of an active space. People congregating on benches and smoke/drink deter use of the greenways
- More benches along greenway that are spread out—don't group them together
- Want to see more islands/green spaces with seating
- Hosford Square is an oasis, neighborhood could use more similar pocket parks
- Paths in green spaces are not conducive to a natural walking pattern
- Streets need to be cleaned up, lots of litter
- More informational signage at city parks
- Mill City Grows Rotary Park preserves and improves open spaces
- Restricting dogs (Some disagreed with restriction; others argued that people don't pick up after dogs)
- Surveillance cameras in parks

### 2. In 5 years, what do you hope Lowell's parks and open spaces will look like?

- Bruce Freeman Rail Trail connection/greater bike rail extensions
- More lighting and maintenance at the Portuguese Veterans Park
- Less condo/residential development and more open/green space
- More benches on streets downtown
- More activities and events at parks, bring in celebrities and leaders
- Railroad/right-of-way clean up by Mario's Furniture on Gorham Street
- Plaques and signs with information of the history of parks/people
- Clean up Chambers and Newhall Street
- Crosswalk on Bridge Street at Arthur's Paradise Diner for greater connectivity.
- Resident mentioned a walking route from Back Central to Kerouac Park, behind Boarding House Park, through Lucy Larcom, which is a more secluded walk. It's a nice walk because it's off main roads. Other residents liked idea of having trail markers for similar loops people may want to follow
- Have greater connections/respice spots at the Hamilton Canal Innovation District
- Would like to have a "Collen's Way" at Lawrence Street as a memorial for resident who tragically lost her life there in a car crash

## Lower Highlands Neighborhood Group | April 25

### 1. What is missing from your neighborhood today?

- A walkable neighborhood—too much litter, uneven pavement, unplowed sidewalks, etc.
- Clemente Park is highly used and a great resource, but it's rough
- Armory Park needs to be cleaned up, plantings get stolen
- Clean up/utilize vacant lots
- Asphalt is not the way to go for sidewalks
- Engaging youth and churches for activities
- We should have a 20 maintenance plan
- Too much emphasis on Downtown/feeling ignored
- Our neighborhood has not really changed that much
- Cupples Square could be improved—the side streets around square needs improvements

### 2. In 5 years, what do you hope Lowell's parks and open spaces will look like?

- Greater walkability
- Biking improvements
- Investments on Liberty Street
- Lowell Cemetery is the jewel of the city; thankful for Dick Howe's walking tours
- Officer Dan Larocque would like to fix or address the perception of the city and that it is unsafe
- Public Skating
- Having outdoor exercise equipment
- The canal walk should have more activities—Envisions San Antonio meets Boston
- More canal boat tours
- Likes idea of pop up model of activities and programs at different parks
- City needs to support maintenance of parks
- Better promotion of activities that already exist
- Streets should have more trees especially where Pawtucket and Middlesex Street meet

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