

2007 LeftinLowell.com Lowell City Council Candidate Questionnaire

Attach additional pages as needed. If a question is reader-contributed, it is noted in parenthesis.

Responses from candidate Curtis LeMay (answers typed from handwritten entry)

General Questions

1. Identify the specific sections of the city that you believe require special concentration of the city's efforts. What are the issues unique to those neighborhoods and what specifically do you propose to correct them?

All the city's neighborhood groups feel they are important and that their voices should be heard, no matter how minor or major their problems are. I agree and that the proper constituent services should be made available. Specifically, the Downtown area has problems with loud noise, litter, the homeless and vagrancy. I have been active at their meeting and believe that under the direction of the new Police Chief, the issues of noise and homelessness are being addressed.

Litter in the canals is being worked on with the owners the National Park Service and volunteer groups. The Highlands has seen a rise in car break-in, but mainly due to owners not locking their vehicles, while the Lower Highlands still trying to deal with illicit gang activity and home invasions. Again the Police Department's Gang Unit is doing the best it can, while the uninformed branch has been taking a new approach in reaching out to the neighborhood, especially the Southeast Asian community. They prey upon their own due to inside information from within the community and holding on to their valuables. I would like to see the DA's office play a stronger role and the courts hand out harsher sentences.

2. A lot of talk circulates about the "direction" of the city. If you agree, define that "direction". Are you satisfied with it or would you take it in a different direction? If different, how and where?

The "direction" appears to be economic development and increasing the city's tax base. I agree. I believe the "condo craze" is at its capacity. We still the Boot Mill, Mass Mills, the Old Lowell Sun building, as well as some mixed use housing slated for the J.A.M. Plan area already in the pipeline. I believe that is enough. Lowell is more than a bedroom community to me. And so as a candidate, that is what I hear from the voters. People need to understand that Lowell as a Revolutionary Industrialized City, these mills contained thousands of jobs, until the early 1960s.

Yes, we have Motorola, Lowes and Target but that is no comparison to what Lowell has lost, let alone what has happened to Raytheon and the loss of Wang. We need to do more!!! Lowell is and always be land poor. Lowell now has an excellent opportunity to subsidizing the loss of all those jobs with the Jackson, Appleton, Middlesex Streets (JAMP) Plan. It is time to shift and ease the burden from the residential taxpayer with this eleven plus (11+) acre site by making it mostly retain and commercial space.

Careful planning and productive partnership are essential to its success. There is no room for knee-jerk reactions! The next City Council working with the City Administration, the entire State Delegation and the new Chancellor, former Congressman Marty Meehan of U.

Mass. Lowell will make this over 500 million dollar project come to fruition over the next several years. I know it in my heart and would like to be part of it, if elected.

3. Do you feel that property taxes are high? If so, how would you start the process of lowering them?

Based on municipalities this size throughout the Commonwealth and services provided property taxes are fair in Lowell. You will find that any surrounding town in Greater Lowell has higher property taxes than Lowell, yet that doesn't mean we can't do better. The key is holding the line, but still providing adequate police and fire services, a good water supply (most surrounding towns buy Lowell's water), a good public school system, trash pick-up service, clean and plowed streets, job availability and fiscal sound management; incentives such as Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is one way to entice new jobs into the city as well as increasing our commercial tax base. Motorola was offered one recently and located in the former Wang Towers bringing with them several hundred, good paying jobs. I support this approach as a way to lowering taxes.

4. There is still a lot of discussion regarding the dismissal process of the previous City Manager. What is your opinion of the course of events that took place in April 2006?

History will prove that the dismissal process as well as the hiring process is still the same since 1944 when Plan E government was formed. A manager is hired and fired or dismissed, if you prefer the term, by a majority (5 or more) of a sitting City Council. No individual "owns" the title of City Manager! I have been around long enough and witnessed first hand that there eventually comes a time when a City Manager low points overtake his high points, or that a majority of the City Council becomes disenfranchised (to put it mildly) for whatever reason and feel it time to change an administration. And if the voters are not happy with that decision, they enjoy the sanctity of the election ballot every two years to render their pleasure or displeasure.

This is not to say that former Manager Cox didn't have any accomplishments during his tenure; Winterfest, for example was a welcomed addition as a seasonal venue needed in the City. Finally, I do not recall any ground-swell support for former City Manager Richard Johnson when the motion was made to vacate the office of City Manager. And guess what, he too was going on vacation the day after the motion was made. Probably due to the fact that he and his wife were outsiders (blowins) from Taunton although they settled in Lowell. Enough said, my point is this: City Managers come and City Managers go. It's time for government to move on and get over it, Period!!!

5. What do you think of City Manager Bernie Lynch's leadership of the City? Name specific strengths or weaknesses. (Anonymous)

As a candidate, most people I come in contact with think Manager Lynch is the "breath of fresh air" the City needs at this point in time. They like the fact that as a so-called outside professional, he currently holds no ties or allegiance towards an one person or group except to the City Councilors that hired him.

His willingness to be up front with the taxpayers on where it stands with its finances. The transparency he has brought with the city budget and city government in general, as well as his willingness to go out into the community and address neighborhood groups and their concerns is being well received. One weakness, rumors on the street, are that he trusts no one. Although the manager has been here for a little over a year, I would like to see him warm up more to those who have stake or vital interest in the city in making it prosper. He has been cold at times. Its not that they are trying to be in the inner circle, that's his prerogative to shape and create that. The fact is that there are others that come into the equation that help shape and make policy, and need to be brought into the fold.

Budget

6. Do you think the city of Lowell funds its public schools adequately? (Explain why or why not, and what, if anything, you would do about it.)

Since Education Reform passed in 1993, unfortunately, the city on the municipal side has only funded a status quo amount to the school side of the budget. Its no fair to rely on an increase in local aid, year after year in order to receive your proper funding of the budget. This year the area delegation has spoken loud and clear, that this practice will not continue and I agree. This was not the intent of the Education Reform Bill passed. This was not the intent of the Education Reform Bill passed. I am in favor of a maintenance of effort fund set-up similar to the Enterprise Fund set up fro the Wastewater Treatment Plant in order to maintain the million of dollars Lowell's spent on its new schools. Lowell should put its money where its mouth is when it comes to the educational school system in the city.

7. What are your thoughts on the City's union contracts? Are they out of line? Would you commit to rejecting contracts that burden future generations? (*Eleanor Rigby and Right in Lowell*)

I would like the record to reflect that I have been a due's paying blue collar worker my entire working life. With that said, I am in favor of good job with good wages and working conditions. After all, that is what drives our economy. By the same token, I am not in favor of giving the store away either. Although the City Manager is the one that negotiates contracts and the City Council ratifies his recommendation, its those given and take negotiations at the bargaining table sessions, allowing both sides to get their points across, yet produce a compromise that is good for the workers and the city. I would like to see everyone brought up to date soon. Lingering contract negotiations isn't healthy for our taxpayers, our city or its workers. I stand on my record as a former City Councilor regarding contracts.

8. What do you see as our options and what do you recommend with regard to improving our bond rating and our reserves? (*Mr. Lynne*)

Bond ratings are tied to several factors, mainly how you are keeping in line your accounting and spending practices and balancing those with good sound economic development policies. So far, so good. I don't have a problem continuing on those lines. Reserves or "Free Cash" as some call it is almost depleted and relied on too much, year after year. It stands to reason that if millions of dollars are coming back at the end of a fiscal year, that

budget was actually inflated. Better budget controls need to be put into place but I have not seen any yet..

9. What is your target percentage increase in the tax rate for the upcoming FY2009 budget, and what are the primary actions required to achieve that? (*waittlnextyr*)

Lowell, as of this writing, doesn't actually know what this year ('08) budget is going to be, let alone FY 2009. No one likes to see an increase but with fixed cost such as health care, electricity, fuel, supplies and insurances (City of Lowell is self-insured) are inevitable. To counter that you need new residential growth every year and commercial development to offset this as I mention in my comments to question #2 pertaining to the upcoming JAM Plan.

Economic Development

10. The city owns several buildings which are long vacant, in poor condition, and blighting influences in their neighborhoods, such as the building behind the playground on West Sixth Street and the Butler School on Gorham Street. The City has allowed these buildings to stand vacant for years, in the hope of renovating them for public uses sometime in the future, but has not been able to secure the funds to do so. Should the City continue to maintain the buildings as they are, or sell them on the private market? (*joe*)

If elected, I would like to have a complete inventory of what we currently have available. I am planning for the future, remember what I mentioned earlier, the City of Lowell is very land poor. It needs to be a very thought out process. When Lowell realized it needed to replace its aging schools, some of which were over 125 years old, Lowell needed to branch out across the city in order to accommodate the state of the arts schools we have today, all with cafeterias, gymnasium and libraries. And we still have several more to do! In 1972, the Police Department on Market Street and Central fire Station on Palmer Street merged to what is called today, the JFK Civic Center.

Guess what, in the not to distant future, either the Police Department or the Fire Department or both are going to have to move because they have outgrown the Civic Center. Cost and size always come into play, but location, location is the key, especially in locating a new Central Fire Station or Police Department. Open space and both passive and recreational parks are important also. I say we can never own enough land but careful planning is the key to its success.

11. What do you plan to do to facilitate development at Massachusetts Mills and the old Post Office garage sites? (*waittlnextyr*)

I will see that a compromise is reached in order that the Mass Mills project moves forward and comes to fruition. The City could command a pretty penny for the old Post Office garage site, especially where it sits on the Merrimac River, but the market is not as such as this time. I do believe it will turn around, however and should be sold. My comments in the previous question (# 10) should be taken into consideration also.

12. What else can we do to support the growth/recruitment and retention of more artists in the city? (Jason)

I have met quite a few that have moved into the “Artist Community” either downtown or on Western Avenue over the last couple of years and must say they are a welcome addition to the City of Lowell. Better promotion or perhaps a major annual event would help, but I must confess, I don’t have the answer to this question other than to say, I’ll listen to your needs.

13. How can better use be made of the Connector Corridor and its access to the highway system? (Jason)

Better use to me means fixing up and developing the blighted Tanner Street area; then maintaining its cleanness. As far as access goes, it is what it is and that I have not heard of any problems with it other than the fatalities that happened and the state put in place more guardrails.

Infrastructure

14. What do you consider the most pressing traffic bottlenecks in the city, and what would you propose to alleviate them? (waittilnextyr)

Middlesex and Wood Streets (Rourke Bridge) is my understanding the worst in the city. Most concerns center on the Bridge traffic that backs up from Pawtucketville all the way back to Middlesex Street creating chaos at Wood Street. Unfortunately, the real solution won’t be until a new four (4) lane Rourke Bridge is built, but I think if the green light was longer at both ends of the Bridge, the traffic flow might be better.

Chelmsford and Plain Streets where Parker Street intersects is bad but I am told is coming up for a complete make-over with Powell Street becoming a one way. Next is Bridge Street and the V.F.W. Highway which is simply horrendous during any peak mornings or afternoon drive too. With he V.F.W. highway which is simply horrendous during any peak morning or afternoon drive time. With the F.V.W. being a state highway, Mass Highway officials along with the city traffic division need to come up with a plan to alleviate this mess.

It becomes complex involving Lakeview Avenue and dedicated terms. Finally, one should be able to drive on Father Morrisette Boulevard (French Street Extension) from say the Tsongas Arena all the way to the Textile Memorial Bridge without having to stop at every light along the way. Its plain ridiculous. The easiest way to accomplish this is to better synchronization of the traffic lights creating a normal flow.

15. What would you propose to stop daily firehouse closings? It has been 15 years with no reasonable solution that protects all neighborhoods safely, fairly and equally.
(Jason)

I have never dictated to a fire chief what he should or should not do. That included what three (3) fire stations were to be closed in the early 90s that are unfortunately still closed today, although in use performing other functions. The bottom line is manpower. Unlike the Police Department has seen a hundred new police officer come on the street from former President Clinton's Community Policing Grant Program in the mid-90s, the level of Firefighters had always stayed the same. The City and the grant money to help out but more is needed. I'll be more than happy to discuss man power issues with Fire Chief Pitta, if elected.

Residents of Lowell

16. Do you think Lowell's long term viability is helped or harmed by being a gateway city for immigrants? Conversely, is the prospect of gentrification a subject of concern? (Jason)

The City of Lowell was built and founded by immigrants. Early Irish, French and Greek settlers laid the foundation to what Lowell is today. Lowell's ethnicity in my opinion is what brought us the Lowell National Park system and the Mogan Cultural Center to name a few, hence, the "Melting Pot City of Lowell."

Lowell doors have always been open to immigrants, therefore, I believe Lowell's viability is helped. From a housing stock point, I don't think gentrification is a concern. Most developers of late have taken into consideration low-income families and offer a percentage to be made available.

A perfect example is the former Julien Steele Housing Project on Gorham Street, where a couple of hundred single and duplex family homes are being built.

17. Because Congress has not passed any immigration reform measures, cities around the country have begun passing their own regulations. Would you consider measures related to undocumented immigrants, and if so, would you be in favor of measures intended to shelter undocumented immigrants from the current anti-immigrant climate or measures intended to force them out of our city? (Victoria)

Touchy subject matter but my opinion is that any measures taken need to include the whole country, not just isolated cities. What is good for undocumented immigrants in say Brownsville, Texas should be the same for ones in Lowell, Massachusetts. If they are willing to meet the criteria set for by the Congress and pay their fair share, then I will be willing to be in favor of some form of pathway to citizenship so they can enjoy the freedom and privileges we have that people die for every day.

About You, the Candidate

18. How do you keep up with local or regional news? A television program? Radio program? Newspaper? Magazine? Blogs? Talking with members of the community? Which programs or print media do you read? How frequently do you do this? How accurate or inaccurate do you rate these sources? (*TooJohn*)

I don't really have a lot of time to watch television other than the news. Locally I watch either channel 6 or 7 or 13. Nationally I watch CNN or Fox. Radio programs are WCAP during peak drive times while I like WBZ during the regular day and sometimes at night. I regularly attend many neighborhood meetings regardless if I am running for public office or not and lend to the discussion whatever I can. I subscribe to the Lowell Sun and several magazines, and look several times a week at the Left in Lowell, Richard Howe Jr. and Jackie Doherty blogs. Everyone is entitled to their own spin as to accuracy goes. That is what makes the world go around. I find them all enjoyable to watch and read.

19. Could you name one or two current elected officials - at any level of government - that you admire and why? (*TooJohn*)

U.S. Senator Ted Kennedy and State Senator Steven Panagiatrakos. They both are cut from the same cloth so to speak. The Senior Senator and Pangie, as I like to call him, stand tall for the common man, woman and child in the Commonwealth of Mass. Across the state they are held in high regard, not only based on their powerful positions they hold in government, but because their willingness to listen, compromise and bring home the bacon. Lowell is most fortunate to have these two, and others represent them. Respect is earned, not given, and Pangie and Senator Kennedy have both earned it well.

20. What specifically do you hope to accomplish as a councilor? (*Anonymous*)

Being the only former City Councilor (1988-1993) as a candidate for this election, I felt I possess the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to commit myself in getting the job done of maintaining Lowell as a progressive City. I won't be there for a popularity contest or to be controlled. The only bandwagon Curtis LeMay will be on, is yours, the taxpayer! I plan on supporting and rolling up my sleeves in working with City Manager Lynch at ensuring core services are maintained with minimal tax increases.

A unified City Council willing to work and forge partnerships with neighborhood groups, the business community across the city, both hospitals, U. Mass. Lowell, Middlesex Community College, and the entire area delegation from the State house is the only way to go. That way, we can put in place a retail and commercialized tax base, JAM Plan, and help alleviate the current burden facing the residential taxpayer. We can continue with the School Building Program making it the best system in the state, as well as upgrading our infrastructure system of water and sewer lines that is 140 years old, streets and sidewalks, and our bridges. I would carry on more, but my promise to you is to use good judgment, common sense and to be independent for the public good. Please consider me on November 6th. Thank-you.