

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 Jim Milinazzo

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?

Lower Highlands-Public Safety Issues

Lower Centralville-Implementation of Master Plan for Bridge Street Corridor
Overcrowding and code enforcement issues

Jackson-Appleton-Middlesex-work with both business owners and new residents to deal with trash & issues with the Middlesex Shelter.

Pawtucketville-work to implement the Pawtucketville Master Plan; continue to work with PCC and the Army Corp of Engineers to deal with the flooding problems.

Belvidere-work with BNC to address the odor smell emanating from Duck Island

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?

I do believe the city is now moving in the right direction. Our finances are improving, the bond rating has been stabilized, and we have a number of aggressive economic development plans underway. I support City Manger Bernie Lynch and I voted to extend his contract.

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

I feel that the property taxes are fair and equitable. As an elected official, I know there must be balance between revenues and spending. We need to continue to grow our commercial tax base in order to lessen the burden on the residential tax payer.

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?

Since I was “in the room” during the discussion with the former city manager I thought the process was handled very professionally. I had heard rumors that the City Manager was looking for a change; in fact he mentioned that he was contemplating a job offer. Based upon a number of issues, I believed that the manager had lost the support of a majority of the council. Our discussion evolved around him resigning on his own terms and timetable. It was time for a change.

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

As I stated earlier, I support City Manager Lynch and I am proud of the role that I played in bringing him to Lowell. Manager Lynch is a tireless worker and has a very strong understanding of municipal finances. I also believe he surrounds himself with talented, hard working professionals. During his first year he has opened up city government and he has reached out to all of our neighborhood groups.

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.)

Under full disclosure, let me state that my wife is a school teacher in Lowell. It is always difficult to strike the appropriate balance between school and city funding. I do support funding the schools at appropriate levels without sacrificing overall city services. A community is only as strong as its schools. I also think the school department and the city administration need to work more closely to identify funding opportunities and weaknesses.

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*)

This is a very difficult question. Let me begin by saying that I have a great deal respect for the role unions play in our city. However, I do think they can sometime become too political. I know firsthand that I have not been endorsed by 1705 because the previous administration told them not to endorse me. Here again-we need to balance what is in the best interest of the city and its employees. I think union contracts can be beneficial to both parties. If we were to get to a point where the contracts became a burden to future generations; then those contracts would need to be negotiated in good faith to lessen the burden.

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)

The administration and the city council need to continue to work with the Department of Revenue. We need to continue to grow our cash reserves and maintain our stabilization fund. The city needs to expand our commercial tax base to generate more revenue for the city.

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)

My percentage target increase in the upcoming tax rate is under 2.00%. We need to keep our expenses in check and to continue to identify new revenues. I would support the creation of a Parking Enterprise Fund to have the parking garages stand on their own.

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)

I would support developing Requests for Proposals for the buildings in question in an effort to sell the building for the highest and best use. I would work with the neighborhoods groups to draft each RFP in order to make sure the end use would be an appropriate fit in the neighborhood.

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

As you know the Massachusetts Mills Redevelopment Plan is now tied up in court. The issue involves two private parties, so the city is at a loss until their differences can be worked out. I did ask for an update, but there was no new information to report. As you probably know, this issue is impacting the extension of the river walk along the Merrimack. The old Post Office garage site will be put back out for proposals during 2008. Once Will Soucy's project begins adjacent to the new post office, interest in the former site should improve.

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

A simple answer would be to do what my wife and I have done-BUY ART. I also support the new creative economy as proposed in the new Cultural Plan. I think the new oversight committee working with COOL can grow and recruit more artists. I continue to support the artists live work space and I have voted for the zoning changes to support same.

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

I had filed a motion to undertake some beautification work along the Connector. The city has been working with the Tanner Street businesses to develop improvement plans. The easy access on and off the highway is key to developing this area to its potential. I also support the continued traffic enforcement along the Connector.

Infrastructure

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

Bridge Street/Lakeview Avenue/VFW Highway is one of the worst traffic bottlenecks in the city. I would work with MASS Highway, the Northern Middlesex Council of Governments, the city's traffic engineer, and the Centralville Neighborhood Group to develop improvement plans.

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 would work hard to identify revenues to assist the Fire Department on this issue; i.e. grant funds and Homeland Security Funds. I would have the City Manager and the Fire Chief develop a strategic plan to deal with this safety issue.

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)

I am very proud of the fact that Lowell has always been a city that welcomes new immigrants. My paternal grandparents came to this country in the early 1900's and worked hard to make a home here. I enjoy the rich culture all of our immigrant groups provide to our community. Gentrification is not a concern of mine based upon our history of welcoming and supporting new immigrant groups.

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)

I would support a measure to assist undocumented law abiding immigrants becoming properly documented. I do not support separating families as we have witnessed. However, I would not support undocumented immigrants who have had past problems with law enforcement officials.

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 read the Boston Globe and the Sun on a daily basis. I do read a number of Blogs and I attend neighborhood meetings to stay current on the issues. Overall, I feel the media outlets that I use are accurate.

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

Senator Stephen Panagiotakos: he is a hard working, caring public official who listens and is always available. He is highly respected by his peers and his constituents.

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

I hope to continue to work hard and to serve you. I want to continue to use my extensive economic development experience to move the Hamilton Canal District plan forward and to implement a development strategy along Tanner Street. I also want to be able to provide continued support to our professional city manager as he and the city council move the city forward. I respectfully request one of your nine votes on November 6th.