

## 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 Dr. Louis Stylos***

#### **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?**

It would be best to concentrate on the citywide issues of substandard housing. We need to re-establish previously coordinated efforts between neighborhood groups, the Department of Inspectional Services, the Health Department, and police that successfully addressed properties that were at risk of becoming breeding grounds for crime and blight in the community.

**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 am currently satisfied with direction in which the city is moving. I feel that the wise use of tax dollars, greater efficacy and transparency in government and creating a healthy cash reserve and capital funds is how Lowell should be run going forward.

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

Each person has a different opinion about taxes being too high, too low, or just right. The challenge is to have people feel that they are getting value for their tax dollars. Of course, I would work to increase our tax base by drawing new business into the city, such as national retailers, Fortune 500 companies and other new small businesses.

**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?**

I do not feel that this is an issue that warrants discussion in selecting our next City Council.

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

Since I have not yet had the opportunity to work directly, with Bernie I will give my outside impression of his performance to date. I feel that he has a strong handle on looking at the

big picture. He appears to think things through with an open mind and listens to all ideas presented to him without regard to who brings it forward. I've been impressed with how he has solved some very tough problems with minimal impact on the tax rate. He appears to be a tireless hands-on worker. I have not personally seen any weaknesses that I can identify at this time.

## **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.)**

I think anyone that has faith in their public schools would never feel that they could not use more money to further enrich our students. I think that we should always fund our schools to guarantee a safe and productive environment to learn. As funds and economy become available I would certainly want our schools to benefit from that positive growth.

### **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 am not versed on the particulars of the City's union contracts. I believe that every contract should be fair and equitable to the needs of both dedicated city employees and the taxpayers. Both the unions and the city must work together in open and honest discussions given the conditions at the time. Contracts need to be negotiated with an eye to how it will affect the future finances of the city. I would not vote for contracts that would jeopardize the city's ability to afford necessary services to its citizens in the future.

### **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*)**

If the Council follows the plan established by the current administration to build up cash reserves and a healthy capital fund, our bond rating will improve over time.

### **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*)**

Since the City's budget is heavily subsidized by State funding, it is premature to discuss forecasting projects for FY2009.

## **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 want to review the current redevelopment plans and timelines before selling any City asset. It may be best to continue maintain certain properties until the economic climate improves. I would insist that the buildings were securely "moth balled". As for their appearance, one suggestion could be to involve our local artist community, asking them to contribute ideas and talent, with City support, to improve their outward appearance in a cost effective way.

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

My research resulted in the following information:

Mass. Mills: The issue as I understand it is that fire regulations require that the building farthest away from the river needs to be significantly altered to allow fire units to access the area. The developer/owner has stated that this would make the next renovation phase too expensive for it to be economically feasible in this current climate. The reality is that until the economy improves or the fire regulations change, this project will be on hold.

Post Office garage: The land is contaminated and will cost the City or a private developer 1 to 3 million dollars to clean before it is suitable for development. Currently no private developer has shown an interest in absorbing this cost because it would be economically prohibitive. The City is also not in the position to provide the funding to reclaim this land.

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

I suggest that we continue to follow the plan developed by the Lowell Plan, which endorses and supports Lowell as an art and cultural destination. I believe many cultural organizations and artists will benefit greatly from this coordinated effort to market the city. The City, though COOL, can play a very important role as the central point for all artists and cultural activities. I think this would generally help support the artist community and other cultural organizations. Specifically, I would want to see the City create a major art festival and other cultural events to focus specifically on the local artists and our rich cultural heritage.

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

In the short term, I feel that a plan to improve the landscape of the connector would better serve the city since this is a major entrance into our City. With the new retail additions in the area, the long-term opportunities will require the city to develop a comprehensive study to suit the needs of the area.

**Infrastructure**

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

I would again consider a citywide approach to this problem. A comprehensive traffic study should be conducted, including recommendations to update the signage and signals throughout our City. From there, a complete list of short and long-term recommendations should be released for public review. With public involvement, the City Council could use the study as a blueprint to phase-in funding from the capital improvement account.

**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 think a better approach is again a comprehensive assessment of the entire fire department and their needs to protect the citizens of Lowell in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**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)**

As the son of Greek immigrant parents, I know first hand that Lowell is a place where a desire to work hard and learn will result in obtaining the American dream. I don't believe Lowell is ever going to be in danger of losing this proud legacy. I do believe that there is nothing wrong with more areas in the City becoming nicer places to live.

**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 don't feel that this is an issue that the City Council can have any impact on. This is purely a federal issue.

## **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*)**

My usual daily sources for news and information are in print: The Boston Globe and The Sun. I try to catch a bit of WCAP and WJUL in the morning on my way to work. We attempt to watch the evening news when our son does not have evening activities or other events keep us from home. Just recently, I have started to read blogs and use the web as a source of news and information. As for accuracy, I trust that the writers and editors would not misrepresent a story or a person.

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

State Senator, Steve Panagiotakos Steve continues to accomplish great things for our City, while maintaining a balance to his family and his commitments to our State government. Steve's honesty and dignified approach to statesmanship have always been attributes that I admire.

Lowell City Councilor Eileen Donoghue. Eileen is another person I admire. Like Steve, Eileen has walked that fine line between her commitments to Lowell and living a private life with poise and pride. Eileen would always attack an issue with great preparedness and thought never forgetting her Holyoke roots or what was in the best interest of the City.

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

I would like to help to further establish and nurture the professional management approach to governing Lowell for decades to come. Prepare our city to take advantage of good economic times and provide stability during more challenging ones. At the end of my service I would like to have been directly involved in leaving the City in a strong financial position. Lastly, I want Lowell to be the model that all midsize urban cities would look to emulate.