

**2005 LeftinLowell.com Lowell City Council
Candidate Questionnaire
Rodney Elliott**

1. Identify the specific sections of the city that you consider "problem areas".

Lower Highlands, Acre, Lower Centerville.

2. What are "the problems" with those sections of the city and what specifically do you propose to correct them?

Gangs: I think gang related problems are one of the biggest problem the City has to face. The problems stem from families that aren't functioning as families. Government can only do so much. There needs to be some personal responsibility. Parents need to step up to the plate and gain control of their children. This is a societal issue that needs to be addressed within the family unit.

Sub-standard Housing: I have proposed contracting with retired building and code inspectors to come in and make a sweep of the housing in the City and issue citations to those landlords that have not kept their property up. There are 25,000 parcels of property in the City and only a handful of code enforcement employees. We really need to catch up.

3. What specific plans do you have to attract major business/industry into the city?

I'd like to see the commercial tax rate lowered. We have one of the highest rates in the state and I think that is detrimental to development.

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

I think the City is headed in a forward direction and that is positive. I travel around the State for my job and I think Lowell is far better off than other cities in the Commonwealth.

5. Do you support or oppose the suggestion that the planning and zoning boards should be elected, not appointed positions? Why?

I do not support elected Boards. I would however support term limits for those Boards. There should be people on Boards with expertise in the area. I'm not convinced that that would happen with elected Boards. We can barely manage to generate interest in a City Council race. Running for office takes a lot of time and money. I'm sitting here now answering 18 questions you've submitted. And that is just one of the many questionnaires we've been given. There are candidate nights and rallies. I think that might be a solution for a town but not for a City. Board members need to focus on the business at hand, not running campaigns.

6. What will you do to improve Lowell's image to people living outside the city who still consider it a crime ridden drug haven?

It's difficult for one person to change a perception that has existed for decades. I think by having people come to the City for events and having those events run smoothly helps. I also think the Police department is an important part of changing the image of the City. The Officers need to step up to the plate and make the City a safe place. Take pride in the neighborhood they service and go the extra mile.

7. John Cox has been Lowell City Manager for over 5 years. What are his assets? What are his liabilities?

The Manager's positives include a good working relationship with employees. He genuinely wants to make the City a better place.

His negatives include a lack of communication with Councilors. We don't always get the information we need to make an informed decision.

8. If a motion was made to vacate the office of city manager would you support/oppose it? Why?

We just finished the Managers evaluation process and I rated his performance commendable. It would be odd to vote for vacate the office at this juncture unless there were some type of malfeasance that would warrant it.

9. Is/should John Cox be an issue in this campaign? If so, how will you take back policy decisions that have been preempted by the city manager?

No, the Manager should not be an issue in the campaign. He has no contract. If a new council wanted to hire someone else when they're seated they could do so. So I feel it's a non-issue.

10. Other than you (if you are a present councilor), who is the most effective/hardest working city councilor?

Each has their own niche and strengths. I'm not here to evaluate the performance of my colleagues. That's what voters do every other year and I respect their choices.

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

Yes. Check my voting record. I vote consistently against increases in spending that will cause taxes to rise. The process starts at budget time. Setting the budget drives the tax rate.

12. Where do you feel the budget could possibly be reined in, regarding spending?

I've made specific proposals to cut the budget during every budget cycle. It varies depending on the content of the budget. I've made proposals to look at purchasing prescriptions from Canada. I think that would save a great deal of money.

13. Do you feel televising the Planning and Zoning board meetings a good idea? What about subcommittee meetings?

Yes. I have previously filed that motion. It is something the Manager's office is working on as we speak. I think it's important for people to be able to see what is going to happen in their neighborhoods. The Council subcommittees are where a lot of the work takes place. I'm in favor of televising them.

14. Where do you stand on the 4 and 4 plan? Do you feel this issue is getting a fair hearing in the media? If you are against the 4 and 4 plan, what other solutions would you implement to increase the police presence downtown at night?

I voted against the 4 and 4 plan.

The media has its job to do. I don't think it's smart to rely on any one news source as the only place you get your information from. I try to research information independently of both the media and the Administration.

Liquor establishments with closing times after 11:00 pm should be required to hire details to deal with the downtown issues. If an establishment is consistently causing problems they should have their license suspended by the License Commission.

15. Do you feel there is a conflict of interest with the city boards and developers? If so, what would you want to see happen to correct this?

Yes I feel there is a conflict of interest with City Boards and developers. I think televising the meetings would help. No one wants to be on camera doing something questionable.

16. Do you think the following is a good idea: getting the tax rate projection for budget increases proposed in the spring before approving new budget?

Yes

17. Will you support the next phase of the School Building Plan (two new elementary schools; one to replace the old Morey school, and one to replace the Varnum and Moody schools)?

As long as the reimbursement rate is sufficient from the State I would support the plan to build new schools in the City.

18. Do you feel a recycling plan for the downtown area (businesses and residential) is needed? What steps what they take to implement such a program?

I work for the Environmental Protection Agency so it's hard for me not to support a recycling initiative. I think curbside recycling is the only way to go in a City. We have a residential recycling program that is easy to participate in. I would think we'd want to model any future plan on our current plan. Running parallel programs is both cumbersome and redundant.