

**2005 LeftinLowell.com Lowell City Council  
Candidate Questionnaire  
Curtis LeMay**

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

The lower sections of Belvidere, Highlands and Centralville, as well as the Acre, are several areas of concern that need immediate attention.

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

The Lower Highlands has many instances of illegal gambling, home invasions and gang activities. The Acre is still plagued with prostitution and drug dealing. Lower Centralville and lower Belvidere has their share of crimes against individuals, breaking and entering into homes and businesses and recent random shootings. First off, no city the size of Lowell (about 108,000) is without their share of crime. In proportion, I'd say Lowell, with all its ethnic diversity, is in much better shape than other urban cities such as Worcester or Springfield. What we, as a city, need to do is place more emphasis in these areas with a heavier concentration of undercover police, along with more uniformed police personnel., Probable expansion of the current gang unit and better utilization of Lowell's mobile command center would go a long way also. If elected, I would sit down with the Supt. Of Police to see how his current force of 250 police officers is deployed and work hard to achieve the above. The city should continue to work with such agencies as the Boys and Girls Club of Greater Lowell and the United Teen Equality Center (UTEC) to mention a few, and help alleviate today's peer pressure that exists with today's youth.

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

We must continue to offer Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Programs. Some of the successes due to TIF Programs are the Cross Point Towers, the Market Basket Supermarket on the corner of Broadway and Fletcher St; and the Gateway Project. I would also ask the Planning Department provide information on available areas of industry zoned land that would be attraction to major companies, develop a business/industry recruitment plan, and continue to work with Lowell Development Finance Corporation as well as other financial institutions to provide financial assistance to potential companies.

**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?**

The Gateways and Downtown area have basically already been defined as a bedroom community with little retail or light manufacturing space available. My understanding is the Hamilton Canal Project (Jackson-Appleton-Middlesex, J.A.M. Plan) is only offering 15,000 square feet of retail space. That's not much considering the whole project encompasses 7+ acres. As a life-long

resident of Lowell, I am old enough to remember a great percentage of blue collar people from Lowell, working in Lowell at such places as Joan Fabrics, Paris Shoe, Avco, Educator Biscuit Co., and Symphonics to name a few. Today, people from Lowell only come home to retire for the evening after a long day at work, and commute!!! Just several years back, we

lost Wang and most of Raytheon. Today Lowell's major employers, besides the city are both higher education systems (UMASS at Lowell and Middlesex Community College). Lowell's two hospitals (Lowell General Hospital and Sts. Memorial Hospital) and Market Basket, I guess what I'm saying is that Lowell must always put its best foot forward and plan for its future and its people, with the least possible burden on taxes. We must plan and look towards the next J.A.M. Plan when this one is finished. Where will it be? Could it be Tanner St? Maybe outer Middlesex St? How about the Lawrence or Dutton Street areas? I'm not saying I have all the answers but I'm willing to roll up my sleeves and help make Lowell a better place to work and live.

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

Under the Plan E form of government, a charter change would be required in order to accomplish this. I wouldn't be opposed to a non-binding referendum to view the mood of the people and see where their coming from. Presently, the City Manager, who is a direct employee of the Lowell City Council, is the appointing authority with ratification needed from the City Council on most appointments. My opinion is, if elected, most members of the boards and commissions would be elected as a popularity contest vs. who might have the expertise necessary to get the job done, along with the right background and education. What there should be is a zero (0) tolerance on any appearance of impropriety, period!!! Therefore, the need for this question might not be needed, but if elected, who knows?

**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?**

I find Lowell to have more positives than negatives. Public Safety is an important image that a city like Lowell's needs and I think we have it. But that doesn't mean it can't continue and strive to do better. As I outlined in my answer in questions #2, other than returning the gang unit to a full compliment, and better utilization of the Police Command Van, I feel we'll be in good shape. Remember, not too long ago, Lowell made good 100 less officers. So unless the proper deployment is not being used, we have the tools to get the job done. Don't forget we also work with the State Police, district Attorney's Office, and State and Federal Drug Tasks Forces amongst other agencies in order to get the job done.

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

John Cox possesses great political savvy. He has vast knowledge of its inner workings being a former 10 years legislator and always delivered for his district. Millions of dollars for just the Tsongas Arena alone were obtained by him. He was always held in high regard by the leadership then, and continues to be able to with them today based on his contacts. He also has a very close working relationship with Lowell's State Senator and its entire delegation, all of which hold chairmanship or leadership posts within the Legislature. John Cox also knows everything there is to know about local aid, state aid, cherry sheets, etc.

As for liabilities, John found out early on in his tenure that although he's the City's Chief Executive Officer and appointing authority, under Plan E form of government, he's held accountable to nine (9) elected City Councilors (his bosses) on a weekly, if not sometimes daily, basis. As a Representative, John was only held accountable to no one but the voters, but only once every two years which is a lot less scrutiny he was not used to getting. Everyone likes to get, or take credit for things, but I can't help but feel that the City Manager,

sometimes puts too many matters and issues on his plate than he personally needs to. He has many employees and department heads that are quite capable of assisting with some of these tasks, thereby freeing up his valuable time for other more pressing matters. The bottom line; John Cox has come along way in five (5) years.

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

As a present City Councillor I'd say it's an appropriate question, however, as a candidate I don't find it appropriate. Mostly because I don't have any knowledge of the situation if such a motion was made, nor would I have had an opportunity to have a working relationship with the city manager in or to make an intelligent decision regarding any facts if such a motion was put forth. I might add, a motion to vacate (fire) the office of city manager is not one to take lightly. In fact I believe since Plan E was adopted in 1944 there have only been three (3) or four (4) times such a motion has been made. No one lasts forever. As question #7 said, John Cox has been city manager for 5 years, he must be doing something right! Or is there a problem with the City Council?

**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?**

Two issues I see in this campaign are continued zoning flaws that need to be corrected and stabilization of the tax rate based on what we spend versus what we raise for revenue. John Cox, as City Manager, implements policy as set forth by his policy makers, the City Council. Therefore, if past policy decisions are an issue with this campaign, then the City Councillors should be an issue in this campaign, not John Cox. Again, one must remember that under the Plan E form of government, the buck stops at the City Council and only the City Council. A manager can always be replaced by the Council and the Council can always be replaced by the voters. Remember, policy decisions, whether preempted by a city manager's authority or a City Council's vote can always be rescinded by that same City Council and made whole, depending on the situation. Some votes require a simple majority (5) vs. some require a two thirds (6) vote.

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

Everyone has different strengths and weaknesses. I don't believe this to be a fair question.

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

The tax rate, for fiscal year 2005, is \$10.18/1000 for residential property and \$20.20/1000 for Commercial, Industrial and personal property. The residential tax rate actually is lower than it was in FY04, which as \$13.97/1000, therefore, the tax rate itself was reduced from the prior year. In order to reduce a homeowner's or commercial property owner's tax bill, we first, must expand the amount of property that is taxable, whether it is a private residence or commercial property. Last year we saw more condominiums come on line that added to our tax base, and we expect more of these condominium units to be added to the tax rolls. Our challenge on the commercial side is to be able to attract new businesses including small businesses and manufacturing companies. In order to attract these businesses, I would look to the Planning Department to see what incentive plans are

available to assist in recruiting small businesses as well as large businesses. I would also insist on a comprehensive report that identifies available, or vacant, properties that are zoned industrial and are in need of re-development. I would also advocate for a strategic plan that would include comprehensive outreach to existing companies; R&D Firms, "think tanks" and venture capitalist groups that may benefit from a relocation or location in the City of Lowell. These also should be compatible with the existing Master Plan of the city.

I fully support the development of the Hamilton Canal District which will be the largest redevelopment activity in the city to date and certainly would go a long way in expanding the city tax base, both residential and commercial.

Basically, the city must do everything in its power to rejuvenate the commercial tax base. Over the past several years, we have seen a decrease in the commercial tax base; naturally shifting the tax burden to the residential tax payer, and in order to relieve the increasing residential tax burden, this must be turned around.

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

If there is a way to provide better and more cost efficient health care coverage for our city employees. The health care costs is one of the largest budget busters for any private or public entity. These costs have skyrocketed over the past 10 years. The administration should be working with our unions and looking into other options for health coverage such as PPO's and HMO's. Working with the unions through negotiations, the city could look at offering incentives to employees to choose a less expensive health plan like an HMO, by lowering the percentage that the employee pays into the plan versus what the city pays where those who choose a more expensive plan would pay a higher percentage. We should also be monitoring overtime spending in all departments as well as the hiring of personnel.

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

Yes, we need to provide the citizens of Lowell with full access to all aspects of city government. The Council sub-committee meetings are essential sources of information to Lowellians since that is where crucial information is provided and decisions are made with regards to future planning in the city. Planning & Zoning Board meetings are another key source of information to the citizens of Lowell. Again, crucial decisions are made at these meetings which impact the overall development of our city and in particular, the design and quality of life in our own neighborhoods. We should also be televising other boards such as the Board of Parks, Cemetery Commission, Conservation Commission etc.

**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?***

The 4 and 4 plan offered by the police officer's union was not fully flushed out, especially in terms of the financial impact to the city. Certainly, the concept of increased police presence in our downtown areas and neighborhoods is an important one. I would propose a re-evaluation of the distribution of our police officers and assignment of duties of our police force be looked at as an entire department, if elected. It was only 1993 when Lowell only had 159 police officers and did a fairly good job of protecting all of the City of Lowell. Today we have 100 new officers in the city and I'd like the opportunity to sit down with Chief Davis and find out the deployment of these new men and women.

**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, in order to gain the integrity and trust of people, several things must happen from the onset. First, all members of the City's boards and commissions should not be painted with the same brush. Many are not compensated but have vast knowledge and expertise in their field. The problem is that any potential member applying for the position should be told that as criteria for the position in question, there will be zero(0) tolerance on any appearance of impropriety. Period!!! There should also be a rotation of chairman or chairwoman of any particular board of commission, giving someone else a chance.

**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?**

The fact that Lowell is a quarterly billing community, and one that picks up much needed "new growth" (value attributed to new building) through June 30th, it appears almost impossible to get an accurate projection on what the actual tax rate may be six months in advance, particularly where we have been so dependent upon "free cash" to offset the tax rate over the past several years. What we should be focusing in on is holding back on the increase in spending. The fact is, that the budget can be increased, if necessary, once we know what the new growth and free cash figures are, which ultimately will affect the tax bills.

**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)?**

Yes, I have been a strong advocate of all of the phases of the new school building projects over the past 18 years. As a former City Councillor, in 1988 the first phase of the \$130 million school building project was presented for a vote to the Lowell City Council, I voted in favor, to go forward with this project in order to provide state of the art facilities for all of the children in our city. I continue to be a strong advocate of the school building programs in order to provide an environment that promotes a positive learning atmosphere for all of our children in the City of Lowell.

**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?**

Yes, I support a recycling program in the downtown area and I'm sure a fair and equitable solution can be reached. The newly formed Downtown Residential Association, Condo Associations, business and commercial property owners should work with the City's Recycling Coordinator in order to identify the means to carry out this most needed service. Where there's a will, there's a way!