

This current report is a *summary* of strategic directions. The full Cultural Plan Report will be released in the fall of 2007 and will provide an analysis of the Lowell Cultural Economy.

## T H E I T I N E R A R Y

### *Outline of the Full Cultural Plan Report*

#### **1. Introduction**

Why Cultural Development  
Tools of Analysis  
Framework: Past, Present, Future

#### **2. Past: In the Rearview Mirror**

List of Past Plans  
Recommendations and Accomplishments

#### **3. Present: Are We There Yet?**

The Landscape  
Cultural Organizations  
Festivals and Events  
Entertainment  
Creative Businesses  
Community-based and World Culture  
Educational Institutions  
Key Opportunities and Challenges

#### **4. The Destination: City of World Culture**

Vision  
Principles  
Goals  
Strategies  
Action Ideas



# *The Destination: City of World Culture*

## VISION

*Lowell – April 2017*

We knew we were approaching Lowell when we saw the first smokestack. We had seen them before when driving past the city, marveling at the images and poetry that flashed on the tall towers, ever changing with the seasons. Turning onto the Connector, we followed the signs pointing the way to local cultural attractions and entered the city through the colorful gateway that announced our arrival to Lowell, City of World Culture.

The mosaic markers led us to our riverfront hotel that doubled as the training facility for Middlesex Community College's hotel and culinary arts program. There, over a late night dinner, we eavesdropped on our neighbor's animated discussion of that night's Merrimack Repertory Theater performance.

Next morning, we met up with our group in front of the Smith Baker Community Arts Center. We were beginning our visits to the College and UMass Lowell with a tour of the city's downtown. We were a mixed group of parents and teenagers, the future Class of 2022, all partaking in the springtime ritual of college tours. About half of the group came from Massachusetts with the rest coming from throughout the U.S. and overseas. Word travels far and fast when a university wins a Nobel Prize.

Our guides were a pair of university and high school students, Creative City Ambassadors, who were eager to tell the group of Lowell's proud past and plans for the future. They started with the Smith Baker itself, "a place for people to do" they called it, with an impressive film screening facility, a concert hall, and plenty of meeting space for the high school's and community's cultural organizations. They pointed out the nearby Lucy Larcom Park, site of the summer outdoor film series.

Our next stop was the UMass Lowell Center for Advanced Research & Digital Arts that housed everything from the music technology department to the Avid Post-Production Studios to the public access station's Digital Story Archives. The Center's Artist/Inventor residency program was renowned for both its commercial spin-offs and the awards it kept collecting at global cyberarts festivals. Ever since *The Busker* won Best Picture at Sundance and Massachusetts introduced film tax credits, Lowell had become a center of feature, educational and foreign language filmmaking. If the gorgeous cobblestone streets, flowing canals and rich supply of locally trained film and sound technicians weren't enough, the regional educational and healthcare institutions could be counted on for steady demand of high tech teaching media.

Next door was the Asian Institute, a partnership with a coalition of local Southeast Asian organizations and a major regional museum. The City's connection to Asia had been jumpstarted by the partnerships formed to bring the Cambodian Opera to Lowell in 2007. Ironically, that same opera, written halfway around the world, had bridged the gap between the University and College on the other end of town. All the partnerships were still going strong and the Fat Lady hadn't even begun to sing.

The summer of 2007 was a memorable one: that was the year that the world converged on Lowell for the Cambodian Opera and the Kerouac Scroll. Visitors came from all over and the old languages that were once spoken in the mills suddenly reappeared on the streets and in restaurants. It was as if the families that had remained behind in the Old Country were coming to Lowell to enjoy the fruits of their ancestor's labor. It didn't hurt that the *New York Times* had discovered Lowell and that the City's investment in its City of World Culture program had leveraged major Ford Foundation funding.

From the Center they caught the trolley back downtown, marveling at a giant head sprouting flowers and a proliferation of signs for the upcoming Boardinghouse Park Music and Art Series, the World Water Festivals, and the Angkor Traditional Arts performances. Art was indeed the handmaid of human good in this city!

Some of the group wanted to stop at the downtown book and media store, the local meet-space for writers, playwrights and poets, the place to go for spoken word events and to buy the hottest indie music, 'zines and publications. Kerouac's books sat alongside those of the local publisher and customers were busy downloading soundtracks of the latest World Garage Music, as Lowell's sound had come to be known.

Meanwhile, other members of the group were more taken by the fashion shops, little boutiques featuring African, Latin, and Asian-influenced clothing, jewelry, and accessories. Mixing traditional prints with new designer styles, the clothing showcased fabrics and designs produced at the digitally printed green textile company spun off from the University's incubator and the fledgling fashion cluster that had sprung up on Western Avenue. Fashion items were particularly popular among tourists who shopped from the artcarts that were rolled out downtown during festival weekends.

They passed groups of school students led by a National Park Ranger and Lowell High School students sporting *My City* tee shirts. When the kids weren't listening to their guides, they were focused intently on their PDAs. Our college tour guides explained that that visiting school groups used technology developed by Motorola and the National Park Service that triggered stories, music, and images whenever they passed a historic or cultural site. The PDAs also pointed out stores, restaurants, and venues where you could experience the contemporary culture real time, and were capable of relaying the tour live to friends. The devices had inspired a local industry that produced the technology and content for a national travel market hungry for educational travel.

Finished with the downtown tour, the guides handed out neighborhood maps that marked the COOL bus route to restaurants and sites beyond downtown. "The bus stops every 15 minutes at the artist-designed bus stops – you can't miss them." The only questions we have left are: should we have Cambodian, Greek, Italian, Brazilian, or vegan? And what did they say are our chances of getting into Middlesex or the University?

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Make **Authenticity** the key to successful cultural economic development. Lowell's strength lies in the city's culture: its people, its heritage, its cultural organizations, and its mills, rivers, and canals.

**Broaden** the thinking beyond funding. While increased funding is undeniably important to a healthy creative economy, so too are good marketing, high quality products, and smart business practices.

**Collaborate**—within and beyond the city—to create connections, economic efficiencies, and expanded cultural offerings.

**Dare** to think bigger and act larger. Concentrate on a few strategic initiatives rather than many smaller activities.

**Execute** the plan with a high quality process, broad institutional and social inclusion, strong organizational capacity, and enough capitalization to support its success.

**Focus** on existing cultural assets, strengthening, expanding, and connecting what is already there before embarking on new initiatives.

**Gauge** performance. Make sure that every organization that receives public and private resources is accountable to its investors.

**Hone** the message—create a clear and concise image for the city's cultural sector.

**Integrate** all of the different groups into the civic life of the community and guarantee that the immigrant community moves from the margins of the city's cultural infrastructure and becomes part of its core.



## THE GIVENS

*These issues all emerged as critical to Lowell's Cultural Economy, but beyond the scope of a cultural development strategy.*

- Signage
- Traffic Patterns
- Hotel
- Downtown Business District
- Education



## Goals...

**GOAL 1:** Strengthen Lowell's Cultural Organizations and Artists

**GOAL 2:** Enhance the Cultural Product

**GOAL 3:** Promote Creative Business Development

**GOAL 4:** Build New Leadership and Civic Engagement

**GOAL 5:** Shape the Image and Improve Marketing



GOAL  
1

## STRENGTHEN LOWELL'S CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

### I.I Action: Strengthen and Broaden the Role of COOL

#### Objective

Consolidate and increase funding and support for cultural activity in Lowell under COOL.

#### Key Actors

COOL, City of Lowell, Lowell Cultural Council (LCC), Merrimack Valley Conventions and Visitor's Bureau, Others.

#### Action Ideas

##### ■ Consolidate cultural support resources in COOL:

Merge COOL and the LCC in order to strengthen the city's administrative capacity and integrate support for both individual artists and cultural organizations.

Expand COOL Board to incorporate LCC leadership, youth, and individual artists

Support one full-time grant writer working for COOL.

Focus of COOL should be on cultural promotion, new product development, convening, and technical assistance and support of organizations, businesses, and individuals in the creative economy.

Develop annual benchmarks and hold COOL accountable through clear performance measures.

##### ■ Create increased capacity for community based organizations representing the city's immigrant community.

Two Options:

*Expand COOL Board to more fully represent the City's diverse population and cultural organizations; or*

*Create new World Cultural Support organization.*

##### ■ Create the COOL Pool:

Consolidate city, state, and philanthropic funding already being spent to support cultural activities in Lowell. Create an annual \$300,000 pool of funding for operations and special projects.

This fund would have the following priorities:

*Grants to support individual creative activity— support for Lowell residents who produce creative products: visual arts, crafts, music, theater, literary, etc.*

*Credit enhancement and operating support to stabilize existing cultural institutions.*

*Seed funding for new cultural products.*

*Grants for collaborative marketing activities and special events.*

## I.2 Action: Streamline Approach to Festivals and Events

### Objective

Take the existing events and festivals in Lowell to the next level of scale by increasing their capacity in fundraising, marketing, and operations.

### Key Actors

Jericho Road, City of Lowell, Lowell Festival Foundation, COOL, others.

### Action Ideas

#### ■ Create Festival Advisory Board composed of representatives of each of the major events and festivals being sponsored in Lowell.

#### ■ Convene Advisory Board to explore the following options:

*Expand the capacity of the Lowell Festival Foundation and broaden its responsibility to cover all of the festivals and events in the city.*

*Create Festival Resource Center based on the model being developed by Jericho Road.*

#### ■ Develop a relationship between the City's Event Staff and the new Board.

#### ■ Streamline the regulatory and bureaucratic process related to operating a festival in Lowell.

Create a *Lowell Event Handbook* that has specific checklists and fee schedules related to events and festivals in the city.

Appoint a citywide *Festival Team* – city staff with specific responsibilities to ensure the best visitor experience with each festival or event including traffic, police, signage, etc. This team would be mobilized for each event.

Invest in banners and signage created by artists that can be used for each of the city's major events.

## I.3 Action: Increase Cultural Collaboration

### Objective

Reduce the costs of existing cultural organizations by creating economies of scale and other efficiencies through collaboration.

### Key Actors

MRT, Quilt Museum, Textile Museum, LMA, Whistler House, Angkor Dance, National Park, Arena, Brush Gallery, Revolving Museum, other interested institutions.

### Action Ideas

#### ■ Convene major cultural organizations to begin exploration of areas of potential cultural collaboration:

Educational Programming

Booking and Touring

Grant Writing

Retail Sales

Ticketing

Catering

Technology and Website Management

### MODELS

#### Chattanooga Museum Collaborative

The Creative Discovery Museum, the Hunter Museum of American Arts, and the Tennessee Aquarium have developed a partnership that has involved collaborative activity in five areas: Human Resources, Finance and Accounting, Information Technology, Marketing, and Retail Buying.

#### Contemporary Art Center: New Orleans

A consortium of seven cultural institutions received funding from the Getty Foundation to look at the possibilities of collaborative programming and back office cost-sharing. The organization has already started providing grant writing assistance to smaller arts organizations



GOAL  
2

## ENHANCE THE CULTURAL PRODUCT

### 2.1 Action: Create Merrimack Valley Cultural Corridor

#### Objective

Create new signature events that involve Lowell in a broader cultural market.

#### Key Actors

MVEDC, Nashua, Manchester, Revolving Museum, Lowell Plan, Others.

#### Action Ideas

##### ■ Explore developing new cultural relationships in the Merrimack Valley

Promote touring of Lowell performing arts organization in other venues in the Merrimack Valley — initial focus on MRT and Angkor Dance developing relationship with Manchester, New Hampshire.

Develop a *Merrimack Valley Open Studios* weekend.

Develop a signature Merrimack Valley Art event. Consider a *Merrimack Valley Smokestack Project*. This project would create seasonal artworks on the many smokestacks throughout the Valley.

Create an annual *Merrimack Valley Art Show*. The location could rotate every year.

#### MODELS

##### Vermont Open Studios

For 15 years Vermont has had an open studios weekend on Memorial Day that covers the entire state. Sponsored by the Vermont Crafts Council, the weekend includes over 250 studios. There are yellow signposts and a map and guidebook that are published annually, providing visitors with information on where to go. This event has helped to spawn additional local networking amongst artists.

##### 50 Miles of Art

Three communities in Northeast Missouri along the Mississippi have come together to create an arts corridor. The communities are linked by history, heritage, and transportation routes. The communities host studio tours twice each year by the artisans along the 50 Miles of Art.

##### WaterFire Providence

WaterFire has become a significant art event in Providence that has attracted a growing audience. The event attracts on average 40,000 visitors and has been seen as an important element in the cultural renaissance of Providence.

## 2.2 Action: Develop New Cultural Center

### Objective

Create a new community cultural center that can meet the need for a mid-sized venue and bring together much of the small and community-based cultural activity in the city.

### Key Actors

UMass Lowell, Middlesex Community College, Lowell Plan, COOL, City of Lowell, foundations, National Park, Heritage Partnership, Lowell High School.

### Action Ideas

#### ■ Explore feasibility of renovating the Smith Baker into the Lowell Community Cultural Center

Home for Angkor Dance.

Home for New England Orchestra, Image Theater, Lowell Opera, and Lowell Philharmonic.

Venue for Middlesex Community College and UMass Lowell.

Youth arts center.

Film screenings

### MODELS

#### McColl Center for Visual Arts Charlotte, North Carolina

In 1995, Bank of America acquired a fire damaged church for the purpose of establishing an urban artists' community.

The Center was completed in 1999 and today houses exhibition space, workshops, residencies, classes, and outreach activities with the community.

#### Roxbury Center for Arts at Hibernian Hall (RCAHH)

RCAHH houses the Madison Park Development Corporation and its Arts, Culture, Trade Roxbury Consortium (ACT Roxbury). It is the site of ACT Roxbury's cultural and arts programs and features retail, restaurant, and office space for arts-related businesses and educational organizations.

The dance hall has been restored as Roxbury's only high quality performance and events venue.

## 2.3 Action: Develop an Urban Cultural Residency Program

### Objective

Increase the visibility of Lowell in the national and international cultural world.

### Key Actors

COOL, MRT, UMass Lowell, Middlesex Community College,

Artist League of Lowell, Others.

### Action Ideas

#### ■ Explore the feasibility of creating a program that brings artistic talent to live and work in Lowell for three-month residencies.

MRT has housing units that it already uses for visiting performers.

Use this space and other artist live work space and sponsor five to ten annual residencies with focus on:

poetry and literature (a Kerouac Residency); digital technology; and world culture.

### MODELS

#### The Hyde Park Art Center in Chicago

This new center is planning an artist residency program called Urban Space to be jointly administered by the Art Center and the University of

Chicago's Division of the Humanities. The effort will have three working artists in the building who interact directly with diverse audiences.



GOAL  
3

PROMOTE CREATIVE BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

**3.1 Action: Support Creative Entrepreneurial Activity**

**Objective**

Develop a more focused effort to support individual artists and craftspeople.

**Key Actors**

Jericho Road, the Small Business Center, Middlesex Community College, and UMass Lowell, Arts League of Lowell, Downtown Venture Fund, LDFC

**Action Ideas**

- **Establish the Lowell Creative Business Partnership.** The Partnership would explore the development of the following activities:
- **The creation of a Lowell Cultural Catalogue:** a website that is devoted exclusively to the artwork and crafts of Lowell's artist community—both immigrant and mainstream.
- **An Arts Small Business Incubator** that would be for all artists, but especially for youth and immigrants.
- **Business skills workshops for artists** run by MCC and UML faculty and SBAC and Jericho Road staff.
- **Access to capital to get their production off the ground or expanded, to improve their marketing and promotion, to improve their production space, etc.**

**MODELS**

**New Orleans Arts Council's Arts Business Program**

The program is a centralized source of business assistance for area artists, arts organizations, and arts businesses. Started in 1991, the Arts Business Program is a place where individuals and organizations can learn, grow their businesses, and exchange ideas and creative energy.

**Fostering Arts Partnership: Franklin County**

The Fostering the Arts and Culture Partnership is a project of the Franklin County Community Development Corporation (FCCDC), Franklin County Chamber of Commerce and Greenfield Business Association (FCCC), Franklin-Hampshire Regional Employment Board (FH-REB), Greenfield Community College (GCC), River Culture, MassCountryRoads.com, and the Shelburne Falls Area Business Association (SFABA). The Partnership provides workshops for artists focused on improving their business skills.

### 3.2 Action: Promote Commercialization of Creative Activities at MCC and UMass Lowell

#### Objective

Utilize technological and creative expertise in higher education to create new creative enterprises.

#### Key Actors

UMass Lowell, MCC, Lowell Plan.

#### Action Ideas

##### ■ Undertake a Creative Scan of MCC and UMass Lowell:

Create an internal Task Force at both UMass Lowell and MCC with the mission of identifying areas of expertise in the creative sector.

Hold two workshops with groups from both schools focused on potential areas of collaboration and intersection with the business community.

Engage the faculty and staff at UMass who are involved in Venture Lab and the Commercial Ventures & Intellectual Property Team to give them a better understanding of creative products.

##### ■ Explore the feasibility of developing a Digital Arts Center associated with UMass and located downtown.





GOAL  
4

BUILD NEW LEADERSHIP AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

**4.1 Action: Engage Students in Lowell Cultural Life**

**Objective**

Develop next generation of youth leaders in Lowell

**Key Actors**

High Schools, Middlesex Community College, UMass Lowell, COOL, Revolving Museum, UTEC, LTC and other youth organizations.

**Action Ideas**

■ **Engage students at Middlesex Community College and UMass Lowell in cultural activities in the City:**

Expand COOL Student Ambassador program to Middlesex Community College.  
Broaden scope modeled on the Creative Campus initiative at the University of Alabama.

■ **Develop new cultural programming for high school students that promotes their involvement in the community:**

Create a community-wide Digital Storytelling Initiative. Work with the Lowell Telecommunications Corp to teach young people how to develop and conduct interviews and use technology to film, edit, and present those stories.  
Create My Town/Youth Tour Guides through a collaboration between the high school and the National Park and Mogan Center.

■ **Keep COOL cool:**

Reserve several COOL Board positions for a representative of the HS, MCC, and UML.

**MODELS**

**Creative Campus Initiative University of Alabama**

This initiative was developed by the University to create a bridge between the campus and the community by using arts and culture.  
“The Creative Campus is committed to seeing the excellent scholarship taking place at the university applied in concrete ways both on campus and in the community.”

## 4.2 Action: Establish Lowell Cultural Gateways Project

### Objective

Involve all communities in Lowell in a creative and collaborative process that builds new relationships

### Key Actors

City of Lowell, Foundations, Lowell Plan,  
Others.

### Action Steps

#### ■ Develop a significant public art project that invites designs to improve the gateways into Lowell and to showcase the City's ethnic heritage:

Major gateways into and out of Lowell will be identified.

Each ethnic community in Lowell will be invited to participate.

A design review committee will be established to review designs.

Proposals will be written to major corporations and foundations to fund the implementation process.

### MODELS

#### Indy Gateways: Indianapolis

Indy Gateways is a project of the City of Indianapolis and the Rotary Club of Indianapolis. Its purpose is to showcase the city's gateways at major points of entry to the city. A Gateways Workgroup was charged with identifying potential gateway locations as well as developing a toolbox to provide a guide for the development of gateways in Indianapolis.



GOAL  
5

SHAPE THE IMAGE AND IMPROVE MARKETING

**5.1 Action: Lowell Image Project**

**Objective**

Develop consensus around the Lowell “brand” and develop a branding process that goes beyond the tagline.

**Key Actors**

City Manager, City Council, Lowell Plan, COOL, MVCVB, MCC, UMass Lowell, other community Stakeholders.

**Action Ideas**

■ **Create a Consortium of Lowell organizations and businesses that will manage and reach consensus on a Lowell brand.**

The group will be led by the Lowell Plan.

The group will be tasked with deciding on a new logo and unifying marketing campaign for the City.

The group will also explore new, cutting edge marketing strategies that focus on three audiences:

*Internal Audience*—reaching all of the residents of Lowell;

*Regional Audience*—reaching residents and businesses in Greater Boston and Southern New Hampshire; and

*External Audience*—National and international Audience.

The group will run workshops for cultural institutions, realtors, developers, and businesses on the new identity.

**MODELS**

**Spirit of Milwaukee, Milwaukee, Wisconsin**

*Spirit of Milwaukee* is a 501(c)(3) private nonprofit corporation whose mission is to educate the public, both locally and nationally, about greater Milwaukee’s assets and to encourage better utilization of these assets. This coalition of Milwaukee civic organizations and corporate leaders was initiated by Midwest Airlines. In addition to its effort to develop a new brand, the organization promotes new collaborative relationships among the city’s civic organizations and businesses with a focus on “communicating the value of Milwaukee as a cultural destination.” Spirit of Milwaukee spearheaded the development of the “community-owned” Milwaukee mark or logo that is being used extensively throughout the city. The president of Spirit of Milwaukee is also heading the “Identity Team” for the economic development organizations in the 7 counties in the greater Milwaukee region. Economic development organizations in these counties created “Milwaukee 7” to oversee and implement a “strategic coordinated branding campaign” for that region.

## 5.2 Action: Develop a Detailed Marketing Strategy for the City

### Objective

Improve the effectiveness and efficiency of current marketing activities being undertaken by the City of Lowell.

### Key Actors

City Manager, City Council, Staff of the Department of Planning and Development.

### Action Ideas

#### ■ Create a city marketing plan.

The City currently spends about \$250,000 directly on marketing the city and provides the MVCVB with another \$100,000 in funding. Yet, there is not a clear strategy for how to make the most use of these funds. The City Manager and major department heads should develop a detailed marketing plan and consider:

As a participant in the Image Project, the City will have a new identity with which to work. Once this brand is established, the City needs to identify the most effective ways to reach the different targets: visitors, commercial and retail businesses, technology-based companies, and residents.

A plan should also examine internal staffing, outside consultants and collaborations. The City should consider identifying a range of marketing consultants with expertise in different areas.

#### ■ Enhance the relationship with MVCVB

Lowell is the only municipal member of the MVCVB that contributes funding beyond what the state allocates to the region. In order to ensure that the City of Lowell gets the highest return on its \$100,000 allocation to the MVCVB, the City should consider the following options:

Restructure the Board of Directors to better represent the level of support for the CVB;

Develop specific performance measures tied to the city's \$100,000 investment that involves specific tasks for the City of Lowell; or

Continue to support the CVB in the same manner as the other member cities and towns, and reallocate the city's \$100,000 contribution to its own marketing activities or to the Cultural Fund.

## 5.3 Action: Create Unified Cultural e-Blast

### Objective

Create one very high quality cultural newsletter and calendar for Lowell

### Key Actors

COOL

### Action Ideas

#### ■ COOL should convene all of the organizations and individuals in Lowell currently publishing cultural list serves and calendars

Review models of cultural e-Blasts that are put out by local cultural organizations.

Develop a prototype for the e- Blast.

Develop the procedures for centralizing information on calendars and email lists.

Put out a weekly e-Blast focusing on Lowell cultural events and individual artists.

### MODELS

The Office of Cultural Development for the City of Pittsfield has an extensive on-line calendar as well as a very effective weekly e-Blast that highlights some of the key events occurring in the city that week.



# The Road Map...

## Example of Implementation Activity

Meeting between Mt. Auburn, MRT, and Director of Economic Development in Manchester.  
Marketing Memo Submitted to City of Lowell with recommendations on branding and marketing.  
Facilitating contacts for the Cambodian Opera.

## Convene Working Groups

Marketing and Support Infrastructure  
Merrimack Valley Corridor  
Entrepreneurial Development  
Cultural Collaboration

## Explore New Sources of Funding

New public sources: 1% for Arts  
National Foundation Grants  
Federal Agency Grants

## Example of Federal Funding Opportunity

The Federal Office of Community Services' (OCS) Job Opportunities for Low-Income Individuals (JOLI) program helps low-income individuals achieve economic self-sufficiency. Grants can be used to create a revolving loan fund and make at or below market rate loans to eligible beneficiaries for business development activities. Grantees also attempt to integrate their projects with the larger economic development strategy within the target communities. Grants are awarded through a competitive process to nonprofit organizations having 501(c)(3) or 501(c)(4) status with the Internal Revenue Service. Proposals Due: June 2007



