



## ★ ENDORSEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE ★

**Deadline: September 25<sup>TH</sup>**

**Candidate Event: October 15<sup>TH</sup>, 5:30PM**

# Solidarity Lowell 2023 City Council Questionnaire

**Name:** Wayne Jenness

**Office Sought:** District 4 Councilor

**Website:** <https://district4lowell.com/>

**Facebook:** [Wayne Jenness, Lowell City Councilor](#)

**Twitter:** [@District4Lowell](#)

**Instagram:** [@District4Lowell](#)

### **Section 1: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

#### **1. The city has more work to do in the area of fair, unbiased policing.**

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Neither Agree nor Disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly Disagree

#### ***Why or why not? How would you address this issue?***

I think every city and town has work to do here. Lowell's community policing strategy lays the foundation for this work. I would love to see more effort put in towards recruiting members for the Citizen's Advisory Committee. The last update the council received was in December of 2022. At that time membership was down significantly. It is time for the new chief to re-build this committee. Additionally, increasing the DEI program across all levels of the city government will help to address this issue.

**2. The city needs to diversify its hiring practices so that City Hall proportionally represents the ethnic makeup of our city's residents.**

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Neither Agree nor Disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly Disagree

***Why or why not? What are your proposals to address Lowell city hiring practices?***

Now that we have a DEI officer in place, they should be charged with focusing on this and improving our recruitment and hiring processes to better align with an overall DEI strategy. It is up to the council to hold the manager and his team accountable for this work.

**3. Would you support requiring developers in the city to sign community benefit agreements? These might include requirements that their workforce reflect Lowell's diversity, that a certain percentage of their workforce be local hires, and/or that pay be a living wage. (YES/NO)**

I think there is an opportunity for these agreements, and would like to see them explored. However, I am greatly concerned with the lack of housing development in this city, and do not want to do anything that would further hamper housing construction. To date, seven residential occupancy permits have been issued across the entire city year to date. Lowell can not survive without a SIGNIFICANT increase in housing production.

**4. The city needs to ensure that all marginalized communities are equally protected.**

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Neither Agree nor Disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly Disagree

***Why or why not? What proposals do you have for ensuring equal protections for all Lowell residents and visitors?***

Everyone should feel welcome in Lowell, everyone should feel safe in Lowell, everyone should have opportunity in Lowell. Continual review and improvement of all our policies and procedures across all levels of the city is something that needs to be central to the day to day operations of the city. Additionally, reviewing and acting on external input in terms of reviews and audits like the the HRC municipal equality index can inform where improvements are needed and help us see any blind spots we may have.

**5. Systemic racism is a public health crisis in Lowell.**

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Neither Agree nor Disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly Disagree

***If so, why and how do you propose to respond to the crisis in Lowell-specific ways? If not, why not?***

I am proud that the council unanimously voted to declare racism a public health crisis in the city of Lowell. Now, we must make sure we continue to invest in the community, the city staff, and our systems to be able to address these needs. This needs to be done by building community partnerships, leveraging best practices and hard work. Our DEI program is central to this mission. Having Middlesex College on board to help us down this road is a huge first step in the right direction and an example of the steps that need to be undertaken.

**6. What steps would you take, if elected, to engage all of the diverse communities of Lowell in policy-making, and what past actions of yours should give voters confidence that you will follow through?**

We need to increase the recruitment of diverse candidates for our boards and commissions in the city, as well as improve our recruitment and hiring practices when it comes to full-time city employees. When we are looking at making important policy changes and decisions, community input and partnership with our local community focused non-profits and neighborhood groups is very important. During my first term on the council, I have always tried to keep an open mind and engage with as many different members of the community before coming to conclusions and figuring out how to proceed. If re-elected, I will continue to engage with all aspects of our community to make sure we are doing the right things as we move forward.

## **Section II: Housing, Labor, and Development**

### **1. Lowell's code enforcement should do more to protect tenants from evictions and/or penalties for previous evictions.**

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Neither Agree nor Disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly Disagree

### ***If so, why and how do you propose to strengthen tenant rights? If not, why not?***

Lowell should have an office of housing stability, just like other cities in the commonwealth do. In those offices, city employees can and do help tenants understand their rights when it comes to evictions and other housing challenges, and are empowered to either provide direct assistance, or connect tenants with other groups who can help. For example: In Worcester, if an eviction is filed with the court, a member of their housing stability office goes to the residence that day or the next day and meets with the resident to help them understand their rights and helps them work to re-gain stable housing. I see no reason why we can't do the same.

### **2. How would you expand affordable housing in Lowell and ensure development without displacement of established communities?**

The first thing we need to realize is that this displacement is already happening, and has been for some time. As of last Friday (9/22) the City of Lowell had issued seven new occupancy permits for new housing units in the entire calendar year. This practically non-existent pace of housing development is driving up housing costs across our city and pushing people who want to stay in Lowell out. We need to have some serious conversations and actions around zoning, density, and our path forward. We need housing development at all levels, and we need it five years ago.

### **3. How would you address the needs of the unhoused population of Lowell?**

We need more resources. More housing, more funding, more outreach and social services workers doing the day to day work. The city can not do it on its own. We need to go to the state legislature and the governor's office with concrete, actionable plans. I.e. "here's an opportunity to build housing for 20 homeless individuals with substance abuse issues, here's the project plan, the expected

costs, the staffing needs, the site and the permitting ready to go". Just saying 'we need help' is clearly not working. Let's start building actual plans and then ask for help to execute those plans.

**4. Do you agree with a Housing First approach? (YES/NO)**

YES.

**5. Do you agree with the city's unhoused encampment sweeps? (YES/NO)**

YES.

**6. Would you agree with establishing legal camping areas for those unhoused persons for whom no other accommodations are available? (YES/NO)**

YES.

**7. How would you ensure there are adequate services for all unhoused persons?**

The reality is, the city can not guarantee these services. We could utilize every dollar in our budget and we still would not meet all of the needs of all the unhoused individuals that need help. Because of that, we need to make our funding go as far as it can. This means finding ways to work with other organizations (state, federal, non-profits, even for profit businesses), to stretch that spending. We need to encourage more housing to get built within the city so there is a path for people to leave the shelter system into stable housing. We are missing that rung on the housing ladder, and it is really hampering the ability for people to move on and open a bed up for the next person that needs it. Increasing the availability of affordable housing and permanent supportive housing is the single most effective thing we can do to address this crisis.

**8. Would you support a city wage theft ordinance that would set up structures to protect workers from wage theft violations such as failure to make wage payments; failure to abide by minimum wage, prevailing wage and overtime laws; and independent contractor misclassification? (YES/NO)**

The Attorney General's office is extremely good at this work already, and are passionate about addressing these issues. They are better equipped, better armed, and more efficient than the city could possibly be. The best thing we can do is assist their teams in this work, not stand up our own infrastructure.

**9. How would you fill the empty downtown storefronts?**

Our economic development team is doing a good job with the resources they have, but I think they need 2-3 more staff members to drive this work. There are a few things that need to be addressed:

1. Start with one block, make that block the best it can be before you move on to the next block.
2. Fix the infrastructure and make downtown more accessible. Downtown businesses can not survive solely off downtown residents. It needs to be easier to get downtown by car, by bus, on foot or on bike.
3. Increase our festivals / events, build an open streets culture / environment.
4. Focus on cleanliness/appearance (get better about picking up trash, emptying barrels, increasing lighting, etc), our unique offerings (canals, historic architecture, national park, etc.), and public safety (No one wants to spend time in an area they feel unsafe, this is true in our parking garages and on our streets.)

It's a lot of work and it requires building sustainable practices that can be continued over time.

### **Section III: Environment and Transportation**

**1. Would you support programs to subsidize retrofitting the old housing stock in Lowell to be more energy efficient, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and reduce energy costs for residents? (YES/NO)**

YES.

**2. Climate change is causing more days of extreme heat, flooding, damaging storms, and drought; just to name a few of the impacts. Lowell could do more to prepare for the impacts of climate change.**

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Neither Agree nor Disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly Disagree

***What steps would you recommend that the city take to improve its preparedness?***

We need more frequent reviews of our emergency preparedness and disaster response plan. All assumptions should be frequently re-evaluated in the light of our changing climate, and the realities of our public safety staffing need to be considered.

**3. In 2018, the Lowell City Council passed a resolution supporting a goal of 100% renewable energy use in Lowell-- including in buildings and transportation-- by 2035. This year, Massachusetts passed a new climate law that requires significantly reducing greenhouse gas emissions across our economy by 2030. What steps would you recommend that Lowell take to accomplish these goals?**

The biggest wins are the decarbonization of our schools and other buildings, and aggressively phasing out carbon-based vehicles and equipment where possible. We should not buy another gas fueled car for the city manager, we should be finding ways to replace two cycle lawn equipment with battery operated equipment, etc

**4. The hours and reach of the LRTA need to be extended.**

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Neither Agree nor Disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly Disagree

***Why or why not? If so, what would you recommend in order to reach this goal?***

The most frustrating part of being a city councilor is our lack of oversight and control of the LRTA. The LRTA is simply ineffective in meeting the needs of our community. However, most of the seats on the LRTA board are appointed by the governor. This leaves us very challenged in what we can do to improve service, but we should be trying to improve it wherever possible.

**5. Lowell should prioritize policies that make it easier to get around the city without depending on cars.**

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Neither Agree nor Disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly Disagree

***Why or why not? What policy priorities do you support to achieve this goal?***

Lowell needs to do bike infrastructure properly. We've never done it right. We haven't built one protected bike lane in this city, and then we wonder why no one uses bikes. We need to figure out how to start building a protected bike NETWORK (not individual lanes that don't go anywhere), and continue to expand existing multi use path infrastructure like the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail, the canal and river walks, etc. We should adopt a vision zero plan to make walking and biking on city streets safer, we should expand our spending on traffic calming.

**Section IV: City Management/Council Relations**

**1. Do you agree that too much of our City Council meetings are spent on discussing items that could have been delegated to the City Manager or the appropriate department ahead of the meeting?**

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Neither Agree nor Disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly Disagree

**2. Do you support the five minute speaking time limit being extended to also cover City Council and School Committee members?**

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Neither Agree nor Disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly Disagree

**3. Do you agree that there should be a limit on the number of amendments a Councilor can propose on a given motion or ordinance?**

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Neither Agree nor Disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly Disagree

**Please share any additional thoughts on how our city meetings are run.**



The city council rules already limit the length of time a member can speak on any one issue (five minutes max, and a maximum of twice), we need to follow the rules we have in place. It doesn't matter what the restrictions are if the person running the meeting allows the rules to be waived at every turn and lets the members do whatever they want. The mayor needs to better understand the city council rules and Robert's Rules and actually use them to run the meetings efficiently.

## **Section V: Final Thoughts**

### **1. Communication between the Lowell city government and the people of Lowell needs to be improved.**

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Neither Agree nor Disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly Disagree

### ***If so, what ideas do you have to improve the communication between the Lowell city government and the people of Lowell? If not, why not?***

This is why one of my first motions when this term began was for the city manager to consider creating a centralized communications department. We have now brought on one staff member whose only job is communication. That role must continue to expand in a multi-cultural way to better address communication needs across the city. Over time, I think that should end up being a 7-10 person department in order to meet the communications needs of the city.

### **2. What will you do to maintain contact with your constituents while you are in office?**

I am always accessible via facebook / instagram / twitter / text messages / phone calls and emails. I show up to as many community meetings and events as possible, and do my best to stay in touch with people on a regular basis. I would like to add an email newsletter to this setup, but have not had the bandwidth to accomplish that just yet.

**3. Do you commit to ensuring that important city communications are accessible in the main languages (English, Spanish, Khmer) of the city's residents, including City Council meetings and minutes, policy and emergency announcements?**

Yes. We should be looking at this with every piece of communication we work on.

**4. What are your top three priorities if elected?**

1. Increasing the vitality of the downtown, 2. Improving and maintaining our open space throughout the city, 3. Improving our transportation infrastructure for all users, but with a particular focus on non-car users (public transit, bike, walk).