

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 Mehmed Ali

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?

I believe all neighborhoods of the City should be treated equal so that if one area of Lowell has new sidewalks, then all sections should be scheduled for similar improvements.

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?

There are many great elements of the current direction of the City such as the transformation of the empty or underutilized commercial and industrial buildings into new residences for people. A concern of mine is to ensure, however, that working families can afford to stay in Lowell so I want to ensure that gentrification does not happen in some of our core inner city neighborhoods.

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

Obviously it depends on the individual household and their capacity to pay taxes but property taxes are part of life and the argument could be made that they are always too high. In order to stabilize the tax rate, I would like to work at growing the tax base by working on economic development issues.

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've read what the Lowell Sun has to say and I've heard hearsay. I wasn't in the room when it happened and I don't know more than that.

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

I am a supporter of City Manager Bernie Lynch and I believe he should be given a chance to prove his leadership as he just completes his first year in office.

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.)

The City should provide adequate funding for its public schools and I would like to see a better system of more frequent dialogue between the School Department and City Hall.

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*)

The City needs to give city employees a fair and equitable salary and benefit system through their contracts while at the same time not overburdening the tax payers.

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*)

I am unsure what is meant by "options" and do not understand the question. Please redefine.

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*)

Although it is probably impossible to predict a target percentage increase or decrease I would like to see the tax rate remain stable and again would work on economic development to expand the tax base.

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*)

The City should be held to the same standards as other property owners in neighborhoods and should bring buildings back on line within a short period of time. If the best way to make that happen is to sell them off to a private developer then the City should push that to happen.

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

I would like to see the Massachusetts Mills development happen but until the current legal case is resolved I do not believe there is anything the City can do to push the project. Although I am not in favor of high-rise developments in other parts of the City such as Pawtucketville and Middlesex Village, I believe the old Post Office VMF site might be a good place for that type of development.

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

As a member of the Mayor's Task Force on Cultural Assets, I have participated in helping to create a Cultural Economy plan which will come out with recommendations that will help artists. I would like to see if it's possible to remove the barriers cutting off Western Avenue from Dutton Street.

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

We need to work with our small businesses in the Tanner Street/Ayer's City area to improve their capacity and have growth along the Connector.

Infrastructure

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

By creating more local jobs for local people the City could alleviate traffic problems by having residents live closer to their workplaces.

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*)

If we are able to grow the local economy by having citizens re-orient their identity towards Lowell, we will be able to have full city services that are necessary for a city our size including proper coverage with our neighborhood fire houses.

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*)

Immigrants are an important and necessary part of Lowell's past as it will be part of our future and I welcome new people to Lowell whether they come from the Ivory Coast, Brazil or Wisconsin. As far as gentrification, please see answer #2.

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 believe we need to speak as a unified City to let Congress and the President know how we feel about the immigration issue which I believe is caused primarily by the bureaucracy of the Federal government.

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*)

I primarily follow local news almost exclusively via the local newspapers, blogs, and radio stations but I really find one of the best sources of ideas comes from my listening to people in the community. By listening to different sources, I believe I am able to come to my decisions fully apprised of the situation.

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

Not sure.

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

As a councilor, I want to be a representative for the entire city and I would like to work on alternative energy sources for City operations and assist small business in order to try to add jobs to the local economy.