Is our “Main Street” Downtown healthy and successful? If not, what would you do to change that?

I don’t think it’s as successful as it could be, or as successful as it needs to be. Not to ignore some of the successes that have happened, but the past year and a half has been difficult for any business that’s operating in the downtown area coming off the pandemic. We have to help small businesses get back on their feet.

Absolutely. This is something that I've worked on a bit through my job with the ALCO. We work on training programs that help folks to receive good paying union jobs and we've worked on a couple of pilot programs around the state, reentry and retraining for folks that officers have worked with.

Well, this is an issue that came up last year at the City Council and I voted to declassify racism as a public health crisis in the City of Lowell. I felt strongly that the city should make that declaration because when you look at health statistics for children, for businesses, for neighborhoods, among residents of Lowell, it's undeniable that many of those inequities correlate directly to race and historic inequities that have existed throughout this country and this city is not immune from those sorts of inequities and injustices. So I did feel strongly in making that declaration to begin to take steps forward and address policy outcomes and solutions, but definitely support that statement and declaration.

Would you vote in support of a motion to allocate funding from the city budget for rental assistance programs for incarcerated people who are being released into society?

I know that there are still a lot of business owners that want to take a chance and make the investment in downtown Lowell and I think they see the potential that we do, but we don't have all of our storefronts full and operating like they should be. Until we do that, then we still have a lot of improvements we can make.

I believe that was addressed at least somewhat in the recent police reform law that passed in the State Legislature but the duty to intervene is something that came up and that's why I voted to declassify racism as a public health crisis in the City of Lowell. I felt strongly that the city should make that declaration because when you look at health statistics for children, for businesses, for neighborhoods, among residents of Lowell, it's undeniable that many of those inequities correlate directly to race and historic inequities that have existed throughout this country and this city is not immune from those sorts of inequities and injustices. So I did feel strongly in making that declaration to begin to take steps forward and address policy outcomes and solutions, but definitely support that statement and declaration.

How would you vote on a motion that says, “racism is a public health issue”?

Yes, and I believe that was addressed at least somewhat in the recent police reform law that passed in the State Legislature but the duty to intervene is something that came up and that's why I voted to declassify racism as a public health crisis in the City of Lowell. I felt strongly that the city should make that declaration because when you look at health statistics for children, for businesses, for neighborhoods, among residents of Lowell, it's undeniable that many of those inequities correlate directly to race and historic inequities that have existed throughout this country and this city is not immune from those sorts of inequities and injustices. So I did feel strongly in making that declaration to begin to take steps forward and address policy outcomes and solutions, but definitely support that statement and declaration.

Do you support having our own version of the CARES Act that makes the police department stay in one building, so we could have one police officer to fail to intervene when another officer is using excessive force?

One thing I want to find out first is, there's an actual budget in place for that purpose. Otherwise it's like doing something without knowledge, so I'd like to know what the city is already doing to support formerly incarcerated people in partnership with the Sheriff, or District Attorney's office to better understand the whole picture and to find the opportunities. If we have programs through all those different points: Police Department, Sheriff's Office, nonprofits, etc. I'd like to see how much we're spending on that and compare us to other communities. If Lowell was spending less on this than similar sized cities, then I'd say, I'll make the case for funding.

Great question. For those who do not know, I co-led the citywide effort last year, post the murder of George Floyd, to have the city of Lowell declare racism a public health crisis. At that point, I was the co-chair of the advisory sub-committee for the Diversity Equity and Inclusion Consortium of Lowell. The Consortium wasn't one or two people, this was various organizations around the city, everyone banding together to say we stand in solidarity that we're going to deal with systemic issues that have existed for centuries. Even though we're not in a time where we see people walking around with white hoses on, or drinking from different water fountains, things are behind the scenes, a lot of systemic things we don't realize, and it affects all of us. As Councilor I felt that opportunity presented itself that I would have done that 100%. Unfortunately, that declaration failed at City Council but was upheld on the School Committee. There's a disconnect there and we need to be on the offensive to build trust so we can build trust. If anyone is interested, I would do that.

I'd have to be more hopeful than the Lowell Police Department to fail to intervene when another officer is using excessive force.

On a general level, as we talk about policing, and the community, and young people, without a doubt, things must change. I've worked with programs that have effectively helped young people with substance use disorders stay in school, get support, and help them navigate their way toward healthy, physical health, family situations. Whether you see it or not, we're all going through something. Our downtown's physical environment isn't healthy because we see vacant store fronts and we see homelessness. We also know that homelessness can look differently, sometimes it's folks couch surfing. I'd love to see more folks walking downtown. When a whole bunch of people come downtown, it becomes more lively, more exciting, and it helps the businesses, and it helps with economic development efforts. We also know that homeless people want to make downtown healthy and inspire people to come downtown.

One thing I want to find out first is, there's an actual budget in place for that purpose. Otherwise it's like doing something without knowledge, so I'd like to know what the city is already doing to support formerly incarcerated people in partnership with the Sheriff, or District Attorney's office to better understand the whole picture and to find the opportunities. If we have programs through all those different points: Police Department, Sheriff's Office, nonprofits, etc. I'd like to see how much we're spending on that and compare us to other communities. If Lowell was spending less on this than similar sized cities, then I'd say, I'll make the case for funding.

Yes, absolutely. Particularly in downtown, we have a lot of storefronts that are either empty or under utilized. We need to find creative ways to use those, either if it's temporary use for art or pop-up shops, would be great ways to utilize those spaces. It takes work with the landlords and owners of those buildings, but certainly if we could utilize them and bring some vibrancy to the downtown, it makes a difference. Some of the upper floors can also be used to address more housing.

Absolutely. I've lived downtown for 13 years, I actually started my own small business in Lowell after going through a program called E-Commerce and construction trades, or would absolutely love to see a program that allows a place directly for people from incarceration into a good paying job. Whether it's in the building construction, or other trades pipelines into careers, as it's an extremely worthwhile investment that has been proven to work in other places. I'd definitely be willing to allocate funding through the city or other funding sources as well.

It's a “no” for sure. It's ugly to me. If you have a better police department, you don't have to be forceful, you just have to know how to do it, people are homeless. If you have the right leadership, you can change a lot of things whether it's spending less on people living in our downtown.

I had to vote on that before, and I would vote against that. I believe Lowell is a great place. I've been over America. I'm a place from where you don't feel comfortable living in... I would never vote for that issue, I didn't vote on that before, and I won't vote for it again because I've got faith in people, and I think Lowell is a tremendous place to be.

Absolutely, it's something that I've worked on a bit through my job with the ALCO. We work on training programs that help folks to receive good paying union jobs and we've worked on a couple of pilot programs around the state, reentry and retraining for folks that officers have worked with.

Well, we already had that motion, and we have nine city councilors, six of us voted that it's not a public health crisis, it's a problem in the city to some degree? Probably it is, but to say the word crisis I couldn't say the word crisis. I don't want the city to be viewed as a crisis. If racism is such a crisis, why are people from Afghanistan coming here? In Lowell High School alone, I think we have 68 different countries represented in this world. If it's such a bad city, why are people coming here from all around the world? Is homelessness a public health crisis? Yes, is drug addiction? Yes. I'm not saying racism doesn't exist.

That's a great question. I can only speak as a person working in a place where we would sometimes have to cuff up a person or restrain them. No one would ever think now of me, especially if you're doing something illegal. I worry about any officer that judged that paycheck coming to their house, and I'm not anybody because I have a bad cop. You don't let someone else hurt somebody in front of you, your job as a judge or police officer, is to protect them.

We have APAAP money, $76 million, one time money from the federal government to address the impact the pandemic has had on cities and towns. Some of this money is going to be used for infrastructure and lost revenue, as well as to use the money to help businesses, including the small businesses. This is an important initiative for chapter 1 homes and business owners but it highlighted disparities and the inequities that we face as a city in education, housing and so on. In regard to reentry from incarceration, we should work closely with the Sheriff and DOC to make sure that we do have a diverse workforce in the city. The issue is difficult and uncomfortable for some. It costs money to address systemic racism and the inequities in education, housing, and health. It's an uncomfortable issue, but it's important that we deal with it because it makes us stronger and healthier as a city.

I support the motion that says "racism is a public health crisis." I was on the ending of it. If you look back at 2015, I had an incident with one of the officers from the Lowell police department where there were no Asian police officers. We worked to get grant funding to get Latino Police Officers from Ariz., and the city of Lowell "voted" to have a diverse workforce in the city. The issue is difficult and uncomfortable for some. It costs money to address systemic racism and the inequities in education, housing, and health. It's an uncomfortable issue, but it's important that we deal with it because it makes us stronger and healthier as a city.

I don't know much about the law, but I'd be more than happy to study more about the law. What I'm happy about now, I've been advocating for, and I know it's been difficult for the police union. Recently they did a negotiation with the contract and part of the agreement is that the Lowell Police Department now agreed to use body cameras as a project. Absolutely. That's one thing to do, it's important not to take it. It's good to have it to build trust, and more importantly it will validate what the police say in their report. It's going to help me do my job. I'm more than happy to look into the (Carey's Law).
I don't think it's at the point where one can call it healthy and sustainable, we're still struggling with homelessness, with vacant storefronts, and it's a major construction zone right now so it's difficult for people to get down here to explore the shops and the local business. I think there is a lot of motivation in this area, the overarching issue is homelessness and its impact on the economic development, there is a lot of talk about full day programming that provides wrap-around services that keep folks engaged during the day so they can improve their lives and not just a place to sleep.

The city has worked well with organizations like UTEC in securing funds to support reentry. One of my first jobs was at the Career Center in Lowell, I put me in that position because of the organizations like UTEC through reentry programs. I certainly think that the reentry programs are working well in the neighborhoods and they are working well in the downtown areas. I think in general it's good that we are using our existing funds, and it's important that we access those monies to assist with reentry in our community.

I certainly would have voted in support of that movement. I think declining racism as a public health crisis is the least our city leaders can do and it helps guide the framework on the work that needs to be done. As an elected official, it's my job to help guide public health actors to help people. I've listened to over the past year so on this issue has really come up, there’s been an increasing number of public health actors that understand that racism is a public health crisis. I think it's important that we recognize that and take that into account.

I would support it. I'm half black, half Irish which I look at it like this. We need to look at specific data that proves there has been negative impacts to the health of minorities in particular and in communities. We saw with the pandemic where poorer and more densely populated parts of our cities where minorities live wasn't afforded the same opportunities as it came to vaccines and testing. Whether they're consciously or unconsciously, we need to start having these conversations and everybody needs to keep that in the back of their mind. If the community is coming forward stating that they want their elected officials to support something that they strongly and actually have been proven, and they've shown the information to justify the stance, especially if you're an advocate, you've got to represent the people. How could you not?

We have a great city, Lowell is one of those few mid-sized cities in the country COVID-19 is still a list of problems and while there have been left cities to the south, but today you look at a city like downtown Lowell, you see some businesses thriving and others not doing well. Those businesses not doing well in downtown will need to develop programs to help the downtowns become better businesses; how to run their businesses and be more attractive. Those are areas where there is poor lighting, or public transportation, downtown lighting. There's also this issue of homelessness and we need to do a better job taking the homeless of the street and give them programs that will work for them. I've been here as they see the people they're at, and that's what we have to do with the homeless.

Absolutely, there's a lot of potential out there, Lowell, a lot of untapped potential. With just a little investment, we can make a big difference in the feel and look of the neighborhood and that's to bring more people in and make it a better place to hang out, shop, grow up to work and live. I think that spending a little money to make the place look nicer and be more comfortable and welcoming would go a long way.

That's something that we have to do. We can't control how people are treated in the institutions. Some institutions will find ways to be a better job. What we do is get them into training programs and they come out with skills and knowledge. I'd like to see programs that take people coming from incarceration, if there's an obstacle that has to be dealt with, that's what we deal with. If there's a skill, that's what we have to do. First of all, we're still trying to get those people coming from incarceration, when you reacoming to society, let's give you the opportunity to be successful in your workplace and in your workplaces on how to address these problems. I learned that as the headmaster of Lowell High School, you have to reach out to people.

I would love to see what that would look like. In general, I would certainly support the Social Services Department’s job. We have to do something. Whether it's putting that money back into the pandemic and unfortunately, I think the pandemic has passed and we're still fighting our way out of it. I think our Economic Development Department in particular has done a great job with maintaining our business base in the Downtown through the pandemic. They've really worked hand in hand in helping the businesses and the downtown and we have really lost many businesses in Lowell compared to other cities around. As we come out of the pandemic, I want to make sure we maintain that hand-in-glove approach and really work with the existing and new businesses to get the Downtown back to a thriving situation and past the survival situation.

I think it's getting there. We're on the upswing. There are a lot of existing businesses that are doing great, and I know there's a few that are not. I think there are definitely more people than enough. I think if we go out there and really reach out to these month of St. Patrick's Day, it's going to be a big day. Absolutely. I think we need to see the steps that the state has to take to address this issue and that this is a state-level as well and the state has a lot more resources than the city can do.

Yes, I think that's a great question because I would support that. I've known UTEC for a long time and I know it's core mission. Taking people from a situation that's not ideal and just throwing them out of the system and putting them back into it is not the solution to racism. Follow-up is not sufficient that a lot of people are really good at it and I think that UTEC is a good follow-up and follow through organization. Instead of just saying “well if you did your jail time, you're redeemed, you have a good life,” you guys are like, “hey let's see what we can do.” Whether it's job opening or the economy, if you can take that person who obviously had a rough patch, let's get them back to not just be okay but really thrive, so yeah, I would support that.

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2021 City Council Candidate Forum

Kim Scott

Regrettably, this candidate was not able to attend.

Yes, I would.

Absolutely, Lowell is such a good city that’s a mix of old cultures and new cultures. There’s new businesses and old businesses and infrastructure. Anything that needs to be rehabilitated that is cost-effective, like storefronts or businesses, would like to see them being improved and up to date and that looks good for everybody.

Yes. Retailing storefronts is something that’s an important issue that we should be looking into. Right now in Downtown, it’s falling and failing. I definitely do agree with revitalizing the downtown, the storefronts as well as vacant buildings throughout the city. We have a homelessness problem as well, so we can use those buildings to provide more affordable housing by working with organizations like Coalition for a Better Acre to help with more homes for the homeless and people who are housing insecure.

Yes, I’ve been working on a program now with eight different storefronts in the Upper Acre neighborhood. It’s been something that’s just what we’re doing. We’re bringing in 250 or more living units saving from brand new condos to people who have won their battle with addiction to veterans. I’ve been working with the developer to make sure that those new storefronts at the street level should be about something for the community.

Yes, if I may say, my profession is real estate broker and before that, I was the executive director at the Cambodian American League and there were two buildings sitting idly and they were looking for expansion to this area, and I helped them find Market Street. If you’re able to stop, the food is excellent.

Yes, so if I have to say, this has to do with my legal training and my principle in life, like police, but every police officer has to treat every person equally. Also, I believe in protecting our communities, we have to listen to the residents and the police department to better serve the community. Police work with the community, and it takes many forms of police officers attending community meetings to on a weekly basis, and mend bridges with the police and community members work together where police officers attend community meetings to listen to voice the community and police officers play a key role to play a key role to play in the relationship between community members and police officers.

Absolutely. It’s a tough question to answer. More that’s a tough question to answer. I would more than likely not have time to think on that.

The issue of a motion that says racism is a public health crisis, is not saying that one person is racist; I have experienced it, and I did support the motion, not to say that the city is racist, but to say that it’s a public health crisis. For the most part, we need to accept diversity and support one another, but there is a point in life when you’re walking by yourself. When I walk that mile by myself, I do experience people discriminating against me. It’s not a lot, but if one person feels one incident of racism, we must address it. Racism exists, even if one person says it, and that’s good enough for us to address.

Absolutely. I would support that. I would love to do that. I would also, not just support that, but provide training to re-adjust back into society. They need employable skills, so I would definitely allocate my support to that initiative and program.

Yes of course absolutely. It’s tough when you have a tough background. Coming out, there’s stigma and you can’t really deal with that. Most that’s not right. That kind of brings you down when you just have a chance, but society keeps kicking you back and forth. I support it fully.

Yes, it would support it. It’s my belief that police are serving and protecting all communities, and that police should be respected and treated with the utmost respect.

Yes, support it. We have an issue right now with COVID-19 virus, and it will go away. We need help for the people struggling due to the COVID pandemic. We were working on bringing down our opioid epidemic and there are many development projects but once it’s done downtown is going to be very beautiful.

Yes, it would vote on that right side. If I could, if I was on City Council. Racism is a public health crisis. A lot of us think of racism as someone just using a derogatory slur towards you, but racism is engrained everywhere in this country in our military, in the retail, and I see issues with racism as a parallel and I see how Black and brown people have higher conviction rates than their white counterparts as well as their sentences are usually longer. You can go into health and talk about why Black women die at four times higher rates from having childbirth? When you have these different groups throughout the system that reflect your background, it’s healthier because they know that your culture and your race are so more able to see things that you can’t see. Racism is a public health crisis, it’s dangerous to the city, and we need to make sure we tackle that issue.

Yes, I support it fully. That’s an important issue with accountability, and I think as far as saying it would be a crime for you not to report? I think they have to get the reporting right on that so that some one is in a situation that could be borderline, that you don’t look a person into that situation. I think there’s a way to get that done. As to say “it’s a crime” right up front, I’m not sure I can get there, but I think there’s a way to draft that legislation better, maybe with some of the subject matter experts and community presence. Everybody in the room should be find something else that fits this vision. It’s not saying that someone is going lower, it’s going to get hard to see where the line is.

Yes, I would support that right away. There’s a much larger need for this than we’re going to have. There are some special needs, and other things. I’ve never seen that they’ve been gone beyond and beyond, so I have faith in our police force, so I see no problem with it. But sometimes it’s hard to tell your boss that something is going wrong, and sometimes it’s hard to do that. I think that police and community work very well together with the community. They join Acre Fest and National Night and National Night. It’s a great program. The city would do trainings for police to treat everyone with respect and they’re on your side with foot patrol.

Yes, in my experience, I’ve been thinking about it a lot. I grew up in a tough neighborhood in Central Falls, in public housing with drive by shootings, but I don’t believe that racism is a public health issue. I believe it’s sexual violence and domestic violence is a public health crisis. You hear it all the time, especially when you live in a tough neighborhood. I believe in violence prevention. If we get to talk to the kids who are going to be on the basketball court. Use case managers or Streetworkers to go out and talk to kids to see what they need.

Absolutely, one should turn a blind eye on that stuff. It always does, but it does need to be a crime if we don’t. I think that there’s someone going above and beyond and that the city of Lowell watches closely and that the Police Department does a great job.

Yes, I have to admit, I have to study this law, but my principle in general, like I said, but police every police officer has to treat every person equally. I believe in protecting our communities. We have to listen to the residents and the police department to better serve the community. Police work with the community, and it takes many forms of police officers attending community meetings to listen to voice the community and police officers play a key role to play in the relationship between community members and police officers.