



2023 LOCAL ELECTION VOTER GUIDE: LOWELL, MA

Frequently Asked Questions

When do I vote?

Election Day is November 7th

Where do I vote?

<https://www.sec.state.ma.us/WhereDoIVoteMA/WhereDoIVote/>

Polling Locations are open 8am- 8pm

What if I am not registered to vote?

<https://www.sec.state.ma.us/ovr/>

Note: *Deadline to register to vote for the elections is 10 days prior to the said election day.*



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A note from our organizing crew...

For the 2023 local elections cycle the organizing crew at UTECH prioritized getting to know the candidates in the local municipal elections in the Merrimack Valley.

We first did research on all of the candidates running for Mayor, and City Council in Lowell, Lawrence, and Haverhill. We then drafted questions that we would like to ask the candidates and created the candidate questionnaire distributed them to all of the candidates in the race and asked them to return with their responses. The responses in this guide are from those who returned the questionnaire.

We also hosted candidate meet and greets for all of the candidates who were willing to participate. Please take a look at our voter guide and share widely.

Happy Voting,
-UTECH's Organizing Crew



2023 Lowell City Council Voter Guide

Councilor at Large

Question	Rita Mercier	Vesna Nuon	Corey Belanger
Are you going to address and help with the homelessness issue in the city?	Yes	Most important is building affordable housing. We need to partner with our surrounding communities and secure funding from the State and the Feds.	Yes- I pledge to put to use any & all available resources to assist this population.
Are you going to help combat gentrification?	-	I am a proponent of ADUs and building more multiple family homes.	Yes- The city will need to seek state & federal grants in order to achieve.
Do you have a plan to combat rising costs of housing?	-	The only answer is to build more housing.	Yes- The city will need to seek state & federal grants in order to achieve.
Do you have plans to improve DPW and the trash issue in the city?	Yes	Start educating our children about litter, provide sufficient receptacles in public places, and fine offenders when possible.	Yes- Get staffing levels to pre-covid numbers. I do think we are doing a good job in this regard
Do you have plans to implement needle drop off boxes?	Yes	I am no expert on this, but I do think we need to come up with a plan that will stop the dumping of used needles in our parks and streets.	No
Do you have any solutions to address the addiction crisis in our community?	-	I would fully support a program implemented by one or more of our healthcare providers. The city currently has someone assigned to this issue, but more needs to be done.	Yes- I am Chairman of the Mayor's Opioid Task Force. This issue will be placed in the forefront once again.
Will you prioritize the safety of our kids and families in public spaces such as parks?	Yes- removing tents from our parks	My career is in public safety, and it has always been and always will be a priority.	Yes



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Councilor at Large

Question	Rita Mercier	Vesna Nuon	Corey Belanger
Do you have a plan to address food insecurity?	-	We are fortunate to have several food banks and pantries for those in need. I will continue to advocate for the city to partner with these organizations to be sure no one goes hungry.	Yes- Will work closely with food banks throughout the City.
Lawrence has a community fridge that can be used by the food insecure, will you implement anything similar or new to this in your community?	We have the Merrimack Valley Food bank as a resource	I am not familiar with this program but will look into it. That said, as I mentioned above I will continue to support our food banks and pantries.	Yes- Sounds like a great initiative. I will research it.
Do you have any plans to combat the mental health crisis?	-	I believe that we need to unconditionally accept those seeking care in a humane and compassionate way.	Yes- Hire an additional staff member to join COOP team trained in mental health.
Do you have plans to improve our school systems and make them more safe?	-	Without a doubt, the most pressing issue in schools today is safety.	Will full fund school resource Officers.
Do you have a plan to address the violence in our community?	-	Working with our police department and enforcing gun control laws is very important.	I think we are doing great for a city our size. I will emphasize community policing for more outreach.
Will you listen to youth voices in your position?	Yes, we do not have all the answers and need input from everyone, youth especially	We welcome our youth to City Council meetings to speak on issues important to them. I would also support lowering the voting age to 16 for municipal elections.	Yes
Do you support youth programming for young people returning from incarceration?	Yes	Absolutely, and we are very fortunate to have UTEC providing such programming. I will continue to support the invaluable work done by UTEC in Lowell.	Will assist in any way possible



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Councilor at Large

Question	Virak Uy	Bobby Tugbiyele
<p>Are you going to address and help with the homelessness issue in the city?</p>	<p>Yes- It's essential to involve stakeholders from various sectors to develop a comprehensive plan that benefits everyone while addressing the unique challenges of Lowell.</p>	<p>I would like to see a more formal process in place to handle the homelessness crisis. I will advocate to have a process in place for vulnerable individuals to be served, while also advocating for our city to be safer.</p>
<p>Are you going to help combat gentrification?</p>	<p>Yes- We need to develop strategies to counter gentrification, such as offering tax incentives to long-term residents or providing financial assistance to help them stay in their homes.</p>	<p>If elected, I will advocate for development that is mixed use, when applicable, to ensure our city continues to provide opportunities for residents to thrive.</p>
<p>Do you have a plan to combat rising costs of housing?</p>	<p>Yes- We need strategies that include preserving affordable housing through partnerships and policies, enforcing inclusionary zoning, and establishing community land trusts for long-term affordability.</p>	<p>I can advocate for bringing people together for action and approaches to get families out of the cycle of inter-generational poverty.</p>
<p>Do you have plans to improve DPW and the trash issue in the city?</p>	<p>Yes- I intend to allocate more resources and manpower to enhance trash collection in our neighborhood.</p>	<p>I think this problem could be improved when a team is in place, with good communication and resident reporting issues of concern.</p>
<p>Do you have plans to implement needle drop off boxes?</p>	<p>Yes, I am fully committed to implementing needle drop-off boxes in our community.</p>	<p>I wouldn't be opposed to trying this out for a trial period to see if it were successful.</p>
<p>Do you have any solutions to address the addiction crisis in our community?</p>	<p>Yes- We need a holistic program that provides not only housing support but also necessary services such as mental health support, addiction treatment, and job training.</p>	<p>If an individual is seeking help with addiction, they should not have to wait 30+ days to be entered into treatment. We need to do better statewide, not just in this city</p>
<p>Will you prioritize the safety of our kids and families in public spaces such as parks?</p>	<p>Yes- We can prioritize and implement action plan that will improve the safety of families in public spaces: increased lighting, security patrols, community policing, security cameras and emergency call boxes.</p>	<p>Always. Our parks need to be well maintained, clean and well lit.</p>



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Councilor at Large

Question	Virak Uy	Bobby Tugbiyele
Do you have a plan to address food insecurity?	Yes- Ultimately, a multi-pronged approach that combines immediate assistance with sustainable, community-driven efforts is crucial to effectively combat food insecurity in Lowell.	In Lowell, you can find a meal 7 days a week, three times a day. It's incredible that that is offered. And many food pantries have popped up around the city to assist residents.
Lawrence has a community fridge that can be used by the food insecure, will you implement anything similar or new to this in your community?	Yes- This initiative not only addresses immediate hunger but also promotes a stronger, more compassionate, and resourceful community in Lowell, where everyone has a stake in supporting those in need.	I would defer to the nonprofit organizations on this matter. I consider them more knowledgeable about food insecurity and the needs of our residents.
Do you have any plans to combat the mental health crisis?	Yes- By combining short-term interventions with long-term systemic changes, Lowell can work towards a healthier and more mentally resilient community.	Listen to nonprofits, listen to GLCC, Vinfen, Lowell General, etc.
Do you have plans to improve our school systems and make them more safe?	Yes- Adequate funding is critical to ensure that classrooms are properly staffed, as well as implementation of diversity, equality, and inclusion in the hiring process of hiring staff.	Work with the School Committee and the Lowell Public Schools Superintendent
Do you have a plan to address the violence in our community?	Yes- Community policing, collaborative initiatives with local organizations, strengthening mental health services, community outreach and conflict resolution programs, investment in education, gun control	Most neighborhoods have active neighborhood groups where concerns and celebrations are discussed. Residents need to speak out more, talk to each other more, and be vigilant.
Will you listen to youth voices in your position?	Yes- Young people represents the future of the community, and their perspectives, concerns, and aspirations are integral to shaping the city's direction and policies.	Absolutely- We need to make sure youth and young adults have the same opportunities for growth, education and wealth as anyone else.
Do you support youth programming for young people returning from incarceration?	Yes, I have always been and will always be a strong advocate for supporting youth programming for young people returning from incarceration.	I believe anyone who wants to better themselves and build a better life, should be able to do just that.



2023 Lowell City Council Voter Guide

City Council District Race

Question	Marty Hogan- District 2	Wayne Jenness- District 4
<p>Are you going to address and help with the homelessness issue in the city?</p>	<p>Yes- I feel that we have not done enough, it will take the work of the City Council, many of the city departments, and the coalition of our great non-profit and human service agencies.</p>	<p>Yes- I think that the Housing First approach adopted by the city in 2019 has the best chance for making a difference for the community and the individuals experiencing homelessness.</p>
<p>Are you going to help combat gentrification?</p>	<p>Yes- One of my goals will be to bring new and better-paying jobs and job development to Lowell and specifically Centralville to help improve our residents and ensure that our neighborhoods keep their character.</p>	<p>Yes- The cost of housing in Lowell has been growing at an unsustainable rate and that rate has recently accelerated. We need to find ways of reversing or at least stabilizing this trend.</p>
<p>Do you have a plan to combat rising costs of housing?</p>	<p>Yes- I will work to improve and increase the educational and employment opportunities for our residents. We need to invest in our city to invest in our people.</p>	<p>Yes- It is time to review the zoning code and find other places where we can make smart, incremental changes to allow for more housing production.</p>
<p>Do you have plans to improve DPW and the trash issue in the city?</p>	<p>Yes- We need to evaluate our DPW resources and see what our efficiencies and inefficiencies are and plan to improve this department.</p>	<p>Yes- The City Council and the administration have been making this a priority over this term; it is a constant struggle, but it is an area that all of us take seriously and are working hard to address.</p>
<p>Do you have plans to implement needle drop off boxes?</p>	<p>Yes- I would absolutely work to make this a reality.</p>	<p>If needle drop boxes are something the health department thinks can be managed effectively and safely, I would support that.</p>
<p>Do you have any solutions to address the addiction crisis in our community?</p>	<p>We have great resources, however I think we can work to increase what we can offer to our residents.</p>	<p>This is another area where we need additional help from state and federal resources to help create more beds in treatment facilities so when people are ready to accept help, the opportunity is there for them.</p>
<p>Will you prioritize the safety of our kids and families in public spaces such as parks?</p>	<p>Yes- Added lighting and signage in these open spaces would help to deter crime and increase safety, as well as Safety Communication Stations.</p>	<p>Yes- Maintaining our parks, developing new ones, and making sure that they are inviting spaces with the activities and amenities people want is a key factor in residents' happiness and health.</p>



2023 Lowell City Council Voter Guide

City Council District Race

Question	Marty Hogan- District 2	Wayne Jenness- District 4
Do you have a plan to address food insecurity?	Yes- Educational and more importantly employment opportunities are the real equalizer for our residents. I will work as a Councilor to bolster our food banks and non-profits to help in the aid of hunger.	Yes- Because it is so varied how people experience food insecurity, our response must be varied as well.
Lawrence has a community fridge that can be used by the food insecure, will you implement anything similar or new to this in your community?	Yes- I would like to see how this can be used to help our residents. Anyway that we can help to reduce the burden should be investigated and I pledge that I will do so as a Councilor.	I believe that these types of programs are most successful when implemented and supported by a group of community members and volunteers.
Do you have any plans to combat the mental health crisis?	Yes	We need to continue to innovate, and strengthen the programs that have the greatest positive impact.
Do you have plans to improve our school systems and make them more safe?	Yes- Our youth should not have to worry about their safety while they are trying to learn important life skills. I will work closely with the police and the school department to make sure every opportunity is used to protect our students.	Yes- I am proud of the work put in by this and previous city councils to strive for consistent improvement in our school environment across the city. I look forward to continuing to work with the school department to make this goal a reality.
Do you have a plan to address the violence in our community?	Yes- We need to enforce the laws and regulations of our city. Additionally I believe we need to invest in our Police department. I want new young and trained officers added to our ranks.	Yes- I believe in continuing to strengthen relationships between neighbors, neighborhoods, city government and public safety.
Will you listen to youth voices in your position?	Absolutely, as a Councilor and a servant of the people the most important thing is to listen and hear my constituents, especially the youth.	Absolutely. I am always happy to speak with anyone to understand their concerns, hear their feedback and ideas.
Do you support youth programming for young people returning from incarceration?	Yes	Yes- Helping people return to life after incarceration has been shown to be one of the best ways to reduce recidivism and help people to lead successful lives makes for a better community for everyone.



2023 Lowell City Council Voter Guide

City Council District Race

Question	Susie Chhoun- District 5
<p>Are you going to address and help with the homelessness issue in the city?</p>	<p>Yes- As a City Councilor, I will be an advocate for ways to create more affordable housing to prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place, which would relieve stress on our community support services.</p>
<p>Are you going to help combat gentrification?</p>	<p>Yes- Lowell is a city of many cultures and backgrounds, we are also a city of innovation and growth, we need to make sure everyone feels comfortable voicing their opinion when it comes to issues that affect their communities.</p>
<p>Do you have a plan to combat rising costs of housing?</p>	<p>Yes- We can increase housing stock by exploring zoning reform, passing an ADU ordinance, and creative incentives for developers to build more affordable housing here.</p>
<p>Do you have plans to improve DPW and the trash issue in the city?</p>	<p>Yes- One way to address the issues with trash pick up is to review the city's contract with the waste management company, see where the terms of the contract are not being met, creating an action plan and agree to consequences for not meeting goals.</p>
<p>Do you have plans to implement needle drop off boxes?</p>	<p>No- I would lean on the expertise of the Lowell Health Dept. and community partners when developing and implementing a plan.</p>
<p>Do you have any solutions to address the addiction crisis in our community?</p>	<p>No- I think it is best to lean on the Health Department and other community stakeholders in the health care/addiction field to create and implement plans with the council's support.</p>
<p>Will you prioritize the safety of our kids and families in public spaces such as parks?</p>	<p>Yes- Our parks and public spaces should have regular maintenance, and residents should be able to easily report a problem and be given a timeline when the problem will be addressed.</p>



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City Council District Race

Question	Susie Chhoun- District 5
Do you have a plan to address food insecurity?	Yes- The city can continue to partner with CBA, Project Bread, Merrimack Valley Food Bank, and other community stakeholders to make sure that the public is aware of the services offered.
Lawrence has a community fridge that can be used by the food insecure, will you implement anything similar or new to this in your community?	No- I would poll the community groups that serve our city in this fashion and see what their thoughts on a community refrigerator program might be, and lean on them for advice on how to implement, or listen to their suggestions on possible alternative programs.
Do you have any plans to combat the mental health crisis?	No- I do not currently have a plan to directly combat the mental health crisis, but I am open to all ideas for this important conversation. I would lean on the experiences of the community and expertise of our school department and community partners when developing and implementing a plan.
Do you have plans to improve our school systems and make them more safe?	Yes- One way we could help improve safety in school is by addressing ongoing issues in the school buildings. Working with the school department, the buildings should be inspected for issues, and those issues addressed in order of highest need first.
Do you have a plan to address the violence in our community?	No- I currently do not have a plan that directly addresses violence in the community, however, advocating for basic human needs like affordable housing and food will go a long way in indirectly preventing violence from happening in the first place.
Will you listen to youth voices in your position?	Yes
Do you support youth programming for young people returning from incarceration?	Yes



2023 Lowell City Council Voter Guide

City Council District Race

Question	Paul Ratha Yem- District 7	Fru Nkimbeng- District 7
<p>Are you going to address and help with the homelessness issue in the city?</p>	<p>Yes. I have been working with the manager to provide the tool and resource to help with temporary shelters, medical, and mental health treatments.</p>	<p>Yes- Take inventory of vacant public buildings and abandoned private homes in the city. Hold meeting with CIT, CBA, City Planners and real estate developers to brainstorm idea together to build affordable housing</p>
<p>Are you going to help combat gentrification?</p>	<p>Yes- Be sure housing development in the City allocates for affordable housing rental and ownership.</p>	<p>Yes- Affordable homes must be included in the contract for home developers.</p>
<p>Do you have a plan to combat rising costs of housing?</p>	<p>Yes- More affordable housing development in the City for low income families.</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>Do you have plans to improve DPW and the trash issue in the city?</p>	<p>Yes- The City has hired additional DPW staff and works with Lowell Litter Crews to keep our City clean.</p>	<p>Yes- Publicize a toll free number to text and call to report when trash on the streets, parks and neighborhoods.</p>
<p>Do you have plans to implement needle drop off boxes?</p>	<p>Yes- The Council has been advocating for safe needle drop off, but the problem is when a person is high, he/she may not be in the right mind to put the needle in the box.</p>	<p>Yes- Educating to population of the risk of contaminated needles is good. I will meet with public health and safety professional to come up with a plan of action.</p>
<p>Do you have any solutions to address the addiction crisis in our community?</p>	<p>Yes- The City Health Department, Lowell Community Health Center along with other agencies working daily to help addiction, mental health crisis in our City.</p>	<p>Yes- I keep protocol in place to address addiction and connect them to the addiction recovery centers.</p>
<p>Will you prioritize the safety of our kids and families in public spaces such as parks?</p>	<p>Yes- The City dedicates a good amount of resources to protect all citizens and focus on hot spot areas such as South Common.</p>	<p>Yes- Visibility - helps to keep an eye on children Neighborhood watch programs. Awareness programs in the schools like stranger danger. Supervision and closing parks to motor vehicles will protect kids and families</p>



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City Council District Race

Question	Paul Ratha Yem- District 7	Fru Nkimbeng- District 7
Do you have a plan to address food insecurity?	Yes- The City provides funding to Mill City Grow, food banks, other agencies to address the food security. Check out weekly farmer's market.	Yes- Coordinate with local grocery stores for surplus food donations. Implement mobile food delivery programs. Create community gardens or urban farming initiatives to produce fresh produce locally.
Lawrence has a community fridge that can be used by the food insecure, will you implement anything similar or new to this in your community?	As stated earlier, the City supports food banks and other agencies to provide nutritional foods and meals.	Yes- I appreciate the Lawrence community for coming up with an innovative idea to end hunger. I would do the same by setting up the community fridges and additionally I will establish food banks or distribution centers in the areas of need.
Do you have any plans to combat the mental health crisis?	Yes- The City Health Department, Lowell Community Health Crisis Center along with other agencies working daily to help addiction and mental health crisis in our City.	Yes- We would need funding in order to really be of help. I would like to add a free community gym, free health classes and outdoor activities as there have been studies that prove that those activities promote a healthier mind.
Do you have plans to improve our school systems and make them more safe?	Yes- This City Council put in motion a plan for capital improvement of public building using City and State funds to make safety improvements of our schools.	Yes- We could implement metal detectors and such, however this could worsen the situation as students may feel oppressed, I am open to any and all suggestions.
Do you have a plan to address the violence in our community?	Yes- 2024 City budget has \$60 million for public safety; police and fire departments; community policing, police and youth program and neighborhood policing.	Yes- I believe in increasing policemen on the streets and banning panhandling. This would improve the substance abuse issue we are currently facing
Will you listen to youth voices in your position?	Yes and I successfully made a motion to created a youth sub-committee to provide a vehicle for our young people to have a voice	Yes- Conducting programs in schools, colleges and universities to go close to the youth to hear from them to make our district a better place to live.
Do you support youth programming for young people returning from incarceration?	Yes- The City provides funds to UTEC who works with incarcerated young people and would love to hear any suggestions young people may have for our city.	Yes- Absolutely, if we don't give them a second chance they will return to the people and situation who placed them there in the first place