




Yovani Baez-Rose
Assistant City Manager/DPD Director

Camilo Espitia
Deputy Director

MEMORANDUM

TO: Thomas A. Golden, Jr., City Manager 

FROM: Yovani Baez-Rose, Assistant City Manager/DPD Director

CC: Ali Carter, Director of Economic Development
Liz Oltman, Transportation Engineer

SUBJECT: MOTION RESPONSE: 5/9/2023–C. Robinson–Request City Manager Provide a Detailed Report Updating Any Potential Plans to Implement a Pedestrian Only Food, Drink, Small Business Area Pilot in Calendar Year 2023

The Department of Planning and Development (DPD) is conducting a pilot study of closing a portion of Downtown Lowell to vehicular traffic. DPD’s Transportation Engineer and Director of Economic Development are working collaboratively on this project. The Northern Middlesex Council of Governments (NMCOG) will conduct an initial feasibility study report advising on which sections of which streets to undertake a temporary closure. During the period of temporary closure, NMCOG will evaluate traffic, parking, and business operations and create a report advising on whether the closure should be made permanent, altered in any way, replicated as a seasonal event, or not repeated. A final report outlining the impact of street closures in Downtown Lowell will be provided to the city.

This project is funded by the District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) program, funded by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), and provided at no cost to the City of Lowell. The estimated cost for this project is approximately \$25,000. The project began in May 2023 and will be completed in November of this year. First steps in the project involve intensive outreach by City staff to business owners in the study area, including surveys available online, delivered in-person to businesses in hardcopy form, and with follow-up interviews of selected respondents. The NMCOG team will do an initial traffic analysis including turn counts, pedestrian counts, and other data collection at key intersections in the study area. For more detailed information, please see the attached scope of work for the project.

AC/ybr

Attachment



Northern Middlesex Council of Governments

Scope of Work Lowell Open Streets Project

NMCOG Project Team

Chris Hayes – DLTA Manager
Justin Howard – Transportation Director
Shravanthi Gopalan Narayanan – Transportation Planner/Project Lead
Support Staff: Carlin Andrus and Jessica Boulanger

City of Lowell Project Team

Elizabeth Oltman – Transportation Engineer
Alison Carter – Director of Economic Development

Description of Work

The City of Lowell wishes to conduct a pilot study of closing a portion of Downtown Lowell to vehicular traffic for six weeks, tentatively in August-October 2023. The subject area includes portions of Middle Street, Palmer Street and Shattuck Street.

The Northern Middlesex Council of Governments (NMCOG) will conduct an initial feasibility study report advising on which sections of which streets to undertake a temporary closure by July 19, 2023. Then, during the period of temporary closure, NMCOG will evaluate traffic, parking, and business operations during the period of temporary closure and create a report advising on whether the closure should be made permanent, altered in any way, replicated as a seasonal event, or not repeated by November 29, 2023.

OBJECTIVES

At the completion of this project, the City of Lowell will have a pre closure feasibility study report outlining the locations that should be included in a pilot street closure. During the closure, traffic conditions will be monitored to assess the impact of the pilot. A final report outlining the impact of street closures in Downtown Lowell will be provided to the City.

FUNDING SOURCE

This project is funded by the District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) program, funded by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and provided at no cost to the City of Lowell. The estimated cost for this project is \$25,110.

TIMELINE

The Project will begin in May 2023 and will be completed in November 2023.

Scope of Work

Task 1. Coordination and Kickoff

1. Weekly Project Meetings (26 hours)

Justin Howard will send a recurring weekly meeting invite to relevant NMCOG and City staff to move the project forward. The goal of these meetings are to ensure continued progress in development of the Study and discuss ongoing tasks and issues. This scope assumes meetings

will last 30 minutes and include two NMCOG staff people. These meetings will occur between April 1, 2023 and October 1, 2023.

2. Kick-off Meeting (8 hours)

NMCOG staff and all relevant City staff, including Neighborhood Liaison, Economic Development staff, Transportation staff, and other staff as determined by the City of Lowell will conduct a meeting either on-site, at City Hall, or virtually. NMCOG staff will present scope of work, timeline, and discuss next steps and project roles/responsibilities. Scope assumes three staff at 1.5 hour kickoff plus prep time and notes.

Task 2. Review Similar Projects

1. Research other projects where downtown streets were closed to Vehicular Traffic

NMCOG staff will provide findings on the research to the City in the form of a brief memo. The City may request up to three cases in addition to any NMCOG identifies as relevant. Case studies shall include urban context, year in which street closed, approximate size of closure, issues or opportunities that can be found in public reports, and business and traffic outcomes that can be found in public reports. No interviews are anticipated as part of these case studies.

Task 3. Initial Data Collection

Data will be collected twice. Once in May when Middlesex Community College and University of Massachusetts Lowell are in session, and once during the closure period.

1. Conduct Turning Movement Counts at specific locations in the study area

Staff will conduct 2 hour AM and PM peak turning movement counts at the following locations:

1. Market Street at Palmer Street
2. Middle Street at Palmer Street
3. Merrimack Street at Palmer Street
4. Merrimack Street at Shattuck Street
5. Middle Street at Shattuck Street
6. Market Street at Shattuck Street

2. Conduct Traffic Volume Data Collection

Staff will potentially conduct traffic volume counts at the following locations:

1. Market Street between Shattuck and Palmer Streets
2. Middle Street East of Palmer Street (subject to change based on pavement conditions)
3. Palmer Street between Middle Street and Merrimack Street
4. Shattuck Street between Merrimack Street and Middle Street
5. Merrimack Street between Palmer Street and Shattuck Street
6. Shattuck Street north of Market Street
7. Middle Street west of Palmer Street
8. Palmer Street between Market Street and Middle Street

3. Parking inventory

Staff will review the Lowell Parking Inventory project conducted in 2021 to potentially summarize data from that report. In addition, staff may conduct an inventory of available parking through field visits. This may include gathering data from the Lowell Parking Department on utilization of the five downtown garages prior to closure and during closure period. Private lots will not be inventoried. This shall also include an evaluation of delivery zones.

Task 4. Public Outreach

1. Conduct Interviews with Businesses located in the Study Area

Lowell City staff will interview businesses in the study area to gather support and opinions on street closures. This will be undertaken twice, once prior to the temporary closure to alert businesses to the plan and timeline, and once at the end of the closure or after the closure to

gather feedback on impact to business during closure period (see Task 6.2). This should include both small businesses that operate in the area, but also businesses that own large amounts of property and may have access impacted, i.e., Enterprise Bank. This should include discussion of delivery needs and timing. The City of Lowell shall provide this information in tabular (excel) format in order for NMCOG to integrate it into the final report.

2. Presentation to Lowell Downtown Neighborhood Association (LDNA)

NMCOG staff will attend a maximum of one presentation to the LDNA to gather support and opinions on street closures prior to the closure. This assumes one NMCOG staff person will attend in addition to City staff and that City of Lowell will arrange meeting agenda. NMCOG staff may prepare a short presentation.

3. Pop-Up at Street Closure

NMCOG Staff will attend at least one pop-up opportunity during street closure at event to collect feedback from attendees. This assumes one NMCOG staff person will attend in addition to City staff and that City of Lowell will arrange timing and all necessary equipment, i.e., table, tent, sign-in sheet, etc. NMCOG staff may prepare materials such as a survey, visual materials, or other materials.

Task 5. Preliminary Report (NMCOG Staff, 58 hours)

1. Preliminary Report

The draft Preliminary Report document will include the literature review, findings of the traffic and parking counts, and information provided from initial public outreach from the City of Lowell. It will also include recommendations on sections of streets to close during the temporary period and possible traffic routing for any businesses impacted. It will be ready for internal review July 5, 2023. NMCOG will distribute the draft to City staff by July 19, 2023 and assist with presenting the findings to appropriate City committees.

2. Prep for Presentation of Findings

NMCOG staff will prepare a presentation with an overview of the project, the problem statement, a summary of outreach, data collection and analysis. The presentation will also include a summary of scenarios and preferred alternatives.

3. Present Findings to the City

NMCOG staff will present findings of the Initial Report to the City by July 19, 2023

4. Edit Document based on feedback

NMCOG staff will edit the report based on feedback from the City to finalize the preferred alternative. This scope includes one round of edits.

5. Submittal to the City

Once edited, NMCOG will provide the City with an electronic copy of the Initial Report on August 2, 2023.

Task 6. Final Data Collection and Report

1. NMCOG and the City will monitor conditions during the pilot closure

NMCOG will conduct traffic counts on surrounding roadways to monitor traffic congestion and confusion around the closure. This will be in similar locations and scope to the Initial Data Collection (Task 3), minus any closed areas within the study area. NMCOG will report any issues to the City.

2. Outreach to Businesses during closure

The City will continue to work with impacted businesses during the closure to assess the success of the closure and any ongoing concerns.

3. Final Report

After the temporary street closure has been completed, NMCOG staff will draft a final report that includes the findings of the traffic and parking counts undertaken during the street closure period, a comparison of those counts to counts undertaken during the spring, and new information provided from public outreach from the City of Lowell. It will include scenarios including permanent closure, permanent closure with the area of closure changed, seasonal closure, or no future closures, including recommendations.

4. Prep for Presentation of Findings

NMCOG staff will prepare a PowerPoint presentation with an overview of the new information learned during the pilot closure, a summary of outreach, data collection and analysis. The presentation will also include a summary of scenarios and preferred alternatives.

5. Present Findings to the City

NMCOG staff will present findings of the Final Report to the City by November 1, 2023.

6. Edit Document based on feedback

NMCOG staff will edit the report based on feedback from the City to finalize the preferred alternative. This scope includes one round of edits.

7. Submittal to the City

Once edited, NMCOG will provide the City with an electronic copy of the Final Report and closeout documentation by November 30, 2023.

Collaboration with other Agencies

Lowell Regional Transit Authority

City staff will work with the LRTA to make sure they are aware of closures in the area.

Deliverables

The NMCOG staff shall deliver the following products to the City of Lowell prior to completion of the project:

1. Preliminary Case Study Memo
2. Presentation materials for pop up events, meetings with City and LDNA
3. Digital Version of the Open Street Feasibility Study – Initial Report to the City in July
4. Digital Version of the Open Street Feasibility Study – Final Report to the City in November

City Support

Expectations for the City during this project include:

1. Attendance at bi-weekly Zoom project coordination meeting
2. Outreach to all impacted businesses prior to and during/after street closure and provision of data from interview in tabular/excel format
3. Set up and attend meeting with LDNA prior to project
4. Set up and attend pop-up outreach opportunity during street closure
5. Timely review of interim and final deliverables – Schedule assumes 2 weeks for review of deliverables at the end of Task 2, Task 5, and Task 6

Proposed Timeline and Budget

NMCOG staff would be fully supported by the District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) XV Program funded by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and provided at no cost to the City of Lowell in accordance with the terms of the Letter of Agreement by and between the Northern Middlesex Council of Governments and the City of Lowell.

TABLE 1 PROJECT TIMELINE AND BUDGET

	Task	Completion Date	Hours	Cost
1.1	Weekly Project Meetings	10/1/23	26	\$2,340
1.2	Kick-off Meeting	5/8/23	8	\$720
2.1	Research Other Projects	5/5/23	10	\$900
3.1	Turning Movement Counts	5/31/23	48	\$4,320
3.2	Traffic Volume Data Collection	5/31/23	30	\$2,700
3.3	Parking Inventory	5/31/23	20	\$1,800
4.1	Preliminary Interviews with Businesses (CITY)	5/31/23	-	-
4.2	Presentation to LDNA	6/30/23	3	\$270
4.3	Pop-Up at Street Closure	10/31/23	6	\$540
5.1	Preliminary Report	7/12/23	40	\$3,600
5.2	Prep for Presentation of Findings	7/19/23	4	\$360
5.3	Present Findings to City	7/19/23	4	\$360
5.4	Edit Document Based on Feedback	8/2/23	10	\$900
5.5	Submittal to City	8/2/23	-	-
6.1	Monitor conditions during closure	10/31/23	30	\$2,700
6.2	Final Interviews with Businesses (CITY)	10/31/23	-	-
6.3	Final Report	11/1/23	20	\$1,800
6.4	Prep for Presentation of Findings	11/8/23	4	\$360
6.5	Present Findings to City	11/15/23	4	\$360
6.6	Edit Document Based on Feedback	11/29/23	10	\$900
6.7	Submittal to City	11/30/23	-	-
	TOTAL		279	\$25,110