



Yovani Baez-Rose
Assistant City Manager/DPD Director

Camilo Espitia
Deputy Director

MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor Daniel P. Rourke & Members of the Lowell City Council

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

CC: Thomas A. Golden, Jr., City Manager
Conor Baldwin, Chief Financial Officer

Date: November 5, 2024

RE: INFORMATIONAL - Front Runner Community Initiative Invitation to Toronto, Canada

The City of Lowell has been invited to Toronto, Canada on behalf of the Urban Economy Forum (UEF). Urban Economy Forum (UEF) is an initiative to provide a forum for professional dialogue between cities and municipalities, banks and other financial institutions, and private sector, professionals and non-governmental organizations to increase the efficiency of urban economy and promote innovation in markets for sustainable urban development.

At the Urban Economic Forum 6 Conference, Mayor Rourke was introduced to the Front Runner Community Initiative Program. Given its alignment with Lowell's current efforts to support sustainable development it appeared this was a program worthy of pursuing further. Since the Conference the City Manager, and Planning Department and Mayor's Office, have met with representatives to understand the program and investigate the possibility of Lowell pursuing a Front Runner City designation.

The City has been invited to tour Toronto, Canada by the Urban Economy Forum. The proposed trip to Toronto will lead the group through Downtown Toronto, Regent Park, and Richmond Hill neighborhoods. Given the Toronto's Front Runner designation, it has seen significant revitalization through investments leveraged from private and public investments. All Front Runner Communities commit to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal Number 11 by 2030: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. There are a number of communities across the globe with this current designation and none from the United States.

This is an opportunity for Lowell to learn about this program, see examples of the type of investment and transformations this designation can bring to communities in person, and how our current redevelopment plans align with this program's goals.

Additional information about the Urban Economy Forum: <https://www.ueforum.org/about-us>

United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 11:
https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal11#targets_and_indicators

The City hopes a visit to Toronto, with leaders from the Urban Economy Forum, can give us concrete examples of how participating in the Front Runner City Program may assist Lowell in determining ways “sustainable urban development can be achieved, including roles of policy, legislation, inclusive governance, planning, municipal finance and sustainable infrastructure development.”ⁱ

Lowell will need to understand the level of staff time that would be required to commit to the established Core Pillars of the program. The SDG Cities initiative has five core pillars:

1. **Data:** Cities will access and use data to monitor their progress toward meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
2. **Strategic planning:** Cities will generate inclusive, spatially represented strategic plans for 2030 by merging city data with community and stakeholder participation.
3. **Institutional capacity:** The initiative aims to ensure adequate, inclusive local systems and institutional capacities in areas such as governance, urban planning and design, revenue and finance, and urban basic services.
4. **Investment in impact:** The Cities Investment Facility supports the financing of high-impact projects in cities.
5. **SDG Cities certification:** Participating cities can be awarded different levels of United Nations certification based on their efforts to accelerate inclusive progress toward meeting the SDGs.ⁱⁱ

Ultimately, the interest in Lowell seeking an SDG Front Runner City designation is to connect to a pipeline of global investment. The recently completed Lowell Forward Master Plan, our continuous work on improving sustainability across municipal buildings, our designation as a Green Community, and our recent zoning changes appear in line with this program and its core pillars. This could present an opportunity for Lowell to continue advancing its goals while harnessing the support of a global initiative to support long-term sustainable development.

ⁱ <https://unhabitat.org/programme/sustainable-development-goals-cities>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.worldurbanpavilion.org/sdg-cities-initiative/>