



## Solidarity Lowell Meeting Notes for November 22, 2020

### Guidelines for Our Virtual Meetings

- Use Manage Participants → Raise Hand if you want to speak
- The Stacker (For this meeting, that's Joe Boyle) will pay attention to the hand raise order and unmute you in turn
- Use Stop Video if you need to take a break from sharing your camera
- Start Video when you are ready to return
- This meeting is being recorded
- Step up, step back

### What is Solidarity Lowell?

Solidarity Lowell is a volunteer-based group of community members of Greater Lowell working towards social justice by defending the human rights, dignity, and equality of all persons against all forms of hate and discrimination.

With all in-person events on hold, we hope we can bring people together virtually and come up with ways to pursue progressive issues in this time of social distancing!

We are a chapter of Progressive Massachusetts. Interested in learning more about Progressive Mass or joining one of their committees? Let us know after the meeting.

The SL Coordinating Committee is your team of fearless leaders running the meetings, organizing events, disseminating relevant news, and sharing calls to action.

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New Digital Engagement Committee forming and needs volunteers. Looking for wordsmiths and graphic artists to create informative and creative visuals for PM's digital outreach issues.

### Honoring

The Transgender Day of Remembrance was this week, please take a moment to acknowledge those who were lost this year.

On Thanksgiving, take a moment to acknowledge the indigenous tribes whose land we stand on. Here in Lowell, those tribes are the:

Wabanaki Confederacy

Penacook

Pawtucket

Massa-adchu-es-et

Learn more at <https://native-land.ca/>.

## Let's Celebrate Our Victories!

Teresa English close race, got 10k to 12k votes in non-blue Billerica.

Fantastic news!

Initiative #3 (16th Middlesex) overwhelmingly passed! 71% overall. Congratulations to 350MA.

Yay! This is to encourage a transition to completely renewable energy to 2050.

Biden/Harris won the Presidential Election!!!

Amendment #180 ROE Act passed in the Senate.

Added from speaker notes - We applaud the Senate for adopting Amendment #180, and for overwhelmingly rejecting an anti-abortion effort to undermine the amendment. By removing medically unnecessary barriers to care in Massachusetts law, Amendment #180 reaffirms that abortion is essential, time-sensitive health care. The amendment also takes an important step forward by codifying the right to abortion care into Massachusetts state law.

Public Charge' Immigration Rule Is Vacated by Federal Judge

From Joe Boyle - Rep Lori Trahan is in support for withdrawal of the US from Yemen per a staff conversation. They have asked for another meeting with Lori specifically.

From Paul Gaudet - Justice for Our Neighbors had a successful fundraiser this past weekend and met their fundraising goal.

Highlighted #Upbeat on FB

Who else has victories they'd like to share?

\*\* Join Solidarity Lowell Upbeat on Facebook for more!\*\*

Join SL on Slack <http://solidaritylowell.slack.com>. Contact Steve Malagodi ([steve@solidaritylowell.com](mailto:steve@solidaritylowell.com)) or Chris Offerman ([chris@solidaritylowell.com](mailto:chris@solidaritylowell.com)) for help on joining.

## Subcommittee Updates

Election Committee - Dee Halzack ([dee@solidaritylowell.com](mailto:dee@solidaritylowell.com)) and Lisa Arnold ([lisa@solidaritylowell.com](mailto:lisa@solidaritylowell.com)).

Time to start the conversation on the City Council elections. If interested in getting involved, please contact: Dee and Lisa.

Dee is trying to get organized to work on getting different people on the City Council as well as working with our district councilors.

We need addresses to figure out districts. Please let us know if you know anyone who would be running for City Council.

Voter turnout was very high in Lowell. As far as we know all categories had high turnout, particularly due to mail in votes. If we are still in a pandemic, we will be in a good place for collecting votes.

Immigrant Rights Committee - Chris Offerman ([chris@solidaritylowell.com](mailto:chris@solidaritylowell.com)).

All local actions still on hold, hoping to hold Welcoming Week 2021.

This would be held in September of 2021 if we are in a position to hold this again. This would be the traditional picnic in the park. We will announce plans as soon as they are done.

Safe Communities Act (S.1401/H.3573) now in Ways and Means which will decide whether to advance it by the end of the year. Email or call you legislator to support this act:

<https://actionnetwork.org/letters/pass-the-safe-communities-act>

Work and Family Mobility Act (S.2061/H.3012) - email or call Governor Baker and your legislators to urge them to prioritize this bill: <https://actionnetwork.org/letters/df-letter>

This bill would help undocumented immigrants to get a drivers license. This license would be a different class; not same as Federal ID (not able to use for voting).

For updates

Follow MIRA (Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition) at [miracolation.org](http://miracolation.org) – great resource to use for updates.

Or Driving Families Forward on Twitter [@DrivingMA4ward](https://twitter.com/DrivingMA4ward)

Merrimack Valley Interfaith Sanctuary Network (MVISN) - Marissa ([marissa@solidaritylowell.com](mailto:marissa@solidaritylowell.com)).

Marius is still staying in sanctuary space. He is a gentleman from Togo.

MVISN has pledged \$500 a month for living expenses.

There will be a virtual fundraiser for Marius - December 15th, 7pm on Zoom, RSVP to

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/finding-sanctuary-marius-journey-north-tickets-128307791057>

This will be a conversation with Marius about his journey from Togo to the US, as well as the majority of the conversation will be about his experiences crossing the border, in ICE detention, and making it to our area.

Donate at: <http://www.merrimackvalleyproject.org/donate-1/> (please write "asylum" in the "special notes" part of the donation form)

## Group Updates

### 350MA

Campaigned in the 16th Middlesex district. They worked on a non-binding resolution that by 2040 MA would be at 100% renewable energy. The resolution passed by about 71%. This would be good considering obstacles for instance no ads were accepted by the Lowell Sun, so this was a ground campaign only. 29% did say no which is pretty substantial; interesting to think about. They are preparing state-wide priorities with allies for spring/summer next year. Public transportation sector is a concern as it is the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest contributor of greenhouse gas; in dire straights without help. The building and construction sector needs to be looked at as well; making new buildings as energy efficient as possible working through MassSave to make it more comprehensive and accessible to lower income/single-owner homeowners. The climate bill that has not passed yet which would update MA's goals to what they should be. Allies are needed to revolve around T for Mass and to call for East/West Rail system & commuter rail system to evolve into a regional rail system. Current system is evolving due to working from home; demand is different and the old model of commuting may be outdated. From Joe former Gov Ducas' has a group that is working on changing all transit systems and the North/South rail link group may have gone dormant during the pandemic.

### Act On Mass

Ryan Organizing Director told the group that Act on Mass is launching a campaign as a transparency advocacy organization advocating to change the State House into the People's House. This campaign would focus on transparency and corruption. The new legislative session begins in January; a new rule book is passed each January which is written by members. No transparency means advocacy and how to lobby is difficult. This campaign would change 3 main rules - Secretive Committee Votes, Off-the-Record Floor Votes, and No Time to Review Final Legislation.

Sessions cannot begin until rules are approved. Act of Mass already has support; sympathetic representatives will submit amendments. This is focused on the House. All House members must vote. There is some good momentum already. Reps Howard, Golden, Mom have not agreed yet; it could be tough as Golden and Mom are close to leadership. Act on Mass is creating teams for each district to figure out how to focus pressure on each rep.

### MVP

Paul Gaudet reported that the MICAH awards event in which SL had an ad and made a contribution raised over \$25,000. MVP is looking to increase organizations and members in their 3 areas in the new year (Haverhill, Methuen, and Lowell).

## Speaker

Vesna Noun City Councilor spoke about affordable housing within Lowell.

There is a major shortage of affordable housing in Lowell; which to Vesna is a crisis.

He wants to lower building permits and zoning difficulties as well other restrictions to help builders who come into Lowell; specifically builders who want to add affordable housing into their development.

Vesna highlighted that the city of Lowell has lost five or six million dollars for developing affordable housing and recreational spaces because our neighbors joined the Community Preservation Fund and Lowell did not. If you are a part of the fund then you get a percent of the amount you put in from taxes to help create affordable housing, maintain open recreational spaces, preserve open spaces, and maintain the historical district. Cities/towns are allowed up to 3%. Vesna made a motion in the past and with support from the City Council, 1% was approved equaling roughly 1.3 million.

When a developer comes into Lowell, they come before the City to get their permits and permissions to build. The City then says that certain things need to be fixed for them to be approved to build their development. The money that the developers pays goes into the Preservation Fund. When a developer comes before the City Council the Councilors have the option to send the proposal to the Housing Subcommittee (members are appointed by the Mayor) to further investigate the project. Currently, the Housing Subcommittee is chaired by John Drinwater, who is an ally. John has worked well with Vesna. John feels that affordable housing is important. Part of the Committee's roles is to investigate the linkage fee part of the proposal.

Additionally, there is a Trustee Board for the Preservation Fund that is appointed by the Mayor. Vesna would like to see this Board work with the different organizations that are working on affordable housing within Lowell already to be able to use some of the funding for them. Vesna emphasized that when a developer comes to Lowell to ask for these reliefs that Lowell must ask for money for the Preservation Fund and/or something to do with affordable housing. This way the city is giving the developers the "store" but not the "keys" too. Vesna said that there are many on the City Council that do not mind giving all of the reliefs without getting anything in return.

Vesna said that currently the City sells houses that they acquire due to tax liens to developers. He would like to see these houses go to organizations within Lowell instead that are working on affordable housing.

The Win Company which has developed many buildings in Lowell came to speak about how to bring more affordable housing into Lowell. Part of the discussion revolved around the different types of relief that could be offered to developers such as tax relief, peppermint relief, and parking relief.

Vesna emphasized that whether Lowell is part of this Fund or not they still need to create affordable housing and maintain recreational spaces, but by joining this Fund the City receives the 1.3 million every year. The City Council is creating a board that will determine what the money will be spent on.

Vesna highlighted that Summerville about 20 years ago used their trust fund money to create not only affordable housing but affordable rentals as well.

2021 will be the first year that this money will be available to use. The total amount that is available is between 800,000 and 1 million. This money can be used for the 4 things mentioned above. Of these 4, affordable housing is the most pressing issue that needs to be dealt with.

The Merrimack Valley Housing Partnership is working with families that want to buy a house but can not afford the down payment. The City Council needs to learn more about how to help these low-income families afford to buy a house.

Vesna highlighted that the new city district map is on the Lowell website and encouraged people to run for City Council next year as well. Vesna said that there should be another public meeting with regard to the new districts at some point in 2020.

Vesna encouraged Solidarity Lowell to be more active in being an ally for this as well as joining the Police Commission group that was just formed as well as the Mayor's Taskforce that is currently being formed.

Steve asked Vesna that when they are filling the vacancies on the Preservation Fund committee, he is concerned that they are only focused on affordable housing and wants to make sure that there is a balanced approach and avoids gentrification; such as making sure the perspective of low-income and poor people are represented.

**Next meeting: December 20th**

Help us celebrate the 2020 Victories! – all victories for the whole year

Who will help us with reminder calls/texts?

Tara volunteered!

## Join us online!

- Join us on our Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/solidaritylowell/>
  - On the page, you'll see public events, photos, and more, but will miss out on discussions and members-only events.
- Join us in the Facebook group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/SolidarityLowell/>
  - In the group, you can participate in discussion, and have access to ALL of our events, including those for members-only.
- Join us on Slack: <http://solidaritylowell.slack.com>
- Visit our website: <http://solidaritylowell.com/>
- Follow us on Instagram @solidaritylowell
- Follow us on Twitter @solidaritylowell

THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING! SEE YOU SOON!