

LOWELL SUSTAINABILITY COUNCIL

Meeting Minutes

February 26, 2026 | Hybrid (In-Person & Zoom)

Location: | Lowell DPW Office, Middlesex St (and Zoom)

Members/Attendees

Neil Dale

Vic Vooys (council member)

Mikaela Hondros-McCarthy (council chair)

Billy Lefebvre (council member)

Ana Christina (council member, joined late)

Cormac Hondros-McCarthy (council member, remote)

Cynthia Hagan (Energy Coordinator)

Katherine Moses (Sustainability Division Director, City of Lowell)

William Aquino (regular non-member attendee)

Jay Tobin (Energy Manager)

Note: One council member resigned from the council during this meeting (see Section 4 below)

1. Approval of Minutes

The Chair called for edits or comments on the draft minutes from the January 22nd meeting.

One member requested that the third bullet under item 2A be stricken, noting it was already complete.

A formatting irregularity was noted when printing but confirmed not to have caused any content to be cut off.

Motion to approve the January 22nd minutes was made by Cormac and seconded by Billy.

Vote: Approved unanimously. No opposed. No abstentions.

2. Continued Business

2a. LPS Student Presentation Competition / Civics Day (May 21, 2026)

Background: This initiative, originally proposed by LSC Chair Jay Mason, aims to recognize Lowell Public Schools students for climate change projects at Civics Day on May 21, 2026

(correction: the event is on May 18th). The City Council voted in favor of a motion to move the project forward.

Katherine Moses provided the following update:

The motion response accepted by City Council differs somewhat from the original LSC proposal, due to ongoing efforts by the city law department to harmonize municipal board functions.

The city's position is that the most expeditious path given the timeline (now approximately 12 weeks to Civics Day) is a multidisciplinary approach involving the city, schools, and community partners -- rather than routing all steps through LSC board meetings.

The LSC's designated role is to provide one representative to serve on a five-person judging team. The LSC representative will help develop judging criteria and evaluate student submissions.

Katherine requested that the council designate its representative and provide the name to the superintendent's office, which will coordinate remaining steps.

Discussion:

Several members expressed frustration that the motion response was drafted without input from LSC members, particularly given the sustained effort the council had put into this initiative since October.

Katherine acknowledged the timeline delays and noted that the structure reflects constraints from the broader municipal board review underway, not a devaluation of LSC's role.

Jay Mason was not present; he had not registered for the Zoom link per new MIS protocols (see note below). The council agreed to table designating its representative until Jay can participate.

Zoom Registration Protocol Update

Per new MIS department guidance, Zoom links can no longer be published in public forums due to cybersecurity concerns. Current protocol: (1) Council members are provided the Zoom link directly and do not need to pre-register. (2) Non-members and regular attendees must email the Sustainability Division in advance to register; registration instructions are included on publicly posted agendas. (3) Pre-registration deadline is 4:30 PM on the day of the meeting.

2b. Follow-ups from Chris Sullivan Presentation (Curbside Composting)

The council discussed using a flyer being developed by Chris Sullivan in tabling materials.

Katherine noted that the flyer she had previously shared may be different from the one Chris is currently preparing. It was agreed that all materials should be channeled through the

Sustainability Division.

The council expressed enthusiasm about working with Chris on an ongoing basis; members noted that curbside composting is launching in March.

An interest was expressed in potentially producing a documentary-style video series featuring Chris Sullivan. AC confirmed continued interest in this project.

3. Sustainability Division Update -- Katherine Moses

Katherine presented a comprehensive overview of the Sustainability Division's history, accomplishments, and 2026 priorities.

Partnership Opportunities with the LSC

Katherine outlined three primary areas where the LSC can support the Sustainability Division:

Promote Mass Save, with specific emphasis on Lowell's Designated Equity Community status and expanded incentives

Amplify the Division's communications by resharing city sustainability content on LSC and personal social media channels

Generate community-level ideas and feedback that the Division can incorporate into outreach planning

Discussion highlights:

Neil Dale highlighted the importance of social media outreach and the challenge of communicating with large numbers of residents

Suggestions from members included: lawn signs with success stories/QR codes; ads in LRTA buses; presence at the train station; targeted outreach to landlords; piloting window-unit heat pumps in rental units (referencing a Boston Housing Authority pilot program -- Mikaela offered to research funding model), WBUR story here: [Boston is piloting a new type of heat pump that's as easy to install as a window AC | WBUR News](#)

Katherine noted that Mass Save adoption data is not shareable due to PII/non-disclosure agreements, making geographic targeting difficult

The council proposed adding Instagram and LinkedIn accounts; Katherine agreed to raise with the city's communications/MIS chain, noting that new social media channels for city boards face standardization hurdles

One member proposed tabling at the UML Seed Swap on March 21st; Katherine agreed to provide Designated Equity Community flyers and offered a brief Zoom briefing for tablers beforehand

Katherine confirmed that a potential partnership with Green Energy Consumers Alliance (GECA) was discussed that day with GECA's Margot; to be updated at the March meeting

Winterfest (upcoming weekend): members encouraged to attend and speak with Energy Advocate Victor at his table

4. Governance Discussion -- Role and Scope of the LSC

A broader conversation emerged regarding the LSC's role relative to the Sustainability Division and city government structure.

Key points raised:

A long-standing member expressed frustration that since the Sustainability Division was established, the LSC has been largely confined to outreach and promotion, with little ability to initiate or advance independent projects

Members noted that a twice-yearly meeting with the City Manager's office -- previously a standing practice -- has not occurred and was apparently denied: Katherine relayed that city leadership's guidance is that all communications from the LSC should be channeled through the Sustainability Division, not directed to the City Manager

Katherine acknowledged these frustrations but noted that municipal boards citywide are subject to the same structural constraints, and that the city's law department is conducting a comprehensive review to harmonize how boards function

Questions were raised about whether the LSC has any formal authority, and what distinguishes it from other advisory boards. Katherine noted that while the LSC lacks decision-making authority similar to boards like the Planning Board, it provides community input, idea generation, and amplification that the Division values

Member resignation:

LSC member Cormac Hondros-McCarthy stated that the Division's responses felt like "pure lip service" and announced their resignation from the council effective during the meeting.

Remaining discussion

Other members reaffirmed the value of the council, noting that idea generation and ground-level feedback are genuine contributions

A member noted that a colleague (conservation agent in Carlisle) expressed interest in joining but wanted to see updated guidelines -- members noted this underscores the need for clarity on roles

Katherine reiterated that updated board guidelines are being developed at the law department level and would be shared when available

5. Specialized Stretch Code -- Status Update

Vic confirmed that her written recommendation on the opt-in specialized stretch code was submitted and forwarded to the city's comprehensive zoning review effort

Katherine clarified that this review involves multiple city departments (planning, law, department heads) but is not a formally named committee -- it is an internal multidisciplinary process

The Sustainability Division is not currently represented on this review group; members suggested that should change

No timeline available for completion; it is expected to be a lengthy process given its comprehensive scope

When the review advances to City Council, agendas will be posted at lowellma.gov

The council agreed to keep this as a standing continued-business item to track progress

6. Proposed Speaker Schedule for 2026 Meetings

The Chair noted that invitations to outside speakers have been pending with Katherine's office for some time

Katherine indicated that some invitations have been sent but that speakers often ask for specifics on what the council wants them to address

Council direction: Invite speakers to present on their sustainability-related work and discuss how the LSC might help amplify or support their efforts -- this framing should make the ask more actionable

Katherine agreed to follow up with contacts and report back

7. Envision Sustainability Professional Certification

AC raised the question of whether any sustainability division staff or LSC members have pursued the Envision Sustainability Professional certification

Katherine confirmed no one has pursued it to date given current workload and competing priorities, but acknowledged it as a potential future initiative

Envision is a framework for evaluating sustainability in public infrastructure projects, particularly useful when new construction or major upgrades are being planned

8. Upcoming Events

Winterfest: This weekend -- members encouraged to attend and engage with Energy Advocate Victor at the sustainability table

UML Seed Swap: March 21st -- tabling opportunity; member(s) to staff; Katherine to provide flyers and offer a pre-event briefing

Green Energy Consumers Alliance partnership discussion: Tabled to March meeting

Action Items Summary

Action Item | Owner | Timing

Designate LSC representative for LPS Student Presentation judging team; submit name to superintendent | LSC (pending Jay Mason's input) | Before March meeting

Research Boston Housing Authority window heat pump pilot program funding model; share with Katherine | Council member (Mikaela) | Before March meeting

Follow up with Chris Sullivan re: composting outreach flyer; share with council via Sustainability Division | Katherine / Council Chair | ASAP

Reach out to speakers on LSC's 2026 list; use framing of 'how can LSC support your work' | Katherine | Ongoing

Inquire with MIS/communications about LSC Instagram and LinkedIn accounts | Katherine | Before March meeting

Provide Designated Equity Community flyers for UML Seed Swap tabling (March 21) | Katherine / Cynthia | Before March 21

Offer brief Zoom briefing for Seed Swap tablers on Designated Equity Community programs | Katherine | Before March 21

Update council on GECA (Green Energy Consumers Alliance) partnership discussion | Katherine's staff | March meeting

Keep stretch code / comprehensive zoning review as standing agenda item | Council Chair | Ongoing

Provide updated LSC role/guidelines when law department review is complete | Katherine | TBD

Meeting adjourned.

Next meeting: Thursday, March 26, 2026 | Minutes prepared from video recording