



Lawrence History Center

2022 STRATEGIC PLAN 2024



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Summary

The Strategic Plan (2022/24) includes three major goals with accompanying objectives to be accomplished over a three-year period. This plan is a path to guiding the organization in increasing relevance and sustainability as a research and educational institution. Central to this trajectory is collaboration with other aligned entities and engaging with the Lawrence community as never before. The continued preservation and enhancement of the physical home of the Lawrence History Center, in the historic former Essex Company headquarters, including the longevity, variety of use, and increased accessibility remains a key priority. The implementation of this plan will require an investment of approximately \$1 million across three years including both operating and capital expenditures.

Strategic Planning Process

In the fall of 2021, the Lawrence History Center (LHC) engaged the services of *Community InRoads*, a local organization that connects nonprofits with professional expertise (pro bono) in service of particular goals. The LHC was connected with a consultant, Leslie Levensen, who guided these planning efforts. Following several pre-planning meetings with leadership, the three core areas of the current plan— Education and Outreach, Collections, and Historic Preservation – were identified for assessment and refinement due to their enduring relevance. A pre-planning survey was created, and distributed to the broader LHC community and stakeholders, including board members, funders, community partners, volunteers, and researchers. The results provided novel insight into the organization, and informed the following strategic planning retreat.

The 2021 Strategic Planning Retreat was held on Saturday, December 5, 2021 in Abbot Hall on the campus of Phillips Academy in Andover. The session was board-driven with collaboration of staff, key volunteers and consultant. LHC Executive Director, Susan Grabski and Board President, Mark Cutler opened the meeting with reflections on the state of the organization emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic and its broader impacts, with restrictions initiated on March 14, 2020. From April 2020 to October 2021, the LHC secured nearly \$90,000 in critical support (CARES Act, ARP, and other various relief-related funds), which allowed operations to not only continue during this challenging period, but also to thrive and grow in resilience. The LHC has maintained staffing, continued historic preservation projects (initiated prior to the pandemic shutdown) and program delivery in accordance with COVID-19 safety protocols. On September 26, 2021, the Lawrence History Center resumed normal business hours.

The morning session focused on reflection and assessment of the success of the previous Plan. The afternoon session included more targeted work that incorporated the expertise of the assembled group and input from the LHC community, and new methods of virtual program delivery. Each of the three goals and corresponding objectives were reviewed and edited to better align with and reflect the organizational direction following the pandemic. The final part of the retreat was spent envisioning strategic direction and capabilities for the next three-year period.

Going forward, responsible parties will report on progress at regular meetings of the Board of Directors. The Strategic Plan be viewed as a document that provides direction; one that will be refined and enhanced as LHC moves ahead across the next three years.

Organizational Culture

Mission

To collect, preserve, share, and animate the history and heritage of Lawrence, Massachusetts and its people.

Vision

The Lawrence History Center inspires and engages the Lawrence community in the shared histories, contemporary challenges and opportunities. All those we reach - in Lawrence and beyond – are engaged in sharing, interpreting and harnessing our shared human story of immigration.

Who We Are

Founded in 1978 as the Immigrant City Archives, the Lawrence History Center (LHC) emerged out of a desire to tell the stories of the people who came to Lawrence, from many different lands, with little more than their imagination and determination and the dream of a better life. This initiative addresses a historical imperative to preserve the lives of working people which are too often unrecorded, unpreserved and unknown.

From the beginning, our mission has implored us to—

- Be an active and engaging community partner,
- Contribute by collecting that which might be otherwise lost,
- Bring into view the remarkable stories of people and places that create our community,
- And to share all that we have with others so that they may value and become curious about life in a gateway city.

In 1992, the LHC became the owner and tenant of the Essex Company Office & Yard, an iconic structure that anchors the North Canal District and serves as the entrance to the cultural and historic appeal of our community. This site is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Reflecting our community, our history shapes us but does not define us. We remain attuned to the contemporary and ever-changing stories that surround us.

GOALS

Goal 1:

INCREASE COMMUNITY AWARENESS THROUGH DELIBERATE OUTREACH AND EDUCATION

The history, facilities, and archives are resources to inspire and engage individuals and groups. In all efforts, the integrity of subject matter will be maintained within the parameters of our mission and vision.

Objectives

- Make the city's diverse community (and surrounding communities) aware of the LHC through thoughtful outreach and engagement via the collection and transcription of oral histories (with bilingual translation), the translation of print and web-based organizational materials into Spanish, targeting neighborhoods/communities by naming them in outreach, adding audio/video components to outreach materials to engage people with varying levels of literacy.
- Extend the impact of educational resources by continuing to develop classroom curriculum around significant historical events; use technology to increase reach with online resources.
- Continue to further partnerships with local organizations (social services, educational, religious, business, etc.) through joint programming and as a vehicle for information sharing and collection development.
- Form planning committee for one-day symposium on the subject TBD in Lawrence in spring 2024
- Promote and share news about LHC and its activities via social media, email, web site, radio (All, but, in particular, Spanish speaking programs), local cable, tabling at community events, etc.

Goal 2:

GROW, PRESERVE, AND MAKE OUR COLLECTIONS MORE ACCESSIBLE TO ALL

The archival collections are the core of the organization. They constitute one of the finest such collections in the region and represent content in all curriculum areas—math, science, technology, engineering, art and culture, ethnic diversity, immigration, urban planning, social innovation, etc. Understanding and assessing the scope of these collections is critical to future conservation, accessioning, deaccessioning, programming and development efforts. The future relevance of the organization depends on the successful completion of this goal.

Objectives

- Increase accessibility of the LHC collections through digitization so that we move toward expanding access to information and promote research and education in the broadest way possible.
- Continue to identify and define emerging themes in our collection.
- Evaluate collection needs and acquire related content to meet those needs.
- Engage and educate the community about the value and impact of donating to LHC.

- Establish LHC as a place of opportunity and collaboration for higher education and research
- Continue staff and volunteer education and training for the care of collections.
- Evaluate collections for processing and finding aid development.

Goal 3:

HISTORIC PRESERVATION, MAINTENANCE, AND EXPANDED USE OF OUR FACILITIES

The site is listed on the National Register of Historic Places built in 1882-3 and includes a main office building, carpenter shop, blacksmith shop, stable, warehouse, and sheds, all of which have deferred-maintenance needs. Since 1992, LHC has successfully garnered thousands of dollars from local, state, foundations, individuals, and other sources in order to carry out critical historic preservation projects at our home in the former Essex Company headquarters at 6 Essex Street.

The Lawrence History Center provides a first impression for visitors at entryway to the downtown corridor and, as a vibrant cultural organization, enhances the overall value and quality of life in Lawrence. The historic preservation and expanded use of our buildings is critical for the future success of our organization.

Objectives

- Assess and repair and/ or replace 3 roofs on exterior sheds
- Address HVAC needs in main building, warehouse, and the second floor of the stable where collections materials are stored.
- Achieve 100% ADA compliance in our main building, specifically by creating accessible bathrooms.
- Develop plan for addressing deferred-maintenance needs throughout complex, e.g. interior repainting of carpenter shop, black smith shop, stable and warehouse.
- Update electric, lighting, and fire detection in all outer buildings.
- Identify funding sources and potential partnerships with local trade-based organizations, e.g. Greater Lawrence Technical School.
- Lay groundwork for capital campaign in 2024-2025 based on determined goals and intended use of all buildings, keeping true to our National Register of Historic Places designation.
- Work with new/current administration to emphasize the importance of historic preservation and funding.

Post 2024

- Improve courtyard surface; all cobble or mix of cobble and easily to navigate surfaces that meet ADA requirements
- Advocate for CPA (Community Preservation Act)

What will we be ready to do 3 years from now?

[Participants were given 2 votes each]

- Create an Endowment (7 votes)
- Be ethical stewards of the cultural heritage in Lawrence and demonstrate responsible practices concerning ownership issues (4 votes)
- Increase connections between higher education and high schools (3 votes)
- More staff (3 votes)
- Make a transition plan for staff/volunteers (3 votes)
- Photograph and share artifacts (2 votes)
- Create online gallery (2 votes)
- Capital Campaign for exterior buildings (1 vote)
- Enhance collaboration with surrounding communities and countries (1 vote)

Other ideas:

Physical gallery

Offer professional development points for educators

Organizational History

Since 1978, the Lawrence History Center (LHC) has served as a dynamic living archive as an active and engaging community partner, contributing to the fabric of the contemporary community through extensive collections development, meaningful educational programming, research services, digitization efforts and research technology enhancements, and the continued growth of our reputation both locally, nationally, and globally. That success has meant an increase in research requests, school and community group programming, and more visitors through our doors.

The initial archival collection was started at the YWCA with documents from women immigrants in Lawrence. More than forty years later, The LHC owns its home at 6 Essex Street, Lawrence, Massachusetts in the former Essex Company complex - a site on the National Register of Historic Places built in 1883 that includes a main office building, carpenter shop, blacksmith shop, stable, and warehouse. The largest single collection is the Essex Company business and planning records that meticulously document the building of the City of Lawrence starting in 1845. Other collections include well over 40,000 photographs and glass plate negatives, 800 digitally mastered oral histories, mayoral papers, non-current municipal records, church records, organizational records from local businesses and agencies, and an array of family and individual records that document the ethnically diverse and intellectually challenging nature of Lawrence. The community is actively engaged with these unique materials through physical and online exhibits, symposia, educational programs, and research services to foster understanding of the interaction of the built community and the lives of those who live and work there.

The extensive LHC collections are in being digitized and made available through our website, OCLC WorldCat, Digital Commonwealth, Internet Archive, Columbia University, and the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA). Our online exhibition, Bread and Roses Strike of 1912: Two Months in Lawrence, Massachusetts, that Changed Labor History (<http://tinyurl.com/m5z9bov>), is one of seven exhibitions that were part of the DPLA April 2013 launch in Boston. According the LHC board member/project partner and lauded UMass Lowell History Robert Farrant,

"This project is further affirmation that the Lawrence History Center has become one of the leading research centers in the country for those interested in doing labor, social, and immigration history."

The LHC primarily serves members of the Lawrence community (residents, researchers, scholars, business, civic and private sector leaders, and students) and surrounding towns. Lawrence is home to 89,143 residents and is one of the poorest, youngest, and most heavily Latino cities in New England — 21.4% of residents are living below the poverty level, 26.3% are below the age of 18, 80.6% are Hispanic or Latino, 78.2% speak a language other than English at home, and 40.6% are foreign born. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020)

As a leading cultural institution in the city, the Lawrence History Center (LHC) works to create a sense of place and identity for residents who represent new immigrant populations in low-income neighborhoods. Education focused on the unique history and lived experience of Lawrence residents serves as a catalyst for change, emphasizing the positive and the possibilities for current generations.

Structure

Board of Directors: Consists of 14-18 volunteer members. The board meets every other month, in addition to attending the annual meeting and special events. There are standing committees for finance and development, collections, facility management, outreach, personnel, and, governance, as well as ad hoc committees as needed.

Advisors: Professionals in the local area who offer their expertise *pro bono* building organizational capacity.

Staff: 2 full-time professional staff, 1 part-time contract bookkeeper

Volunteers: A dedicated core of approximately 30 volunteers who aid researchers, process collections and/or support events and programs. These volunteers enrich both research and educational programs with their extensive knowledge of the collection and of the history of Lawrence.

Work Study Students, and Interns: Students from local schools and higher education institutions are provided with mutually beneficial research and collection-based projects and community service opportunities.

Primary Services

Collection and Research Services:

Access to the vast LHC collections and answers to research questions are provided to members with the guidance of staff, volunteers, and an expansive network of scholars and local historians. *250+/- questions are answered annually.*

Educational Programming and Tours:

LHC efforts to link the rich history of Lawrence to current local, regional, and national themes and to foster scholarship at all levels is furthered through varied place-based learning opportunities and symposia. *We serve an estimated 300 school children and receive approximately 1,500 visitors to our site annually, 200+/- of which attend our symposium.*

LHC collections represent content in all curriculum areas—math, science, technology, engineering, art and culture, ethnic diversity, immigration, urban planning, social innovation—supporting customized programs for both students and teachers.

Digital Collections:

Extensive and growing collections are being digitized and made available through the LHC website (<https://www.lawrencehistorycenter.org/>), OCLC WorldCat, Internet Archive, Massachusetts Digital Commonwealth, and the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA). A variety of other online educational resources, (e.g., interactive tours, video, oral history projects, student and scholarly research, etc.) are available on the LHC website.

The LHC offers intern, work-study, and directed study opportunities for students, as well as, close proximity to other cultural resources and landmarks.

Examples of Annual Events and Programs:

Academic symposiums on topics well-represented in our archival collections and relevant to our community (e.g., the 1912 Bread & Roses Strike, Post WWII Immigration, Urban Renewal, Public Health, Public Safety). Each have attracted 170 – 200+ people, scholarship at all levels (middle school to post-doctoral), national speakers, and interest from both inside and outside the city. (Held in the spring every 2-3 years),

The Eartha Dengler History Award Ceremony, a flagship event, which honors the efforts and accomplishments of outstanding leaders who help further our mission through their work to bring development, opportunity and prosperity to Lawrence. (Held annually since 1998 in June)

Lawrence Student Writers Workshop: The Rising Loaves, a program that represents a collaboration with Andover Bread Loaf (ABL), a Phillips Academy outreach program, to provide a FREE place based summer learning opportunity, anchored in history, for 45-50 low-moderate income middle school Lawrence students. (Held in July)

Annual Meeting & Open House, generally in tandem with the Essex Heritage Trails & Sails Weekends. At the business meeting, membership approves the prior year's Minutes, a new Slate of Board Members, the Treasurer's Report, and any other business that might be before the organization, e.g., changes to Bylaws. An overview of the year's programming and events for the year is also provided in addition to other activities, e.g. blacksmithing demonstration, lecture(s), exhibit(s), tours, etc. (Held in September)

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