

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS, NEWS

## CITY HALL TAKES TO THE STREETS

BY ANTHONY CAMMALLERI | August 28, 2022



*Mayor Jared Nicholson adds a cloud to Raw Artwork's painting depicting Lynn's future. (John Andrews)*

LYNN — A large portion of Exchange Street was closed for drivers on Saturday as hundreds gathered in Central Square to dance, eat, and speak with city officials at the Lynnside Out festival.

City departments and local organizations pitched tents along the intersection of Exchange Street and Mt. Vernon Street to converse with the public, while restaurant employees from The Golden Monkey Cafe and D'Empanadas served free food to attendees.

On the street, artists from Lynn's Raw Artworks non-profit invited members of the public to write what they love about the city currently and what they hope to see in the city's future on paper clouds to be added to a mural of Lynn that will hang in City Hall.

Raw Artworks' Community Engagement Manager Kaitlyn Farmer said that the art project serves as a way for the organization's young members to voice their hopes for the future through public engagement and art.

"We're actually building a neighborhood out of paper, and we're surveying the city about what they hope for Lynn, and also what they love about Lynn so we can kind of get some feedback to create this big community mural. The idea is that the mural is actually gonna go back to City Hall and live in the City Hall building so that people can really read it and take it in," Farmer said. "Our mission is to make sure our kids are all seen and heard. This is a perfect way for them to get out in their community, make some art with the public, and have their voices heard. We're really happy to be here."

Before an energetic performance from Lynn's Cultura Latina Dance Academy, the event's host, spoken-word poet Michelle La Poetica gathered the crowd around Frederick Douglass Park to introduce Mayor Jared Nicholson.

In a brief speech, alternating between English and Spanish, Nicholson said that the event's heart lay in the city's Vision Lynn community engagement project, which is meant to guide the city's future planning decisions toward the public's desires.

"The key here is that you guys are here for the plan for the vision and plan for these departments. These departments' vision and plan are here for you. It's the people of Lynn that are the reason we're all here, that are the reason that we do what we do, and we want you to be part of this future that we're talking about. It's the future of you and your family. It's your future," Nicholson said. "It's not a document that we want to sit on the shelf. It's what we want your lives to be over the next three, five, 10 years, and for that to work, for that to be meaningful, we want to hear what you think you want your future to be. How do you want to plug into your community? What do you want your neighborhood to look like? What do you think is missing? What are you proud of that you want to keep? And that is going to work if we are able to really have an open dialogue when you feel comfortable sharing your thoughts. And that's the goal here today."

At the Vision Lynn tent, community members wrote their opinions on the city's future on small cards, which were displayed on a clothing line for all to see. Perched on the table of the Vision Lynn tent was a map of the city, where residents could, very literally, pinpoint where they wanted to see the changes they wrote down, by sticking push pins in their desired locations.

Principal Planner Aaron Clausen said the city was turning the Vision Lynn project's focus to detailed community feedback.

“We’ve done a lot of work to do existing conditions analysis, basically, take a snapshot of the city now its demographics, transportation, information, jobs, economic development. We also did a lot of surveying and outreach to the community to develop a vision, so we’ve established a vision. Now, we’re trying to get feedback from the community to tell us a little bit about more,” he said.

The Health Department handed out COVID-19 testing kits and Narcan spray to those who wanted them, while The Food Project, partnered with the city’s Food Security Task Force and Farmer Dave’s, distributed bags of fresh produce to community members.

Creative Collective Founder John Andrews was tasked with organizing the creative side of the event over the last six months. He said that he enjoyed the synergy of a diverse culture within the community and the government that represents it makes the festival unique and powerful to him.

“The most powerful thing about an event like this is the community,” Andrews said. “I’ve done a lot of events in Lynn, and it’s typically the same type of stakeholders. This feels like the residents. This feels like people coming from all different areas. You can’t find diversity like this at a public event anywhere else, and doing so is very powerful. Young, Latin, Cambodian American, it’s all over the place. And these are the people that need the city services. To be able to create an environment that makes them feel comfortable and safe, open and welcoming, and then also be able to highlight what the city is doing.”

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