Strategic Plan 2019 / 2021
Adopted by the Lawrence History Center Board of Directors December 5, 2018

Summary

The Lawrence History Center, having just celebrated our 40th anniversary, has become aware of the need to pause and reevaluate itself in order to be relevant to the present and to thrive in the future. A critical first step was the production of a strategic plan that took into account the demographics of our community, the increasing competition for resources and constituents, the desire to continue collecting and preserving archival materials, and the need to bolster the study of local history in our city and local area. The plan includes three major goals with accompanying objectives to be accomplished over a three-year period. If followed, this plan is a path to transforming the organization into a more relevant and sustainable research and educational institution -- collaborating with other like-minded entities and reaching the people of Lawrence as never before -- and the continued historic preservation of our home in the former Essex Company headquarters to extend its life, vary its use, and increase its accessibility. To accomplish the plan will require an investment of just under $1 million across three years for both operating and capital expenditures.

Strategic Planning Process

In the spring of 2018, the Lawrence History Center engaged the services of Community InRoads, a local organization that helps non-profits connect to the pro bono services of people with the professional expertise needed to achieve particular goals. We were connected with three consultants who guided our planning efforts in the areas of board effectiveness and strategic planning.

Over the summer and early fall, consultant Stefani Muscat helped us create, conduct and compile pre-planning surveys (something that we have not done in advance of strategic planning in the past). Two surveys were created - one that was directed toward our broader community and the other toward our stakeholders which include board members, funders, community partners, volunteers, and researchers. The results gave us insight into our organization in ways that we wouldn't have had otherwise and informed our strategic planning session held in late October.

Consultants Todd Smith and Maria Infante facilitated a "Board Roles to Board Goals" session in early October with our newly elected Board of Directors to help strengthen their effectiveness as a governing body.

Todd also guided us through very productive organizational planning session on October 27, 2018. The session was board driven with staff, key volunteers, and a community partner in attendance. The reflections from the morning session, the more targeted work that took place in the afternoon, and input from our community, not just from the pre-planning surveys, but from information gleaned from event and program participants, funders, researchers, and visitors across the last year, prepared us well for the process of writing our new 3 year Plan.

The group brainstormed and worked to condense a dozen or so goals down to three and worked to clearly define objectives within each goal, to assign responsibility for the objectives' tasks completion to specific staff and/or board members and volunteers (see Work Plan), to estimate the cost of each objective and to set timetables for beginning and completing them. In December 2018, a draft plan, already approved by the executive committee, was submitted to the full board for adoption.

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
To use the Lawrence History Center and its resources to inspire and inform the people of Lawrence around the history, the current challenges and the opportunities that we share. All those we touch - in Lawrence and beyond – will be engaged in sharing, interpreting and harnessing our shared story of immigration.

Core Values

- **Collaboration** …to engage others in telling their stories
- **Community Building** …to use our collection, our presence and our perspective to strengthen our community
- **Excellence** … to do everything with a focus on quality, integrity, and impact
- **Outreach** … to nurture the connections among the people, places and organizations of this community

Who We Are
Founded in 1978 as the Immigrant City Archives, the Lawrence History Center (LHC) was born out of a desire to tell the stories of the people from many different lands, who came here with little more than their imagination and determination and the dream of a better life. Often the lives of working people are 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 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, we became the owner and tenant of the Essex Company, an iconic structure that anchors the North Canal District and serves as the entrance to the cultural and historic appeal of our community.

Like 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, our facilities, and archive will be viewed as resources and means to an end, rather than ends within themselves as we animate the history experience for 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 aware of the LHC through thoughtful outreach and engagement via the collection and transcription of oral histories (with bilingual translation) and the translation of print and web-based organizational brochures, event, and program materials in Spanish.

- Extend the impact of educational resources by developing classroom curriculum around significant historical events represented in the LHC collections that will be accessed via our website. Technology allows curriculum to be shared efficiently and inexpensively, acting as a supplement to on-site visits by classes and increasing the reach of our small staff team.

- 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 of the history of public safety in Lawrence in April 2021.

- Promote and share news about LHC and its activities via social media, email, web site, radio, local cable, tabling on community events, etc.

Goal 2: GROW, PRESERVE, AND MAKE OUR COLLECTIONS MORE ACCESSIBLE TO ALL
Our 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, engineering, 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 though digitization so that we move toward providing equal access to information and promote research and education in the broadest way possible.

- Define emerging themes in our collection, identify small to medium size collections for processing and finding aid development around those themes and in preparation for future acquisitions, research, exhibits, symposia (in 2021), public and collaborative programs.

- Acquire collections to complement more diverse programming and identify content gaps needing acquisition. For example, grow the collection with evidence of recent (post WWII) history and by documenting current events (e.g., natural gas disaster, public safety), and by being proactive in collecting new books or community materials relevant to the LHC mission.
• Engage and educate the community about the benefits of donating collection items to LHC.

• Establish relationships with regional higher education and research programs to promote LHC as an internship placement site.

• Continue staff and volunteer training around best practices for the care of our varied archival collections.

**Goal 3:**
HISTORIC PRESERVATION, MAINTENANCE, AND EXPANDED USE OF OUR FACILITIES

Since 1992, LHC had successfully leveraged 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 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.

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 our city. The historic preservation and expanded use of our buildings is critical for the future success of our organization.

**Objectives**

• Conduct assessment for the creation of a Systems Replacement Plan (SRP) for entire Essex Company Complex; Interpret findings, prioritize projects, and create Action Plan for carrying out needed work so that our buildings may utilized safely and fully for educational and community programs, collections storage, and as a property listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

• Assess and repair and/ or replace roofs throughout property

• Address HVAC needs in main building

• Achieve 100% ADA compliance in our main building

• Develop plan for addressing deferred-maintenance needs throughout complex

• Identify funding sources and potential partnerships with local trade-based organizations

• Lay groundwork for capital campaign in 2022-2023 in order to address the full renovation of all or some of our outer buildings per action plan set forth in the SRP and stakeholder input.

**NOTE:** See Work Plan for tasks, timelines and person(s) responsible
Organizational History

Since 1978, the Lawrence History Center (LHC) has been more than an archive of the past, but an active, engaging community partner, contributing to the fabric of the current community through our 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.

Our initial collection was started at the YWCA and consisted of documents of resident women immigrants. Forty years later, we own and are located at 6 Essex Street, Lawrence, Massachusetts in the former Essex Company complex - a site on the National Register of Historic Places built in 1882-3 that includes a main office building, carpenter shop, blacksmith shop, stable, and warehouse. Our 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 30,000 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. We engage the community by employing these 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.

Our collections are 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/m5z9b0v), is one of seven exhibitions that were part of the DPLA April 2013 launch in Boston. According to UMass Lowell History Professor Robert Forrant, "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."

We primarily serve (residents, researchers, scholars, business, civic and private sector leaders, and students) from Lawrence and its surrounding towns, Lawrence is home to 78,197 residents and is one of the poorest, youngest, and most heavily Latino cities in New England—27% of residents are living below the poverty level, 47% are below the age of 25, 73% are Latino, 74% speak a language other than English at home, and 36% are foreign born. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010)

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. We educate residents about their own unique history and work to move them forward, emphasizing the positive and the possibilities for current generations.

Organizational Structure

Board of Directors: Consists of 11-15 volunteer members. The board meets every other month, in addition to attending our annual meeting and special events. We have standing committees for finance and development, collections, facility management, outreach, personnel, and, governance, as well as ad hoc committees as needed.

Advisors: We have established relationships with professionals in the local area who offer their expertise to us pro bono as we work toward strengthening and growing our organizational capacity.

Staff: 2 full-time professional staff, 1 part-time contract bookkeeper [Susan Grabski, Executive Director; Amita Kiley, Collections Manager & Research Coordinator; Nancy Leonardi, Bookkeeper (contract)]
Volunteers: We have a dedicated core of about 30 volunteers who help us assist researchers, process our collections and/or support our events and programs. Our volunteers enrich both our 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 include:

Collection and Research Services:
Access to our vast 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. We answer 250+/- questions annually.

Educational Programming and Tours:
Our 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.

Our collections represent content in all curriculum areas—math, science, technology, engineering, art and culture, ethnic diversity, immigration, urban planning, engineering, social innovation—which allows us to offer custom programs for both students and teachers.

Digital Collections:
Our growing collections are being digitized and made available through our website, OCLC WorldCat, Internet Archive, 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 our web site.

We also offer 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:
- In April (every 2-3 years), we host 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). 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.
- In May, we host the North Canal Classic 5k Road Race and Kids Canal Dash…an inclusive, family friendly community event that highlights historic elements and landmarks, as well as recent development and infrastructure work in the North Canal district.
- In June, we hold the Eartha Dengler History Award Ceremony… held since 1998, to spotlight the efforts and accomplishments of outstanding leaders who help further our mission through their work to bring development, opportunity and prosperity to Lawrence.
- In July, we run the Lawrence Student Writers Workshop: The Rising Loaves, a program that represents a collaboration with Andover Bread Loaf (ABL), a Phillips Academy outreach program, and UMass Lowell to provide a FREE place based summer learning opportunity, anchored in history, for 45-50 low-moderate income middle school Lawrence students.