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Innovative Cities will talk shop

Lowell hosts conference

By Christopher Scott, cscott@lowellsun.com

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LOWELL -- In an effort to make the city more of a year-round destination, a diverse group of political, business, educational and cultural leaders are about to cheat.

The Lowell National Historical Park, UMass Lowell, Middlesex Community College, The Lowell Plan and U.S. Rep. Niki Tsongas have organized a June 17-19 conference they're calling Innovative Cities: Best Practices in Urban Development.

The conference will feature a keynote address by Aldofo Carrion Jr., director of the White House Office of Urban Affairs on June 17.

Besides Carrion, the conference also will feature addresses from leaders in four well-established urban destination cities: Ann Arbor, Mich., Asheville, N.C., Belfast, Northern Ireland, Milwaukee, Wis., and Portland, Ore.

In a meeting with The Sun editorial board yesterday, Lowell Plan President James Cook said it's all about finding out what makes those cities tick and trying to do the same here.

"We want to learn more from the cities that are doing it right," said Cook. "Then crib a little bit."

Cook was joined by Tsongas' district director, Brian Martin, Peter Aucella, park deputy superintendent, Paul Marion, UMass Lowell's executive director of community and cultural affairs, and Tsongas on speaker phone.

As the federal government often focuses its urban efforts on larger cities like New York and Chicago, Tsongas said the conference will give a city like Lowell "a chance to be heard," particularly with

Carrion in attendance.

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The group acknowledged the emergence of the city's dining and music scenes during the last decade. However, much of the city's destination traffic is event-driven. Its goal is to have destination traffic year round, regardless of the event calendar.

For instance, there was conversation about making Lowell a true destination city for the devout followers of writer Jack Kerouac, author of On the Road and other off-beat titles.

Other speakers will include Jonathan B. Jarvis, National Park Service director, former Maryland Gov. Parris Glendening, and Alan Mallach of the Brookings Institution.

Community leaders from several other nearby cities have also been invited, including those from Fitchburg, Lawrence and Haverhill.

More than \$30,000 has raised from local businesses to help fund the conference.

Anyone can attend, but registration is required and there are associated fees. For example, the Thursday night event is \$50, including dinner followed by a film and discussion.

Registration for events on Friday and Saturday is \$150.

One event, however, is free: "The Role of Federal Policy in Advancing Innovative Land Re-Use and Sustainability in

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Mid-Sized Older Industrial Cities" on Saturday from 8 a.m. to noon.

All events will be held inside the UMass Lowell Inn & Conference Center.

For more information, click on www.innovativecitiesconference.com.



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