

NEWS

CITY OPENS DOORS TO LIFE SCIENCES

BY [ANTHONY CAMMALLERI](#) | March 8, 2023



Jim Cowdell, executive director of EDIC Lynn, speaks during the city's Community Leadership Summit focused on life sciences expansion in Lynn on Wednesday. (Spenser Hasak)

LYNN — The City of Lynn and BioConnects New England gathered leaders in the state's biotechnology industry to discuss ways to bring life sciences businesses and jobs to the city at a summit Wednesday morning at the Lynn Museum.

Mayor Jared Nicholson greeted the crowd — which comprised city and school officials, biotech company representatives, and leaders from a variety of local organizations — by explaining the city's plans to host life sciences companies and grow a local biotech workforce in Lynn.

Even though Boston's population is roughly seven times greater than Lynn's approximately 100,000 residents, Nicholson said that Lynn Public Schools' student population is nearly a third the size of Boston's public student population.

Nicholson said that the City of Lynn has been working with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) to create a workforce development plan by identifying priority industries, such as the life sciences, and collaborating across sectors to ingrain them in Lynn.

"We're a young city, we're a working city, we're an ambitious city, and those students are our workers of tomorrow," Nicholson said. "For us to be here now, planning their pathways to good-paying jobs, that's exactly what we should be doing."

Lynn Economic Development and Industrial Corporation Executive Director Jim Cowdell followed Nicholson's speech by listing many ways in which Lynn, historically, has been on the forefront of innovation. The City of Lynn, Cowdell said, has seen the first jet engine, the invention of marshmallow fluff, and the first night baseball game.

To demonstrate Lynn's ideal location for a biotech company host city, Cowdell referenced the city's new zoning ordinance, which allows developers to construct a 10-story residential building with a commercial base without City Council approval. He also cited Lynn's Waterfront Master Plan, which paved the way for the area's nearly \$500 million in waterfront development projects.

"The message is, Lynn is the next logical place for the life sciences," Cowdell said. "We want the cash revenue, but it's really the innovation. That's our history, that's who we are as a city. We want to roll down the red carpet and say 'Welcome to our city.'"

Cowdell mentioned Soliyarn, a now Boston-based smart technology textile company that is moving to Lynn this year. Cowdell added that in five years, Soliyarn is expected to create 100 jobs with an average salary of \$85,000. The company, he said, is working in partnership with North Shore Community College and Lynn Tech to develop its workforce.

In his speech, BioConnects New England Lead Jared Auclair said that BioConnects plans to work with the City of Lynn to open life sciences companies, creating opportunities for Lynn residents and students to start biotechnology careers without needing to pay for a four-year university degree.

Executive Director at Gloucester Marine Genomics Institute (GMGI) Christine Bolzan shared GMGI's success in fostering an accessible and affordable biotechnology workforce. She said that the GMGI's 10-month life sciences program is tuition-free and includes seven months of hands-on training in the life sciences field, followed by a three-month paid internship with a biotechnology company.

Recently, Bolzan said, four Lynn students applied for the program after GMGI held workshop sessions at Lynn middle and high schools.

"We've been here in the community – we love Lynn, and we think this is possible here," Bolzan said. "We've been doing what we call 'What the heck is biotech' information workshops in the middle schools and Lynn Classical High School."

After a 10-minute break, the summit returned with a discussion and question-and-answer session among panelists Raul Gonzalez, an MAPC economic development specialist; Sarah MacDonald, a Life Science Cares employee; Zach Stanley, MassBio's chief corporate affairs officer; and Kenn Turner, the president and CEO of the Massachusetts Life Sciences Center.

During the question-and-answer portion, Jacqueline Fitzhugh from the New Lynn Coalition said that she was concerned about potential safety issues that might arise from biotech labs in the city. She also asked the panel if there were plans in place to develop childcare and transportation services to accompany the new industry.

Turner replied that the state's new secretary of economic development worked alongside him this week, and that he is confident the state will support the wraparound services.

"We want to build out a program that will provide all of those services and the funding. For me to continue to do this across the state, we'll have to build it into probably the economic development bill for a few months towards the summer. I'm hopeful that we can," Turner said. "This administration would seem to have a real appetite for apprentice programs and support programs."

Frances Martinez, the founder and CEO of the North Shore Latino Business Association, asked the panel whether or not the life sciences field would be accessible to Spanish-speaking Lynners.

Gonzalez replied that Spanish is his first language, and that the issue of language accessibility "hits close to home" for him.

"When I was growing up, Spanish was viewed as a language not to be spoken. The concept of language accessibility was one for me to learn, and I'm glad that that is changing in that realm, but there needs to be more done in language accessibility in all of our communities," Gonzalez said. "I want it to be accessible not just for Spanish, but with multiple languages."

Nicholson added that the biotechnology industry is already global, and that many life sciences companies do business with other countries in other languages. He said that if the industry could interact multilingually on a global scale, it could certainly accommodate those who speak different languages in the community.

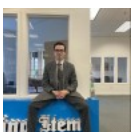
One woman stood up to ask whether or not the panel was aware of "gaps in oversight" in biotech labs. She then asked if anyone in the room was, in fact, from Lynn. More than half of those in the room raised their hands.

When the woman said that she was "concerned about the children" and said that she was alarmed that there were only two Lynn residents in the room.

In response, more than half the crowd raised their hands again, some uttering "We're from Lynn."

Concluding the event, Nicholson thanked the audience and the panelists for their time and input.

"We really appreciate this opportunity to start and continue the kind of dialogue and education that's necessary to earn peoples' trust and to capitalize on this tremendous opportunity," Nicholson said.



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