NARRATIVE IN SUPPORT OF THE PETITION FOR A SPECIAL PERMIT FOR A PROPOSED STUDENT HOUSING BUILDING AT MERRIMACK PLAZA LOWELL, MA 01852

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

It is proposed to construct a student housing building on the former site of the Lowell Five Cents Savings Bank (Subject Property) off of French Street in Lowell, MA. The work requires a Special Permit by the Lowell Zoning Board of Appeals. This document has been prepared in support of that petition.

2.0 EXISTING CONDITIONS

The following subsections provide information regarding the location, setting, history, and environmental condition of the Subject Property. Photographs of the Subject Property and pertinent characteristics are included in Appendix A.

2.1 Site Location and Description

Address:	1 Merrimack Plaza, 2 French Street, and 14 French Street Lowell, Massachusetts 01852
Assessor's Info:	1 Merrimack Plaza Parcel ID: 0158-4055-0001-0000 (1.81 acres) 2 French Street Parcel ID: 0158-2465-002-0000 (0.01 acres) 14 French Street Parcel ID: 0158-2465-0014-0000 (0.43 acres)
Latitude/Longitude:	42°58'35"N, -71°18'36"W
Relative Location:	1 Merrimack Plaza is located approximately 170 feet north of the intersection of Post Office Square and French Street, and 2 and 14 French Street are located approximately 100 feet east of the intersection of French Street and Post Office Square.
Current Owner:	Lowell Five Cent Savings Bank 34 John Street, PO Box 440 Lowell, Massachusetts 01853

2.2 Description and Current Use of Subject Property

The Subject Property is comprised of three (3) parcels, totaling 2.25 acres, located east/northeast of the intersection of French Street and Post Office Square in Lowell, Massachusetts. A two-story, 86,000 square foot concrete building with a finished basement and granite stone facade (Site Building) is located on the central portion of 1 Merrimack Plaza. The majority of the remainder of the Subject Property is covered with bituminous concrete with landscaped islands. A canal (the Merrimack Wasteway Canal) is present between the 1 Merrimack Plaza and the French Street

parcels.

The Site Building is currently vacant, and is heated by natural gas. Municipal water, sewer, natural gas, electrical, and telecommunications utilities service the Site Building.

In general, the Subject Property and grounds are well kept.

3.0 PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS

It is proposed to demolish the existing building and haul unsuitable material to a licensed disposal site. The pavement and building slabs will be crushed and either used as aggregate on site or hauled to a proper off-site facility. The site will then be graded as shown on the plans and the student housing building will be constructed as shown on the plans.

The proposed building is a five story, u shaped structure with a central courtyard . The facade will have vertical and horizontal articulation to break up the exterior face. There will be a vertical glass treatment adjacent to the elevator shafts and the elevator shafts will be outfitted with a tower that extends above the main roof line reminiscent of the mill towers. The main building entrance will feature a covered drop off area and a 30 foot wide glass entrance to the main lobby. The central courtyard will be a combination of hard scape and vegetated areas with appropriate seating areas.

4.0 SPECIAL PERMIT CRITERIA

The following subsection presents how the proposed facility meets the Special Permit criteria.

4.1 Social, Economic and Community Needs

There is a paucity of good student housing at the Lowell colleges. Many of the student housing units that do exist lack adequate amenities. The proposed student housing will provide lounges, a computer room, a gaming room, meeting rooms, a study hall, as well as support services. Since each living unit has a kitchen, the students can enjoy economical meals and not have to dine out. The overall expense of room and board will thus be economical in comparison to many of the alternatives. Rather than having the students spread out in various apartments throughout the region, they will be able to be integrated into this housing community which will provide programs, support services and allow the diverse student population to interface and grow.

4.2 Parking, Loading and Traffic Flow

Other than two handicap spaces, no parking is proposed on the Merrimack Plaza parcel. The 48 existing parking spaces on the French Street parcel will be retained. The handicap spaces are being provided closest to the building entrance as required by MA Architectural Access Board regulations.

The two handicap spaces on the French Street parcel will be converted to non-handicap standard parking spaces. In addition, the City of Lowell Parking Department has committed to allocating 180 parking spaces (pass card agreements). Refer to the February 4, 2016 letter from Nicholas Navin, Parking Director, which is presented in Appendix B. A shuttle service consisting of mini buses and vans will transport residents to and from all of the nearby colleges. In addition, there is adequate public transportation available including bus and taxi cabs.

Four loading spaces are required by the zoning ordinance for dormitories with over 300 rooms. Two are being provided at the northwest corner of the building and two are provided just east of the circular drop off area.

A traditional Traffic Impact and Access Study (TIAS) is not appropriate for this site since the vast majority of the trips to and from the proposed student housing will not be by cars. The trips will be by University shuttle buses, Lowell Regional Transit Authority (LRTA) buses, by bicycle and by walking. The University shuttle service runs from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. on all weekdays. In addition, it operates for the following evening, weekend and holiday hours:

Monday - Wednesday: 7 p.m. to 2 a.m.
Thursday and Friday: 7 p.m. to 2:30 a.m.
Saturday: 9 a.m. to 2:30 a.m.
Sundays and Holidays: 9 a.m. to 2 a.m.

The Lowell Regional Transit Authority (LRTA) has bus service from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. In spite of individual vehicle trip computations not being relevant to this assessment, the peak number of trip ends is still relevant. The Project will entail the development of a 438 bedroom community that will be designed and marketed to serve students at Lowell colleges. In order to develop the traffic characteristics of the Project, trip-generation statistics published by the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) for a similar land use as that proposed were used. ITE Land Use Code (LUC) 220, *Apartment*, with the independent variable of "persons" equal to 438, was used to develop the trip characteristic of the Project. The number of persons residing in the community was based on the number of bedrooms provided and represents a reasonable baseline from which to assess the impact of the Project (vs. the number of residential units proposed). Using the above methodology, the Project is conservatively (high) expected to generate approximately 950 trips on an average weekday (two-way, 24-hour volume, or 475 vehicles entering and exiting), with approximately 78 vehicle trips (21 vehicles entering and 57 exiting) expected during the weekday morning peak-hour and 113 vehicle trips (87 vehicles entering and 26 exiting) expected during the weekday evening peak-hour.

The higher education learning institutions to the south and east of the proposed student housing, include Middlesex Community College, the Lowell Academy of Hair Design, and the Lincoln Technical Institute. These institutions have primarily commuters living at home or have small student populations, therefore, relatively few trips (15%) are expected to be eastbound or southbound

from the proposed student housing. The University of Massachusetts Lowell, which is to the west, is projected to be the destination of 85 percent of the trips. The weekday morning peak-hour would have 48 westbound trip ends per hour and 18 eastbound vehicles per hour. During the weekday evening peak-hour, there would be 74 eastbound vehicle trip ends and 22 westbound vehicles. The projected trip rates above are for all trips including UMass shuttle buses, LRTA buses, bicycle trips and pedestrian trips. On clear sunny days, it is estimated that up to 40 percent of the trips will be bicycle and pedestrian. Conversely, on bitter cold or stormy days, the majority of trips are projected to be shuttle bus trips. Since the proposed student housing will house a significant school population and since the circular drop off area is under roof and protected by the weather, it is projected that the University shuttle service will locate a stop at the student housing entrance. The City of Lowell has already developed an outstanding bicycle lane system along the Merrimack River and is establishing a bicycle lane along the main roadways. There are also good sidewalk systems that are handicap accessible throughout the area.

4.3 Utilities

The site is currently serviced with municipal water and sewer. It is also currently serviced with gas, telephone, electric and cable. The stormwater is currently collected by a series of catch basins and piped to the Merrimack Wasteway on the east end of the site. The proposed building will be serviced by all of the above noted underground utilities. The stormwater from the paved driveways will be treated with a First Defense brand treatment system prior to being discharged.

4.4 Neighborhood Character and Social Structure

The proposed housing is bordered on the west by the seven story George A. Ayotte parking garage and the Tsongas Arena at Lowell University. It is bordered on the northwest by an eleven story apartment complex and a seventeen story apartment complex. It is bordered on the north by the abutting apartment's parking lot. It is bordered on the east by the five story Booth Mill complex and the seven story Mill Warehouse building. The site is bordered on the south by the tourist trolley, the canal, French Street and the three and one half story Lowell High School.

A review of the above noted structures indicates that the proposed footprint and height will be in concert and scale with the surrounding buildings. The vehicle and pedestrian circulation will interconnect with the existing infrastructure.

The inter-college blend of students will fit perfectly in the neighborhoods' social structure. The proposed facility will provide an ideal home for the diverse student population.

4.5 Environmental Impact

The following subsections briefly present the environmental impact of the proposed development.

General

Low level lighting will be provided in the central courtyard. Wall packs will light the walkways to the south and east of the building. All lights will be shielded to prevent glare to abutting properties. They will all be night sky friendly.

Suitably scaled landscaping will be provided around the proposed building and in the central courtyard. There is an existing 3 foot high evergreen hedge along the north side of the trolley tracks which will be preserved. This provides a visual and physical separation between the trolley tracks and the proposed Grass Pave lawn. Grass Pave is a commercial plastic grid that is filled with soil and planted with lawn seed. It is an all season surface that can take fire truck loads. Efforts will be made to preserve the mature pine trees that adjoin the Merrimack Wasteway Canal on the east end of the property. Ornamental shrubs are proposed along the northern property line.

Small snowfalls will be plowed to the side of the access drives. Snow blowers will be utilized to clear all of the on-site sidewalks. Large snowfalls will be loaded on trucks and hauled off site.

Wetland Resources

The water quality of the storm runoff will be improved by removing the existing parking lot and adding a stormwater treatment system. The volume and rate of runoff will be the same as under existing conditions.

Habitats

There are no priority habitats of rare species, no estimated habitats of rare wildlife and no certified vernal pools at or near the site in accordance with the MA Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program.

Air

The facility will be heated with natural gas with high efficiency units. There will be no other source of air pollution, therefore, there will be no significant impact on air.

Groundwater

Laboratory analysis of groundwater samples that were recently collected from on-site monitoring wells indicated no evidence of environmentally impaired groundwater. The proposed improvements will maintain that good groundwater quality.

Historic and Archaeological Resources

There are no historic or archaeological resources on site. The Subject Property is located in the Lowell Historic District and approval from the Lowell Historic Board is required and is being sought.

4.6 Fiscal Impacts

There will be no negative fiscal impacts on city services, the tax base or employment. The structure will be controlled construction and will have all of the requisite safety features. The building will be fully sprinklered and alarmed. It will be provisioned with a state of the art security system. The facility staff will be available twenty four hours a day seven days a week to support student needs. The facility will add an estimated $4 million dollars to the City's tax base with minimal burden on any city services. Snow removal, property maintenance, trash collection and disposal will all be completed at no cost to the City. The project will add over one hundred construction jobs, add numerous permanent jobs and contribute to the success of nearby restaurants, food stores, and other product and service establishments.

4.7 Consistent with Master Plan

The project is consistent with the City of Lowell Master Plan, particularly Section IV, Objective 7 concerning housing and institutional growth. Objective 7 calls for (I) private developers to expand housing near existing campuses, (ii) new student housing of high density to reduce impact on neighborhood housing markets, and (iii) privately owned off-campus dormitories that generate tax revenue for the City of Lowell. The proposed project is consistent with and helps accomplish all of these objectives.

5.0 CONCLUSION

There will be no environmental impacts from the proposed development. The proposed student housing meets all of the Special Permit criteria. It will provide a needed facility on a currently abandoned site.

APPENDIX A

PHOTOGRAPHS

Merrimack Plaza
Lowell, MA

Existing Building Looking North

Trolley Tracks on South Side

Merrimack Plaza
Lowell, MA

Existing Building Looking East

APPENDIX B

CITY OF LOWELL PARKING DEPARTMENT LETTER

City of Lowell Parking Department
75 John Street • Lowell, MA 01852
P: 978.674.4017 • F: 978.970.4044
www.LowellMA.gov

Nicholas Navin
Parking Director

February 4, 2016

To: Vision Properties
401 East Elm Street, Suite 150
Conshohocken, PA 19428

RE: Allocated Parking Spaces

This letter is to confirm that The City of Lowell Parking Department will allocate 180 pass card agreements for parking in the municipal parking facilities in support of the proposed project at 1 Merrimack Plaza, currently the Lowell Five Headquarters.

Specifically, the 180 allotted pass cards will be partitioned amongst the facilities as follows: 100 spaces at the George Ayotte parking facility, 25 spaces at the Joseph Downes parking facility, 15 spaces at the Edward Early parking facility, 15 spaces at the Leo Roy parking facility, and 25 at the Lower Locks parking facility. These monthly pass cards will allow the card holder 24/7 access to the specific facility they were drawn from. Pass cards are subject to the schedule of fees set by the City Council. Currently, the market rate is $64 per pass card, per month. A group billing discount is available.

Please feel free to reach out if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Nicholas Navin
Parking Director

CC: Kevin Murphy
Diane Tradd
Judy Tymon
Frank Warren
Patty Livorsi
Dave Croteau