



TO: Judy Tymon, City of Lowell Planning Board
375 Merrimack Street
Lowell, MA 01852

DATE: July 15, 2016

FROM: Eric K. Gerade, P.E.

TEC Ref #: T0526

RE: Project Narrative
Thorndike Exchange
165 Thorndike Street, Lowell, MA

Introduction

Salvatore N. Lupoli (Applicant) is the owner of 165 Thorndike Street in Lowell, Massachusetts, identified as Parcel ID 0162-5705-0145-0000, containing approximately 65,829 square feet (SF) of land. The site currently contains an existing 123,000± SF vacant mill building and a degraded sixty (60) space parking lot. The site is bounded by Thorndike Street and South Common Park towards the north, a condominium complex (former Keith Academy) to the east, and the Lowell Regional Transit Authority (LRTA) Gallagher Intermodal Transportation Center (GITC), to the south and west. The parcel is within the Urban Mixed-Use (UMU) zoning district and Lowell Downtown Historic District.

Project Description

The Applicant is proposing to redevelop the vacant site into a mixed-use development consisting of restaurants, office/commercial, and residential apartments with a direct bridge connection to the LRTA GITC. The proposed redevelopment will revitalize the property by creating a village-like live-work-play environment. The Applicant is proposing to renovate the existing five story mill building, construct a new building addition, and reconstruct parking areas to provide landscaping, lighting, sidewalks, bicycle racks, granite curbing, and improved stormwater management and utilities.

A. Buildings

The proposed redevelopment will include the renovation of the existing 123,000± SF mill building into a mix-use development including two restaurants (6,750±SF), commercial office space (57,500±SF) and residential apartment units (58,370±SF), complemented with a fitness center for residents within the building. The proposed redevelopment will also include the construction of a new 5-story residential apartment building (66,500±SF) running parallel to the southeast property line with podium at-grade parking beneath the building addition. A total of 118 dwelling units are proposed. The new building will connect to the existing building at the southern corner where a portion of the existing mill was previously demolished due to storm damage. This will create a "U" shaped building footprint with parking in the center of the site. The new pedestrian bridge will connect the renovated mill building at the westerly corner to provide direct, enclosed pedestrian access between the mill building and the LRTA GITC.

A special permit is requested from the Planning Board for the proposed use of a **residential use of more than seven dwelling units on one lot**, according to the **Table of Uses in Section 12.1.e** of the Lowell Zoning Ordinance (Ordinance). A special permit is also requested from the Planning Board to allow for **the alteration of an existing mill complex to contain more than two dwelling units**, as allowed for by **Section 8.1.2**. Additionally, a special permit is requested for **reduction in the Lot Area per Dwelling Unit** from 1,000 to 588, as allowed for by **Section 8.1.3.10** of the Ordinance.

B. Parking and Loading

The project proposes to construct 36 surface and 28 podium parking spaces within the property. Additionally, the Applicant has secured an additional 120 parking spaces within the LRTA parking garage, which will be leased to the Applicant by the LRTA and Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), for a total of 184 parking spaces.

A special permit is requested from the Planning Board to allow for the reduction in the residential parking by 50% due to the close proximity of the parking garage, as allowed for in **Section 6.1.6.6** of the Ordinance. Additionally, the Ordinance allows the Board to reduce the required parking for non-residential parking by 50% due to the close proximity of the parking garage under the same section noted above. Leased parking spaces may also be utilized to meet the required parking demand as noted in **Section 6.1.6.5** of the Ordinance.

The existing mill building is currently serviced by a loading dock and dumpster area on the westerly side of the project, which is accessed from the LRTA driveway. This loading dock and dumpster area will remain and be utilized by the future renovated mill and new building.

C. Traffic Flow and Circulation

The project proposes to consolidate from two curb cuts on Thorndike Street to one curb cut on Thorndike Street. The Applicant has met with City Staff regarding access and an outline of the results of the discussions can be found in the attached *Access Proposal Letter*, dated July 15, 2016. The reconstructed parking areas onsite are serviced with 24' wide, two-way drive aisles with sidewalk connections from the building to Thorndike Street. The project's Parking Management Plan outlines that the onsite parking spaces shall be available during business hours for the use of the restaurants and commercial uses onsite while the leased parking garage spaces will be utilized to service the residential parking demands and any overflow parking for the commercial uses. The parking area has been reviewed to ensure that all necessary emergency vehicles can circulate within the site.

D. External Lighting

External lighting for the project will be provided by the installation of two new light poles with double LED fixtures on each pole. The relative small size of the outdoor area and parking lot do not require the need for a substantial lighting package within the Site. Refer to the Landscaping and Lighting Plan for details on the proposed light

fixtures. The proposed lighting is Dark Sky Compliant to reduce light pollution and there is no light spillover onto adjacent properties.

E. Landscaping and Screening

The existing site is almost entirely covered with building or parking. The proposed plan enhances landscaping for the entry, parking areas and to complement the pedestrian sidewalk areas. Refer to the Landscaping and Lighting Plan for further landscape details. The proposed buildings will provide screening for the proposed parking lot. The proposed redevelopment increases greenspace onsite by approximately 4,500 SF.

F. Utilities

The redevelopment project will utilize existing connections where conditions allow into the renovated mill building. A new stormwater management system will be installed to collect and treat stormwater runoff prior to entering the municipal system. New sewer services will be installed with a grease trap for the restaurants and sediment and oil separator for the at-grade parking spaces beneath the proposed building addition. New water, gas, tel/com, and electrical services will be installed for the new construction building. All utilities will be provided via underground services and will be in keeping with the requirements of the City and private utility companies.

G. Snow Removal

Snow will be removed offsite by the Applicant on an as needed basis to maintain safe vehicular and pedestrian access.

H. Natural Area Protection and Enhancement

The existing site has been previously disturbed. There are no natural resource areas onsite or immediately adjacent to the subject parcel. The existing site is covered by an existing mill building and associated parking lot. Initial subsurface investigations have revealed that the soils onsite consist of urban fill material with trace contaminants. The project has been designed to minimize the environmental impact by removing contaminated materials where feasible and resurfacing the site with new materials including loam, mulch, and pavement to eliminate any potential erosion or windblown migration of soil materials. The proposed project will provide additional landscaped area to provide a significant enhancement over the existing conditions.

I. Lowell Planning Board Approval

Approved by the Lowell Planning Board	Date: _____
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The following is provided to support the special permit requests:

A. Application to Master Plan:

1. How does this project adhere to, apply, and promote the goals of the City of Lowell Comprehensive Master Plan? Successful projects should present specific connections between the goals of the Master Plan and the projects themselves.

The Thorndike Exchange Project promotes the goals of the City of Lowell Comprehensive Master Plan by preserving the unique quality and character of a historic but vacant and underutilized mill building. The rehabilitation and expansion of the Thorndike Mill will enhance the appreciation of the historic building, and will provide a healthy mix of residential and commercial space for residents and visitors. All proposed uses are allowed in the UMU zoning district. The project is located adjacent to the Lowell Regional Transit Authority rail and bus station, providing residents/patrons convenient multi-modal transportation access. The project includes a new pedestrian bridge connection between the Thorndike Mill and the LRTA station which will increase the use and efficiency of public transportation, and will be used to maximize the utility of available parking resources in the LRTA garage. Overall, the project will provide a great benefit to the City of Lowell by rehabilitating and preserving the character of a historic, vacant mill building.

B. Neighborhood Character:

2. How does this project protect and enhance the character of the existing neighborhood? Successful projects should reflect the density, the urban design, the setbacks, height, and landscaping elements of surrounding buildings.

The project will enhance the character of the existing neighborhood by rehabilitating a dilapidated, vacant mill building into a vibrant residential and commercial hub near the downtown area of Lowell. The close proximity and proposed pedestrian bridge connection to the LRTA rail and bus station compliments and makes possible the density, and urban design. The project will retain existing setbacks and height of the existing Thorndike Mill and consistent with the Zoning requirements, and will improve the landscaping elements onsite.

3. How does this project provide for social, economic or community needs?

The Thorndike Exchange redevelopment will provide 118 residential units that will bring new residents near the downtown Lowell Area. In many respects Thorndike Street serves as a gateway to Lowell. Reinvestment in this property along the gateway will serve the social and community needs by building on the continuing to build on the success of the City at renovating and re-purposing these beautiful properties to enhance the Lowell experience for residents and visitors alike. The connection from the

project to the LRTA rail and bus station will enhance access and efficiency of the multi-modal transportation options available in Lowell. Additionally, two new restaurants will provide social and economic benefits by attracting new patrons and visitors to the City of Lowell.

4. Is the project consistent with the character, materials and scale of buildings in the in the vicinity?

The project proposes to rehabilitate the Thorndike Mill and will preserve the character of the historic building. The material and scale of the building will be retained and rehabilitated, enhancing the appreciation for the unique quality and character of the historic Lowell neighborhood.

5. Does the project minimize the visual intrusion from visible parking, storage and other outdoor service area viewed from public ways and abutting residences?

The project will minimize visual intrusion from visible parking by providing 28 new garage spaces within the proposed building expansion, and by coordinating a 120 parking space lease agreement with the neighboring LRTA station garage. The project will also increase the amount of greenspace and landscaping onsite to screen the parking area.

C. Environmental Issues:

6. Does the project have any negative impacts on the natural environment?

The project will not have any negative impacts on the natural environment. The existing mill site is developed and almost entirely impervious. The proposed connection to the LRTA rail and bus station will promote use of public transportation, further reducing the carbon footprint of the project. Additionally, the project will remove an existing combined sewer system and will provide a new sewer connection and stormwater management system.

7. Does the project minimize the volume of cut and fill and the extent of stormwater flow and soil erosion from the site?

The project will retain the existing building onsite, and the proposed parking area will mimic existing grades. The project will increase greenspace onsite and will reduce stormwater flows.

8. Does the project minimize the contamination of groundwater?

This project minimizes the contamination of groundwater by providing all new utility connections to the existing building including a new stormwater management system, water connection, and sewer connection. All new utilities will meet the latest and highest construction standards and will eliminate any leaks or cracks in existing infrastructure.

Infiltration of stormwater is not proposed due to the urban fill nature of the existing soils. Additionally, the project will remove the combined sewer system existing onsite today, providing a great benefit to the environment and the community.

9. Does the project provide for storm water drainage consistent with the local regulations?

The project will provide a new stormwater management system that will meet all local, state, and federal regulations. The storm water drainage onsite today is outdated and discharges to the municipal sewer system. The new stormwater management system will remove this illicit connection and will provide a great benefit to the City of Lowell.

10. Does the project minimize obstruction of scenic views?

This project minimizes obstruction of scenic views by retaining the existing height and setbacks of the Thorndike Mill. The rehabilitated building will bring in new residents and patrons near the downtown Lowell area. Additionally, the project is located across from Lowell's South Common. The newly revitalized building will provide scenic views of the Common for new residents and patrons of the new restaurants.

11. Does the project minimize lighting glare on abutting properties?

This project will provide a new lighting system onsite which will not spill over into adjacent properties. Additionally, the U-shape geometry of the proposed building will not allow for lighting spillover.

D. Traffic, Access and Safety:

12. How does the project address traffic flow and safety, including parking and loading? Does the project provide adequate parking for visitors to the residences? Will the project impact an area with significant on-street parking demand? Will the project require the loss of on-street public parking for driveway curb cuts?

The project will provide adequate parking for visitors by constructing 64 parking spaces onsite and 120 standard parking spaces will be leased from the LRTA station garage for use by residents. The pedestrian bridge connection to the LRTA regional multi-modal transportation station will promote use of public transportation and reduce the need for surface parking spaces. There are no on-street parking spaces along Thorndike Street, as result no on-street public parking will be lost as part of the project.

13. Does the project provide adequate access to each structure for fire and service equipment and adequate utilities?

The project design will be coordinated with the Lowell Fire Department to ensure that adequate access is provided. The project will provide new utilities to support the project.

14. Does the project provide adequate and safe pedestrian and vehicle access through and around the project?

The project will drastically enhance the pedestrian access around the project. A new pedestrian bridge connection will be constructed between the Thorndike Mill and the LRTA station to provide convenient access. Additionally, the project will reconstruct surrounding sidewalks and provide new code compliant curb ramps and access for all users. The project will improve vehicle access by reducing the number of curb cuts to the site and coordinating the design of the site with the future City of Lowell roadway improvements that are currently in the planning stages.

E. Additional Impacts

15. Are there any substantial impacts on public services and utilities?

The project will be connected to the municipal water and sewer systems which have more than adequate capacity to support the development. The project will promote the use of public transportation, and will reduce the need for residents have their own personal vehicles. The proposed residential apartments consist of a mix of studio and one-bedroom apartments which should have a negligible effect on public services including the school system.

16. Does the project have any negative fiscal impact on the city, including impact on city services, schools, tax base, and employment?

This project will bring 118 new residential uses close to the downtown Lowell area and will provide two new restaurants to attract visitors to the City. Overall, the tax revenue collected from the multi-use development will provide a great benefit to the City, and the new residents and visitors to the area will provide an economic benefit.

17. Does the project comply fully with the Zoning Ordinance, including parking, signage, landscaping, open space requirements, curb cut lengths and driveway widths?

This project has designed in accordance with the Lowell Zoning Ordinance. As part of the planning review process, all special permits required for the project will be reviewed and coordinated with City Staff to provide a project that will benefit the City. No variances have been requested as part of the project, the design has been prepared to be in keeping with the Ordinance and the Special Permit request criteria are satisfied allowing the Planning Board to consider the requests as the Granting Authority as outlined in the Ordinance.