



City of Lowell - Planning Board

Planning Board Meeting Minutes

Monday, January 3 6:30 p.m.
City Council Chambers, 2nd Floor, City Hall
City of Lowell, 375 Merrimack Street, Lowell, MA
Remote Participation Optional via Zoom

Note: These minutes are not completed verbatim. For a recording of the meeting, visit www.ltc.org

Members Present

Thomas Linnehan, Chairman*
Gerard Frechette, Vice Chairman*
Richard Lockhart, Member
Caleb Cheng, Member
Russell Pandres, Associate Member

Members Absent

Robert Malavich, Member
Sinead Gallivan, Associate Member

Others Present

Dylan Ricker, Associate Planner

A quorum of the Board was present. Chairman Linnehan called the meeting to order at 6:31pm.

I. Minutes for Approval

December 6, 2021 Minutes

G. Frechette motioned, and T. Linnehan seconded the motion to approve the December 6, 2021 meeting minutes. The motion passed unanimously, (4-0).

November 15, 2021

G. Frechette motioned, and C. Cheng seconded the motion to approve the November 15, 2021 meeting minutes. The motion passed unanimously, (4-0).

II. Continued Business

III. New Business

Site Plan Review: 572-610 Lakeview Avenue, 01850

The Lowell Housing Authority has applied to the Lowell Planning Board seeking Site Plan Review approval for the addition of one ADA accessible residential unit at the existing housing complex. The property is located in the Traditional Multi-Family (TMF) zoning district. The project requires Site Plan Review approval pursuant Section 11.4.2(2) from the Lowell Planning Board, and any other relief required under the Lowell Zoning Ordinance.

On Behalf:

Nora Shull, Applicant's Architect

N. Shull stated that she is representing the Lowell Housing Authority (LHA) along with Laura Watts, LHA's Capital Asset Manager. N. Shull noted that the housing development is an elderly housing development, and stated the modernization project includes updating all units and 2 ADA accessible units. N. Shull added that all existing asphalt will be removed and the parking will be extended to provide ADA parking spaces. N. Shull said the envelope of one building will be expanded to accommodate the new ADA accessible unit. N. Shull stated the intent of the project is to maintain the existing character of the development. N. Shull explained the proposed elevations. N. Shull stated that all sidewalks will be will be expanded to ensure they are ADA compliant and a new seating area will be added to the property. N. Shull added there will be a drop off area within the parking area, and noted that most tenants do not have their own vehicle. N. Shull said there will be no changes to the existing lighting with the exception that the lights will now be LED lights. N. Shull said the existing trees will be maintained on the site and landscaping and trees will be added to provide a visual and sound barrier to the VFW Hwy. N. Shull said there are sufficient utilities on site to accommodate the additional unit. N. Shull stated that all fire prevention updates required will be added and a new stormwater management system will be added and has been approved by the City.

Laura Watts, Applicant

Speaking in Favor:

None

Speaking in Opposition:

None

Discussion:

R. Pandres asked about the letter of map amendment regarding the floodplain and asked whether this had been submitted. N. Shull said they previously met with DPD and at that time it was submitted.

R. Lockhart said the project would work well with the existing development and believes the project will work well.

C. Cheng asked whether the applicant considered bike racks for the site. N. Shull said these had not been discussed since it is an elderly population less likely to bike and noted there is sufficient space outside of each unit for bike storage. C. Cheng expressed support for the landscaping buffer between the property and the VFW Hwy and added that it benefits the property and neighborhood.

G. Frechette agreed that this is a low impact proposal and agreed that the landscaping buffer is an added feature. G. Frechette added that bringing the property up to ADA standards is an improvement.

T. Linnehan expressed support for the project and agreement with the parking plan.

Motion:

R. Lockhart motioned, and G. Frechette seconded the motion to approve the Site Plan. The motion passed unanimously, (5-0).

Flood Plain Overlay District

In accordance with M.G.L. Chapter 40A Section 5, the Lowell Planning Board will hold a public hearing to hear all interested persons relative to an ordinance to amend "The Code of Ordinances City of Lowell, Massachusetts," with respect to Chapter 290, thereof entitled "Lowell Zoning Code" by amending Article IX Overlay Districts, specifically Section 9.1 entitled Flood Plain Overlay District (FPOD). The proposed updates would bring the City's FPOD in compliance with FEMA and NFIP rules to ensure Lowell residents continue to qualify for flood insurance. Changes were made to align with the state's "model" floodplain bylaw.

On Behalf:

None

Speaking in Favor:

None

Speaking in Opposition:

None

Discussion:

T. Linnehan explained the proposed update.

Motion:

G. Frechette motioned, and R. Lockhart seconded the motion to send the proposed FPOD update to the City Council with a positive recommendation. The motion passed unanimously, (5-0).

IV. Other Business

Pre-Application Hearing: 817 Merrimack Street, and 680 Father Morissette Boulevard, 01852

Aptitude Acquisitions, LLC have applied to the Lowell Planning Board for a Pre-Application hearing for a proposal to demolish the existing building and construct two residential buildings at 817 Merrimack Street, and 680 Father Morissette Boulevard. Building 1 would be a 7-story structure containing 126 residential units, 2 levels of structured parking, and a first floor amenity space at 817 Merrimack Street. Building 2 would be a 7-story structure containing 126 residential units with a ground floor leasing office and clubhouse at 680 Father Morissette Boulevard. The subject properties are located in the Institutional (INST) zoning district. When the full application is filed it will require Site Plan Review, and Special Permit approval from the Lowell Planning Board, Variance approval from the Lowell Zoning Board of Appeals, and Historic Board approval for the 680 Father Morissette Boulevard structure.

On Behalf:

John Cox, Applicant's Representative

J. Cox stated the proposal went before the Planning Board for a previous pre-application hearing in which the applicant was considering student housing. J. Cox said that the student housing aspect is no longer being considered and the project will be a typical multi-family development. J. Cox explained the existing conditions of the site and the plans to construct 2 residential buildings. J. Cox noted the project is a work in progress and added that the project will ultimately require Zoning Board, Planning Board, and Historic Board approvals.

J. Cox stated the applicant intends to bring quality, market-rate housing and would fill a void that exists in the City. J. Cox explained the amenities of the property. J. Cox stated the applicant will coordinate with DPD on streetscape improvements. J. Cox explained the applicant's TDM plans encouraging alternative forms of transportation. J. Cox said the property would remain privately owned and the project would lead to increased tax revenue for the City. J. Cox explained how the project aligns with the City's master plan.

Jared Hutter, Applicant

Zachary Feldman, Applicant

Kelly Killeen, Applicant's Engineer

Jason Lutz, Applicant's Architect

Discussion:

R. Lockhart asked what the applicant means by decoupling apartment rentals and parking spaces referencing the applicant's TDM plan. K. Killeen said this means that units can be rented without designated parking spaces. R. Lockhart asked about the subsidies for public transit. K. Killeen stated this could mean a reduction in rates for public transit such as bus passes, etc. K. Killeen added that they do not have an exact plan yet, but the elements included have been utilized at the applicant's other properties.

R. Lockhart emphasized the importance of contacting the City's Historic Board Administrator and the importance of his input on the project. J. Hutter said this is the beginning of the process, but they will be in contact as the project moves forward.

G. Frechette referenced the DPD comment referring to the proposed parking ratio. G. Frechette stated there is concern due to the lack of parking in the neighborhood. G. Frechette expressed concern about the parking ratio and stated the applicant should consider a parking ratio closer to 1 space per unit. G. Frechette noted that essential goods (i.e. grocery stores) are not necessarily within walking distance, and noted the TDM plans are more frequently used for developments nearer to Downtown and the Gallagher Terminal.

G. Frechette noted the Design Planner's comments and reiterated the importance of streetscape improvements that would be associated with the project. G. Frechette stated that increasing the parking ratio would be important. G. Frechette noted the importance of retail space on the first floor, and added

that it would be beneficial for Building 2 to follow the curve of the road. G. Frechette stated that there is very little street parking available in this area and noted there is significant traffic at the nearby intersection. G. Frechette said the Board would like to see a traffic study.

J. Cox stated the applicant is aware of the Design Planner's comments and they will take DPD input into account.

R. Pandres stated the FAR significantly exceeds the allowed FAR and questioned whether the scale of the building works with the scale of the neighborhood. R. Pandres said coming more into scale with the neighborhood would be beneficial. J. Cox said the applicant will look into what is feasible for the site, and reiterated they will take DPD and City input into account.

C. Cheng said that putting bike racks in easily accessible locations is important. C. Cheng agreed with G. Frechette regarding the opportunity for a first floor commercial/retail use, and added that this could work in conjunction with their TDM Plan. C. Cheng stated streetscape improvements will make the street more walkable and a retail use could provide more essential goods to the neighborhood within walking distance. C. Cheng agreed with R. Pandres that softening the FAR differences related to massing would be beneficial.

T. Linnehan noted that the application increased the property by 96 units and decreased the parking. T. Linnehan emphasized that parking was an issue with the previous application and remains an issue. T. Linnehan noted the applicant has not finalized their TDM plan and there should be more details on the benefits that will be offered. T. Linnehan expressed significant concern about the parking ratio.

V. Notices

VI. Further Comments from Planning Board Members

G. Frechette stated that NMCOG hired a new Executive Director who comes to NMCOG with a planning background.

R. Lockhart stated that the Historic Board has not met and the next meeting is January 10th.

VII. Adjournment

C. Cheng motioned, and R. Lockhart seconded the motion to adjourn. The motion passed unanimously, (5-0). The time was 7:28pm.