

**LOWELL HISTORIC BOARD
MINUTES
Mayor's Reception Room, Lowell City Hall
February 13, 2023 at 6:00 p.m.**

Note: These minutes are not completed verbatim. For further detail, contact the Lowell Historic Board, Lowell City Hall, Room 51, 375 Merrimack Street or refer to video recordings available online at www.LTC.org.

Members Present: Jeffrey Harris, Chair; Yovani Baez-Rose, Lisa "LC" Cassidy, Aurora Erickson, Kerry Regan Jenness, George Villaras

Members Absent: Troy Depeiza, Richard Lockhart

Others Present: Stephen Stowell, Administrator

The following represents the actions taken by the Historic Board at the 2/13/2023 meeting. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this meeting occurred in hybrid form, both in-person and via the Zoom video conferencing platform.

Chair Harris called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

1. PUBLIC HEARINGS

A. DLHD-23-33: 35-55 Merrimack Street

The Queen Anne style Hildreth Building (1884) designed by Van Brunt & Howe. Application for a Historic Permit by RCG 45 Merrimack OZ Business, LLC for exterior rehabilitation pursuant to the Lowell Historic District Act (Chapter 566, Acts of 1983).

On Behalf:

Kevin Broderick, Broderick Law Firm, LLC
Christina McMahon, Caveney Architectural Collaborative
Caitlin Smith, RCG 45 Merrimack OZ Business, LLC
David Steinbergh, RCG 45 Merrimack OZ Business, LLC

K. Broderick introduced the proposed project while D. Steinbergh described the project scope. C. Smith presented the project's design plans.

Speaking in Favor:

None

Speaking in Opposition:

None

Discussion

The Chair wanted to state his thanks and appreciation for the applicant, as new owners of the building, responding to address the Board's minimum maintenance concerns with the storefronts that they had inherited from the prior owner. He noted the work was done rapidly, appropriately, and was much appreciated.

L. Cassidy asked about the approach to address the stabilization of the deteriorated sandstone elements on the Merrimack Street façade. C. McMahon said that this had come up in design review with the Administrator and LNHP architect and that they'll be working with a historic consultant to develop the specifications to address the sandstone.

L. Cassidy said that stabilization in some areas might be problematic and shortlived. She noted that it might be a combination of restoration, if possible, and stabilization given the variable surface conditions found on the façade and recommended the preservation consultant approach. C. McMahon acknowledged the importance of working with a specialist.

D. Steinbergh noted that the project will be applying for both state and federal historic rehabilitation tax credits and the masonry scope will also be part of that process.

G. Villaras asked what the building's potential color palate would be, given the building's importance and Prominence. D. Steinbergh said that historically most of the metal work was painted green and that is the current plan with the windows to be determined.

The Administrator noted that the 1880s photograph do show the various hues and tones that potentially could be some accent colors, in particular in the bays but the colors will definitely be looked at during post-hearing Review. C. McMahon noted that the Paige Street façade includes charcoal and neutral grays on the infill pieces.

Y. Baez-Rose inquired about the retail potential along both Merrimack and Paige streets, that the activation of Paige Street is an exciting possibility. She said that potentially outfitting the spaces to accommodate future tenant needs should be considered. D. Steinbergh said that they intend to have flexibility with the retail unit sizes, being able to support a variety of potential uses. He noted there's some flexibility for restaurant venting chases where the building drops down to lower stories in the rear.

A. Erickson noted she was pleased that the plans indicate that the missing pier capitals will be replicated and asked if they were all of the same design. The Administrator said that they were all the same, evidenced by historic photos and the "ghosting" of the missing capitals.

K. Jenness wanted to thank the applicant for making this large investment in the building, that the plans are beautiful. She noted the need for housing and for downtown to look as beautiful as it can, that the plans achieve both those goals.

The Chair inquired about the windows, that the existing appear to be wood. C. McMahon confirmed that. The Chair said that that aluminum replica windows with historic profiles were proposed and if they were going to be installed behind the existing frames or will the entire existing installation be removed. C. McMahon said that they're currently working with a window consultant and both options are being examined. Given the condition of the existing, if full replacement is warranted, all details will match existing in aluminum.

The Chair noted that the brick molds are an important feature and should be retained, whether original or replicated. C. McMahon said that the window consultant was not concerned about replicating the details.

The Chair asked the Administrator if a window mock-up would be installed for final approval. The Administrator noted that one would be. He noted that the window plans match exactly the 1884 image of the building and that in the 1984 rehabilitation, only repairs were undertaken and no effort was made to replicate the original configurations throughout the façade. The Administrator said if full replacement is pursued, that it would be similar to other projects where the entire installation is removed from the masonry opening and there's no compressing/reduction of sightlines or sash sizes.

The Chair echoed L. Cassidy's comments about the sandstone and the importance of addressing the existing conditions.

The Chair inquired about the HVAC equipment. C. McMahon identified the units on the roof of the main building and sightline studies that show they will not be visible. The units for the commercial space will be located in central locations on the lower roof sections to the rear.

The Chair asked the Administrator if any ghost signs were visible on the building. The Administrator said there's a hint of one, very faded, on the right elevation above the adjacent one-story building on Merrimack Street. He noted that a suggestion was made that the location would be ideal for a temporary marketing banner announcing availability of units, given its visibility.

The Chair said this is a wonderful project, injecting new life into the building, and that it's taking advantage of the state and federal historic rehabilitation tax credits to assist in the project's finances. He thanked the applicant for taking such a careful approach to this wonderful building downtown.

Motion:

By L. Cassidy, seconded by K. Jenness, to:

Vote to issue the Historic Permit for the exterior rehabilitation of 35-55 Merrimack Street in the Downtown Lowell Historic District conditional upon the following:

Merrimack Street

1. Submittal, review, and approval of final details related to all aspects of the replica window scope of work including, but not limited to, paint color, any proposed interior screen systems (no exterior screens permitted; dark frames on interior screens), glass, and blinds (dark color) prior to

commencement of individual work items. Plans of existing historic window installations (sashes, frames, moldings, etc.) to be prepared for comparison with proposed replica shop drawings in order to ensure consistency in dimensions and sightlines. No build out of existing window frames is allowed, nor is wrapping of any elements (all existing window elements to be removed so that the new units fit within the dimensions of the full masonry openings);

2. Submittal, review, and approval of material and color samples for any masonry repair/reconstruction, repointing, metal work, wood, and paint. Deteriorated historic masonry to be examined by a preservation specialist and a treatment/stabilization plan developed and implemented to halt further deterioration and to restore sandstone elements as technically feasible. On-site cleaning, mortar, masonry, metal, and paint samples will be required for review and approval prior to commencement of work; and
3. Submittal, review, and approval of any scope of work alterations and final design/construction details including, but not limited to, all roof elements (including mechanical equipment, decks, rails, and headhouses), light fixtures, and signage prior to commencement of individual work items.

Paige Street

1. Submittal, review, and approval of final elevation design and details including, but not limited to, window/door specifications, metal panels, storefront system, and glass. Storefront treatments for the left Paige Street building to be approved once design is determined at a future Board meeting;
2. Submittal, review, and approval of material and color samples for any masonry repair/reconstruction, repointing, metal work, wood, and paint. On-site cleaning, mortar, masonry, metal, and paint samples will be required for review and approval prior to commencement of work; and
3. Submittal, review, and approval of any scope of work alterations and final design/construction details including, but not limited to, all roof elements (including mechanical equipment, decks, rails, and headhouses), light fixtures, and signage prior to commencement of individual work items.

Work is consistent with Sections 2.301, 2.302, 2.31, 2.32, 3.1, and 3.2 of Design Review Standards for the Downtown Lowell Historic District.

Unanimously approved, 6-0.

C. McMahon thanked the Administrator and National Park architect David Lieb for their help with the project.

2. MINUTES

Approval of the Minutes of January 9, 2023

Motion:

By G. Villaras, seconded by L. Cassidy, to:

Approve the Minutes of January 9, 2023

Approved, 5-0-1.

3. OTHER BUSINESS

A. Enforcement/Violations Update

At this point of the year, there will be less of a focus on minimum maintenance as much of this work can only be accomplished in warmer weather. However, several other buildings have been identified that are in need of work, mainly storefront repairs and painting similar to the buildings last year, and Requests for Compliance will be sent in March that will anticipate spring and early summer work being undertaken. This is consistent with earlier last year.

With regard to the Saab Building at 147 Central Street, as you recall the Board voted at the June 13 meeting to find that violations existed and that a fine of \$100 for each of the seven violations would begin to accrue daily. The returned certified mail cards were not returned but using the USPS tracking numbers, delivery was made on June 25, 2022. As of today, the total accrued fines would be \$161,000 (7 violations total @ \$100 per day = \$700 per day x 230 days beginning 6/25/2022 to 2/9/2023). Materials have been sent to the Law Department to seek compliance in Superior Court with a meeting scheduled for next week to begin the next steps.

Non-conforming signage that has crept in during the pandemic will receive additional focus, especially lit signs in windows. These will be addressed and will be brought into compliance as personal visits occur and if needed, a Request for Compliance sent.

B. Administrator's Report

The Administrator noted that the materials in the packet are for informational purposes and would be included in the record.

Upcoming Projects:

Post-permitting review and approval of design details and materials continues at a variety of projects including 733-735 Broadway Street, 279 Dutton Street, 62 Gorham Street, 80 Gorham Street, 199 Market Street, 555 Merrimack Street, 78 Middlesex Street, and 160 Middlesex Street. This is in addition to routine signage and maintenance work.

By-Laws:

Included in the packet for review and approval are the Board's updated by-laws that have been reviewed by the

Chair and Vice Chair. The by-laws date to the early 1990s and have been updated periodically over time. The most recent revisions are minor in nature, addressing Section 2.7 (j.) where agencies and entities have been updated; Section 3.2 updated regarding location of meetings, recording of meetings, and hybrid/virtual alternative; Section 4.7 regarding plans being available for review on the Board website; Section 6.4 regarding order of speaking and time limits; Section 7.4 where the Administrator can issue continuances for Historic Permits for up to a year if the project has not changed substantially; and Section 9.2 where the revised violation procedures approved by the Board in 2021 have been inserted.

Section 7 (2) of the Board's statute directs the Board to "promulgate and enforce any other rules and regulations to carry out the purposes of this act." A vote is requested under Section 7 (2) to approve the revised Board by-laws with a quorum six needed to vote.

Y. Baez-Rose asked about how the work of the Board is gathered or disseminated to the public. K. Jenness noted that having statistics available would also assist in managing the sometimes misperceptions of the Board. Y. Baez-Rose said going beyond the internal documents and minutes, that in reading the by-laws she was thinking about ways in which the positive work of the Board can be more publicly available.

The Administrator said that the information for example from 2022 was published online and in social media. K. Jenness said that an annual report would be a good way to capture much of the information and work of the Board. The Administrator said that updates or reports could be produced every calendar year as well as City fiscal year.

G. Villaras said that enhanced reporting and metrics would be an important outreach and education tool.

The Administrator noted that since the Board's creation in 1983, there has only been one appeal of any decision the Board has made. And that with regard to denials, there have been maybe two that the Administrator can recall with one coming back for approval once it was retooled. He noted that the Board is one that rarely ever says "no" and if something isn't appropriate or in line with the Standards, options are explored in order to achieve compliance.

K. Jenness said that it's a perception issue that the Board can get in front of by publishing and making clear what is actually happening, not what people believe or have heard.

The Chair said he would like to see the annual report that is provided to the Massachusetts Historical Commission and perhaps that could be the basis for the Board's annual report. The Administrator noted that the report is somewhat mechanical and formula driven, that the Board's report should be more appealing visually while also including the important content. K. Jenness said based upon the great success of the Board's social media efforts that there should be no trouble creating other informative content.

Motion

By G. Villaras, seconded by Y. Baez-Rose, to:

Approve the Lowell Historic Board By-Laws as written.

Unanimously approved, 6-0.

City Hall Stained Glass:

As you may recall, the Community Preservation Act is funding the restoration of City Hall's stained glass in the amount of \$473,713, bonded over 20 years. As actual costs come in, future funding may be needed to complete the project due to increases over time. An RFP for services will be produced in partnership with DPW who will ultimately oversee the project.

In order to have a well-defined work scope and restoration specifications included in the RFP, renowned stained glass restoration firm Lyn Hovey Studios will prepare the specifications that will be covered by \$7,200 in Historic Board funds. Lyn Hovey has previously provided analysis and estimates over the years for the stained glass project and is very familiar with the windows.

Downtown Lowell Historic District Building Markers & Black History Trail Markers:

The fabrication of new markers is still on hold pending coordination with the sign fabricator. It is hoped though that another dozen can be installed by Preservation Month in May.

Work continues on the design for 11 new Black history panels that will be mounted on various poles downtown. The project is being undertaken in partnership with the Board, Free Soil Arts Collective, and DIY Lowell and similar to the District building markers, is consistent with Section 7 (10) of the statute that directs the Board to establish historic marker programs. To that end, \$2,200 in Historic Board funds will be used to cover the costs of the marker designs with a subsequent amount covering fabrication and installation.

Preservation Month:

As noted last month, given the fact that Doors Open Lowell is based upon gaining access to many interior, often private, spaces and the hesitancy still existing regarding public access on the part of some, Doors Open Lowell will be paused again this May. Consequently, Preservation Month in Lowell will focus not only on extensive social media programming but also upon a few walking tours and possibly limited openings of some buildings. The Administrator met with representatives of the National Park last week to begin laying the foundation for a few events. In addition, the Administrator will be meeting with LaLa Books on Market Street to explore the feasibility of not only a Preservation Month window book display but also a book event and possible reading.

Sun Sign:

Work continues to preserve and restore the Sun Sign. As you recall, a meeting was held in November with representatives of the Sun newspaper, Sun Building, and the Lowell Heritage Partnership to begin formalizing efforts to restore the roof top Sun sign. Once the sign has been transferred to the building ownership, funds will be sought for the restoration which was estimated at \$45,455. A new estimate is currently being sought as well as one from an alternative contractor. As you recall, the sign would be converted to LED resulting in less maintenance and operation costs due to the longevity of the LED components and the fact they require far less power than neon.

Social Media:

Social media continues to be a very popular and effective community engagement and outreach tool for the Board and is in many aspects, the cornerstone of those efforts. The Board's Facebook page has 7,525 followers, an increase of 87 followers in the last month. Individual posts continue to reach thousands and the page is seen as one of the most comprehensive, timely, and detailed municipal historic preservation pages in the region and nationally. Other platforms include Instagram (1,675), Twitter (700 followers), and Pinterest (33 followers).

C. Board Member Items/Inquiries

L. Cassidy noted that the National Park Service window restoration workshop in Lowell will be held the week of April 4.

Next Meeting:

The Board's next meeting is scheduled for Monday, March 13, 2023 at 6:00 p.m. in the Mayor's Reception Room.

4. ADJOURNMENT

Motion:

By K. Jenness, seconded by G. Villaras, to:

Adjourn the meeting at 7:02 p.m.

Unanimously approved, 6-0.

ATTEST: _____
Stephen R. Stowell, Administrator