



City of Lowell - Planning Board

Planning Board Meeting Minutes
Monday, March 21, 2022 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
Richard Lockhart, Member
Gerard Frechette, Vice Chairman
Robert Malavich, Member
Caleb Cheng, Member
Sinead Gallivan, Associate Member
Russell Pandres, Associate Member

Members Absent

None

Others Present

Francesca Cigliano, Senior Planner
Serena Gonzalez, Assistant Planner

A quorum of the Board was present. Chairman Linnehan called the meeting to order at 6:33pm.

I. Minutes for Approval

March 7, 2022

R. Pandres and S. Gallivan noted that they were not present at the meeting.

G. Frechette motioned to approve the minutes, seconded by T. Linnehan. The motion passed unanimously, (5-0).

II. Continued Business

III. New Business

Site Plan Review: 4-8 Wiggin & 153 Willie Street, 01854

The applicant is seeking approval to construct a new 12 unit townhouse development at 4-8 Wiggin Street & 153 Willie Street. The property is located in the Urban Multi-Family (UMF) zoning district and requires Site Plan Review approval from the Planning Board pursuant Section 11.4.2, and Variance approval from the Zoning Board of Appeals pursuant Section 6.1, and Section 5.1, and any other relief required under the Lowell Zoning Ordinance. This item will be on the agenda at the 3/21 Planning Board meeting, and the agenda at the 3/28 Zoning Board meeting.

On Behalf:

George Theodorou, Applicant's Attorney
Matt Hamor, Applicant's Engineer

Speaking in Favor:

None

Speaking in Opposition:

None

Discussion:

T. Linnehan said that two letters were submitted in favor submitted by the City and one in opposition submitted by Alan Kazanjian. T. Linnehan read all three letters into the public record.

R. Lockhart appreciated the applicant's ability to convert the underutilized sloped lot into a development. He is in favor. It will turn the area in a positive direction. R. Lockhart noted he would like an ANR filed to consolidate the lots. M. Hamor said they would be willing to do so.

G. Frechette said that the zoning was changed to enable this type of development since it is consistent with what is in the area surrounding this lot. The site is a challenge. They are looking for a topographic map with a plot plan on top of it. M. Hamor presented a plan with topography.

S. Gallivan asked whether the sidewalk going up the driveway is ADA compliant. M. Hamor said likely no. It is ADA compliant along the street only.

G. Frechette discusses the slope with M. Hamor. M. Hamor said essentially the entire hill gets displaced with townhouses. G. Frechette asked if they had consulted with the stormwater team. M Hamor said yes. Their plan is to clean water and discharge into the existing sewer main and implement an impact fee for the direct connection.

G. Frechette asked whether there will be blasting. G. Theodorou said yes, whatever is necessary to remove material. G. Frechette noted they are compliant with LA/DU requirements per Section 5.1.

G. Frechette discussed how the applicant is proposing to recess parking so it is not narrowing the street. G. Frechette asked about windows on the end facades of the structures. M. Hamor said they would add windows. F. Cigliano noted that the Historic Board would be reviewing for compliance with design guidelines for the Acre Neighborhood District.

G. Frechette noted that the design should suit the context as an urban neighborhood. M. Hamor noted that the project is a relatively close walk to the train station.

G. Frechette discussed snow storage areas on the site. G. Theodorou said they would be open to removing snow from the site. G. Theodorou clarified that these would be condos, not apartments.

S. Gallivan asked whether usable open space requirements are applicable in this zoning district. She commented that the units step in elevation along the roof line. She would like the building to have articulation on the roof line AND on the building façade between units. The articulation could be via materials or bump outs. S. Gallivan would like sidewalks to be fully compliant with Engineering and ADA requirements. S. Gallivan said that the Engineering Department said for unit 12, there is an 18 inch grade change and two steps. M. Hamor said that they would recess the entryway so that step happens within the entranceway itself, OR they would obtain an easement to allow that step within the ROW.

R. Pandres had questions about the engineering memo and the requirements stipulated. M. Hamor said that the applicant can accommodate their recommendations. They are in the process of making modifications now. The new plan will incorporate the comments from the engineering department. R. Pandres said in general, it is impressive what is happening at the site. It is dense but in a walkable neighborhood. It is a housing type that is needed in the community. M. Hamor noted new sidewalks on Dutton Street would connect to this area as well.

R. Malavich said this is a great project. Turning a bad lot into something good. It will provide housing. He is very satisfied with this project.

C. Cheng said he concurred with the Board that this is a good use for this lot. He has concerns about pedestrian access. He wants to explore the applicant connecting pedestrian access to Rock Street. If he lived there, he would not feel safe walking down the street. G. Theodorou believes that is an overreach. His client is making a significant investment to produce quality urban housing while maintaining a cost that will be reasonable for buyers.

T. Linnehan asked about the five proposed on-street parking spaces. He clarified that these would be City parking spaces on the ROW. M. Hamor said that the applicant is asking for a variance. Most likely, these spaces would be available to residents but they are not technically assigned. The applicant will be requesting resident parking stickers. T. Linnehan noted they had not received comments from the Fire Department.

Motion:

G. Frechette motioned to approve the Site Plan Review with the following conditions:

1. The applicant shall file an ANR plan to merge the three lots;
2. The applicant shall address potential parking issues relative to building one in the condo documents;
3. The applicant shall remove any snow which cannot be stored on-site to an off-site location;
4. The applicant shall comply with the stormwater team's requirements;
5. The applicant shall comply with requirements set forth in the Engineering memo dated March 11, 2022;
6. The proposal is subject to final approved by the Lowell Fire Department; and
7. The applicant shall work with the Lowell Historic Board to revise the elevations addressing the windows on the end facades and the articulation between units.

The motion was seconded by R. Lockhart and passed unanimously, (5-0).

IV. Other Business

Pre-Application Discussion: 190 & 198 Plain Street, 01852

Lowell Development, LLC has applied for a Pre-Application Discussion of plans to redevelop the existing properties at 190 & 198 Plain Street into two restaurants. The properties currently include a VFW Lodge and a parking area for the VFW Lodge. The applicant proposes to demolish the existing building at 190 Plain Street and construct a Popeye's Chicken Restaurant, and a construct a similar restaurant on the 198 Plain Street lot. The applicant is proposing drive-through service for both restaurants. The subject property is located in the Regional Retail (RR) zoning district. The applicant requires Special Permit approval per Article XII and Section 11.3 to construct a drive-through serving a restaurant, and Site Plan Review approval per Section 11.4 for construction of a drive-through service.

On Behalf:

John Geary, Applicant's Attorney
Jim DeCelle, Applicant's Engineer
Lawrence BenBassett, Applicant

Discussion:

R. Pandres asked the applicant to walk through the ownership rights for Eaton Street. It is a private way. Do they own it? J. Geary explained that the City discontinued right to that area so the applicant now owns it. R. Pandres noted that residents need to be taken into consideration along Montreal Street and Eaton Street. There is dumpster storage proposed for the rear. There should be screening including landscaping along the property line. The number of curb cuts is concerning since they are adding another curb cut to Plain Street. This has the potential to cause accidents.

S. Gallivan said generally the plan is straightforward. She would like to ensure the plan complies with landscaped open space requirements. She is in support of removing parking spaces to increase green space. She is in support of reconstructing sidewalks and making them ADA compliant. She thinks there should be striping/material change between the parking area and Popeye's to indicate a pedestrian zone between parking and the building. She asks that staff works with the applicant to clarify the parking requirement. She would also like information on how they plan to light the buildings and sidewalks.

R. Lockhart expressed concern about the capacity of the drive-thru.

R. Malavich asked whether they are screening property from abutting residences. J. Geary said none of staff's comments were objectionable including their recommendation to screen from residences.

C. Cheng agrees with R. Pandres' comments about adding an additional curb cut. He is also concerned about left hand turns exiting the site.

G. Frechette agrees with comments from staff. He asked whether there is another chain in mind for the second building. L. BenBassett said there have been some preliminary discussions but nothing is finalized yet.

T. Linnehan said that traffic is the main concern. A traffic impact analysis is needed. Staff did an excellent job with their memo.

Motion:

None

V. Notices

VI. Further Comments from Planning Board Members

R. Lockhart noted that on March 14 there was a Historic Board meeting that discussed 733-735 Broadway Street. The applicant asked for a continuation. There is a meeting scheduled for March 31 at 6pm to keep that item moving. The next Historic Board meeting is on April 11.

S. Gallivan said that the next Community Preservation Committee meeting is on Thursday 3/24 at 7pm. The CPC will be holding their annual public hearing. Staff are also planning targeted outreach in the neighborhoods.

VII. Adjournment

R. Pandres motioned to adjourn, seconded by R. Malavich (5-0).