



City of Lowell - Planning Board

Planning Board Meeting Minutes

Thursday, April 22, 2021 6:30 p.m.

Conducted 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

Robert Malavich, Member

Caleb Cheng, Member

Sinead Gallivan, Associate Member

Russell Pandres, Associate Member

Members Absent

None

Others Present

Fran Cigliano, Senior Planner

Jess Wilson, Associate Planner

Dylan Ricker, Assistant Planner

A quorum of the Board was present. Chairman Linnehan called the meeting to order at 6:32pm.

I. Minutes for Approval

March 15, 2021 Minutes

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

April 5, 2021 Minutes

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

II. Continued Business

Special Permit and Site Plan Review: 60 Fletcher Street 01854

Kazanjian Enterprises has applied for Site Plan Review and Special Permit approval to rehabilitate the existing structure at 60 Fletcher St. and convert it into a bank and office building. The property is in the Urban Neighborhood Mixed-Use (UMU) zoning district and the Downtown Lowell Historic District. The conversion requires Site Plan Review approval per Section 11.4 to modify a parking lot with more than fourteen (14) parking spaces, and Special Permit approval per Section 12.4.g(2) for the proposed drive-through teller.

On Behalf:

Brian Milisci, Applicant's Representative/Engineer for Whitman Bingham Associates

B. Milisci stated that the applicant was tasked with developing a traffic report which was received in draft form that afternoon (April 22, 2021) and was therefore requesting a continuance to the next meeting to allow the project team to review the draft and revise the Site Plan accordingly.

Speaking in Favor:

None

Speaking in Opposition:

None

Discussion:

G. Frechette acknowledged that the next Planning Board meeting is scheduled for May 3, 2021 and asked if that would be enough time for the project team's review.

B. Milisci agreed that it may be safer to continue to the next meeting after that so that City Staff also has adequate time to review the changes.

G. Frechette stated that he would prefer to continue the application to May 17.

T. Linnehan concurred and acknowledged that there may be some back and forth between City Staff and the Applicant regarding the changes.

Motion:

G. Frechette motioned, and R. Lockhart seconded the motion to continue the hearing to the May 17, 2021 Planning Board meeting. The motion passed unanimously, (5-0).

III. New Business

IV. Other Business

Minor Modification: 14 McIntire Street 01851

Madjack7, LLC has applied to the Lowell Planning Board for a minor modification of a previous Site Plan Review and Special Permit application at 14 McIntire Street. The applicant is seeking permission to modify their project to reduce the number of proposed dwelling units from eight (8) dwelling units to six (6) dwelling units. The property is in the Neighborhood Business (NB) and Urban Neighborhood Mixed Use (UMU) zoning districts.

On Behalf:

George Theodorou, Applicant's Representative/Attorney

Matt Hamor, Applicant's Representative/Engineer for LandPlex

G. Theodorou provided some project history, explaining that the Site Plan Review had been approved by the Planning Board in December 2020 for the construction of 8 residential units. The Applicant is now requesting a minor modification to reduce the number of dwelling units from 8 to 6, with no change to grading or other essential elements of the proposal.

G. Theodorou introduced M. Hamor and addressed the previous confusion regarding the Application and the orientation of the buildings. He explained that the orientation has not actually changed and that the only change is to reduce the footprint from 8 to 6 units. He stated that M. Hamor could speak to the stormwater management design as it relates to the conditions previously set by the Planning Board, and that an Operation Maintenance Plan would be incorporated into a home owner's association for these units.

M. Hamor clarified that the building in the modified proposal is in the same location as the previous iteration. He explained that the building has been reduced in length by a couple of feet but is essentially the same. The only significant difference is the recessed entry ways to the front of the building. M. Hamor elaborated that when facing

the building from Marshall Street, the entry ways will be recessed with stairs and a landing that are covered by the building. Each will have a walkway that comes out to the existing sidewalk. The garages are located at the back of the building, as with the previous plan. The entire back of the site consists of a parking aisle, drainage, and parking spaces will all remain unchanged from the original proposal. M. Hamor stated that he participated in a Zoom meeting with Mike Stuer and Gordon Bergeron from the City's stormwater management team. They walked through the drainage methodology and conducted a soil test witnessed by City staff. He stated that he will be updating the stormwater team with new drainage calculations as referenced in their memorandum and that they intend to also pick up runoff from the adjacent building in their drainage system.

Speaking in Favor:

None

Speaking in Opposition:

None

Discussion:

T. Linnehan asked M. Hamor to share plans on the screen to aid the discussion.

M. Hamor shared the new architectural rendering on the screen and clarified that although the background of the buildings appears to be the back with woods, that is in fact the Marshall Street side.

T. Linnehan asked if the view was facing McIntire Street.

M. Hamor said no and further explained the building orientation, clarifying that the rendering was of the back of the building.

S. Gallivan elaborated that the confusion stems from the mislabeling of the drawing being titled "Front/Left Perspective View" when in fact the rendering shows the back of the building and not the front façade which faces onto Marshall Street.

M. Hamor confirmed that this was a mistake and should be labeled "Rear/Right" and that "Rear/Left" should be "Front/Right." M. Hamor pulled up the Site Plan drawing on the screen and further clarified the building orientation and circulation as it related to Marshall Street in plan view. He stated that the exterior site in the back has not changed at all and that there have only been slight modifications in how the units are accessed from the sidewalk.

S. Gallivan asked if the parking requirement had changed.

M. Hamor confirmed that it had and explained that with the reduced number of units there are no excess parking spaces which benefit visitor parking. He stated that there is also a shared parking agreement with the adjacent property.

T. Linnehan asked if the units in the new proposal are bigger than what was shown in the previous iteration.

M. Hamor confirmed that the new units are larger. He shared the originally submitted Site Plan and clarified the differences. He stated that the previous units were 16' wide which is a little too narrow for a Town House. At 21' wide, the new proposal has more room for mechanical, laundry, and storage spaces. He stated that it is roughly the same square footage overall, but there is more room in each unit.

T. Linnehan asked if the new units are 21' by 24'.

M. Hamor confirmed that they are.

G. Frechette asked to see the previously approved architectural renderings.

F. Cigliano shared the drawings on the screen.

G. Frechette expressed that the new front façade looks too similar to a neighboring building and creates a barrack look. He feels that the previously approved design was much more architecturally pleasing and contributed to the streetscape. In the new proposed design, the rear elevations were treated more thoughtfully than the front. G. Frechette expressed that he has concerns about the divergence of the new design from the previously approved proposal. Mislabeled or not, the rear façade is architecturally more pleasing with dormers and bump-outs. The 8-unit design looked less massive than the 6-unit version.

F. Cigliano clarified that staff thought the rear facade was being proposed as the front, both because it was mislabeled and because it was more detailed than the other façade. Staff thought the front was the façade with garages facing Marshall Street.

G. Frechette stated that the board members and previous project team had worked extensively on the design. He acknowledged that the future use of the adjacent brick building is unknown. He expressed his preference that the project team return to the drawing board on the front façade.

M. Hamor stated that the owner is agreeable to adding dormers on the Marshall Street side.

G. Frechette said that from a marketing perspective it will add a lot more appeal, and reiterated that the proposed design is reminiscent of army barracks.

M. Hamor agreed that the addition of dormers would help break up the front façade and roofline.

G. Frechette suggested that the proposal would create a canyon effect. Being such a large mass along the road and reiterated that it is too similar to the large cement block building on McIntire Street. He feels that the facades need to be redone, but he is in favor of reducing the number of units. He states that at the end of the day, the project will be more aesthetically pleasing and marketable.

S. Gallivan agreed with G. Frechette that the proposed changes to the facades are unacceptable. She stated that the material selections and articulation were much more thoughtfully done in the previous iteration and that the new proposal is a total departure from what was approved. S. Gallivan stated that it needs more than just dormers. She expressed skepticism about the mislabeling, and reiterated G. Frechette's and F. Cigliano's view that the back of the building was treated like the front in its design. S. Gallivan requested that the applicant rethink the landscaped area since the parking requirement is reduced with the reduction of units. She brought up staff's comment that this property is located within the Gateway City Tree Planting Zone and therefore qualifies for free tree plantings. S. Gallivan asked about the integration of accommodations for trash and recycling into this design.

M. Hamor stated that the trash would be the standard City totes and would be stored in the lower garages. He acknowledged that they would have to be taken by private pick up or brought to the front somehow.

S. Gallivan stated that since the design needs to be revisited, the Applicant should clarify trash and recycling accommodations on the Site Plan. She reminded M. Hamor that in the previous proposal the bins were stowed out of site on the street side.

B. Malavich agreed that the front façade is under-designed. He stated that it needs to be looked at again and be resubmitted and noted that this is not a minor change.

R. Lockhart stated that he has no further questions and agrees with the assessments of his fellow Board Members.

C. Cheng expressed that he was also in agreement and asked for clarification on trash storage.

M. Hamor stated that they would need to incorporate private pickup.

C. Cheng stated that it seemed as though the Applicant was interested in selling Building A as well and expressed that it would be nice to have green space but that it may need a dumpster as well. He concurred that dormers are important to break up the roof line and articulate that there are 6 different units rather than just one monotonous building. He noted that the original design included overhangs, front doors that faced the street, and a composition of different textures articulating the individual units.

M. Hamor asked if C. Cheng was suggesting to clad the bottom portion of the façade in brick to break things up.

C. Cheng said no and clarified that the prior elevations showed shingle and horizontal as well as vertical siding. He stated that the 8 units was a little crazy and that the window placement was awkward, but that it may be easier to space the windows in a more aesthetically pleasing way with only 6 units. He suggested relocating the side entrances to the front and rotating the stairs to face the street.

M. Hamor agreed to make that change.

C. Cheng noted that there might be enough space to incorporate balconies.

M. Hamor agreed that an overhang to protect from the rain would be good.

C. Cheng elaborated that if the bump outs protrude further, creating a deck above would add some real estate to the units.

R. Pandres stated that he had no comments and agreed with the comments of his fellow Board Members.

T. Linnehan asked if the Board was making a decision on whether or not the Application was a minor modification, and noted that they could either continue or make that vote.

G. Theodorou acknowledged that the apartment building across the street was built several years ago and agreed that it is not aesthetically pleasing. He stated that they are not trying to duplicate that building and would like to come back before the Board with a revised design. G. Theodorou expressed his preference that the board not vote that night on whether or not it is a Minor Modification, but would rather continue to allow time to make the changes and come back to present to the board for approval.

M. Hamor stated that they could make the changes in two weeks.

T. Linnehan recommended continuing to the May 17 meeting instead.

G. Theodorou agreed.

T. Linnehan noted that would allow Staff and Board Members time to review.

M. Hamor stated that he would sit down with the architect to discuss the Boards recommendations.

T. Linnehan requested that the applicant continue the minor modification to May 17.

M. Hamor confirmed.

Motion:

R. Lockhart motioned, and T. Linnehan seconded the motion to continue the hearing to the May 17, 2021 Planning Board meeting. The motion passed unanimously, (5-0).

V. Notices

VI. Further Comments from Planning Board Members

T. Linnehan brought up the upcoming Community Preservation Act Hearing and Survey.

F. Cigliano elaborated that the survey is intended to help identify priorities and weaknesses that residents feel should be addressed using CPA funding. She provided some background that Lowell approved a 1% surcharge on local property taxes to create a fund that contributes to historic preservation, open space and recreation, and affordable housing projects. The survey and public hearing will help define priorities for allocating funds. She noted that the feedback gathered from the community will inform future Community Preservation Committee decisions.

R. Lockhart provided a Historic Board update, acknowledging that the mural standards have been updated with a very comprehensive mural policy which covers the whole City. The ordinance has been updated with categories for mural placement, prohibited mural types, maintenance of murals, and standards that have to be met by individuals that apply for murals. It also covers topics including surface preparation, design standards, and permitting and appeals processes, and specifies that there will be no fee for mural projects administered by the office of cultural affairs and special events. The new ordinance also defines the role of the historic board. R. Lockhart read the related language out loud. He stated that it is much improved and that the Board voted to recommend the ordinance go before City Council for review and comment.

G. Frechette provided an update on the recent NMCOC meeting. He shared that the 2020 Economic Development Bill and amendments to the Zoning Act and voting threshold enacted on January 14, 2021. He summarized that there are many proposed changes to Chapter 40A, which is the state zoning chapter, including reducing the requirement for a super majority vote on certain zoning measures to a simple majority. He noted that the goal of the zoning measures is to increase density in an effort to help the state meet its goal of increasing housing in the Commonwealth. G. Frechette states that there is a goal of increasing 135,000 housing units by 2035. He stated that there will be further discussion on whether City Council wants to adopt this policy and expects it will be a contentious topic. G. Frechette expressed concerns about whether there will be a mechanism at the state level for quantitative analysis of development. He noted that the City of Lowell is the densest in the region and expressed his view that the surrounding communities are not doing their share to increase ownership options. G. Frechette shared his concerns that there will be unintended consequences. He expressed that he would be disappointed if the majority of housing spurred by this change was created in cities like Lowell. He feels it is critical to support businesses downtown and that the neighborhood character in the City of Lowell is very important to the people that live here. He suggested that Department of Planning and Development Staff give a presentation to the Planning Board on this. He noted that this is one of the most significant pieces of legislation affecting zoning in Massachusetts to come up in a long time.

F. Cigliano stated that Staff has a presentation ready to go and that they would work with Eric Slagle to schedule a presentation to the Board.

G. Frechette stated that it is important to understand the implications.

S. Gallivan asked if the CPA Survey is available.

D. Ricker said that it will be posted to social media in the upcoming days, as well as on the CPA webpage.

F. Cigliano clarified that Staff is coordinating the outreach strategy with the City Manager's Office and that the links should be posted to facebook later that week.

T. Linnehan mentioned the Lowell Sun article that was published about the CPA.

J. Wilson elaborated on Richard's update and clarified that the mural ordinance was reviewed by the Cultural Council but has not yet gone before City Council.

VII. Adjournment

G. Frechette motioned, and R. Malavich seconded the motion to adjourn. The motion passed unanimously, (5-0). The time was 7:36pm.