



City of Lowell - Planning Board

Planning Board Meeting Minutes

Thursday, January 5, 2022 6:30 p.m.

City Council Chamber, 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

Sinead Gallivan, Associate Member

Members Absent

Robert Malavich, Member

Caleb Cheng, Member

Others Present

Dylan Ricker, Associate Planner

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

I. Minutes for Approval

November 21, 2022 Meeting Minutes

G. Frechette motioned, and T. Linnehan seconded the motion to approve the November 21, 2022 meeting minutes. The motion passed (3-0) with S. Gallivan abstaining.

December 5, 2022 Meeting Minutes

T. Linnehan motioned, and S. Gallivan seconded the motion to approve the December 5, 2022 meeting minutes. The motion passed (2-0) with G. Frechette and R. Lockhart abstaining.

II. Continued Business

Site Plan Review and Special Permit – 35 Varnum Avenue, 01854

House of Hope, Inc. has applied to the Planning Board seeking Site Plan Review and Special Permit approval to construct an eight (8) unit apartment building at 35 Varnum Avenue. The property is located in the Traditional Single-Family (TSF) zoning district. The project requires Planning Board

approval for Site Plan Review under Section 11.4, Special Permit approval to extend the existing non-conforming use per Section 4.5.2, and Special Permit approval per Section 6.7.2 for maximum driveway length.

On Behalf:

Deb Chausse, Applicant

D. Chausse explained the approvals they are seeking for the proposal. D. Chausse said the House of Hope acquired the property in 2009 and it provides emergency shelter for families. D. Chausse said given the dire need for housing and an invitation from the Commonwealth for funding, they determined there was space for housing on their property.

Jacob Taylor, Applicant's Attorney

J. Taylor explained the updated plans for the project. J. Taylor noted the buildings will now be connected with an education center serving as the connecting portion of the building. J. Taylor explained the overall relief the project required.

Cliff Boehmer, Applicant's Architect

C. Boehmer explained the differences between the initial proposal and the current proposal, highlighting that the proposed structure was now attached to the existing structure.

Jim Develes, Applicant's Engineer

J. Develes explained the proposed project.

Speaking in Favor:

Karen Frederick, CEO of Community Teamwork

K. Frederick noted the housing crisis in the area stating the high need for housing for homeless families. K. Frederick said the solution to the crisis is more housing. K. Frederick said there are crisis levels of homelessness and said the supply of new housing is far below the need. K. Frederick said there are increasing lengths of shelter stays due to a lack of options for families to move to. K. Frederick said the applicant is willing to work with their neighbors and noted their success constructing housing. K. Frederick said that we are in a housing crisis and the units would make a difference.

Dan O'Connor, House of Hope President

D. O'Connor expressed strong support for the project. D. O'Connor said House of Hope operates 39 units of supportive housing, and their properties are attractive, well-managed, and contribute to the City's tax base. D. O'Connor said the proposal aligns with a number of priorities in the City's Master Plan.

Connie Cogswell, 128 Warren Street, House of Hope Board Member

C. Cogswell said House of Hope delivers on their projects, and they have worked to address the concerns of the community. C. Cogswell noted the importance of the work House of Hope does.

Jeffrey Bush, House of Hope Board Member

J. Bush said House of Hope's efforts benefit the community, and said the current economic and housing environment make it difficult for families to get housing. J. Bush said there is a need for all types of additional housing, and noted the importance of the housing units as well as the services provided. J. Bush said the units help families move into a more permanent housing solution. J. Bush expressed support for the proposal.

June Messina, House of Hope Board Member

J. Messina said there were some concerns about if the property were to be sold, and said this type of project requires affordability restrictions on the property which would likely last 50 years.

Speaking in Opposition:

Tracy Genest, 20 Clinton Avenue

T. Genest said she is not against the project or what House of Hope represents. T. Genest said she is opposed to the project since it is in a single-family zone. T. Genest said the total Variances requested was high. T. Genest said her backyard abuts the property and said the neighborhood is congested.

Mr. Ramos, 14 Clinton Avenue

Mr. Ramos said neighbors are in opposition to the project. Said the proposal is denser than surrounding properties.

Kathy Slater, Unknown

K. Slater said the house is too big and will tower over Clinton Avenue.

Patricia Hanlon-Katz, 8 Clinton Ave

P. Hanlon-Katz said she is opposed to the project and said it is too large. P. Hanlon-Katz said the area is too crowded.

Elizabeth Tighe, Pawtucketville Citizens Council

E. Tighe said she was speaking on behalf of the PCC. E. Tighe said they are strongly opposed and said a worthy cause is not a reason to disregard zoning. E. Tighe said if this is allowed all the abutters will try to do the same thing.

Alan Saba, 33 Dunbar Avenue

A. Saba said the applicant had to request a significant number of Variances, and the decision to alter the plans was due to zoning laws. A. Saba said he is opposed because it is a single-family lot. A. Saba

said that most of their properties are in multi-family zones. A. Saba expressed concern about developable land in Pawtucketville.

Discussion:

G. Frechette said he appreciated the site improvements. G. Frechette said that when he looks at the criteria for a Special Permit he is not sure the proposal can meet these requirements. G. Frechette expressed concern about it being detrimental to the neighborhood. G. Frechette said it doesn't match development patterns.

G. Frechette asked about square footage of the existing home and addition. J. Taylor said the existing home is 2,725 square feet and the total after the addition would be 11,785 square feet. G. Frechette said he believes the extension of a nonconforming use is detrimental. J. Taylor said there is space for 7 shelter families in the existing building. J. Taylor noted that even with the addition the property still meets the FAR requirement.

S. Gallivan said she watched the prior meetings. S. Gallivan said she was convinced by the presentation tonight that the scale of the development is appropriate for the site given the site review provided based on the surrounding neighborhood. S. Gallivan expressed support for the proposal and appreciated the work of the team to reduce the overall volume of the property and believes it is appropriate for the site.

R. Lockhart said he agrees with G. Frechette's concerns regarding the density. R. Lockhart asked about the stormwater report and where the applicant stands regarding the report. J. Develas said the stormwater report has been completed and their prior approval is contingent on stormwater approval.

R. Lockhart noted the plan states trees will be replaced and asked for specifics. J. Develas said there are three trees abutting McDonalds and they are proposing to plant additional trees along with arbor vitae along the property line. R. Lockhart said there were 8 comments from the Engineering Department and asked if they would be able to satisfy these comments. J. Develas said they have responded to the Engineering Department's comments and they have no issue with any of the comments.

T. Linnehan said a report was received from the Deputy Fire Chief with concerns of whether the pervious pavers were capable of support for their aerial ladder. J. Develas said the pipes and pavers are designed to support the weight. T. Linnehan noted the Fire Department comments regarding the swept path analysis. J. Develas said the plans demonstrate the fire truck can turn around, and they will make changes if ultimately the truck cannot turn around.

T. Linnehan said he believes the requirements for Site Plan Review were met.

Motion:

T. Linnehan motioned to approve the Site Plan Review with the following conditions:

1. Final approval from the Fire Department to ensure the fire truck can safely and adequately navigate the site;
2. Final approval from the Fire Department that the pervious pavers are satisfactory and can hold the weight of their fire trucks;

3. The applicant shall provide City staff with a final stormwater report with final approval from the LRWWU;
4. The applicant shall provide a Lighting Plan contingent on DPD approval; and
5. The applicant shall address Engineering Department comments.

G. Frechette seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, (4-0).

R. Lockhart motioned, and S. Gallivan seconded the motion to approve the Special Permit pursuant Section 4.5.2. The motion failed (2-2), with T. Linnehan and G. Frechette voting in opposition.

S. Gallivan motioned, and R. Lockhart seconded the motion to approve the Special Permit pursuant Section 4.5.3. The motion failed (2-2) with T. Linnehan and G. Frechette voting in opposition.

III. New Business

III. Other Business

IV. Notices

V. Further Comments from Planning Board Members

G. Frechette said NMCOG will hold a special planning session at the Chelmsford Library. G. Frechette said the agency will look at their direction moving forward. G. Frechette said there should be a regional approach to the affordable housing crisis. G. Frechette said the first session for the Master Plan study is upcoming in 2/1 and encouraged members of the public to attend.

S. Gallivan said the CPC will begin deliberations to award CPA funding on 1/12.

R. Lockhart said the next Historic Board meeting Monday, 1/9 in the Mayor's Reception Room.

VI. Adjournment

G. Frechette motioned to adjourn, seconded by S. Gallivan and passed unanimously, (4-0). The time was 7:46PM.