



City of Lowell - Planning Board

Planning Board Meeting Minutes
Monday, February 18, 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
Russell Pandres, Associate Member

Members Absent

Sinead Gallivan, Associate Member

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 6:30pm.

I. Minutes for Approval

February 1, 2021

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

II. Continued Business

Subdivision Plan: 4 Tamarack Street 01851

John Cox has applied to the Planning Board on behalf of Martin Burke for the approval of a definitive subdivision plan that includes the extension of Tamarack Street by approximately one hundred forty (140) feet, and construction of a single-family dwelling at 4 Tamarack Street. The site is entirely within the 100-year flood plain and is located within the Traditional Neighborhood Single Family (TSF) zoning district. This project requires Planning Board approval under Lowell's Subdivision of Land Regulations.

On Behalf:

None.

Speaking in Favor:

None.

Speaking in Opposition:

None.

Discussion:

None.

Motion:

T. Linnehan motioned and R. Lockhart seconded the motion to withdraw the application without prejudice. G. Frechette abstained from the vote. The motion passed unanimously, (5-0).

III. New 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, Whitman & Bingham Associates Engineering Firm Representing Kazanjian Enterprises
Alan Kazanjian, Kazanjian Enterprises
David Gray, Kazanjian Enterprises

B. Milisci provided a summary of the project and shared a site plan. He explained that the proposal is to provide a parking area with a drive-up bank teller. There will be two means of egress from the lot. Applicant came before the ZBA previously and zoning relief was approved. The project is seeking historic tax credit. The Project Architect is Gavin and Sullivan located in downtown Lowell. The grade near the East facade needs to be raised by about 2' to accommodate an accessible entrance and preserve the north-facing facade. The wall shown in the plans is taller than what is actually being proposed. There were some concerns over the wall blocking pedestrian flow, but the applicant believes this to be the best solution. A site walk was performed with Jared Alves and Natasha Vance (former City staff) who agreed that this solution made sense at the time. Making the northern entrance one-way would cause circulation challenges for the drive-up teller. B. Milisci was not able to pull up Google Earth view for discussion. Discussed efforts related to stormwater management including test fits and soil studies. Applicant is working with the stormwater team to come up with an approved system.

G. Frechette asked about vertical granite.

B. Milisci said that it would be matched

G. Frechette asked about crosswalks and asked B. Milisci to share the plan on screen again

B. Milisci identified where the Dunkin Donuts driveway is located, where there is an existing sidewalk, and identified potential locations for new and updated crosswalks. The applicant is willing to work with DPD and traffic departments to work towards a safe solution.

T. Linnehan asked if B. Milisci sees any problems with the crosswalks.

B. Milisci said he does not.

D. Gray introduced himself.

Speaking in Favor:

None.

Speaking in Opposition:

None.

Discussion:

R. Malavich asked if there was any way for a pedestrians to enter the property. He said it does not make sense to have an entrance for cars but not for people.

B. Milisci explained that there would be a pedestrian corridor off of Fletcher Street into the building, as well as access from the parking lot.

R. Lockhart asked about traffic impacts.

B. Milisci Said there has not been a formal study completed. On-site circulation and access to and from Dutton Street was studied. There is a wide existing curb cut. They plan to add some granite curbing to shorten egress width. It's a high-volume roadway, but given the size of the project, B. Milisci does not feel that there would be too many vehicles coming and going from the property.

R. Lockhart asked if the applicant has spoken with Stephen Stowell.

B. Milisci said that the project team had spoken with Mr. Stowell previously, and he was not aware of any date being set for the Historic Board yet.

D. Gray confirmed that a date has not been set and that Mr. Stowell had expressed support of the project in their earlier discussion. D. Gray stated that the project team has met with the former City traffic engineer, Natasha Vance

R. Lockhart asked if there was any record of that discussion.

D. Gray said City staff may have records.

G. Frechette read comments from Joe Giniewicz, Urban Renewal Project Manager for the City, citing traffic and accessibility concerns. G. Frechette described the nature of the Lord Overpass project and the implications and opportunities as it relates to this project. He expressed frustration that there is not currently an engineer on City staff. G. Frechette would like to have professional traffic input on the circulation. The Acre Plan provides opportunities for landscaping. This is a highly visible location. There may be opportunities for tree planting.

B. Milisci shared construction details and a landscaping plan and discussed the landscaping strategy.

G. Frechette asked about queueing for the atm.

B. Milisci said a plan had been developed showing how queueing would work, and that he would provide it to the board. He then shared renderings of the teller design.

G. Frechette discussed a recent similar proposal for a drive up ATM and the challenges with that applicant's lack of renderings, and expressed appreciation that this project is well illustrated.

B. Milisci said he was on that meeting for another project.

G. Frechette thinks it is a great location, and appreciates the applicant's cooperation. He would like to see some sort of traffic study to account for increased traffic related to the extension of Jackson Street and the opening of the new Lowell District Court. He recognizes the challenge of doing a traffic count during a pandemic. A more robust landscape plan, traffic plan, and stormwater management design would help build a stronger case for the project. G. Frechette does not recall seeing anything from the Fire Department, and would like to get their ok. He then asked about the 6-month review mandated by the Zoning Board of Appeals.

B. Milisci said those issues have not been addressed since the time of the ZBA meeting. He said they are pursuing acquiring additional property to address any potential issues.

R. Lockhart agreed with G. Frechette and noted that there will be a lot of pedestrians and that pedestrian amenities should be closely considered.

C. Cheng walked the site yesterday morning and agrees with the other members that this would be a great improvement, but also notes the need to accommodate pedestrians. Said it would be very disappointing to not have a pedestrian connection to Cushing Street. He would appreciate the applicant taking a closer look at solutions. He reiterated concern about the retaining wall with fencing inhibiting pedestrian access. He wonders if steps could be added. He would like to see the sidewalk extend the entire length of the driveway and feels that pedestrian safety and access needs to be balanced with open space. C. Cheng would like to know if bike racks could be provided on the site, given the proximity to downtown and Gallagher Station.

R. Pandres noted Emily Hunter's question from the Zoom chat.

E. Hunter noted that ambulances frequently use this route and expressed concern about potential impacts to their mobility.

B. Milisci concurred that there is a lot of ambulance use on this route, but did not think that their ability to operate as usual would be impacted in any way by this project.

R. Pandres agrees with other members. He is skeptical that a two-way entry/exit is necessary and would like feedback on circulation from City Planning and Transportation. R. Pandres said he walks through this property 3-4 times per week and sees a lot of traffic backed up on Dutton Street. He fears this project could contribute to that congestion. From a landscaping perspective, this property serves as a gateway to the Acre. He said it would be great to see more landscaping, especially around the retaining wall and asked if the dumpster pad would be enclosed.

B. Milisci said it would be.

R. Pandres agreed with C. Cheng that pedestrian access to Cushing Street is important.

T. Linnehan asked F.Cigliano if she had received any comments from J. Alves or N. Vance.

F. Cigliano said she had not.

T. Linnehan asked what the projected occupancy is.

B. Milisci said 50-60 people for the whole building.

T. Linnehan asked about snow storage.

B. Milisci agreed to provide a plan for snow storage.

T. Linnehan asked if F. Cigliano could get in touch with N. Vance.

F. Cigliano agreed to try to reach out.

G. Frechette noted the next two meeting dates are March 1 and March 15 and asked the applicant how much time they would need to address the concerns raised.

B. Milisci said it would take some time to produce the additional materials, but would work to resolve this issues in a timely manner.

Motion:

G. Frechette motioned and R. Lockhart seconded the motion to continue to the March 1 meeting. The motion passed unanimously, (5-0).

IV. Other Business

R. Lockhart gave a Historic Board update. He said there has been significant progress made on the mural policy. Details were added to the policy for the downtown Lowell district. A city-wide policy was presented stating that no murals would be allowed in residential districts. The Cultural Affairs office will review murals that reflect historic advertising signs. The policy touches on many topics including prohibited mural types, surface preparation, maintenance requirements, and design standards. Mural permits would be required. R. Lockhart expressed appreciation for the thoroughness of the policy proposal and noted that Christine McCall, Director of Economic Development for the City of Lowell, is involved which reflects on the importance of the initiative.

R. Pandres asked about prohibition of murals in residential zones.

R. Lockhart read "murals shall not be allowed in residential zoning districts."

C. Cheng asked if C. McCall is proposing to incorporate this into the zoning ordinance or a different section of the City ordinance.

R. Lockhart said he is not sure, that will be the next step.

T. Linnehan congratulated R. Lockhart on reappointment to the Historic Board.

V. Notices

VI. Further Comments from Planning Board Members

R. Lockhart said the Historic Board activity level has been quiet. There has been no new activity other than mural regulations in development.

T. Linnehan congratulated R. Malavich for being re-appointed to the Planning Board and welcomed new Assistant Planner Dylan Ricker.

VII. Adjournment

T. Linnehan motioned and R. Malavich seconded the motion to adjourn. The motion passed unanimously, (5-0).

Gerald Barnes spoke up and identified himself as an abutter to a property that came before the board previously. He expressed frustration that as an abutter he has not received any notifications related to activity on the property.

T. Linnehan said that City Council are the only ones who can change zoning and he does not know when the project will come before the Planning Board again, but when they do abutters will be notified.

F. Cigliano confirmed receipt of a pre-application, and noted that the project has gone before City Council, but has not yet come back to the Planning Department for Site Plan Review.

G. Barnes asked who to speak with about the matter.

T. Linnehan suggested G. Barnes ask the City Clerk or the Law Department.