



City of Lowell - Planning Board

Planning Board Meeting Minutes

Thursday, February 23, 2023 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
Robert Malavich, Member
Caleb Cheng, Member
Allison Dolan-Wilson, Associate Member

Members Absent

Richard Lockhart, Member
Sinead Gallivan, Associate Member

Others Present

Dylan Ricker, Associate Planner

A quorum of the Board was present. Chairman Linnehan called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm.

I. Minutes for Approval

February 6, 2023 Meeting Minutes

G. Frechette motioned, and C. Cheng seconded the motion to approve the February 6th meeting minutes. The motion passed unanimously, (5-0).

II. Continued Business

III. New Business

Site Plan Review and Special Permit – 102-108 Westford Street, 01851

102-108 Westford Street, LLC has applied to the Lowell Planning Board seeking Site Plan Review and Special Permit approval to construct a 6-unit residential structure at 102 Westford Street. The previous multi-family property on the site was destroyed in a fire. The subject property is located in the Traditional Multi-Family (TMF) zoning district. The proposal requires Site Plan Review approval from the

Planning Board per Section 11.4 to construct more than 3 residential units, and Special Permit approval from the Planning Board per Section 11.3 and Article 12.1 for 6 residential units. The applicant also requires Variance approval from the Lowell Zoning Board of Appeals.

On Behalf:

John Geary, Applicant's Representative

J. Geary said the applicant has developed multiple properties in the City including properties on Middlesex Street and the brownstone buildings across the street. J. Geary noted the past investments made in the City. J. Geary explained the proposed project, and noted there was a multi-family on the property previously which was destroyed in a fire.

J. Geary said the application is currently before the ZBA for zoning relief and noted the relief requested is consistent with the relief that would have been required to rebuild the pre-existing building. J. Geary said the petition was continued to the 2/27 ZBA meeting. J. Geary said revisions were made to the plans to address ZBA concerns. J. Geary said the ZBA appeared favorable to the project.

J. Geary said there is a significant amount of on-street parking near the property and added the Gallagher Terminal is in close proximity to the property. J. Geary said they have provided the Board with a TDM Plan to address transportation needs.

J. Geary said the usable open space is shown on the revised site plan. J. Geary said this space was designed in a way to be more useful to tenants, and includes a patio at the rear of the property. J. Geary noted the City Transportation Engineer said the TDM Plan is appropriate and that there is adequate parking available on-street. J. Geary said there will be some bikes/scooters located on-site to a lesser degree than the other developments.

J. Geary noted the property is near to the Gallagher Terminal and City parks.

J. Geary said the applicant is amenable to the proposed conditions of a stormwater plan and DPD sign off on their landscaping plan. J. Geary said the units will be energy efficient and they anticipate being energy star rated.

Gwen Noyes, Applicant

Justin MacFarlane, Applicant

Brian Geaudreau, Applicant's Engineer

B. Geaudreau said the engineering focus on the lot is utilities, drainage, landscaping, and beautification. B. Geaudreau said they are working with DPW to determine the existing utilities, and said the applicant is in negotiation with the direct abutter to get an easement to replace the sewer line. B. Geaudreau said they have met with LRWWU regarding stormwater and they are proposing an underground infiltration system in the front yard to store 1.5 inches of rainfall over the proposed impervious area which meets their requirement.

B. Geaudreau added they created a landscaping plan focusing on beautification, and summarized the plan.

Scott Vlasak, Applicant's Architect

S. Vlasak explained the proposed elevations for the project. S. Vlasak said the right and left sides on the building are completely separate, and said the entire building will be sprinklered.

Speaking in Favor:

None

Speaking in Opposition:

None

Discussion:

G. Frechette said it is good to see investment in the neighborhood and asked if the owner has changed since the fire, J. Geary confirmed this. G. Frechette expressed support for the TDM Plan and said the overall project fits with what was previously there. G. Frechette said that given the conditions of the site it would be challenging to create parking on-site. G. Frechette expressed concern about the proposed design.

S. Vlasak said in terms of scale and size the project is very similar to the previous building. S. Vlasak explained the design of the building and noted it will be modular construction. S. Vlasak explained the features of the building. J. Geary added that there is a mix of property designs in the area with most of the buildings being older. J. Geary noted it is modern and said he feels the property adds to the eclectic designs of the neighborhood.

G. Frechette asked if modifying the plans slightly would be doable. G. Frechette said the building looks commercial and asked how far the bump out is. S. Vlasak said their intention was not to propose a project that is identical to the neighborhood and noted there are many different designs in the neighborhood. S. Vlasak said they did not want to fit in, but wanted to add to the neighborhood. S. Vlasak said the proposal shows a new type of architecture and has a more contemporary design. S. Vlasak said the overhang comes out 2 feet and said the overall area is 3.5-4 feet.

G. Frechette said the front doors are setback from the façade, S. Vlasak confirmed. G. Frechette said he is not a fan of the railing, S. Vlasak said the railings may not be the final design and said this item is a flexible element. G. Frechette asked if the modules are under construction, S. Vlasak said no.

J. MacFarlane said he put a lot of effort into his project across the street and said he would not propose a development in this corridor if he did not feel it enhanced the neighborhood. J. MacFarlane noted the structures vary in age and architecture type and massing, and they felt mirroring any of the existing structures would be difficult adding that they tried to differentiate with this building.

C. Cheng asked the type of materials to be used on the property and noted the types of materials used on properties nearby. C. Cheng asked how the details can be altered to be more fitting to the neighborhood. S. Vlasak said the horizontal siding has different spacings and said this variation will add interest to the building. S. Vlasak said they have flexibility on the siding. S. Vlasak said they intentionally did not include corner boards, and explained the proposed materials. S. Vlasak said cementitious siding looks like wood siding, but is more resilient.

G. Frechette expressed concern about the location of the shade tree, and how it may impact the retaining wall. B. Geaudreau said the species of trees are birch and crab apple, and said the trees are not exceptionally large. B. Geaudreau said the location of the trees is to respect the retaining wall and the stormwater retention system. B. Geaudreau said there is 6 feet from the retaining wall and they could move it 1-2 feet. B. Geaudreau said they are trying to make the best of the available space. B. Geaudreau said they are amenable to a condition of DPD approval for the landscaping plan.

J. MacFarlane said the root system for a mature crab apple tree is not known to go through concrete, stone, etc. and they are generally surface roots. G. Frechette asked about trash bins. B. Geaudreau explained the proposed trash plans and said the storage bins are at the rear of the property completely screened. B. Geaudreau said management or residents would bring the trash to the street during pick up times.

G. Frechette said the ZBA had concerns with trash bin screening and wanted Fire Department comments. J. Geary said they adjusted the plan to show a new location in the rear for trash bins, and said Fire has not weighed in and added that the Fire Department will be required to review the proposal when they are seeking building permits.

G. Frechette asked about the potential easement for utilities and how the utility plans would change if an easement can't be obtained. B. Geaudreau said the utilities were combined with the abutter, and said if they can't get an easement they will go out through Westford Street.

C. Cheng said the landscaping, massing, TDM Plan, appears adequate and said the plan is a good fit given the limitation of parking on-site. C. Cheng expressed support for the bike racks and said a location inside or covered would be ideal. C. Cheng noted the improvements to stormwater on the site.

C. Cheng said the design is different and said the proposal is more contemporary. C. Cheng expressed some concern regarding the architectural design.

R. Malavich said his questions have been answered. R. Malavich said it comes down to the elevations, and said the proposal is 2023 housing development not 1800s or 1700s. and it is time for more modern housing in the City. R. Malavich said it is a good project and one of the better projects that will come down the line given that it will be state of the art and energy efficient. R. Malavich said he does not feel trying to make everything similar to 1800s Lowell is the best thing to do and expressed support for the proposed elevations.

A. Dolan-Wilson said architecture is in the eyes of the beholder, but it does look a little commercial. A. Dolan-Wilson asked if the modular aspect makes the building more energy efficient. S. Vlasak said yes and said that when they are constructing the building they will be filling the cavities with insulation and there will be insulated sheeting on the structure. S. Vlasak said modular construction allows for more efficiency since they are built in a factory.

T. Linnehan asked about the open space at the rear of the property. B. Geaudreau explained the located on the usable open space and it encompasses the front yard and added that the pavers are pervious which for stormwater purposes is similar to grass. B. Geaudreau said the patio is usable for all tenants.

T. Linnehan asked if the applicant will work with City staff to plant trees on the site. J. Geary agreed and said they were amenable to the condition. J. Geary said they would select a species that works with the nearby retaining wall.

T. Linnehan said he does not have too many concerns regarding Fire and noted the building is reachable from the street and added the building will be sprinklered. S. Vlasak confirmed sprinklers would be required. T. Linnehan said he likes the project is close to Armory Park and other parks. T. Linnehan noted parking was available during his site visits and it is in close proximity to the Gallagher Terminal. T. Linnehan said he is ok with the architectural plans and it is something new they have not seen.

G. Frechette expressed concern about the design and said he would like to see something done to make the façade less commercial as it faces the street.

J. MacFarlane said nothing is set in stone and some changes can be made to make the design work for everyone.

G. Noyes stated that she is an architect as well and said she is willing to relook at the architectural plans and added the building is contemporary and added that a benefit of contemporary design is larger windows. G. Noyes notes the architectural designs on the street are eclectic and there is no specific architectural design.

J. Geary suggested the Board condition approval on working with the design planner to soften the commercial look. D. Ricker confirmed the City has a Design Planner. G. Frechette expressed concern about granting the approval to DPD rather than the Board.

J. MacFarlane said they will work to present a revised design to the City's Design Planner.

Motion:

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

1. The applicant shall submit a landscaping plan subject to DPD approval to include trees; and
2. The applicant shall obtain a stormwater permit from LRWWU.

G. Frechette seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, (5-0).

T. Linnehan motioned, and C. Cheng seconded the motion to continue the Special Permit to the March 6, 2023 Planning Board meeting. The motion passed unanimously, (5-0).

Site Plan Review and Special Permit – 72-74 Boisvert Street and 253 W Sixth Street1 01854

ZR Development Group, LLC has applied to the Lowell Planning Board to redevelop the existing St. Louis School building into 16 residential units with 31 off-street parking spaces. The applicant requires Site Plan Review approval per Section 11.4 to construct more than 3 residential units, and Special Permit approval per Section 8.1 for the conversion of an existing historic school building. The application also requires Variance approval from the Lowell Zoning Board of Appeals.

On Behalf:

John Geary, Applicant's Representative

J. Geary noted the application is a refile for the St. Louis School, and summarized the proposal. J. Geary said the design was redone to reduce the unit count from 19 to 16 and they increased the parking to 31 off-street parking spaces. J. Geary noted the impervious surface is being reduced. J. Geary noted the Transportation Engineer believes the TDM Plan, total parking, and reduction in parking space size is adequate. J. Geary said the new proposal addresses the primary concern of abutters.

J. Geary said the usable open space will have a pergola, patio, and firepit. J. Geary said the proposal is what was anticipated for the reuse of the property. J. Geary said the use is the best use for the property, provides the City with tax revenue, and ensures the building will be maintained for years to come.

Jim Zorbas, Applicant

Mark O'Hara, Applicant's Engineer

M. O'Hara summarized the changes to the project from the previous approval. M. O'Hara said the rear area will not be completely landscaped and the main parking area will have all of the parking spaces.

Speaking in Favor:

None

Speaking in Opposition:

Sandy McNamara,

S. McNamara said the neighbors' concerns is that there will still be an impact on the neighborhood including density and quality of life. S. McNamara said it will have an impact on the neighborhood, and it will be resident parking only. S. McNamara said the City needs housing and it is a good project, but it's the wrong time.

Regina Faticanti, 169 Bunker Hill Avenue

R. Faticanti said it is difficult to see the street when pulling onto W Sixth Street due to parking on the street. R. Faticanti agreed Lowell needs more housing, but said the complex is too large. R. Faticanti said Lowell does not have a subway and residents must rely on cars. R. Faticanti said the neighborhood is congested.

Maureen Kelleher, 37 Unsworth Street

M. Kelleher cited Section 8.1 of the Lowell Zoning Ordinance. M. Kelleher said the project is an overdevelopment. M. Kelleher expressed general opposition to the project and summarized the total number of Variances the applicant received.

Discussion:

G. Frechette said the prior proposal was approved and noted the inconsistency between the ZBA and PB approvals. G. Frechette noted he previously asked the applicant to reduce the proposal by a few units and noted this was done. G. Frechette said that an on-street parking analysis was completed which showed adequate on-street parking. J. Geary said the applicant received all required Variances and

noted the request is not a use Variance. J. Geary said the ZBA vote was unanimous. G. Frechette noted by design there will not be typical vehicular demand. G. Frechette expressed support.

C. Cheng asked if parking spaces will be assigned. J. Geary confirmed. J. Geary said residents will not be circulating the neighborhood for parking due to the off-street parking. C. Cheng expressed support.

R. Malavich noted the density is lower than the previous application and added that the parking was reviewed by the Transportation Engineer and has her approval along with the TDM Plan. R. Malavich said he has no concerns.

A. Dolan-Wilson asked if there will be an exit gate and how it works. J. Geary said the exit gate will only open when people are leaving the lot. A. Dolan-Wilson asked about guest parking, J. Geary said this is incorporated into the parking requirement.

T. Linnehan agreed with the Traffic Engineer's comments that the parking is adequate. T. Linnehan noted the project is acceptable to DPD staff. T. Linnehan said Board members have completed site visits noting there was available on-street parking. T. Linnehan expressed support.

Motion:

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

1. The applicant shall have a 6 month administrative review for the TDM Plan and Parking Layout and the applicant shall act on any suggested mitigation; and
2. The applicant shall submit a Landscaping Plan subject to DPD approval.

C. Cheng seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, (5-0).

G. Frechette motioned to approve the Special Permit with the following conditions:

1. The applicant shall have a 6 month administrative review for the TDM Plan and Parking Layout and the applicant shall act on any suggested mitigation; and
2. The applicant shall submit a Landscaping Plan subject to DPD approval.

C. Cheng seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, (5-0).

III. Other Business

IV. Notices

V. Further Comments from Planning Board Members

VI. Adjournment

G. Frechette motioned to adjourn, C. Cheng seconded, passed unanimously, (5-0). The time was 8:33PM.