

**LOWELL HISTORIC BOARD
MINUTES
Mayor's Reception Room, Lowell City Hall
August 9, 2021 at 6:00 p.m.**

Note: These minutes are not completed verbatim. For further detail, contact the Lowell Historic Board, Lowell City Hall, Room 51, 375 Merrimack Street or refer to video recordings available online at www.LTC.org.

Members Present: Jeffrey Harris, Chairman; Kerry Regan Jenness, Vice Chairman; Lisa "LC" Cassidy, Aurora Erickson, Richard Lockhart, Christine McCall, George Villaras, James Wilde

Members Absent: Troy Depeiza

Others Present: Stephen Stowell, Administrator

The following represents the actions taken by the Historic Board at the 8/9/2021 meeting. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this meeting occurred in hybrid form, both in-person and via the Zoom video conferencing platform.

Chairman Harris called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m. and requested that the Board members introduce themselves and who they represented.

1. PUBLIC HEARINGS

A. **70 Wyman Street (Andover Street Neighborhood District 01852) – Construction of Single Family Home**

David Murphy is seeking Historic Permit Approval at 70 Wyman Street. The application seeks approval to construct a new single-family house. The property is located in the Andover Street Neighborhood District. The proposed application requires a Historic Permit from the Historic Board pursuant to the Lowell Historic District Act, Chapter 566, Acts of 1983.

On Behalf:

Daniel Donahue, Gavin & Sullivan Architects
David Murphy, Property Owner

D. Donahue introduced and described the proposed project.

Speaking in Favor:

None

Speaking in Opposition:

None

Discussion:

L. Cassidy asked what the square footage of the proposed house was. D. Donahue stated that it was approximately 3,700.

The Chairman asked about any possible impact to the project from the three year street opening moratorium on Wyman Street. D. Donahue noted that there is an easement to the right side of the property off of Mansion Drive that can be used for utility connections.

K. Jenness stated that she had some concerns about the scale of the proposed house in comparison with others along Wyman Street. D. Donahue said that there is a smaller house to the right with a larger home to the rear of the property but in direct proximity, he noted that it is larger but also with an open lot to the left.

A. Erickson asked if the location was just empty property. D. Donahue said it was broken off from the property to the rear facing Andover Street.

J. Wilde commented that this would be the first structure ever on the property. D. Donahue confirmed.

The Chairman acknowledged K. Jenness' concern with the scale of the house and appreciated the efforts to break up the mass of the house through the use of dormers, porch, and varying the materials on the facades. It does help mitigate some of the scale concerns.

Motion:

By J. Wilde, seconded by G. Villaras, to:

Vote to issue the Historic Permit for construction of a single-family residential structure at 70 Wyman Street in the Andover Street Neighborhood District conditional upon the following:

1. Submittal, review, and approval of final design and construction details including, but not limited to specifications for door and window systems, porch railings/post system, paint color, and shingles prior to commencement of work. Material and color samples will be required for paint and shingles;
2. Sample of final siding and trim selection (including colors) to be submitted for review and approval prior to purchase and installation;
3. Submittal, review, and approval of final details related to the site plan, landscaping, and other site features including, but not limited to, planting schedule and paving; and
4. Submittal, review, and approval of any scope of work alterations and final details prior to commencement of individual work items.

Work is consistent with Sections 3.10, 3.20, and 3.30 of the Design Review Standards for the Andover Street Neighborhood District.

Approved, 7-1 (K. Jenness opposed).

B. 228 Worthen Street (Downtown Lowell Historic District 01852) – Exterior Rehabilitation and Construction of a Link Structure

Girls Incorporated of Greater Lowell is seeking Historic Permit Approval at 228 Worthen Street. The application seeks approval to construct a new enclosed link between 228 and 220 Worthen Street. The property is located in the Downtown Lowell Historic District. The proposed application requires a Historic Permit from the Historic Board pursuant to the Lowell Historic District Act, Chapter 566, Acts of 1983.

On Behalf:

Cathleen Gable, Girls Inc.

K. Gable introduced and described the proposed project.

Speaking in Favor:

None

Speaking in Opposition:

None

Discussion:

G. Villaras said he was pleased with how the proposal is respectful of streetscape and that he recalls visiting the Greek American facility as his father was a member. He asked about the thin link and its appearance. K. Gable said that it is set back and that over time, because of the copper cladding, will form a patina. She also noted that they are looking to echo some of the Whistler Park elements across the street with their own landscaping.

J. Wilde asked about the exterior treatment of the building. C. Gable said that the structures currently occupied by Girls Inc., such as the former church, will be scraped and painted.

The Chairman said that the existing metal siding will be removed from 228 Worthen Street but he asked if any has been removed to determine the condition underneath. C. Gable said that they are waiting until construction begins and if the existing is usable, it will be maintained.

The Chairman asked if any documentation exists to determine the building's original appearance. C. Gable said they have several photos that shows the building as it appeared in the past with few differences from today with the exception of the metal siding and porch. The Chairman said that hopefully there will be material underneath that can help guide the rehabilitation work.

The Chairman suggested an additional condition of approval that addresses the investigative removal of the metal siding to assist in the design of the rehabilitation and the reuse of any materials and details found.

The Chairman mentioned the internal accessibility between the existing Girls Inc. buildings and 228 Worthen Street and asked about any external accessibility. C. Gable said that she did not believe it was in the drawings but that a new ramp on the right of the building, off of the existing porch, was being proposed. The Administrator confirmed that the ramp was not shown on the submitted plans.

The Chairman said that the ramp should be included in the plans and tucked in as best as possible.

The Chairman asked if the connecting element was going to have a flat or gable roof. The Administrator confirmed that is a flat roof and sloped to the rear courtyard.

The Chairman noted that he appreciated the contemporary approach taken with the design of the narrow connecting structure, that it was distinguishable from the historic structures.

The Chairman asked if there was any other use of copper on the buildings or if the proposed connecting structure was the only instance. C. Gable said that the entry canopy between the former church and 220 Worthen Street uses copper.

The Administrator said that there is a prior precedent for linking structures at this location as the Board approved the present link between 220 Worthen Street and the former church to its left in 1985 as part of an earlier Girls Incorporated rehabilitation project. He said that the proposed new link is set back and much less of a structure than the 1985 link that included a lobby and elevator.

L. Cassidy felt that the addition was appropriate with the setback, that a preservation person is involved in the project, and that historic photographs are being used to guide the project.

K. Jenness echoed G. Villaras' comments about being respectful of the streetscape and landscape, that all works harmoniously between the buildings and landscape.

Motion:

By K. Jenness, seconded by L. Cassidy, to:

Vote to issue the Historic Permit for the exterior rehabilitation and construction of an exterior link structure at 228 Worthen Street in the Downtown Lowell Historic District conditional upon the following:

1. Submittal, review, and approval of final design and construction details including, but not limited to specifications for door and window systems, siding, trim, paint color, copper, masonry, and shingles prior to commencement of work. Material and color samples will be required for all materials including masonry/mortar if applicable;
2. Siding and trim to have smooth (not raised grain) surface;
3. Submittal, review, and approval of final details including, but not limited to, planting plan/schedule, fencing, paving, building/site lighting, building/site signage and other site features prior to commencement of work;
4. Investigative removal of existing siding to be undertaken to determine details of original siding/trim and to evaluate potential reuse of original materials;
5. Design to be provided for review and approval of proposed side/rear accessibility ramp; and
6. Submittal, review, and approval of any scope of work alterations and final details prior to commencement of individual work items.

Work is consistent with Sections 2.301, 2.31, 2.32, 3.1, and 3.2 of the , 3.20, and 3.30 of the Design Review Standards for the Downtown Lowell Historic District.

Unanimously approved, 8-0.

C. 61 Broadway Street (Downtown Lowell Historic District 01852) – Installation of a Digital Messaging Sign

Hellenic American Academy is seeking Historic Permit Approval at 61 Broadway Street. The application seeks approval for relief from the Downtown Lowell Historic District Design Review Standards to install a digital messaging sign. The property is located in the Downtown Lowell Historic District. The proposed application requires a Historic Permit from the Historic Board pursuant to the Lowell Historic District Act, Chapter 566, Acts of 1983.

On Behalf:

Gregory Curtis, Attorney for Hellenic American Academy
Brandon Currier, Barlo Signs
George Kontos, Hellenic American Academy

G. Curtis introduced and described the proposed project.

Speaking in Favor:

None

Speaking in Opposition:

None

Discussion:

K. Jenness said that a waiver of the Standards requires that extraordinary and unnecessary hardships exist and she asked what those were. G. Curtis said that the circumstances are that the current sign does not function well and is difficult to maintain, that if the school was not located in the historic district that the sign would be LED. He noted that they are attempting to promote the school and that it is an integral part of the Acre and the Greek community.

G. Curtis said that in terms of extraordinary circumstances that they want to keep the school open and that the sign is an important part of the school's visibility. He noted that they are not intruding on the area given the open areas nearby and the Macheras Service Mart, that the sign can be regulated in terms of brightness and duration.

K. Jenness noted that no one else in the District has a sign such as this and she wants to avoid setting a precedent with others requesting similar signs. G. Curtis said that it would be on a case by case basis, that the waiver would not violate the spirit of the Standards and would be consistent with the intent to protect Lowell's historical architectural heritage. He noted that the building is from the 1950s and is contemporary and that they are simply looking to change the existing internally-illuminated bottom portion to LED.

L. Cassidy asked if any alternatives were explored to the current proposal. G. Curtis said that the only option they explored was the sign being proposed. He said they are not intending to have multiple changing messages and animation, that they just want to make it easier to change messages. It would also be safer than having someone opening up the cabinet.

B. Currier stated that the only two options are what exists presently and what is being proposed. He said that nothing out of the ordinary in terms of colors will be shown.

The Chairman asked how often the messaging on the current sign is changed. G. Curtis said not often due to the difficulty in changing the letters, that messaging generally deals with enrollment, graduation, and other events. Messages related to the nearby Holy Trinity Church would also be shown.

The Chairman asked how often it would be anticipated that the messages would change on the digital sign. G. Curtis said he thought maybe four or five messages a day related to the school, church, or adjacent cultural center.

G. Kontos said that it would only be one message a day or week, not multiple messages.

The Chairman said that in addition to lettering, would graphics be proposed. G. Curtis said that they would have basic graphics as shown in the presentation but nothing would be animated, that they are not desirous of having multiple messages changing all the time.

G. Villaras said that that he appreciates that the location of the digital sign is lower down, not placed high. He also noted that it is located more along a commercial section of the street, that you would not see it coming up Worthen or Dummer streets. He said that it does not interfere with more historic areas like on Worthen Street with the Whistler House or Girls Inc.

G. Villaras did note a concern about the glow at night and how would you control the hours. B. Currier said that the sign would be set to operate from 7am to 7pm and that it also has a daylight sensor so that it will adjust appropriately depending upon if the day is more sunny or overcast.

G. Curtis noted that the sign would not operate after 7pm, only from 7am to 7pm.

J. Wilde asked if the images would remain white on black as the present sign is. G. Curtis did not believe it would remain black and white given the options the digital sign has available. He said the sign will be low key.

A. Erickson noted that she appreciates the desire to have a tasteful LED sign but is concerned that the sign has the capability to have less tasteful graphics. G. Curtis said it could be more "flashy" but there is no desire to have animation of any sort and that it can be done tastefully. He said the hours will be limited and that the size is limited. No one wants the sign to be offensive.

L. Cassidy commented that there is no set color, that it could be anything. She noted that the usually the font color and background is blended. G. Curtis said the intent is to catch the eye of people but not be offensive.

G. Villaras asked if the graphic in the presentation is the most advanced or detailed they imagine using. G. Curtis said that it is generally representative of the type of graphic they plan to use.

G. Villaras said that many are familiar with highway signs of this sort with very intricate graphics. B. Currier said that the scale of those signs is so great that the designs are more elaborate. He said that the graphics proposed here would be more simplistic as that is what the human brain is more easily responsive to given the smaller scale.

B. Currier also said that being able to change the sign messaging safely is important as the existing cabinet sign has a heavy door panel. The proposed sign is controlled from the inside and is safer. He reiterated the use of simple graphics that do not flash or are animated.

C. McCall said her concern was the brightness and changeability of the sign. B. Currier said that the daylight

sensor will adjust the brightness automatically depending upon conditions. G. Curtis said that if the brightness becomes an issue, the Board can revisit the issue and address it.

C. McCall noted her concern regarding changeability and that the applicant said the messages would change only once or twice a day or week. She said that she would like a condition of approval being that the sign would change only every 30 seconds to a minute as based upon her experience, she has seen other similar signs in the city changing at 10 to 20 seconds. G. Curtis said that would be acceptable.

The Administrator asked about the daylight sensor and the ability to adjust. B. Currier confirmed that if after the sign is installed and concerns are raised, that adjustments can be made.

L. Cassidy noted other areas of the signage Standards regarding fonts, colors, and so forth. The Chairman said that the use of only certain colors could be conditioned.

G. Villaras noted if the other elements of the signage Standards would only apply to static signs, not electronic ones.

G. Villaras said this is a new type of sign the Board is reviewing and that it should be addressed in the right manner. He asked what the timetable was to install the sign. G. Curtis said within six months to a year as money needs to be raised.

The Chairman asked for confirmation on the dimensions, with no change proposed for the Hellenic American Academy panel and that the existing dimensions will remain unchanged. He noted a possible discrepancy between the existing and the proposed. B. Currier said that trim can cover the edge so that it will remain in the same scale.

The Chairman said that the LED board is larger than the blue sign in the proposal. B. Currier says that the trim can be adjusted to keep the scale and appearance consistent with the existing.

K. Jenness asked if a video could be presented that would show brightness and graphics of similar signs. B. Currier said that a video will not capture an accurate representation of what the LED display would look like in realty. He reiterated the ability to adjust the graphics and brightness if there is a concern.

The Chairman said there is a very contemporary setting in this location and a digital sign could potentially be appropriate in this instance. The Board is so used to dealing with static signs, not electronic signs. He noted that the more static the sign, the better, and with limited backgrounds and graphics. Minimal changeability is key too.

The Chairman said that perhaps initially a more conservative approach be taken and once in operation, reevaluate for additional sorts of graphics.

J. Wilde said he wants to support the proposal and that the Chairman's suggestion regarding a conservative approach at the start is wise. Then revisit several months down the road.

The Chairman said that certain conditions could be placed on the approval initially regarding background, color, font, and so on, then revisit at a future point.

G. Villaras asked if it was possible to get additional examples of various backgrounds and graphics to get a better sense of what graphics could be potentially used on the sign. G. Curtis said that they could.

The Chairman said that additional examples would be beneficial to help evaluate the sign proposal.

Motion:

By C. McCall, seconded by L. Cassidy, to:

Continue the Public Hearing for 61 Broadway Street to the Board's September 13, 2021 meeting.

Unanimously approved, 8-0.

2. MINUTES

Approval of the Minutes of July 12, 2021

Motion:

By K. Jenness, seconded by J. Wilde, to:

Approve the minutes of July 12, 2021

Unanimously approved, 8-0.

3. OTHER BUSINESS

A. Mural Policy Update

The Administrator said that the Board's mural policy will be on the September 13, 2021 agenda for a public hearing.

B. Enforcement/Violations Update

The Administrator said weekly walking tours will be undertaken and that there are already several minimum maintenance and signage items that need addressing.

C. Administrator's Report

Lowell Sun Sign

Work will begin again to coordinate the transfer of ownership and restoration of the Sun sign on the roof of the Sun Building in Kearney Square. Last November, a cost estimate for LED conversion has been obtained which is very reasonable (\$45,000). The next steps include identifying resources to perform the work and connecting both the building owner and sign owner together to transfer ownership of the sign.

City Hall Stained Glass

A revised estimate for the restoration of City Hall's stained glass is in the process of being obtained from Lyn Hovey Studio in Boston. This will form the basis of a Community Preservation Act application for funding under that new program. Project eligibility forms are due September 9 with a full application then submitted if the Community Preservation Committee deems the project eligible.

Downtown Lowell Historic District Building Markers

24 new markers are in the process of being developed that will be installed as they are fabricated. To date, 44 markers have been installed.

Website – Historic Places & Architecture

Hopefully Board members have been able to see the new section of the Board's website that went live in mid-March that focuses on historic places and architecture in Lowell. The section contains a total of 68 new pages that detail each of the districts on the National Register of Historic Places in Lowell as well as individually-listed National Register sites. There is also a section on various architectural styles found in Lowell as well as "Architects of Note" that includes ten architects who were somewhat prominent who historically designed buildings in the city.

Social Media

Social media continues to be a very popular and effective community engagement and outreach tool for the Board. The Board's Facebook page has 6,002 "likes" while individual posts continue to reach thousands. Other platforms include Twitter (711 followers), Instagram (1,403 followers), and Pinterest (25 followers).

The Administrator noted the incredible response on Facebook to a recent post on the progress preserving and rehabilitating 62 and 80 Gorham Street, two very significant early downtown buildings from the early 1830s.

Newsletter

After a hiatus, the Board's electronic newsletter Presence from the Past will be making a comeback later this year. Another popular and effective Board community engagement and outreach tool, the distribution list is being updated and edited with the fall being targeted for distribution.

Next Meeting

The Board's next meeting is scheduled for Monday, September 13, 2021 at 6:00 p.m. in the Mayor's Reception Room.

C. Board Member Items/Inquiries

C. McCall noted that the Community Preservation Committee is currently taking in eligibility forms for the first round of grants and that the intent is to provide equal distribution across all three areas of housing, historic preservation, and open space.

C. McCall asked about the Board's new building markers and tying in African-American history as well. The Administrator said that two of the new markers have included information and that others will also include historic material if applicable. A. Erickson said that the efforts between the Board's markers and other initiatives like the DIY trail and potential new waysides is important.

4. ADJOURNMENT

Motion:

By J. Wilde, seconded by G. Villaras, to:

Adjourn the meeting at 7:40 p.m.

Unanimously approved, 8-0.

ATTEST: _____
Stephen R. Stowell, Administrator