

CITY OF LEWISTON
PLANNING BOARD MEETING
MINUTES for February 9, 2026

- I. **ROLL CALL:** The meeting was held in the City Council Chambers on the first floor of City Hall and was called to order at 5:30 p.m. Chairperson, Shanna Cox chaired the meeting.

Members in Attendance: Lucy Bisson, Penthea Burns, Shanna Cox, Zoë Lidstrom, Michael Marcotte, Alexander Pine, and Amy Smith.

Associate Members in Attendance: None.

Staff Present: Jonathan Connors, Director (for the beginning) and Shelley Norton, Deputy Director.

Chairperson Cox welcomed Penthea Burns in her newly appointed role of full voting member of the board and mentioned that there are two vacancies on the board for Associate Member.

- II. **ADJUSTMENT TO THE AGENDA:**
Shelley Norton requested to add an item under 5.b. "Other Business" for an amendment to the board's Handbook.

III. **CORRESPONDENCE:**

Director Norton informed the board that there is a new email address planningboard@lewistonmaine.gov for the public to be able to email planning board members but that they should not reply to the email if it is from the public, as they will be sharing their personal email address if they do.

Chairperson Cox recognized Director Connor who addressed the board regarding the removal of 240 Bartlett Street from tonight's agenda. He stated that he made the decision to remove the item because we realized there was a breakdown in our abutter notification process following the cancellation of their last scheduled meeting (due to weather). This was his oversight; the department has been operating under an informal past practice regarding re-noticing that he wasn't aware of. Even though legal counsel has confirmed that we aren't technically required to send out new notices, technical compliance is not the standard he wants for the city, he would rather have transparency and fairness to all the abutters. In order to make sure this does not happen again he's asked Deputy Director Norton to bring this up later this evening in Other Business to potentially update the board Handbook to codify this practice. He apologized to the board, applicant, and the public for any confusion tonight, and stated that 240 Bartlett Street would be back on the agenda on February 23, 2026, with all proper notices served.

Chairperson Cox asked what the timeline is for notices for meetings and for rescheduling. Shelley Norton stated that once we have a notice in paper or

mailed they are on notice to follow up with staff or the website for any changes, and that the abutter notice must be mailed 7 days before the meeting, and special meetings just require our best effort to get the word out by notifying the media and posting it to the website and in city hall.

IV. PUBLIC HEARINGS:

- a. The Planning Board sending a recommendation to the City Council on the Lewiston Capital Improvement Plan (LCIP).

Chairman Cox opened the public hearing. No members of the public spoke and the hearing was closed.

Chairman Cox noted that the questions the board had submitted were answered by Department Directors and asked if there were any questions, which there were none. She then called on board members to share their three recommendations for projects to be cut or deferred and their three highest priority projects to be kept. The board went member by member and shared their three recommendations for cuts.

Michael Marcotte stated there is a debt problem, and the LCIP proposal is too much. He recommended eliminating the Police Take Home Vehicles. Despite supporting it in the past, he flagged the Lisbon Street Fire Station as well and the Educational Space for Growing Enrollments. Adding these three together they total 17 million which is still nowhere near the 80% rule requirement.

Penthea Burns attended the last council meeting where there was a presentation from the auditor who said not to defer maintenance. She has taken that to heart and found the work of recommending cuts challenging. She recommended keeping in water, sewer, or things with good match dollars from other sources. She recommends either cut or phase in the Take Home Vehicles and eliminate the Educational Space for Growing Enrollments. Felt reluctant to eliminate the Fire Station so instead recommended eliminating the Open Spaces.

Zoë Lidstrom pushed back on the police take home vehicles to see if there is another creative way to get that funded other than doing it one time. Lighting upgrades at the Public Schools if the current lights are still functional. Water meter division replacement – thinking that cost savings would even out over accounts with some less and some more.

Lucy Bisson would eliminate the Police Take Home Vehicle Program - stated we don't have 65 police officers, why do we need 65 vehicles now? She read a newspaper article and her understanding from the Superintendent's statements is that the Education Space for New Enrollments is being

proposed for administration, she would cut that. She had a question on the section in Ward 1 behind the hospital and the roads there are terrible. She is wondering why they aren't scheduled for replacement. That neighborhood is being neglected. She wants to reassign money in the Street Maintenance section to other streets. What is the public works formula? There was some general discussion on road maintenance, Michael Marcotte would like to see a column that states what year a road was last done.

Amy Smith prioritized taking care of what we already have over adding new facilities. She agreed with others the Fire Station could be deferred. Regarding the Police Take Home Vehicle Program we own a lot of vehicles across all the departments and what are the operational costs associated with these, and the LCIP is very light on this information. Many municipalities lease their vehicles, and all the maintenance is included, interested in this. The last item she would cut is the Educational Space for Growing Enrollments as it doesn't have much detail provided.

Alexander Pine stated he agreed with cutting the Educational Space for Growing Enrollments, it feels like we are being asked to provide funding before there is any information about what it will be. Regarding paving, there are a lot of streets in poor condition in the city, his recommendation that anything that is a dead-end street would get low prioritization as it only provides the one use, not connection. He saw the presentation on the Police Vehicle program, and he thinks scaling it down based on the number of people and focusing on more people on patrol and prioritizing vehicles. Ax city-wide wayfinding signs, investing in character of places is more important.

Shanna Cox was most concerned with Take Home Vehicle Program for Police, she isn't against it, but she thinks it sounds like a great pilot program and that it could be scaled over a number of years. Educational Space for Growing Enrollment, the school department is having listening sessions coming up and is partly to determine what people would want to see 287 Main Street used for. She would push out the years for funding. She loves the Fire Department but in the time she's on the board they have replaced two fire stations. She grew up in an EMS and Fire family, and she appreciates what they do, but the pace of upgrade is really fast paced for a community of our size. She would like to see an explanation of how many fire stations we need now versus seventy years ago considering the fire suppression systems we now have.

Shanna Cox noted there were universal comments from the board on Police Take Home Vehicles, she saw almost universal questioning of Education Space with universal questions on School Department budget. The Lisbon Street Fire Station and Street Maintenance also had several comments. Shanna did want to raise the comment of how important it is that we maintain what we already have. She said this board has typically wanted to see

proactive planning from the Departments and in her seven years this is the first time the School Board has provided numbers five years out. She complimented the school department for its efforts. She spoke of two areas of consistent investment being canal improvements and the Riverfront Island Master Plan. She stated that year after year investments in these areas work towards intentional economic development. She said the size of the request is disproportionate to the available resources, which is challenging. She said she can't help but wonder if the reason they keep seeing this is because the process sets us up for failure. She would like to see the newish City Administrator to design a process and a budget that prioritizes staying within the bond goal and leads directors and their staff to do so as well. Penthea Burns stated that she heard someone at a council meeting talking about not being able to keep up with grant writing. Penthea then said she would like to see a permanent dedicated position to look at grant opportunities as well as public and private partnerships. Amy Smith had a process comment, stating that there isn't transparency in when projects happen or get finished. She believes it would be helpful if the public was kept informed of when to see tangible results as a result of these investments. Shanna said there are years when they see an item listed as the most important thing in a department budget and it doesn't get funded and then this super critical thing doesn't show up on future LCIP's. If it was very important and they found a way to put it into the operating budget that was not conveyed to the Planning Board, which is part of what makes this feel like a game which is unfortunate for everyone. Michael Marcotte agreed and wants to know if the Public Works Wash Station has happened, it's not in the LCIP. Did it get delayed or has it happened? He suggested that nine months into the year there is a process that shows what got built, what got shelved, get separated into different years, etc.

Michael Marcotte wanted to make a point that maintenance should be in the operating budget, but a 6-million-dollar number won't fit into that.

The board then clarified what they would want preserved:

Alexander Pine – Continental Mill TIFF, Sunnyside Park renovations and ADA Upgrades for the schools.

Amy Smith – RIMP Implementation, Library HVAC system, HS & MS roofs.

Lucy Bisson – RIMP Implementation, School Maintenance items: ADA, roofs, etc., and the library.

Zoë Lidstrom – Continental Mill TIFF, Sunnyside Trails next year, School District bathrooms.

Penthea Burns – Water main replacement, new roofs on the schools, and Library HVAC.

Michael Marcotte – Continental Mill TIFF, Lowell Street Development TIFF, MDOT locally administered 3 state funded pedestrian improvements. Riverfront Island Implementation is not city funded so that should be kept in.

He feels the Wayfinding project should be kept in as he believes that this project would benefit greatly from a grant writer.

Shanna Cox – supports all the TIFF's, all the Parks, MDOT projects.

Shanna Cox stated that when presented with a big book such as the LCIP, it is easy to go line by line and department by department while losing some of the value of what the spend is. She said it is not always the value of the dollars, it is the value of the cost of not doing it, the additional revenue that can come from making that investment. The TIFF's and parks will be investments, not expenses, in terms of economic development. She suggested that there would be much opportunity in developing relationships with the private sector who would believe in supporting our parks that are akin to businesses, employers or large institutions who have a vested interest in maintaining, contributing to or having naming rights in the park.

Shanna recapped the Board's projects recommended to be preserved as the TIFF's, parks, and MDOT match projects. She stated that the board wants to leverage dollars, creating opportunities for future return on investment. Big shout out to the water mains that keep the city working.

Shanna thanked the board for being clear and planful instead of in a reactive state, and to the Department Heads for answering their questions.

The following motion was made:

MOTION: by **Lucy Bisson** to make a motion pursuant to Article VII, Section 4(e) of the Zoning and Land Use Code to send a favorable recommendation for the City Council's consideration of the adoption of the FY 2027 Lewiston Capital Improvement Program with the suggestions for deletions and acceptances made during discussion. Second by **Michael Marcotte**.

Michael Marcotte offered a friendly amendment to add the word guidance as well as the deletions and acceptance. Lucy accepted the amendment.

Michael Marcotte requested that the board reiterate/ clarify what the recommended deletions, acceptances, and guidance is that they are sending to council.

The board then clarified:

That their recommendation for deletions from the plan saw universal mention of the Police Take Home Vehicle Program, almost universal questioning of the new Educational Space with universal questioning of School Budget items, and the Lisbon Street Fire Station and Street Maintenance also had a number

of comments. Shanna raised up one of the board members' comments that we need to maintain what we have.

Shanna summarized the board's recommendations for high priority items to fund stating there was a lot of agreement on funding the TIFF's, Parks, and MDOT projects. This Planning Board sees the investment of leveraging expenses where it either leverages outside dollars or the investment of that expense creates the opportunity for future return on that investment with development and increased economic activity. A big shout out to the water mains that keep life working. Michael Marcotte added guidance to please get as close to the debt reduction plan as possible.

The board discussed whether a new motion is required.

The following motion was made:

MOTION: by **Shanna Cox** pursuant to Article VII, Section 4(e) of the Zoning and Land Use Code to send a favorable recommendation for the City Council's consideration of the adoption of the FY 2027 Lewiston Capital Improvement Program with the specific recommendations from this board that cuts be considered from the take home vehicles, the educational space and/or the school budget, as well as consideration of the street maintenance and the new Fire Station and that they further recommend the preservation of investments into both TIFF's and parks, as well as any place where the expense will leverage additional dollars from other means specifically calling out the MDOT areas for preservation. They ask that the council reflect the guidance given throughout their deliberation sessions including tonight and that specifically the council does its best to aim for adherence to the debt reduction policy.

Lucy Bisson stated she couldn't accept this as an amendment as it was phrased as a new motion. Shanna called a vote on the first motion with its first friendly amendment.

VOTED: 0 – 7 (Failed)

Shanna Cox proposed the new motion

The following motion was made:

MOTION: by **Shanna Cox** pursuant to Article VII, Section 4(e) of the Zoning and Land Use Code to send a favorable recommendation for the City Council's consideration of the adoption of the FY 2027 Lewiston Capital Improvement Program with the specific recommendations from this board that cuts be considered from the take home vehicles, the educational space and/or the school budget, as well as consideration of the street maintenance and the new Fire Station and that they further recommend the preservation of investments into both TIFF's and parks, as well as any place where the expense will leverage additional dollars from other means specifically calling out the MDOT areas for preservation. They ask that the council reflect the guidance given throughout their deliberation sessions including tonight and that specifically the council does its best to aim for adherence to the debt reduction policy Second by **Lucy Bisson**.

VOTED: 7 – 0 (passed)

Michael Marcotte thanked everyone.

V. OTHER BUSINESS:

- a) Discussion on city council comments regarding Article XI amendments (meeting held 2/3/2026).

Shelley Norton provided a review for the board.

Alexander Pine sees two paths on this one – he doesn't like doing an average height like was suggested by Councilor David Chittim, they already have that for density which is very confusing. He thinks it could be worded so the principal structure would need to be 20 feet in height, he is familiar with shorter buildings in the neighborhood and thinks they are out of place. He feels that accessory structures, ADUs or additions could be one story.

Lucy doesn't like the idea of not having a minimum for the main structure because a short building is not going to fit in the neighborhood. She still thinks an ADU should be proportional to the neighborhood. Prefers an average to no minimum at all.

Shanna suggested they remove it for now and put the rest of the ordinance update forward to council. She asked for a straw poll and the yes votes were Alex, Amy, Shanna, Lucy, Zoe, Penthea (majority). Shanna raised up the lack of differentiation between accessory structures and primary structures,

and maybe an ADU hits $\frac{3}{4}$ of the requirement. Some ideas for future discussion.

- b) Amendment to the Planning Board Handbook regarding abutter notices and cancelled meetings.

Lucy Bisson supports making a clarification that if a meeting is cancelled additional notices don't need to be sent.

Lucy stated she would be willing to make a motion. Michael does not agree with this. Abutters will have no idea when it is being rescheduled. Alexander asked if there was a phone number on the abutter's notice and staff answered yes there was. Penthea asked for all info to go into the abutter notice. Shanna asked how this language addresses the agenda item and inquired if it is the expectation that the neighbor would have been at the meeting and it is their responsibility to follow up. The board agreed to update the language tonight for passage. Zoë reviewed all reviewed and proposed changes.

The following motion was made:

MOTION: by **Lucy Bisson** to accept all grammatical and procedural changes to the Planning Board Handbook, Section C, Notice to Abutters. Second by **Penthea Burns**.

VOTED: 7-1 (**Passed. Michael Marcotte Opposed**)

Shanna Cox stated that going forward the board will inquire why a no vote was given by a board member only when that agenda item will be presented as a recommendation to the City Council. Michael Marcotte stated that anyone can give their thoughts for the minutes.

VI. READING OF MINUTES:

The following motion was made:

MOTION: by **Lucy Bisson** to reconsider and accept the December 22, 2025, minutes. Second by **Alexander Pine**.

VOTED: 7-0 (**Passed**)

The following motion was made:

MOTION: by **Lucy Bisson** to adopt the January 12, 2026, draft minutes as presented. Second by **Alexander Pine**.

VOTED: 7-0 (**Passed**)

Michael Marcotte said he thought the vote for the December 22, 2025 minutes was just to reconsider the minutes.

Michael Marcotte stated that anybody has the right to give input if they want to see their thoughts in the meetings minutes. He stated that when he reviewed the minutes, he found that while he gave his reasoning for a no vote, the minutes only stated that he shared his opinion but did not provide the actual details and that was something that went to council.

VII. ADJOURNMENT: The following motion was made to adjourn.

MOTION: by **Lucy Bisson** that this meeting adjourns at 7:20 p.m.

Second by **Zoë Lidstrom**.

VOTED: 7-0 (Passed)

The next regularly scheduled meeting is Monday, February 23, 2026, at 5:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Zoë Lidstrom" followed by a circled "H".

Zoë Lidstrom, Secretary