



City of Lowell - Planning Board

Planning Board Meeting Minutes

Monday, March 2, 2026, 6:30 p.m.
City Council Chambers, 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

Chairman Linnehan
Vice Chair Frechette
Member Cheng
Member Tenczar
Member Walker
Associate Member Sar

Members Absent

Associate Member Cardoso Silva

Others Present

Mary Brundage, Associate Planner

A quorum of the Board was present. Chairman Linnehan called the meeting to order at 6: 31 PM

I. Minutes for Approval

2/2/2026

T. Linnehan motioned to approve. G. Frechette seconded. Motion passed unanimously, (5-0).

II. Continued Business

Site Plan Review - 558 Gorham Street, 01852

The Lowell Planning Board will hold a public hearing to hear all interested persons relative to an application by NLK Homes LLC to construct one triplex and one duplex (a total of 5 units) at 558 Gorham Street. The subject property is located in the Urban Mixed Use (UMU) zoning district. The proposal

requires Site Plan Review per Section 11.4.2 of the Lowell Zoning Ordinance for a development with more than three units, and Special Permit approval per Section 11.3.2 for four to six dwelling units on a single lot in the UMU zone.

On Behalf:

Kasey Ferreria, Howard Stein Hudson, Applicant's Representative

K. Ferreria reviewed the changes made to the plan since the last meeting. He explained that the duplex garages will not physically change but they will now be denoted as one car garages, not two car garage. In doing so, one surface parking space needed to be made up to achieve the required 10 parking spaces. A space was added adjacent to Unit 3. It is anticipated that units 4 and 5 would use the two surface parking spaces since they won't have the dedicated two garage parking spaces. K. Ferreira also discussed the revised landscaping plan and snow storage to accommodate the surface parking space. Also, a sidewalk was included that goes around the triplex to get to the rear door in the middle of the triplex.

Speaking in Favor:

None

Speaking in Opposition:

None

Discussion:

G. Frechette stated that is an interesting solution to the concerns that the Board had. He asked if the garages could fit two smaller cars that conceivably there could be extra parking spots on that site. K. Ferriera confirmed that would be the case and not using the two car garage spaces to meet the parking requirements. G. Frechette asked for some clarification on the architectural plans for the final submittal. K. Ferriera confirmed that the plans submitted on January 11th have remained the same since there were no changes to the architectural except for the denotation for the one-car garage. The site plans were updated and dated February 22nd.

C. Cheng agreed that it was an interesting solution. He asked if the exits to the duplex open on the side in the front and there are no stairwells or staircases on the back of the building. K. Ferriera confirmed that was correct. C. Cheng said that he thinks all the previous issues have been addressed and no further questions.

D. Tenczar stated he had the same concerns same as the last hearing and that he like the three-unit not the two unit. He felt that four units was the right number of units for that site. He had concerns about snow storage and trash removal.

L. Walker appreciated the updates to the project and overall thinks the project is good for the neighborhood. She stated that there it appears to be five feet less between the triplex and duplex from the previous plan and questioned whether a swept path analysis was done for this iteration of the plan. K. Ferriera confirmed that there was the same amount of room as the previous plan. He also confirmed that the access for fire department that was approved has remained the same.

T. Sar stated he agreed with D. Tenczar that the lot is too small of a space for five units.

T. Linnehan stated the concerns regarding the fire department and the garage has been addressed. He stated that the three unit and one unit totaling four units has already been approved and the application is for the additional extra unit.

G. Frechette commented that looking at the zoning requirements that the site plan review is specific whereas the special permit has more latitude. One of the concerns the Board had exercising that latitude was the turning into the parking garages for the duplex. Looking at the dimensional requirements of the zone, the minimum lot area requirement is 3400 SF. And the applicant is proposing 10,340 SF. The minimum lot area per dwelling unit is 1,000 SF and the applicant is proposing 2,068 SF. Minimum frontage is 55 feet and the applicant is proposing 110 feet. The minimum front yard setback is 6 ft and is proposed plan complies with that. The side yard setbacks also exceed what is required. The parking requirement of 10 spaces is also met. The zoning requirements have all been met. The concern was the layout with the parking and getting two cars into the garages and that's not what is now being proposed. He stated that based on the reconfiguration and architectural renderings that it was a good addition.

K. Ferreira added that the required parking aisle is 22 feet and that an additional 13 feet is provided so the swept path for each vehicle getting in and out is plenty.

C. Cheng asked about the striping to denote no parking zones. K. Ferreira answered that there not going to denote the no parking because the space the fire truck needs is the 22-foot aisle. The only striping that will be done is to denote the one parking space adjacent to unit number 5.

K. Ferreira that is up to the HOA to enforce not to block the fire access. He stated he did not want to discourage users, especially the unit 5 owner to park their vehicle in front of their own garage and out of the drive aisle.

T. Linnehan stated that the main concerns have been addressed and does not have an issue with approving the site plan and special permit.

Motion:

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

1. The development will have private trash pick-up.
2. Snow must be removed from the site in extreme snow conditions not to eliminate any parking spots as a result from accumulated snow.
3. The HOA bylaws will state that fire access cannot be blocked
4. The applicant will work with wastewater and water departments on their comments regarding the existing conditions video.

C. Cheng seconded. Motion passed (4-1), with D. Tenczar opposing.

T. Linnehan motioned to approve the Special Permit with the following conditions:

1. The development will have private trash pick-up.
2. Snow must be removed from the site in extreme snow conditions not to eliminate any parking spots as a result from accumulated snow.
3. The HOA bylaws will state that fire access cannot be blocked
4. The applicant will work with wastewater and water departments on their comments regarding the existing conditions video.

C. Cheng seconded. Motion passed (4-1), with D. Tenczar opposing.

Motion:

III. New Business

Public Shade Tree Hearing – 375 Merrimack Street and 652 Merrimack Street, 01852

In Accordance with MGL Ch. 87.5 and the Chapter 260 of the Lowell Code of Ordinances, the Lowell Planning Board will hold a public hearing to hear all interested persons about the proposed removal of nine (9) trees in the vicinity of 375 Merrimack Street with approximate DBHs of 12", 16", 6", 4" and 1" and one (1) tree at 652 Merrimack Street with a DBH of 6". These trees are to be replaced by twenty-two (22) new trees. The removal of these trees is necessary to provide safer pedestrian crossings, updated bus stops and shelters, and bicycle infrastructure.

On Behalf:

Elizabeth Oltman, City of Lowell Transportation Engineer

E. Oltman explained that there will be a removal of shade nine trees in front of City Hall to be replaced by 14 new trees and the removal of one 6-inch tree at the intersection of Merrimack St. and Cabot St. to be replaced by 8 new trees. Both projects are designed to reset the sidewalks to improve pedestrian crossings and pedestrian experience on the streets. The curbing will be reset so that the current drainage issues will be resolved.

Speaking in Favor:

None

Speaking in Opposition:

None

Discussion:

L. Walker stated that she is rarely in favor of tree removal however when you look at the reasons for ADA compliance, bus stops and bike storages that it is needed. If you want people to frequent downtown, it's important. She appreciated the plan showing where the planting of new trees will go.

D. Tenczar also appreciated the replanting plan. He questioned why the trees would need to actually come out. E. Oltman responded that in a lot of the locations where the road has been resurfaced or the way the road or curb has been settled, there is no curb reveal which is the main reason for the water issues and ponding on the ADA ramps causing icing along the curb line. Basically, everything has to be pulled out between the building and the curb to reset the curb and reapply the sidewalk to its' required depth. Also, some of the trees were not the best trees for that location. The plan calls for removing those trees and putting trees that respond better to the urban environment. D. Tenczar asked what trees are being put in. E. Oltman explained that they want trees that will go down instead of out. When the trees are replanted, they'll make sure that they take out enough soil so that the tree can establish itself and the roots will go down as opposed to underneath the sidewalk and pop up the sidewalk.

C. Cheng noted that at some of the bike ramps, the trees are currently in the way and that City is planning to extend the curb further out from the building to accommodate. E. Oltman confirmed that was correct. C. Cheng concur with other members and appreciated the replanting of the trees.

T. Linnehan stated he was in favor.

Motion:

T. Linnehan motioned to approve. J. Frechette seconded. The motion passed unanimously, (5-0).

Data Center Moratorium

In accordance with M.G.L. Chapter 40A, Section 5, the Lowell Planning Board will hold a Public Hearing to hear all interested persons relative to an ordinance to amend "The Code of Ordinances City of Lowell, Massachusetts," with respect to Chapter 290, thereof entitled "Lowell Zoning Code" by amending Article II "Definition" to add a definition for 'Data Centers', amending Article VII "Special Regulations" by inserting a new Section 7.11 creating a 360 day moratorium on the development of data centers, and amending Article XII "Table of Uses" by adding a 'Data Centers' use that is prohibited in all zones.

On Behalf:

T. Linnehan explained that this before the Board to make a favorable or non-favorable, non-binding recommendation back to City Council and City Council has the ultimate authority to approve this or not. He read the proposed amendments to the Lowell Zoning Code in regard to the data center moratorium.

Speaking in Favor:

Jake Forkes – 36 Iowa Street

J. Forkes stated that he is an abutter on the southside of a big data center and he has come before the Board many times. He stated that diesel engines have popped up where they are not supposed to be. He stated that the back gate that's not supposed to be blocked is blocked. He expressed concerns about fire access. He encouraged the Board to look into data on health impacts on living next to data centers. He also stated concerns about increased electricity bills and denigration of the neighborhood. He emphasized the need for significant guard rails be put in place for data centers and that he is in support of the moratorium.

Belinda Juron, 109 Mansur Street.

B. Juron stated that she is speaking as a resident and former engineer and lawyer who wants what's best for the City including economic development and a safe place for our neighbors. She stated that the moratorium can't be overly broad as it can struck down by courts and may not attract the kind of businesses and jobs we want. Also don't want to be too narrow or it won't protect the residents. She mentioned that the proposed definition will inadvertently prohibit any commercial enterprise, that is any business that houses computers. As written, as long as the intended primary use of the building is commercial then if it houses computers, it would be a prohibited data center. That would capture anything from a bank to a small business that has several PCs. She suggested a change to the definition to tie the commercial to the computers. She offered the definition of the operation of buildings whose primary intended use is the is the operation of equipment for large-scale digital data processing or computational workloads and whose operation requires unusually high electrical loads and heat dissipation capacity relative to conventional data centers and with a definition for what a conventional data center is. B. Juron stated that a thorough and thoughtful process is needed to get community input to buffer the residents from the harmful impacts while ensuring a strong tax base for future growth. She said that we can learn from other regions of the country who are wrestling with the same issues such as Virginia and northeast Pennsylvania.

Jacqueline Coles, 7 Bourne Street

J. Coles stated that she was part of the group, Honest Future for Lowell and is in support of the moratorium.

Mary Wambui, 668 Princeton Boulevard

M. Wambui stated that she is in support of the moratorium. She mentioned that the negative impacts of data center are not new. That while we have examples from places like Virginia, there are residents here who have their stories to tell. She stated that the most immediate threat is the diesel fuel and that we need the pause to conduct a comprehensive study on fire safety and other impacts. She mentioned that the moratorium is necessary to prevent further expansion by stealth property acquisition. She emphasized that it is important for the City to perform its' due diligence to prevent uncoordinated development. She also mentioned that the City has given the Markley group a \$70 million tax break and we need to balance what is being called economic development. She also questioned how much energy is being consumed and how that effects the residents' electric bills. She asked the Planning Board to support the moratorium and build policy on responsible planning and not reactive policy.

Eileen Castle, 64 Otis Street

E. Castle stated that there are two cooling towers next to her house although one was approved. She stated that the neighborhood has been trying to fight this fight so that they don't get sick or have fires and children can walk around without worrying about they inhale. She emphasized that it is up to the City to stop some of this. She implored the Board to think about the needs of the citizens versus big business.

Randall Snead, 63 Otis Street

R. Snead stated that he was in favor of the moratorium mainly because when data centers first came to Lowell eleven years ago that City was not fully aware of the impact of a data center might be when the original plan was approved. He stated that going through with this moratorium and getting the proper guidelines that Lowell can be the benchmark.

Christine Crutcher, 1975 Middlesex Street, #7.

C. Crutcher stated that she is here as a resident and volunteer at 350 Mass Lowell which is a climate action, climate justice group. She stated that Lowell does not have zoning regulations specific to data centers even though these facilities have major impacts on electricity, water and public safety infrastructure. That data centers require enormous amounts of energy and often rely on diesel backup generators which increase greenhouse gas emissions and directly contributes to climate change at the local level. That means more air pollution in a city with already high asthma rates and residents vulnerable to poor air quality. These facilities are not typical industrial uses and allowing them without clear rules puts infrastructure and public health at risk. A temporary moratorium would allow time for the City to study climate, health and infrastructure impacts and create thoughtful regulations that protects residents and ensures development aligns with Lowell's long-term goals.

Alex Solange, 15 & 21 Robinson Street,

A. Solange stated that he was here in support of the moratorium and Honest Future for Lowell. He felt that Markley has ignored their concerns. He stated that he does not like to have 27 generators next to his house and that the trees have been dying on his property. He expressed concerns about his health and concerns for the school in the neighborhood. He said that there are other technologies like solar and Tesla batteries that could be used for fuel. He also expressed concerns about the water that is being used and air quality.

Nancy Fortes, 36 Iowa Street

N. Fortes thinks the moratorium is a start. She stated that the four generators were not supposed to be on the southside where she lives. She commented that there are smoke and fumes coming from those generators. She expressed the need for regulations.

Sean McDonough, 61 Market Street

S. McDonough stated the Lowell is not the only community that is facing the ongoing issues with data centers. Everett is also considering a similar moratorium. He mentioned that Lowell was an early adopter to data centers and is considered a cautionary tale in communities around Massachusetts. He expressed concerns about water quality, electric rates and neighborhood impact. Need the time to know what rules are needed in place and use Lowell as our own example. He asked if the definitions would hold up in court and asked to the Board to use their judgement.

Kim Scott, 27 Commonwealth Avenue

K. Scott stated it is time to take a pause and that the rise of data centers has taken us by surprise. She mentioned that a brief moratorium would allow the City to review adequate locations and the infrastructure to support them, to review impacts on electric and water rates, noise requirements and buffers.

Michaela Hondres-McCarthy, 618 Stevens Street

M. Hondres-McCarthy stated that she is in support of the moratorium. She stated that it will give the City a chance to take offensive not a reactive stance and also allow the City to consider economic growth opportunities not at the expense of neighbors. It would give a chance to explore bringing in their own clean energy to mitigate the negative effects of data centers.

Speaking in Opposition:

None

Discussion:

J. Frechette thanked everyone for coming out and stated that this is a non-binding recommendation from this Board that would go to City Council. He encouraged people to speak at the City Council meeting. He recognized that they have struggled with this issue for some time. He stated with AI and cloud data is developing faster than we can fathom at this point. He commented that the cloud is not an arbitrary place but is a big place with a lot of servers that requires a lot of cooling. Municipalities are just starting to understand the demand on the infrastructure within their communities. He stated that if there is not something in place in zoning to address a certain issue, a moratorium would hold up because you are asking to have the time to actually develop the zoning requirements and guidelines. He stated that clearly the zoning code does not have anything that addresses data centers. He said that the moratorium is needed for the City as a whole. He reviewed the comment memo from DPD and all the City departments from the last proposal from the Markley group and what was stated at that time. He mentioned that they needed to be a greater concern from a fire perspective. He mentioned that the air quality is outside the prevue of the Board. The Site Plan review does not give the Board a lot of latitude. A Special Permit would give a bit more flexibility. He would have liked to see a presentation from the City. He questioned whether the current wording of the ordinance would also prevent any further expansion of existing data centers and would like that addressed. He mentioned that the Table of Uses listed under 12.9 (w) able in Section 3 of the proposed ordinance needs to include all the zoning districts. He also wanted the language of the definition of the data center to be reworded to state that the

buildings or series of buildings whose primary intended use is the commercial housing operation or support...instead of with the intended primary use being commercial... This is to eliminate banking or other commercial uses that have a data storage from being captured in that definition of data centers.

C. Cheng was also seeking more information from DPD. He heard the public concerns about Markley but does not change the existing approval. He said that the moratorium would address forward looking issues. He stated that the existing concerns with non-compliance should be raised to an enforcement agency to make sure the landowners comply with what was approved and, in the zoning ordinance. He shared G. Frechette's comments about the data center's impacts that are not addressed in the current zoning ordinance. He agreed on the narrowing of the definition of the data center. He mentioned that permits that Markley has from DEP is that the generators were for only emergency uses. He also mentioned that there should be permits related to the water quality and encouraged neighbors to check with DEP. The moratorium will help deal with newcomers with data centers.

D. Tenczar also thanked everyone for coming out and expressed the need for voices to be heard. He stated that this a chance to stop and figure out to proceed. That we didn't know about the problems caused by data center 11 years ago. He stated that the enforcement of these regulations also needs to be looked at. A lot of the issues regarding noise, air and water are regulated by the State but the City can set their own standards.

L. Walker stated that the moratorium is a forward-thinking initiative and it's important to assess the impact of data centers on energy infrastructure, wattage consumption, health concerns such as emissions and drinking water and effect on rate payers. She is also hopeful to see something done at the State level like Vermont that introduced a five-year moratorium. Perhaps there could be a focus on water usage.

T. Sar stated that he is in favor and agreed about having enforcement.

T. Linnehan stated that he was in favor and was looking at the what the planning staff and other City departments can do for recommendations regarding impact on power, water, sewage and capacity limitations as well as noise and potential legal implications. Also important is the enforcement of the regulations. He said that the main part would be for DPD to develop a timetable back to City Council for a new ordinance and the verbiage be very clear and precise. He asked when this comes before Council. M. Brundage confirmed it would March 10th.

J. Frechette mentioned that separate from the zoning that there needs to be some sort of accountability as to how to enforce. He also stated that community agreements need to be looked at as far what these businesses are going to bring into the community.

Motion:

G. Frechette motioned to recommend a positive recommendation to the Lowell City Council to adopt the proposed moratorium with the following considerations:

1. The definition of 'Data Centers' should be adjusted to state, "A building or series of buildings where the primary intended use is the commercial housing, operation, or support of high-performance servers, storage systems, networking equipment, and related computing infrastructure and equipment necessary for storing, processing, and distributing data and applications" to ensure other commercial uses are not included in the definition;

2. Clearly state whether the intended purpose of the amendment is to include the expansion of existing data centers in the moratorium in Section 2.2.
3. The use in the Table of Uses be listed under 12.9 (w) in the Table of Industrial Uses and shall include all zoning districts.
4. The Council should explore better provisions for enforcement for any conditions in place on Data Centers; and
5. Consider requiring Community Benefit Agreements for Data Centers.

D. Tenczar seconded. The motion passed unanimously, (5-0).

IV. Other Business

G. Frechette mentioned that there will be a joint meeting with the zoning sub-committee and the neighborhood subcommittee in City Council Chambers on Notice March 5th at 6 PM. This would be the review of the existing zoning codes for the City.

G. Frechette provided an update on the Rourke Bridge. There is continued construction of the temporary access platforms on the north side of the Merrimack River and preparing the existing work zone on the south side. The cranes, barges and construction equipment have been mobilized on the north side and into the Merrimack River. Test borings on the river have been conducted at future pier locations. There has been selective tree removal on Middlesex Street and Wood Street extensions to support utility relocation. National Grid will relocate the electrical utilities along the north side of Pawtucket Boulevard at the Bridge. He mentioned that there will be a motion by Mayor Gitschier to place a livestream camera on the site so the progression can be monitored.

D. Tenczar mentioned that Community Preservation Committee will be meeting on March 5th to go over the applications for the community preservation funds and make recommendations to the City Council.

V. Further Comments from Planning Board Members

T. Linnehan reminded the public that there is an election tomorrow for the new state local senator.

VI. Adjournment

T. Linnehan motioned to adjourn. D. Tenczar seconded. The motion passed unanimously, (5-0). The time was 8:18 PM.