

**LOWELL HISTORIC BOARD
MINUTES
Mayor's Reception Room, Lowell City Hall
April 13, 2026 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: George Villaras, Chair, Vice Chair Jeffrey Harris, Troy Depeiza, Aurora Erickson, Gray Fitzsimons, Lucia Walker

Members Absent: Deborah Belanger, and Yovani Baez-Rose

Others Present: Stephen Stowell, Administrator

The following represents the actions taken by the Historic Board at the 4/13/26 meeting.

Chair Villaras called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m.

1. PUBLIC HEARINGS

A. DLHD-26-40: 225 and 259 Middlesex Street

The former Appleton Mfg. Co. Turbine House (ca. 1915). Application for a Historic Permit by the Lowell Community Charter Public School for demolition, smokestack height reduction, construction of a new athletic and community center, and associated site improvements pursuant to the Lowell Historic District Act (Chapter 566, Acts of 1983).

On Behalf:

Nick Leonardos, Applicant

Robert Gignac, Applicant

R. Gignac explained the proposal to demolish the turbine house, reduce the height of the smokestack, and construct a new athletic and community center. R. Gignac said the smokestack reduction is due to structural and safety concerns. R. Gignac said the design has been revised to retain the maximum amount possible of the smokestack and documented structural issues with the smokestack. R. Gignac said the revised plans improve the streetscape. R. Gignac said the project contributes positively to the Historic District.

Laurie Coles, Applicant's Architect

L. Coles explained the existing conditions for the site. L. Coles said the existing site is underutilized. L. Coles said the proposal the new structure will be tied into the existing mill building and an elevator will be added. L. Coles said a new play area and court is being proposed as well as a new entrance to the school via the athletic center. L. Coles explained the proposed elevations. L. Coles said the main lobby and entrance area will have glass windows.

Andrea, Applicant's Architect

Andrea explained the proposed building materials. Andrea said the base is a decorative CMU material, and the majority of the upper building will be insulated metal wall panels using colonial red, and grays. Andrea said they

want to use similar color bricks on the brick portion but not match the existing mill building exactly. Andrea explained the design.

Mike Hughes, Applicant's Representative

In Favor:

None

In Opposition:

None

Discussion:

G. Fitzsimons asked how the 30 ft height for the preserved section of the smokestack was determined. M. Hughes said different heights were analyzed and as the smokestack is lowered the stack becomes more susceptible to earthquakes and similar stresses. M. Hughes said 30 ft is a good spot for height and stability based on their analysis. G. Fitzsimons said the 30 ft is roughly where a belt course is located. M. Hughes said there is lead flashing.

J. Harris asked what type of work will need to be done to the remaining smokestack to retain it. M. Hughes said they are preparing repair documents for the remaining portion and said it will be repointed, structural work will be done and a cap will be added to prevent water getting inside.

T. Depeiza said the design is improved and complimented the design of the building.

A. Erikson said there is general concern with removing a smokestack. A. Erikson said she is unsure whether the applicant has made the case that the smokestack needs to come down due to safety. A. Erikson said she is unsure whether the smokestack or smokestacks in general are a hazard. A. Erikson said she is unsure whether the concern is the safety or the cost to rehab the smokestack. A. Erikson said she is unsure she has heard a case as to why the Turbine Building needs to be removed. A. Erikson requested info on why the Turbine Building is unsafe or cannot be reused.

R. Gignac said the Turbine Building is unsafe, the windows are board up and there are no lights. R. Gignac said there is significant water damage and has animals living inside. R. Gignac said the goal is to save the turbine itself. R. Gignac said the smokestack is structurally unsafe, and said it wasn't their initial intent to remove the smokestack, and said he wishes the smokestack was carved out of the deal. R. Gignac said they sought the cost for repointing, but said this would not make the smokestack safer.

G. Fitzsimons asked if there have been any discussions with the National Park Service about documenting the smokestack and Turbine Building. R. Gignac said he has not had these conversations, but an acceptable condition would be providing pictures and survey of the buildings.

S. Stowell provided an update on how other smokestacks were managed on past redevelopment projects. S. Stowell said the Lowell National Park architect does not have concerns with the reduction in height of the smokestack due to the design of the new building. S. Stowell said the park architect agreed the new proposed building is contextually responsible. S. Stowell said photos are included and measured drawings could be added as well.

L. Walker said she has concerns about the removal of the smokestack, but understands why and is happy that 30 ft will remain. L. Walker complimented the design of the building. L. Walker asked if there was room to plant trees around the building. R. Gignac said the building goes to the sidewalk, R. Gignac said there will be some plantings within the site. L. Walker said plantings may help give the building more nature.

J. Harris thanked the applicant for their willingness to work with the Historic Board. J. Harris said the design is improved and complimented the design. J. Harris asked about the metals panels for fencing and asked if it will be the same material as the sign panels. Andrea said this will be the same material. J. Harris asked about the screening above the fencing near the basketball court. Andrea explained the extent of the netting for the basketball court. J. Harris said he has a concern that the height of the screening could block the view of the remaining smokestack. Andrea said the net is transparent. J. Harris recommended a net that is as light, and transparent as possible.

J. Harris recommended the decorative pattern extend along the doors. J. Harris asked how often bus parking will be used. RG said this will be used a few times a week, but not regularly.

G. Fitzsimons asked if this facade will now be viewed as the main entrance, R. Gignac said the main entrance will remain on Jackson St and this will just be the entrance to the athletic center.

S. Stowell said Y. Baez-Rose said her primary concerns were related to the streetscape and she said nothing jumps out to her as a concern.

S. Stowell said quorum is five, and said a vote of five is needed to issue the Historic Permit.

G. Villaras said he is disappointed that the smokestack needs to be removed, but said the applicant addressed concerns, and complimented the design of the building.

Motion:

G. Fitzsimons motioned, seconded by JH, to approve with condition of applicant providing measured documents. Motion passes (5-1) with A. Erikson voting against.

2. MINUTES

Approval of the Minutes of March 9, 2026.

L. Walker motioned to approve the minutes, G. Fitzsimons seconded. The motion passed unanimously, (6-0).

3. OTHER BUSINESS

A. Enforcement/Violations Update

S. Stowell said enforcement with Boost Mobile is ongoing, and the illuminated signs are not allowed.

B. Administrator's Report

S. Stowell said the report is informational, and said the final Doors Open Lowell restaurant partners were finalized. S. Stowell explained the partnership.

G. Villaras noted the Busker Festival is happening the same day as Doors Open Lowell.

S. Stowell said a Preservation Award from Preservation Massachusetts was applied for for the Sun Sign.

S. Stowell said he will be attending the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions Forum.

4. ADJOURNMENT

G. Fitzimons motioned to adjourn, L. Walker seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, (6-0). The time was 6:50pm.