



City of Lowell - Planning Board

Planning Board Meeting Minutes

Monday, June 1, 2026, 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

Chairman Linnehan

Vice Chair Frechette

Member Cheng

Member Walker

Member Tenczar

Associate Member Sar

Members Absent

Associate Member Cardoso Silva

Others Present

Peter Cutrumbes, Assistant Planner

A quorum of the Board was present. Vice Chair Frechette called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM

I. Minutes for Approval

5/18/2026

C. Cheng noted that his last name was spelled wrong. Staff said this will be corrected.

D. Tenczar motioned to approve the minutes. L. Walker seconded. T. Linnehan abstained because he was not at the previous agenda. The vote was unanimous (4-0).

II. Continued Business

Site Plan Review and Special Permit - 130 West Jenness Street, 01851

Boston Gas Company has applied to the Lowell Planning Board for Site Plan Review and Special Permit approval for a proposed natural gas regulator. The property is located in the Suburban Single-Family (SSF) zoning district. The application requires Site Plan Review approval under Section 11.4.2(3) for construction or expansion of any parking lot with more than fourteen spaces or 4,000 square feet of impervious surface and a Special Permit under Article 12 and Section 11.3.1.

C. Cheng and D. Tenczar recused themselves. Associate Member Sar was eligible to vote on this matter.

On Behalf:

Joshua Lee Smith, the representative for the applicant, gave a description of the site locus. The site is bordered by Route 3. There is a dirt path running through the property and it is also in an overhead electric line transmission corridor. They are proposing a natural gas regulator site on this dirt path near the end of West Jenness Street and Carroll Parkway. He showed the proposed plot plan. There will be a paved driveway off of West Jenness Street with concrete buildings on site. This is going to be an unmanned station. There will not be personnel coming in and out every day. In terms of staffing, it is similar to an electric substation. There will only be personnel on site from time to time. There is existing vegetative screening, but the applicant is proposing to add more.

Speaking in Favor:

None

Speaking in Opposition:

None

Discussion:

G. Frechette asked if the facility emanates any noise. J. Lee Smith said the vast majority of the equipment is internally housed. It cannot really be heard. G. Frechette noted that the site is not frequently accessed and is low impact. He likes the vegetation plan. Could the fence be changed to have slats and be more opaque? J. Lee Smith said they may be able to do that. It depends on the height of the fence. It could create a windload issue. The company tried to tuck the site back closer to the highway side to prevent viewing. The site is also constrained by wetlands buffers.

L. Walker asked if there will be any smell emitted from the building. Joe Zagarella, National Grid's Engineer, said no. L. Walker asked about the yellow markers on the plan. J. Zagarella said that is the high pressure line from Tewksbury. The markers are included on the plan just to make the line visible and demonstrate it isn't affecting the project. L. Walker said she is happy that it is not a barbed wire fence. How secure are the buildings themselves though? J. Zagarella said they will be concrete buildings with steel doors that are locked. They are remotely monitored as well. L. Walker asked what would happen if a breach was detected on the property? J. Lee Smith said there are alarms on site that would trigger security staff for the company.

T. Sar asked what will occur at the building that would bring the occasional workers. J. Lee Smith said tasks such as testing and maintenance.

T. Linnehan said there were not any significant staff comments. The project is not high impact. There are no large buildings. National Grid needs the building to keep the utilities intact in the area. T. Linnehan suggested an additional condition that the applicant explore fencing options or added landscaping. J.

Lee Smith said they cannot consider this as a condition of approval because of height and setting issues. T. Sar asked if a typical fence is being proposed. J. Lee Smith said yes. Regarding the fencing, G. Frechette noted that there is no one here in opposition but sometimes neighbors get upset after the fact. Matthew O'Brien, the Outreach Manager for the project, outlined the process. They have sent mailers and also gone door to door to discuss with neighbors. They received no negative feedback. The sign has also been up on the site. Specifically, they spoke to direct abutters who had no concerns. G. Frechette said this made him feel better about the situation.

Motion:

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

1. The applicant shall obtain a Trench Permit from the Engineering Division for the proposed drainage work;
2. The applicant shall obtain a Driveway Permit from the Engineering Division for the proposed paving work; and
3. The applicant shall obtain a Stormwater Permit from the LRWWU.

T. Sar seconded. Motion passed unanimously, (4-0)

G. Frechette to approve the Special Permit with the same conditions as the Site Plan. The motion was seconded by L. Walker and passed unanimously (4-0).

III. New Business

Site Plan Review -225-259 Middlesex Street, 01852

Lowell Community Charter Public School has applied to the Lowell Planning Board for Site Plan review approval to construct an addition to the school at 225-259 Middlesex Street. The addition will include a new gym. The subject property is located in the Downtown Mixed-Use (DMU) zoning district. The proposal requires Site Plan Review approval from the Planning Board per Section 11.4 for a non-residential building greater than 10,000 sq ft.

On Behalf:

Lori Cowles and Andrea Yoder from HMFH Architects, the applicants architectural firm. L. Cowles began by going over the project and staff comments. The subject property is Mill No. 5. The building site is to the south of the building. It is currently a parking lot and turbine building. The school's entrance is on Jackson Street and that is where it will remain. The parking lot will be replaced by a gym and the playground will be expanded. There will also be a basketball court. They are working with National Grid on moving the existing transformer to a new location. City staff asked to pull back the 6 foot fencing at the corner of Middlesex and Canal to meet sight line requirements. They are amenable. Gym connects to the building. They are adding a new elevator to make the building much more accessible. There was a focus on activating the street level. They have put windows by the lobby. The fencing will also have highlighting and depth spelling out the name of the school. They went with a red theme to complement the brick. They are continuing to work with the Historic Board. A. Yoder discussed the materials. They will be incorporating masonry, decorative CMU, and insulated metal wall panels. Color scheme will be red, light gray, and dark gray. This will differentiate it from existing building. Matthew Zeroli, the Civil Engineer for the project spoke. There will be a new water and sewer line. The City's Engineering department requested they upsize to a 6 inch pipe. The stormwater will be handled by 18 plastic chambers buried underground. This will handle the run off from the roof and play area. There will also

be detention under the playground. Engineering asked them to provide info on the existing catch basin next to the playground and confirm if there are any outlets there. The applicant team has tried to check on this, but it is currently blocked by debris. They will make sure there are no illicit connections. Plans will also be slightly redesigned to work around the new transformer location.

Speaking in Favor:

None

Speaking in Opposition:

None

Discussion:

G. Frechette asked if the design changes affect Historic Board approval. L. Walker said the applicant had worked with Steven Stowell. She stated that the opacity of the CMU did give the building the feeling of windows, that the lobby area has windows, and that these helped to activate the street. G. Frechette said he likes the exterior aesthetic treatment of the building, He understands the windows can't be used at street level at gym. He asked if the smokestack coming down. L. Cowles said it is coming down to 30 feet above grade. G. Frechette asked where the shade trees are on the site plan. L. Cowles said there are two trees located by the basketball court.

C. Cheng concurred with G. Frechette's comments. Expressed support for the location of the trees because they are visible from the street. He asked what species of tree will be used. A. Yoder said they are envisioning a deciduous tree that would provide ample shade. C. Cheng asked about the stormwater situation for the lower playground. Would it hold up in a worst case weather scenario? M. Zeroli said the subsoil is very sandy. He believes stormwater would leech into the soil. He did hydrologic calculations to confirm they aren't making the existing situation worse. C. Cheng asked at which stage of construction would they be able to verify the existence of the above referenced illicit connections. M. Zeroli said they plan to clean out the area in a couple weeks and provide information to LRWWU staff.

D. Tenczar said he was surprised by the metal building being proposed in Downtown Lowell, but he thinks it looks great and it was approved by Historic Board. Asked why they are lowering the smokestack. L. Cowles said that a structural assessment showed it was unsafe for kids. D. Tenczar asked if the plan presented tonight is still evolving. L. Cowles said the only thing that is changing is the transformer location. D. Tenczar asked whether the dumpsters will be relocated. A. Yoder confirmed and showed it on the plan. They will be in the same screened area used by the building next door. D. Tenczar expressed support.

L. Walker expressed support.

T. Sar said he knows the school has always wanted this gym. He is glad it is moving forward. Fully in support. Asked when it will be finished. L. Cowles said the end of next year.

T. Linnehan said he was very excited when he saw the project. It will have a positive impact on the area. Happy to support the project as long as they comply with City staff comments. It will be a great addition to the City and to the student's experience.

C. Cheng asked if the dumpsters will sit in the open or if there is there any screening. Robert Gignac (CEO of the school) said the area where the dumpsters will be is being fenced in to provide wooden screening.

Motion:

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

1. The applicant shall obtain stormwater permit from LRWWU addressing any issues from the stormwater team;
2. The applicant shall address Water Department comments;
3. The applicant shall comply with Engineering Department comments; and
4. The applicant shall comply with Fire Department comments; and
5. The applicant shall plant a shade tree in the playground as close to Middlesex St and Canal St as possible.

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

Site Plan Review – 260 High Street, 01852

Quynh Quach has applied to the Lowell Planning Board for Site Plan Review approval to operate an adult day care facility at 260 High Street. The subject property is in the Urban Mixed-Use (UMU) zoning district. The proposal requires a Site Plan Review approval per Section 11.4.2.(7).

On Behalf:

T. Linnehan noted the Board approved this project for its Special Permit at the last meeting. Quynh Quach, the applicant, spoke. Nothing is being changed inside or outside the building. Their goal is to provide an adult day health program. Q. Quach said they are looking forward to answering any questions. She noted staff concerns about employee parking. Q. Quach explained that all employees will be offsite. The space used for parking right now will be used only for drop-off and pickup of attendees. They plan to obtain a “No parking” sign for the time slots when pick up and drop off take place. The bus will only pull forward onto the corner of Andover and High Street. It would not back up into the street.

Speaking in Favor:

None

Speaking in Opposition:

None

Discussion:

G. Frechette noted they received some suggestive language to expand on condition 4 from the Special Permit.

C. Cheng asked about the code analysis from the architect. He would like to know why the change of use would not require a sprinkler system. Q. Quach said the architect said the building is not big enough to require it. LFD fire prevention is going to come down and ensure all safety measures are met. C. Cheng said the Building Commissioner felt differently about sprinklers, and that they should be required. Q. Quach said that architect has offered to speak with Building Commissioner. C. Cheng suggested including a condition to address Building Department comment in the approval.

D. Tenczar noted that the City’s Transportation Engineer said to use the existing parking area as a sort of u-shape to pull in and out. He likes the idea and the project.

L. Walker asked about trash storage and pickup. Trash is going to increase. Q. Quach said trash is going to be picked up by the City on High Street. It will not interfere with participants accessing the site on Andover Street.

T. Sar had no questions.

T. Linnehan said the questions about pulling in and out of the driveway have been helpfully addressed by the Transportation Engineer. Noted they are going to need a license from the Health Department.

G. Frechette asked the applicant to explain again what their parking plan is in regard to pick up drop off. Q. Quach said that she has a handicap ramp in front of the parking. There will be a sign that reserves that area during pickup and drop off hours.

Motion:

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

1. The owner/operator will provide transportation for the clients of adult day care.
2. The adult day care will not exceed 30 clients.
3. Employees of the adult day care must park offsite.
4. The owner/operator will provide assistance in the egress and the entry of the daycare vans. This condition does not impose any legal duty on the part of the owner/operator to enter any City street for the purpose of directing or otherwise blocking traffic. Furthermore, this condition does not provide any agent, servant, or employee of the owner/operator with any actual or apparent authority to direct or otherwise block or restrict city traffic in the same manner as a public employee.
5. The applicant will provide signage to reserve parking spaces for times of drop off and pick up in order to maximize maneuverability of the vans to pull out of the site.
6. The applicant will work with the Building Department implementing an appropriate fire suppression system.

C. Cheng seconded. The vote was unanimous (5-0).

IV. Other Business

V. Further Comments from Planning Board Members

G. Frechette discussed his role on the Lowell Zoning Rewrite Steering Committee. They had the first meeting on May 20. They reviewed the materials from the zoning audit, and were asked to provide additional feedback. They went over some sections staff felt like could be rewritten as they have caused unnecessary issues. There are also some larger questions to discuss. A neighborhood walkthrough of Back Central was discussed. Sean Callahan from the Zoning Board asked if other Zoning Board members wanted to go. G. Frechette said, as the Planning Board will actually vote on the new ordinance, he would

like to get clarification from Law regarding OML on whether other Planning Board members can attend the walk. He also suggested keeping the Council Zoning Subcommittee frequently updated.

D. Tenczar thanked DPD staff for full-sized plans on these projects. If he does not receive full sized plans in the future he will have a hard time voting for or against a petition.

VI. Adjournment

C. Cheng motioned to adjourn. G. Frechette seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 8:09 P.M.