

**LOWELL HISTORIC BOARD
MINUTES
Mayor's Reception Room, Lowell City Hall
July 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: Chair George Villaras, Vice Chair Jeffrey Harris, Yovani Baez-Rose, Troy Depeiza, Aurora Erickson, Deborah Belanger, Gray Fitzsimons, Lucia Walker

Members Absent:

Others Present: Dylan Ricker, Senior Planner

The following represents the actions taken by the Historic Board at the 7/13/26 meeting.

Chair Villaras called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

1. PUBLIC HEARINGS

A. DLHD-26-51: 375 Merrimack Street – Bus Shelter

An application for a Historic Permit has been submitted by City of Lowell. The applicant is seeking to construct a bus shelter at 375 Merrimack Street pursuant to the Lowell Historic District Act (Chapter 566, Acts of 1983).

On Behalf:

Elizabeth Oltman, Applicant

E. Oltman presented the proposed transit shelter. E. Oltman said this is the same design that was used in front of the Market St garage.

In Favor:

None

In Opposition:

None

Discussion:

D. Belanger asked if a transit shelter is being replaced. E. Oltman said there were no existing bus shelters at these stops so they will be brand new. E. Oltman said these will establish formal bus stops with shelters for City Hall.

J. Harris said no site plan was provided showing the exact location of the shelters. E. Oltman said a site plan can be provided and explained the proposed location of the bus shelters. J. Harris asked where on the sidewalk they will be positioned. E. Oltman said they will be on the back of the sidewalk. J. Harris recommended providing a plan showing the location as a condition. J. Harris said he would prefer it not obstruct the Smith Baker or City Hall facades. E. Oltman said it will not obstruct this. E. Oltman agreed to provide the site plan.

J. Harris asked if the roof is glass or solid metal. E. Oltman said the roof is solid metal and the walls are tempered glass. E. Oltman said it is clear glass.

L. Walker expressed support for the design and said it does not impede the character of the street.

A. Erickson expressed support for the addition of bus shelters and noted it is a real need for the City. A. Erickson added that it will improve accessibility for people who take the bus and can only stand for a limited amount of time. A. Erickson expressed support for the addition of a bus shelter.

J. Harris asked if there are plans to install additional shelters in the Downtown. E. Oltman said there are plans for an additional bus shelters in downtown around the Church St shopping center. E. Oltman said a pad, but no shelter will be installed near LHA on Chelmsford Street.

D. Belanger asked how many bus stops exist in the City. E. Oltman said she does not know the exact number, but said there are at least 100. A. Erickson asked how many bus shelters there are, E. Oltman said there are a few outside of the Downtown core, which have a different design, but is unsure the exact number of bus shelters.

G. Fitzsimons asked if any thought was given to adding a unique design for a transit shelter. E. Oltman said this was a copy of the Market St shelter because she believed this was previously approved for Downtown use. G. Fitzsimons noted unique transit shelter designs in other cities, and asked if any thought was given to more unique designs. E. Oltman said once the pads are in place the structures can be changed to something more unique if that is desired.

G. Villaras said he gave thought to a unique design, and said the proposed design is acceptable. G. Villaras asked if there will be any marketing materials on the transit shelter or signage. E. Oltman said there is no marketing on the shelter, the only info potentially would be routes and that would be coordinated with LRTA.

A. Erickson noted Mosaic Lowell installed an art installation at bus stops and recommended this may be an option in the future.

Motion:

J. Harris motioned to approve the Historic Permit with the following condition:

1. The applicant shall provide a plan showing the location of the transit shelters which shall be subject to review by the Historic Board and staff.

G. Fitzsimons seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously, (7-0) with Y. Baez-Rose abstaining.

2. MINUTES

Approval of the Minutes of June 8, 2026.

G. Villaras proposed 3 edits to the minutes.

L. Walker motioned to approve the June 8 meeting minutes with the edits proposed by G. Villaras, D. Belanger seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, (8-0).

3. OTHER BUSINESS

A. Minor Development Review: 166 Suffolk Street

On Behalf:

Tristan Souza, Applicant's Representative

T. Souza said the proposal is 40 total panels with 3 total arrays that would be visible to the public way at Suffolk Street. T. Souza said the plans show the proposed solar array.

Discussion:

J. Harris said the building is a gabled front building facing Suffolk Street.

G. Villaras said this is a prominent roof along Suffolk Street, and expressed concern this would be a detractor to the building since they are not hidden or on a flat roof.

J. Harris said one of the roofs is North facing and said he is unsure how effective the panels on the North facing roof will be. T. Souza said this is the roof with the least amount of sunlight. T. Souza said this roof would only generate 39% power, where the other arrays are at 74% and 95%. T. Souza said the North facing roof's panels are the least productive.

T. Souza said there is a property with panels a street over with panels on their Southeast facing roof. T. Souza noted this may be a less favorable array due to the layout. T. Souza said the team can work toward a more aesthetically appealing layout.

G. Fitzsimons thanked the applicant for working toward revisions to improve the aesthetics.

A. Erickson asked for information on solar arrays approved in the past. D. Ricker said he would send over materials on past approvals in the Acre Neighborhood Historic District and Downtown Lowell Historic District.

Motion:

G. Fitzsimons motioned to defer an approval until reviewing a revised plan, J. Harris seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, (8-0).

B. Minor Development Review: 30 Market Street

On Behalf:

B. Buitenhuys, Applicant's Representative

B. Buitenhuys explained the proposal and summarized the roofing work that has been completed. B. Buitenhuys said the deck is replacing an existing deck. B. Buitenhuys said they will utilize trex decking. B. Buitenhuys said the most significant change is that 1 unit would like to ultimately convert their spiral staircase to a full size straight set of stairs.

Discussion:

G. Villaras asked if there is any change of coloring for the head house. B. Buitenhuys said these will be all plywood painted battleship gray with the same trim as before, B. Buitenhuys added the colors will remain the same.

T. Depeiza said he had no concerns, and the changes were not significant.

Motion:

T. Depeiza motioned to approve the Historic Permit, Y. Baez-Rose seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, (8-0).

C. Informational Presentation: Pawtucket Canal Wall

On Behalf:

None

Discussion:

G. Villaras asked if anyone was present for the presentation. D. Ricker said no one is present.

Y. Baez-Rose asked if the applicant was aware they should be in attendance. D. Ricker said there may have been some confusion, and staff will follow up with the applicant.

J. Harris noted the applicant sent the memo this afternoon prior to the hearing.

G. Villaras asked to confirm there were additional materials related to the informational sent last week. D. Ricker confirmed plans were sent last week. G. Villaras asked if staff were aware of the extent of the canal wall collapse. D. Ricker said staff can request additional information from the applicant.

G. Villaras noted the Historic Board worked with an applicant on a canal wall near the Perking Building in the past, and said there is context from how the past application was handled.

G. Fitzsimons stated the engineering report details the cause of the failure, and details 3 different repair proposals. J. Harris asked if the report recommended a specific option. G. Fitzsimons said the report just presented the options.

A. Erickson asked what the Historic Board has a role is in the approval of the project, or whether this is just being provided as information to the Board. J. Harris said the canal wall's are within the Historic District and the Board has approval power over any changes.

G. Fitzsimons said in the past the National Park had a role in the maintenance of the canal walls, and their input would be important. J. Harris agreed. G. Fitzsimons recommended staff contact David Lieb at Lowell National Historical Park.

A. Erickson asked if there is urgency to repair. D. Ricker said the applicant did not indicate any urgency. G. Fitzsimons said the collapse occurred in May.

G. Villaras noted this is a highly visible area and getting Lowell National Historical Park comments would be helpful.

D. Historic Board Administration: Discussion and Vote

Discussion:

G. Villaras said the administration of the Historic Board is important especially in summertime. G. Villaras the City Solicitor is joining the meeting virtually. G. Villaras said he met with Y. Baez-Rose prior to the meeting to discuss the administration. G. Villaras said the City was facing a budget crunch and the position was defunded, G. Villaras said the position exists but there is no funding. G. Villaras noted there are roles that need to be carried out but there is no one in the organizational chart specifically for this. G. Villaras said there are 3 positions that will handle the administration of the Historic Board. G. Villaras said tonight the plan is to approve a concept of the administration of the Board. G. Villaras said it is not the appointment a new administrator but an approval of the administration process. G. Villaras said in the future if there is funding that role may be brought back to handle the functions of that position.

Y. Baez-Rose said the recommendation is to have 3 planners jointly administer the Board. Y. Baez-Rose recommended limiting the signatory authority to the Senior Planner position. Y. Baez-Rose said the project intake, agendas, meeting staffing would be split, but the final signature and sign off would be with the Senior Planner.

G. Fitzsimons cited Statue 566 establishing the Lowell Historic Board. G. Fitzsimons said City bylaws were established based on that statute which details the duties of the Historic Board members and administrator. G.

Fitzsimons said he believes the City's action of laying off the administrator was against these bylaws. G. Fitzsimons said they need to know their role in approving the administrator.

Y. Baez-Rose said the plan is to have the administrative role split between 3 existing staff with final signatory authority with the Senior Planner. G. Fitzsimons asked if the Board is required to approve that plan. Y. Baez-Rose confirmed.

J. Harris asked if they are approving an administrator. G. Villaras said they are not approving a specific administrator, but acknowledging the 3 staff administering the Board and granting signatory authority to the Senior Planner. G. Villaras said the Board will be co-administered in their planner roles.

D. Belanger asked if there will be communication with all 3 staff members, and said she is concerned about getting materials late just before the meeting. D. Belanger questioned having additional people involved in the process.

G. Fitzsimons said communicating with 3 different people can be confusing. G. Fitzsimons said this does not follow Statute 566 in his opinion.

G. Villaras asked what information people would like to receive in order to move forward on the plan.

G. Fitzsimons said he believed the plan was to appoint a single person as administrator. G. Villaras said the Historic Board Administrator is a City position that is currently vacant. G. Fitzsimons said the statute states it is unclear that the Historic Board Administrator is employed by the City. Y. Baez-Rose said paragraph 5 states the Historic Board Administrator is an employee of the City of Lowell. G. Fitzsimons said he does not believe it is clear in the language of the statute. Y. Baez-Rose said Paragraph states the administrator is an employee of the City of Lowell.

A. Erickson said she is concerned with the position being left vacant permanently, but does not want to prevent the City from moving forward. A. Erickson suggested an interim Historic Board Administrator. Y. Baez-Rose said there is no clear date when funding will be available.

A. Erickson said she is the historical society seat, and noted the historical society's concern with the elimination of the Historic Board Administrator role. A. Erickson noted the expertise which is important for Historic Preservation. A. Erickson said having a specific person in the role is useful. A. Erickson said the position should be filled long term.

Y. Baez-Rose said the budget required certain decisions to be made. Y. Baez-Rose noted the position was cut but not removed completely. Y. Baez-Rose noted it is a union position and the position remains. Y. Baez-Rose noted there is a much more complicated process to delete a position, but noted it was not deleted.

G. Fitzsimons expressed concern that the Historic Board was not notified of the decision.

L. Walker said the Planning Board has 3 administrators and they have no issues and all info is provided timely. L. Walker said change can be difficult, but this process works well with the Planning Board.

Y. Baez-Rose read Paragraph 5 of the statute saying all staff members of the Board shall be City employees.

G. Fitzsimons cited Section 6 and said it states the Board selects the administrator. G. Fitzsimons said Section 6 is a little vague.

Y. Baez-Rose said there have been other issues related to the Historic Board Administrator that have been handled at the staff level in the City like all other union members are treated. Y. Baez-Rose said this process followed the same process as all union members of 2532 that were laid off which is consistent with how

staffing issues have been handled in the past. Y. Baez-Rose said DPD wants to ensure the work still happens and noted there needs to be a vote of 5 members.

Y. Baez-Rose said the Board will need a plan on how it will complete work if it does not accept this plan. Y. Baez-Rose said the plan mirrors the process of the other Boards. Y. Baez-Rose said it is 3 people dividing the work of each of its Land Use Boards. Y. Baez-Rose said this is why this is recommended because it mirrors an existing administrative processes.

G. Fitzsimons asked if 1 staff member could be the administrator. Y. Baez-Rose said she would be opposed to this because of the other responsibilities of staff. G. Fitzsimons said he is concerned whether this would lead to inconsistencies.

G. Villaras said it is the Board's role to ensure there is consistency.

D. Belanger expressed concern about getting items later. Y. Baez-Rose asked if this is related to the Pawtucket Canal memo which was only submitted to staff late this afternoon which is why this was sent to the Board shortly before the meeting.

A. Erickson said it is helpful to get all items together and sent at one time. A. Erickson said the previous administrator provided significant background on projects and a recommendation. A. Erickson said this will likely change with new administration. A. Erickson said it would be helpful to get a pdf of all materials sent to members the day before the meeting. Y. Baez-Rose said this conversation can be had once the administration is settled. A. Erickson noted that the minor decisions are made by staff and expressed concern about whether all staff will have expertise to make these decisions.

G. Fitzsimons said relationships and networking are critical to the Historic Board Administrator role.

G. Villaras recommended continuing the item to the September meeting so questions can be answered. Y. Baez-Rose asked for clarification that this is OK for continuing the existing process until the next meeting. G. Fitzsimons agreed.

J. Harris noted the role includes a lot of processing applications, and reviewing applications, but also enforcement, informational building signs, and outreach. J. Harris asked how enforcement will be managed. J. Harris asked for clarity on these questions for the next meeting.

Motion:

G. Fitzsimons motioned to continue to the September meeting, D. Belanger seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, (7-0) with Y. Baez-Rose abstaining.

E. Board Member Items/Inquiries

4. ADJOURNMENT

G. Villaras motioned to adjourn, L. Walker seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, (8-0). The time was 7:11pm.