Pawtucket Planning Commission
Pawtucket Municipal Annex Council Chambers (Second Floor)
100 Freight Street
Pawtucket, RI 02860

Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, October 20, 2026

A. Opening/Call to Order
Chairman Kolodziej called the October 2026 Planning Commission Meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

B. Roll Call
The following Planning Commission members were:

Present (6): Monique Renaud, Lee Esckilsen, Christopher Fontes, Elizabeth Crowley, Karen Kolodziej, Fabiola Alikpokou

Absent (3): Jonas Bruggemann, Albert Vitali Jr., Annmarie DeBrito

Staff (1): Director Jason Pezzullo, Jacob Alderman, Nicholas Corbo

C. Approval of Minutes
The minutes of the June 16, 2026 meeting and September 15, 2026 were presented for approval. Motion to approve the minutes of June 2, 2026 and September 15,2026 were made and seconded. Both motions carried unanimously.

D. General Public Comment
No public comment

E. Old Business
Staff reported no items of old business

F. New Business

a. Unified Development Review (DPR) – 103 Oswald Street (AP 29 Lot 240)

Planner, Mr. Corbo presented the application of Mohammed Qandil to construct a two-story, approximately 2,300-square-foot single-family home on a roughly 6,154-square-foot lot owned by Bermudez and Rojas Realty. The site is in the Slater Park neighborhood, which is primarily single-family homes. The planner explained that the application had originally sought a zoning variance and drew an objection, which sent it to Unified Development Review under RIGL §45-23-50.1. The planner stated that the matter predated the current planning staff.

The variance concerns the accessory-use provision of the Pawtucket Zoning Ordinance (§410-46). Where an existing structure on an adjacent lot is less than 8 feet from the shared lot line, a new two-story structure must be located at least 16 feet from that existing structure. The existing home to the north is approximately 5.9 feet from the lot line, and the proposed home is 8 feet from the same line. The combined separation is therefore about 13.9 feet, roughly 2.1 feet short of the 16 feet required. The planner noted that the proposed home meets all dimensional requirements in isolation, and that the shortfall results from the neighboring home's nonconformity. The planner also cited consistency with Comprehensive Plan goals on protecting neighborhood character and expanding homeownership. Staff recommended approval of the variance and the unified development application.

Applicant Testimony. Attorney Robert (Bob) Amin stated that he had only recently become involved and that the builder was issued a building permit. Mr. Qandil, the builder, stated that he applied for the permit early in 2026, received it after about four months of providing information, and began the foundation in July. He said the footings passed their first inspection. He stated that the city then paused work after concluding the adjacent-lot calculation had been mistaken. He reported having ordered approximately $75,000 to $80,000 in materials, including trusses and lumber, and having paid $25,000 to the foundation contractor. He said the materials cannot be cut down to compensate for the addition two feet difference. He stated that the lot has always been independently owned and that the neighboring structures have always been 5.9 feet from their property lines. Mr. Qandil added that the proposed home has no accessory dwelling unit and has a front-facing garage and driveway.

Questions from Commission. The Chair asked about the lot's ownership history, whether the neighbors' setbacks had changed, and whether the issue concerned the structure's height or number of stories. Staff responded that it did not. Commissioner Esckilsen asked whether the side setback conflict existed on both sides of the house. Staff confirmed that the only issue was the northern side. Commissioner Esckilsen also asked how the permit had been issued, and whether the foundation had been staked and poured as permitted. Director Pezzullo responded that the city's building and zoning officials had not caught the issue at permitting and that it was found in the field after the first inspection. He said he did not have information on whether the foundation was staked or poured differently from the permit. Mr. Qandil confirmed that the foundation pouring and staking followed the approved plans and survey. Commissioner Esckilsen asked for written documentation of the city's error. Director Pezzullo said none existed, as the matter had been conveyed verbally by the building and zoning official. He added that the application was delayed by staffing transition within the Planning Department. Commissioner Alikpokou asked whether the house would need to be reduced in size to comply,

and Mr. Corbo referred the question to the building official. The building official, Mr. Qandil, confirmed that the requirement from building to property line was 8 feet. Since the foundation was already poured and staked, along with the materials being ordered, moving the building 2 more feet from the lot line was not feasible.

Public comment. Shelby Southworth, owner of 111 Oswald Street, an abutter, first objected to continuing the hearing. She stated that abutters had not received the 14-day advance mailed notice and affidavit required under state law and Article 13 of the ordinance. She submitted a notarized petition and copies of documents attesting to lack of notice.

Ms. Southworth then presented formal remarks opposing the variance, stating that the applicant bears the burden of proving all statutory criteria under RIGL §45-24-41 and §410-113 of the ordinance. She argued that:

1. The hardship resulted from the applicant's own prior actions. She stated that a building permit was issued on June 2, 2026, a stop work order was issued July 10, 2026, and the order was lifted on the applicant's representation that setbacks would be met and height reduced. She also stated that a later site visit found the footings were not correctly placed.
2. The variance would alter the character of the area. She reported that about 80 percent of abutting homes within 200 feet are single-story or 1.25 to 1.5 stories, and that the seven nearest neighbors on Oswald Street are single-story.
3. The lot has no unique characteristics creating a hardship, being a typical 50-by-100-foot city lot.

She also noted that the plans show a height near 33 feet, above the 30-foot maximum, and that no height variance had been requested. She stated she was not opposed to a home on the property and suggested a ranch-style design would fit the neighborhood. She asked that the application be denied and that neighbors be given a chance to participate at a future hearing.

Staff response and disposition. Director Pezzullo acknowledged that the notice was not sent properly, describing it as an honest mistake by new staff learning the notice requirements for each application type. He recommended that the matter be continued, re-advertised, and noticed, to be heard at the next monthly meeting. Mr. Corbo accepted full accountability for not sending the mailing. In response to a commissioner's question, staff confirmed the plans show a height of approximately 32 feet 7 inches and that the height issue could be discussed at the next hearing. No vote was taken on the application. The item was continued without discussion of the merits by the Commission.

a. Informational Public Meeting: Workshop
  i. Zoning Ordinance Update

Planner Corbo reported that staff has compiled legislative changes to Rhode Island General Laws from 2024 through 2026 into an Excel matrix with recommended actions. Most changes concern

updated definitions, such as recovery residences, parking space requirements, and childcare homes. Staff is reviewing best practices from Coventry, Lincoln, Smithfield, Providence, and Warwick. Proposed changes include:

- Improving the zoning and land use maps
- Creating a two-sided applicant and staff checklist that includes notice requirements for each application type.
- Adding a public comment and question link on the city website, routed to staff email.

Next steps include confirming the changes, developing a timeline, and preparing a transition report. They also include involving staff from zoning, commerce, and resiliency planning. In response to Commissioner Alikpokou's question about pre-application hearing, Director Pezzullo explained that state law prohibits requiring applicants to appear before the Commission for a pre-application meeting. He said communities had abused the practice, and Pawtucket would instead use a staff intake process, with Commission pre-application reserved for larger projects.

i. Land Development and Subdivision Regulations Update

Planner Corbo stated that the update would follow the same process as the zoning ordinance, including alignment with the 2026 legislative changes and clerical and readability improvements. Formalized pre-application meetings are to be removed as mandatory requirements and strongly encouraged instead. The department is also considering a single OpenGov online application process to replace the current mix of online and paper applications. Staff proposed clearer classification of administrative, minor, and major subdivisions and a single point of contact for applicants to avoid "answer shopping" between offices. Examples from Woonsocket, Lincoln, and Newport were presented, with Newport's tiered and separated applications cited as the strongest model.

ii. Comprehensive Plan Update

Planner Alderman presented a tentative schedule for the comprehensive plan update of approximately 14 months - shorter than the typical 18 to 24 months - because the plan's state approval expires on June 16, 2027. The plan would remain in effect locally, but the city would have two years after expiration to readopt before losing the ability to use it as a basis for denying land use decisions.

Data analysis is targeted for completion by the end of 2026, with community engagement beginning at the tail end of data collection.

Data presented included:

- **Population:** A peak of 81,436 in 1950 and 75,604 in 2020, projected by statewide planning to fall below 70,000 by 2050. Alderman modeled a moderate growth scenario

(about 1.6 percent per decade, reaching about 79,000 by 2050) and a goal scenario (2.5 percent per decade to return to the 1950 peak). Director Pezzullo noted that population is projected to decline throughout the state, largely due to household size.

- **Housing:** the largest share of housing was built before 1939. Planner Alderman and Director Pezzullo noted that Census estimates show only about 150 units built since 2020, whereas the city has permitted well over 1,000.
- **Employment:** 26,885 residents work outside the city, 13,891 workers commute in, and 3,409 live and work in the city.
- **Natural resources:** Maps of flood zones, hurricane inundation, and conservation areas were shown.

Next steps include selecting an aspirational peer city, continuing the data and map series, and developing a community engagement program and project brand.

Commissioner Esckilsen asked what the growth projections were based on and what housing capacity would be needed. Planner Alderman stated that carrying-capacity analysis is under way. The commissioner also asked staff to consider the impact of the loss of Hasbro and McCoy Stadium and of the new high school, the Apex site, the intermodal station, and the new stadium. He further asked how relocating municipal buildings would affect city services.

Commissioner Alikpokou requested more data on homelessness and on aging in place. She also requested more on downtown and municipal buildings, and recommended a dedicated website for the comprehensive plan. Commissioner Alikpokou also asked about the purpose of collecting foreign-born population data. Planner Alderman replied that it is part of the existing-conditions data and Director Pezzullo said foreign-born population data informs services such as ESL programs and language-responsive staff. Planner Corbo added that the population data also supports translation of applications and workforce needs. Commissioner Crowley asked that planning provide permanent space for the local soup kitchen and food pantry and for the Woodlawn area. The Chair also raised concerns regarding the burden of rising rents on elderly residents. The Chair and Director Pezzullo discussed engagement with local employers, and the Director noted that Hasbro had not responded to city overtures. Director Pezzullo reported that the city's low- and moderate-income housing stands at 10.4 percent, meeting the state's 10 percent threshold, and that Penrose and the Paddocks, both 100 percent LMI projects, were approved in the past year. He said the comprehensive plan and ordinance updates will remain a standing agenda item.

G. Director's Report

Director Pezzullo reported that the department is working through a transition to a new administration and has been very busy, with no further items to report. He stated that staff would work on the three major efforts discussed and correct the issues from this month so that the next meeting be better fit for presentation.

H. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn was made and seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

All Planning Commission meetings are open meetings unless otherwise stated. The meeting location is accessible to people with disabilities. If you are in need of interpreter services for the hearing impaired, please contact the City Clerk's Office at 722-8239 (TDD) not less than two (2) business days in advance of the hearing date.