

MINUTES

Lowell Planning and Zoning Board

Regular Meeting

Tuesday, April 4, 2023, 6:00 P.M.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Scott Wilson, called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m. Planning Board members present: Heather Seay, Troy Roberts Sr., Norris Lamb and David Jennings. Staff members present: Joe Gates, Planning Director, Todd Stroupe, GIS Analyst and Cheryl Ramsey, City Clerk. There were no members of the public in attendance.

II. DETERMINATION OF QUORUM –it was determined a quorum was reached.

III. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE - led by Scott Wilson

IV. CHANGES TO AND APPROVAL OF AGENDA – Mr. Gates made the board aware that the agenda has an error. The approval of the minutes should be for March 7, 2023, and not February 7, 2023, as printed and distributed. Board Member Lamb made a motion to approve the agenda with the change, seconded by Board Member Roberts. The vote was unanimously in favor.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM THE MARCH 7, 2023, MEETING.

A motion was made by Board Member Roberts to approve the previous minutes, seconded by Board Member Jennings. The vote was unanimously in favor.

VI. OLD BUSINESS

A. Lowell Development Ordinance –Sign Ordinance Discussion. Master Sign Plan. Wall and Freestanding Signs. Menu Boards, etc. Mr. Gates stated that at the previous Planning Board meeting he was requested to bring back recommendations for the sign ordinance and potential changes. He then showed a PowerPoint presentation of the text amendment to update Table 17.1, Permanent Sign Standards and Criteria, more specifically to allow a change in the square footage. His proposal would leave the table itself as is and select certain zoning districts that are primarily on the interstate and US highways. He then proposed for the zoning districts of C84, C85 and Industrial, where signs would be allowed to be 10% of a wall area and up to a maximum of 100 square feet instead of a maximum of 32 square feet as it reads now. This would eliminate developers having to come to City Hall requesting larger size signs and getting their permit without going through the Master Sign Plan unless they want something greater than the maximum. Anything greater than the maximum would have to go

through the former process and be approved by City Council. He stated that most municipalities follow the same guidelines.

Mr. Gates then went over the second part of the sign ordinance regarding menu boards at drive-through locations. He hasn't seen anything in the ordinance regarding drive-through signs and is proposing these signs to not exceed 64 square feet, not to exceed 8 feet high, and one per drive through lane. Businesses can split the signs into two if they like, but the maximum cannot exceed 64 square feet for the entire length of the lane. He stated he did some research of Gastonia and Charlotte and noted that one of their requirements is that the sign can't be any closer than 15 feet to a residentially owned property. He is ultimately proposing to keep the same table as noted above but add a drive-through signs section in the ordinance with the same requirements previously mentioned. This ordinance would also allow electronic or video displays.

Chairman Wilson asked if the 15 feet from residential properties is standard to Charlotte and Gastonia? Mr. Gates said properties would have a buffer, then the drive-through lane, then the menu sign. He said realistically this would end up being a 30-40 feet distance. He does not foresee a house being that close to any of these types of properties. Board member Roberts gave the example of Hardees [on McAdenville Rd] where there is a home beside it but there are two parking lots between them and that would be what you would typically do when developing. Mr. Wilson said he was thinking of the old idea of putting a McDonalds beside the Dollar General and a bright sign being too close to the homes near that lot. He asked if 15ft is enough? Mr. Gates said it would depend on how the new building or McDonald's would be oriented when it is built and hard to say without a site plan. In the instance of Mr. Wilson's example, there would have to be a buffer and once you put in the building and the parking they would need, he would think that site would be too small for a fast-food restaurant.

With a brief discussion regarding locations, mixed-use districts, as well as a visual review and discussion of the Wendy's on New Hope and Franklin in Gastonia, Board Member Lamb made a motion to approve the changes presented for 17.1, building signage as well as drive-through signage. It is consistent with Lowell's Comprehensive 2040 Plan. It was seconded by Board Member Seay. The vote was unanimously in favor.

B. Lowell Development Ordinance – Parking Regulations. Discussion around how we calculate parking and potential alternatives.

Mr. Gates stated this was not in the board members' packet but more of a discussion of parking requirements noted in Article 12, Off-street parking, of the ordinance. He stated he sent the board links to review regarding off-street parking and the idea of reducing or removing parking minimums. He then discussed

articles he researched and the problems of having too much parking. This includes inflated housing costs for developers in the multi-family and mixed-use projects areas which in turn raise costs for consumers, stormwater issues including flooding issues, resistance to using old buildings for fear of mandated regulations. Old buildings may not have enough parking that is required and force developers to add spaces even if they are not needed; therefore, discouraging them from renovating old spaces. He then discussed what the city would gain if this requirement was taken out. Now you see large empty parking lots that generate a lot of heat because of the asphalt. It could also improve water quality, reduce costs for developers, more walkability, and better transportation options.

Chairman Wilson asked if this topic has come up with developers. Mr. Gates said this was more of him looking at minimum requirements and when he worked at Gastonia a developer asked him about it then. The developer suggested he look at options and he wanted to get ahead of this for future developments. Board Members discussed the current ordinance, specifically Sections 12.3-6, 12.11, and 12.3-2. Board Member Seay asked the minimum requirement for districts. Mr. Gates stated that the minimum requirements are broken up by specific uses. Residential can have multiple requirements for example. Board Member Seay asked if people have to come to us [City of Lowell] for exceptions? Mr. Gates said the city hasn't had any requests to change the ordinance for new businesses and most of the current businesses when they change from one owner to the next are doing similar type business (like retail to retail, restaurant to restaurant etc.). Chairman Wilson asked if we would have to change residential parking where they wouldn't have to provide off-street parking. Mr. Gates said they don't have to do that now. He said the ordinance states that if you can have enough parking on-street, you don't have to do off-street but if you are going to do off-street then you must use the calculations from the ordinance as it is currently.

Mr. Gates then showed where this parking change has been successful. He named Gastonia, NC, Hartford, CT, Fayetteville AR and showed a map of many areas across the country doing this. Chairman Wilson asked if there are other restrictions we might want to look specifically if other cities limited this to just their downtown areas? Mr. Gates said he will investigate and get back to the board. Board Member Lamb asked if this was city-wide or in the city center. Mr. Gates said he's looking for guidance from the board on this. Board Member Lamb thinks city center is a step in the right direction but prefers it to be city-wide because the market drives the plan. After more discussion about the topic, the board asked Mr. Gates to look at city-wide options and draft what would have to change to accomplish this goal.

VII. NEW BUSINESS


A. PCAR (Preliminary Capacity Assurance Review)/Willingness to Serve: Reservation of Utility Service – Beacon Partners, McAdenville Industrial Project, Parcel – 306717. Request to extend/re-route existing sewer service outside City of Lowell municipal limits. Mr. Gates stated Beacon Partners has completed an application to extend the existing sewer line for a proposed renovation to an existing 15-inch sewer outfall located on the property not in the city limits. They want to replace 4,478 linear feet of existing sewer outfall with 2300 linear feet of 15-inch epoxy line DIP or PVC sanitary sewer at no cost to the City of Lowell. Estimated cost is about \$1,059,000 that they will be covering. They are proposing 425 employees with 273 loading bays and an estimated sewage flow of 37,925 gallons per day. Based on our preliminary review of the application and our capacity levels, he felt this was something the Planning Board should review and approve. He included the application and letters of support and the benefits from Thomas Shrewsbury, Public Works Director and one from the City Engineer.

Board Member Jennings asked what would happen to the existing line. Mr. Gates said it will be abandoned in place and the sewer would shut down. The new line will be further away, underground, and will permanently have an easement for repairs after it is built and turned over to the city. There was a brief discussion about the application request. Board Member Roberts then made a motion to send the application to City Council with the Beacon Partners, McAdenville Industrial Project Parcel for the request to extend existing service outside the city of Lowell. It was seconded by Board Member Lamb and the vote was unanimously in favor.

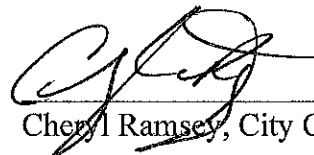
VIII. ADJOURN

Motion was made to adjourn by Board Member Seay, seconded by Board Member Jennings. The vote was unanimously in favor. Adjourned at 7:46 p.m. The Stormwater meeting was held immediately after the Planning Board meeting.

AFFIRM:



Chair, Scott Wilson



Cheryl Ramsey, City Clerk