



101 W. First Street
Lowell, North Carolina 28098

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Tuesday, February 6, 2024, 6:00 PM
City Hall
101 W. First Street
Lowell, North Carolina 28098

1: Call to Order

- 1A. Call to Order
- 1B. Determination of Quorum
- 1C. Pledge of Allegiance
- 1D. Changes to and Approval of Agenda

2: Approval of Minutes

- 2A. January 2, 2024 Planning Board Meeting Minutes

3: Old Business

4: New Business

- 4A. Discussion of Article 17 - Sign Regulations
Staff is seeking guidance from the planning board to determine possible updates to the sign regulations.
- 4B. Planning Report

5: Adjournment

Date Posted: February 5, 2024

**** The following document is a draft of the minutes and the not the official approved minutes**

Minutes for the Planning Board

101 W. First Street, Lowell, North Carolina 28098

January 2, 2024, 6:02 PM - January 2, 2024, 6:16 PM

Roll Call: *(The following members were in attendance)*

- **David Jennings**, Board Member
- **Norris Lamb**, Vice Chairman
- **Troy Roberts**, Board Member
- **Scott Wilson**, Chair
- **Sandy Railey**, Mayor
- **Natasha Shuford**, Board member

1. Call to Order

1A. Call to Order- 6:02 PM

Called to order by Chairman Scott Wilson.

1B. Determination of Quorum- 6:02 PM

Attendees included Chairman Wilson and Board Members Jennings, Lamb, Roberts, and Shuford. Board Member Seay was absent. It was determined a quorum was in place. City Staff included Planning Director Joe Gates, Planner Tyler Cobb, and City Clerk Cheryl Ramsey. There were no members of the public in attendance.

1C. Pledge of Allegiance- 6:02 PM

Led by Chairman Wilson.

1D. Changes to and Approval of Agenda- 6:03 PM

There no changes.

The item was motioned To Approve by David Jennings and seconded by Natasha Shuford with a passing result 4-0-1-1 Abstained by Scott Wilson Absent was Heather Seay

2. Approval of Minutes

2A. December 5, 2023 Planning Board Meeting Minutes- 6:04 PM

The item was motioned To Approve by Natasha Shuford and seconded by Norris Lamb with a passing result 4-0-1-1 Abstained by Scott Wilson Absent was Heather Seay

3. Old Business

None

4. New Business

4A. Consideration of Board Calendar for 2024- 6:05 PM

Presented by Joe Gates. He put together a list of dates for the 2024 year for Planning Board meetings. As set forth in the by-laws, these meetings are currently designated for the first Tuesday of each month at 6pm. Mr. Gates stated that the November date has been changed to Monday, November 4, 2024 due to Election Day. Board Member Jennings asked about the week of the 4th in that some people travel [4th of July]. Mr. Gates said moving that would be under the boards' discretion. With no other questions, Board Member Lamb made a motion to accept the calendar as it stands, seconded by Board Member Jennings. The vote was unanimously in favor.

The item was motioned To Approve by Norris Lamb and seconded by David Jennings with a passing result 4-0-1-1 Abstained by Scott Wilson Absent was Heather Seay

4B. Monthly Planning Report- 6:07 PM

Presented by Joe Gates. He highlighted some of the zoning items, including the 166 permit count for calendar year 2023 to date, noting that the department only had 66 permits during the same period last year. He said this is indicative of the growth and the things that are going on here in town.

Chairman Wilson asked about the construction of a new road for Northpoint. Mr. Gates said as part of the new development, this is an extension of what is known as Aberdeen on the City of Gastonia side. They are extending it where it will tie into Church St, then there is a section between Church and Cobb St. This is a NCDOT maintained road. Also, 3rd party engineers have been inspecting this road the entire time so that if the developer would like to have those roads adopted into our maintenance schedule, they have to go through a process, which includes inspections and a resolution by council to turn it into a public right-of-way.

Board Member Jennings asked about the road at First Presbyterian. He asked if that is there [owners] property and why did we put a gate up at the end of the street where it says "road closed". Mr. Gates said that had happened a number of years ago in the form of a public hearing. The right-of-way had been closed so the church owns the property on both sides. At that time,

Council approved the closure, so it is now private property and that private owner chose to put a gate at the end of their property. It is no longer public right-of-way that the city maintains between 2nd St and 1st St. Board Member Jennings asked if anyone has ever hit it [the gate]? Mr. Gates said that would be a private matter at that time if they did. He said the city had done it's due diligence back then to ensure that this closure could be done. In addition, the current city staff looked at all the documentation and determined it was legitimate.

Board Member Lamb asked what G-Camp is? Mr. Gates said it is the Gaston County Association of Municipal Planners. The county hosts a monthly meeting for all the planning staff of all municipalities in the county to discuss specific issues in their towns/cities and share ideas. Board Member Lamb then asked what is Polimorphic? Mr. Gates said it is an IT system the city uses to process our permits through. These are standing monthly meetings on updates or any issues that have arisen within the system.

Chairman Wilson asked Mr. Gates to explain the presentation at the AI Conference. Mr. Gates said that the Centralina Council of Government is an organization the city partners with. Centralina has monthly topics of discussion and this was one of the topics in which presenters came and spoke on the ethics of AI [Artificial Intelligence] and AI uses and what it is. He presented AI as a user of it in conjunction with Polimorphic.

5. Adjournment

Board Member Jennings made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Board Member Lamb. The vote was unanimously in favor. The meeting adjourned at 6:15 pm



City of Lowell

Planning Board Memorandum

Prepared By: Joe Gates

Discussion of Article 17 - Sign Regulations

Staff is seeking guidance from the planning board to determine possible updates to the sign regulations.

Meeting	Agenda Group	
Tuesday, February 6, 2024, 6:00 PM	New Business	Item: 4A
Reference File	Presented By	

To: Lowell Planning and Zoning Board
From: Joe Gates, Planning Director
Date: February 2nd, 2024
Re: Review of Article 17 - Sign Regulations

During the January 2024 regular meeting of the Lowell City Council, Councilmen Robinson expressed his desire for staff to review the Sign Regulations located in Article 17 and determine if changes could be made concerning the Master Sign Plan process and potentially other sections that would make it easier for businesses to replace and potentially expand their signs for their business.

There are several questions staff would like to pose to both the Planning Board in order to arrive at the desired outcome.

Objective Clarification

- What specific goals are we aiming to achieve by revising the sign ordinance?
- How do we define "better sign visibility" and what metrics will we use to measure it?

Current Regulations and Limitations

- What are the existing regulations regarding sign sizes and placement in commercial and industrial zones?
- How have these regulations impacted businesses' ability to effectively advertise and attract customers?

Economic Impact Assessment

- How do current sign regulations affect local businesses, particularly those located along the interstate and state highway?
- What economic benefits or drawbacks are associated with allowing larger wall signs and freestanding signs?

Traffic Safety Considerations

- What potential impacts might larger signs have on driver distraction and traffic safety along the interstate and state highway?
 - Allowing larger signs along the interstate and state highway could have several potential impacts on driver distraction and traffic safety:
 1. **Visual Distraction:** Larger signs may attract more attention from drivers due to their increased size and visibility. This heightened visual stimulation could distract drivers from focusing on the road ahead, potentially leading to decreased reaction times and increased risk of accidents.
 2. **Information Overload:** If there are numerous large signs competing for drivers' attention along the highway, it could overwhelm drivers with excessive information. This information overload may make it more difficult for drivers to quickly and accurately process important traffic signals and roadway conditions.

3. **Reduced Visibility of Road Signs:** Larger signs may obstruct the visibility of important road signs, such as speed limits, exit signs, and directional signs. If drivers have difficulty seeing these critical signs due to the presence of large commercial signage, it could increase the likelihood of missed exits or lane changes, contributing to traffic congestion and potential accidents.

4. **Glare and Reflection:** Large illuminated signs, especially at night, could create glare and reflections that impair drivers' vision. This glare could be particularly problematic in areas with low visibility conditions or when approaching curves or intersections, increasing the risk of accidents.

5. **Driver Distraction:** Drivers may become more focused on reading or deciphering the content of larger signs rather than paying attention to the road and surrounding traffic. This diversion of attention could lead to delayed reactions to changing road conditions or unexpected hazards, heightening the risk of collisions.

6. **Impact on Vulnerable Road Users:** Larger signs could also impact the safety of pedestrians, cyclists, and other vulnerable road users by creating visual distractions or obstructing sightlines at intersections and pedestrian crossings. This could increase the likelihood of accidents involving these individuals.

- Overall, while larger signs may enhance visibility and advertising opportunities for businesses along the interstate and state highway, careful consideration must be given to their potential impacts on driver distraction and traffic safety to ensure that any revisions to sign regulations strike an appropriate balance between economic interests and public safety.
- How will allowing larger signs impact the aesthetic character of the town, particularly in commercial and industrial areas?
- What environmental considerations, such as light pollution, need to be taken into account?

Aesthetic and Environmental Concerns

- How will allowing larger signs impact aesthetic character of the town, particularly in the commercial and industrial areas?
- Is light pollution a concern? How bright is too bright?

Comparison with Nearby Jurisdictions

- *How do our current sign regulations compare to those of nearby towns or cities, specifically for properties located in commercial and industrial districts?*
- *Are there lessons to be learned? Do we know what we want to avoid in terms of signage?*



City of Lowell

Planning Board Memorandum

Prepared By: Joe Gates

Planning Report

Meeting	Agenda Group
Tuesday, February 6, 2024, 6:00 PM	New Business Item: 4B
Reference File	Presented By

To: Planning and Zoning Board
From: Joe Gates, Planning Director
Date: February 5th, 2024
Re: January 2024 - Planning Report

Code Enforcement:

- Multiple nuisance violation letters issued.

Enforcement Action:

- All violations corrected by property owners/public works.

Zoning:

- Processed (10) zoning permits in January.
- Permit count (15) for calendar year 2024 to-date.
- Attended meeting regarding Wastewater Treatment Plant future plans and needs for projected development.
- Held pre-submittal meeting for a site plan to develop property along Hwy 7. Development will be in phases and begin on the northern part of the property between

Planning:

- Attended Lowell Planning and Zoning meeting, 1/02/2024.
- Attended Lowell City Council Meeting, 1/09/2024.
- Attended Lowell Community Committee meeting 1/22/2023.
- Collaborated with city staff regarding submittal of projects for a grant provide by T-Mobile. Program is called Hometown Grant Program, aimed at revitalizing small towns by providing funding to "shovel ready" projects. Multiple submittal opportunities throughout the year.
- Completed final review of preliminary plat for Spencer Ridge. Staff expects construction drawings to be submitted at the beginning of April. Staff also expects submission of the required Development Agreement during this time as well.
- Completed review of a revision to a recombination plat for Spencer Ridge.

Other:

- Attended monthly department head meeting.
- Attended Polimorphic Monthly update meeting.
- Attended Budget Retreat Meeting.