



City of Somerville
ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS
City Hall 3rd Floor, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

15 NOVEMBER 2023 MEETING MINUTES

This meeting was conducted via remote participation via Zoom.

NAME	TITLE	STATUS	ARRIVED
Susan Fontano	Chair	<i>Present</i>	
Anne Brockelman	Vice-Chair	<i>Present</i>	
Katherine Garavaglia	Clerk	<i>Present</i>	
Ann Fullerton	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Zachary Zaremba	Member	<i>Absent</i>	
Brian Cook	Alt. Member	<i>Present</i>	
Sisia Daglian	Alt. Member	<i>Present</i>	

City staff present: Andrew Graminski (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning)

The meeting was called to order at 6:05pm and adjourned at 6:35pm.

GENERAL BUSINESS: Meeting Minutes

Members Cook and Daglian sat as voting members.

Following a motion by Clerk Garavaglia, seconded by Member Cook, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to approve the 1 November 2023 meeting minutes as presented.

PUBLIC HEARING: 35 McGrath Hwy (P&Z 23-000044)

Member Daglian sat as a voting member for this hearing.

The applicant team explained that the proposal is for construction of a 9-story lab building on an underutilized industrial site. The project had previously been approved in principle by the Board on May 18th of last year, but the relief granted expired. The team is seeking to reinstate the previous relief for identical Hardship Variances. These variances will allow the applicant to revitalize the currently underutilized parcel with an appropriately designed building, meeting the intent of the ordinance and with the minimum relief necessary in order to move forward. The applicant is seeking three variances from the Somerville Zoning Ordinance due to the unique shape of the lot. The variances relate to the prohibition of driveways in the frontage area, maximum front yard setbacks, and the requirement that all façades be parallel to the front lot line. The only access from this lot to a public thoroughfare is across the front lot line. Unique features of the site include its landlocked nature and the angle of its frontage along McGrath Highway. More flexibility is sought for the frontage to create a stronger street wall between neighboring structures and some flexibility in the design of the façade.

In response to a question from the Board, the applicant team explained that there is approximately 10' between this building and the adjacent one at the tightest point.

Chair Fontano opened public testimony. Seeing none, Chair Fontano closed public testimony.

The Board discussed the findings for each criteria for the hardship variance application. This property is uniquely shaped and is triangular. This is applicable to all three of the requests for hardship variance. The next criteria is that literal enforcement of the provisions of the Ordinance would involve a substantial hardship, financial or otherwise, to the applicant. This criteria can also focus on the shape of the lot, with the triangular building and the narrow path to get to the public right of way. Literal enforcement would cause substantial hardship. Allowing the project to be constructed to follow the frontage would make the building look completely out of place. Allowing the three variances will not cause any harm and would be more desirable overall.

Following a motion by Clerk Garavaglia, seconded by Member Fullerton, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to approve all three Hardship Variances for the reasons discussed and with the requirements within the Staff Memo dated 26 October 2023.

RESULT:	APPROVED
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OTHER BUSINESS: 2024 Public Hearing Schedule

The Board discussed the 2024 public hearing schedule.

NOTICE: These minutes constitute a summary of the votes and key discussions at this meeting. A recording of these proceedings can be accessed at any time by using the registration link at the top of the meeting agenda.