



City of Somerville

ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS

City Hall 3rd Floor, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

TO: Zoning Board of Appeals
FROM: Planning, Preservation, & Zoning (PPZ) Staff
SUBJECT: 200 Inner Belt Road, ZP24-000094
POSTED: December 12, 2024

RECOMMENDATION: No Recommendation

This memo is supplemental to the PPZ Staff Memo dated October 21, 2024. This memo is in response to new information (in the form of a memo dated November 22, 2024) provided by the applicant and applicable analysis by staff responding to that information.

BACKGROUND

200 Inner Belt Road (ZP24-000094) was initially scheduled for the November 6, 2024 Zoning Board of Appeals meeting. The applicant requested continuances to November 20, 2024, and December 18, 2024. During these postponements, the applicant met with staff to discuss their proposal. The applicant's memo, responding to the Staff Memo of November 22, 2024, is the subject of this response.

ANALYSIS

On November 22, 2024, the applicant claimed that the unique characteristics of the existing structure, rather than general zoning district issues, constitute special circumstances. The applicant argues that the building's unusual placement on the lot, set back from a dead-end street with a main entrance poorly suited for signage, prevents adequate identification of the tenant. A graphic on page three of the memo illustrates this point. However, the Staff Memo of October 21, 2024, references a different entrance than the primary one highlighted by the applicant. This key information about the building's main entrance and the side door's sole function as an exit was initially not included in the Hardship Variance application, leaving Staff unaware of the situation.

On page 3 of their memo, the applicant provides zoning and design details about commercial sign types that were not included from the public [Staff Memo dated October 21, 2024](#). While the applicant correctly notes that businesses are best suited to choose their own signage, the Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO) clearly outlines permitted and prohibited sign types. SZO §10.8.3.q.ii explicitly states, "**Sign types not identified in this Section are prohibited**," regardless of whether monument signs are specifically mentioned.

Staff maintain that a monument sign is not necessary for tenant guests to find the building, and traffic issues at the dead-end street are unlikely. The building's set-back position is visible from the end of Inner Belt Road. While the building's frontage onto

another lot might be unusual, it does not preclude the use of compliant commercial signage to identify specific tenants and provide wayfinding for visitors. Such signage may not be immediately visible from the road's dead-end, but it would clearly identify building occupants.

Staff would like to remind the Board that granting the requested hardship variance should not cause a substantial detriment to the public good or nullify or substantially derogate from the intent and purpose of the Commercial Industry zoning district. Further Staff would also like to remind the Board that granting the requested hardship variance should not substantially derogate from the broader intent of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance.

CONSIDERATIONS & FINDINGS

In accordance with the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, the Zoning Board of Appeals may grant a Hardship Variance only upon deliberating and finding all of the following at the public hearing for each requested variance:

Hardship Variance Considerations

1. Special circumstances exist relating to the soil conditions, shape, or topography of a parcel of land or the unusual character of an existing structure but not affecting generally the CI zoning district in which the land or structure is located;
2. Literal enforcement of the provision of this Ordinance for the district where the subject land or structure is located would involve substantial hardship, financial or otherwise, to the petitioner or appellant, NRL WSC 200 Inner Belt Prop, LLC, due to said special circumstances; and
3. Desirable relief could be granted without causing substantial detriment to the public good and without nullifying or substantially derogating from the intent and purpose of the CI district in this Ordinance or the Ordinance in genera