



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

20 NOVEMBER 2024 MEETING MINUTES

This meeting was conducted via remote participation on Zoom.

| NAME | TITLE | STATUS | ARRIVED |
|-----------------|-------------|----------------|---------|
| Susan Fontano | Chair | <i>Present</i> | |
| Anne Brockelman | Vice-Chair | <i>Present</i> | |
| Ann Fullerton | Member | <i>Present</i> | |
| Zachary Zarembo | Member | <i>Present</i> | |
| Brian Cook | Alt. Member | <i>Present</i> | |
| Sisia Daglian | Alt. Member | <i>Present</i> | |

City staff present: Andrew Graminski (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning); Steve Cary (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning); Kit Luster (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning)

The meeting was called to order at 6:03pm and adjourned at 7:21pm.

PUBLIC HEARING: 200 Inner Belt Road (ZP24-000094)

(continued from 6 November 2024)

Following a motion by Vice Chair Brockelman, seconded by Member Fullerton the Board voted unanimously (6-0) in the matter of 200 Inner Belt Road (ZP24-000094) to continue the hearing to 18 December 2024, at the request of the applicant.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC HEARING: 76-78 Powder House Boulevard (ZP24-000029)

Following a motion by Vice Chair Brockelman, seconded by Member Fullerton the Board voted unanimously (6-0) in the matter of 76-78 Powder House Boulevard (ZP24-000029) to continue the hearing to 4 December 2024, at the request of the applicant.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC HEARING: 25 Atherton Street (ZP24-000039)

Member Cook sat as a voting member.

The applicant team explained that relief is being sought from the 20' front lot setback requirement for accessory structures, which include electric vehicle chargers. The special circumstances include the shape and location of the parking lot, which is located at the corner of Atherton and Harvard Streets, is almost entirely within the front setback area, contains 19 deeded parking spaces, and was established when the building was converted to condos in the late 1990s. The applicant team stated that without a Hardship Variance it will be impossible to install electric vehicle charging on the property which impacts several owners who have electric vehicles and is counter to the City's decarbonization goals. The actual charging stations are small, unobtrusive, and partially screened by an

existing black iron fence. The chargers will not change the character of the neighborhood or impede views of the building.

Chair Fontano opened public testimony. There was none at this time, but Chair Fontano left the public comment period open.

The applicant team explained that the existing spaces are deeded to individual condo owners. The chargers will be installed at the existing deeded spaces for those who choose to participate. Eight chargers are proposed to serve 12 spaces.

Chair Fontano dropped out of the meeting due to technical difficulties. Vice Chair Brockelman sat in as Acting Chair.

Nicholas Linsky (25 Atherton Street) – spoke on behalf of those that will be affected by this proposal. It would be a hardship for people to own an electric car and not be able to charge it.

Chair Fontano rejoined the meeting.

The Board asked about the three criteria to be satisfied for a Hardship Variance. The applicant team explained that the primary hardship is that the shape of the lot prevents the installation of electric vehicle charging stations almost anywhere else on the property. The deeded parking spaces are primarily within the 20' setback and there is not an alternative location that would be appropriate. Regarding a financial hardship, as owners start to get electric vehicles, a denial of this variance would make it more difficult to charge those electric vehicles. The owner of the property has a deal with an electrical installer to pursue installing the chargers. There may already be financial commitments toward the installation of the chargers. Regarding potential public detriment, these are small chargers mounted to small poles. There will be no visual obstruction or nuisance caused by the chargers.

The Board noted that the height of the poles will be a bit taller than a person. There are substantial footings needed for poles that tall. One pole is proposed to be placed next to a 12" caliper tree and this installation could damage the tree. The applicant team stated that the installer has not indicated that any trees will need to be removed. Removal of a tree would be detrimental to the neighborhood. Staff noted that the tree is on private property and a replacement tree would likely be required if it needs to be removed. The applicant team explained that the intention is to preserve trees on the property as much as possible.

Chair Fontano closed the public comment period.

Following a motion by Vice Chair Brockelman, seconded by Member Cook, the Board voted (4-1), with Member Fullerton against, in the case of 25 Atherton Street (ZP24-000039), to grant the requested Hardship Variance with the following considerations:

- 1) Regarding special circumstances, this is a corner lot, subject to 20' setbacks and there is an existing condition related to the parking lot being at the corner of the lot.
- 2) Literal enforcement of this provision would involve substantial hardship with the fact that the applicant cannot move the parking lot or rearrange the parking spaces to be behind the 20' setback. The categorization of these chargers as accessory structures is also a hardship.
- 3) Regarding that desirable relief could be granted without causing substantial detriment to the public good, these structures are similar to light poles, like urban furniture and signage.

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| RESULT: | GRANTED |
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PUBLIC HEARING: 22 McGrath Highway (ZP24-000061)

Member Daglian sat as a voting member.

The applicant team explained that this request is regarding the Twin City Plaza shopping center located at 22 McGrath Highway. The request is for Site Plan Approval to refresh and update the façade of the plaza. Two Neighborhood Meetings have been held and the proposal was well received. The Urban Design Commission (UDC) unanimously chose the applicant's preferred design option and found that the proposal meets the Design Guidelines of the CB zoning district. They noted that there is a need to simplify the shapes and forms of the buildings, as there are several different aesthetics. The proposal is for a more contemporary design, with cleaner surfaces and clearer signage. At the corner of Medford Street, the existing building has massive, galvanized steel frames which are not possible to remove. Instead, the proposal is to move forward with rigid materials to create a new aesthetic. The applicant team stated that the exterior of the corner building will contain some color elements and possibly some aluminum with a wood-like finish. The intention is to keep the glazing intact wherever possible. The UDC allowed for some flexibility to be able to use a couple of different materials. The new aesthetic will open up spaces for murals and more glazing. The site will also receive new landscaping. The team noted that the proposed conditions in the Staff Memo are acceptable, except for condition #8 which states that utility meters are not permitted on any façade or within the frontage area of the lot. Twin City Plaza would like to move the existing gas meters to the rear of the building, but this is contingent on Eversource's approval. The request is that the condition be revised to state that the existing gas meters will be moved to the rear of the building subject to the approval of Eversource.

The Board asked about the timeline for the project. The applicant team stated that the intention is to start this project in the spring and complete it by next fall.

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

Following a motion by Vice Chair Brockelman, seconded by Member Fullerton, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) in the case of 22 McGrath Highway (ZP24-000061), to grant a Site Plan Approval, incorporating the permit considerations and findings in the Staff Memo dated 4 November 2024, with an amendment to condition #8 to read, "the existing gas meters will be moved to the rear of the building subject to the approval of Eversource."

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| RESULT: | APPROVED |
|----------------|-----------------|

NOTICE: These minutes constitute a summary of the votes and key discussions at this meeting. To review a full recording, please contact the Planning, Preservation & Zoning Division at ZoningBoard@somervillema.gov.