

181 Pearl St  
Narrative for Hardship Variance - Sidewalk Width  
December 17, 2024

Seeking relief on **SZO Section 4.1.16.a.i** "For any lot abutting a sidewalk that is less than twelve (12) feet in width, the frontage area must be paved to provide a sidewalk that is at least twelve (12) feet in total width."

*a). 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 zoning district in which the land or structure is located;*

- 181 Pearl Street is a small, corner MR3 parcel. At 2,024 SF, it is less than 1/3 the size of an average MR3 parcel.
- It is abutted on each side by NR parcels. A 10' side setback is required per SZO for any building type in the MR3 district when it abuts NR.
- A 12' curb setback is required at the primary and secondary fronts of the building.
- These proportionally large setbacks on all four sides of the parcel leave a very small developable area.

*b). 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 due to said special circumstances;*

To meet the 12 feet wide sidewalk requirement, part of the paved sidewalk width would be within the parcel boundary of 181 Pearl St. The proposed project includes planters within this required paved zone to help meet the Green Score required in the MR3 district. We have been told by ISD that planters cannot go within the 12 feet wide paved zone. If the planters were removed from the required paved zone, the project would no longer meet the required Green Score. The footprint of the proposed building would need to shrink to make additional ground level space for plantings and/or permeable area, which contribute to the required Green Score. Shrinking the buildable area would be a substantial financial hardship.

*c). 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 a specific district in this Ordinance or the Ordinance in general.*

Granting relief on the paved sidewalk width does not cause detriment to the public good. The proposed paved zone is eight feet wide and provides a continuous six foot concrete walkway, which Public Space and Urban Forestry requested. The six foot wide walkway is consistent with the guidelines for new thoroughfares in the zoning ordinance. The planters provide a visual amenity for the neighborhood and contribute to the city's resiliency and ecological goals by increasing permeable area and adding native species and pollinators to diversify the local

habitat. A bench is also built into the planters, extending the stoop culture of the neighborhood that is an important part of Somerville's culture.