



City of Somerville

# ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS

City Hall 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

**TO:** Zoning Board of Appeals  
**FROM:** Planning, Preservation, & Zoning (PPZ) Staff  
**SUBJECT:** Clarendon Hill (34 North Street), 40B2020-001-R3  
**POSTED:** July 10, 2025

**RECOMMENDATION:** Insubstantial Change (Revision to Comprehensive Permit)

Staff memos are used to communicate background information, analysis, responses to public comments, review of statutory requirements and other information from Planning, Preservation, & Zoning Staff to the Review Board members.

## SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

Preservation of Affordable Housing (POAH) is requesting a revision to the Comprehensive Permit, including the following modifications:

1. Revised phasing
2. Changes to the woonerf (pedestrian crossing on Thoroughfare 1)
3. Modification to pedestrian crossing at the intersection of Thoroughfare 1 and Alewife Brook Parkway, additional crosswalk on Thoroughfare 1, and relocation of bike racks
4. Modification of the proposed trees and plantings

No changes are proposed to the buildings' massing or footprints, number of units, or broader site design.

## BACKGROUND

A Comprehensive Permit under MGL Ch 40B was issued for Clarendon Hill on September 30, 2020.<sup>1</sup> Since then, the Applicant has been moving forward with construction documents and addressing other items that must be completed before applying for a building permit. In the course of doing so, the Applicant has identified some items included in the original decision from 2020 that they wish to modify. The project has already received two (2) revisions in October 2022 and January 2023, for changes that the ZBA determined to be insubstantial.

The process for modifying Comprehensive Permits is as follows:

1. The Applicant submits a request to change the permit.

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<sup>1</sup> The decision can be found at <https://www.somervillema.gov/departments/ospcd/planning-and-zoning/reports-and-decisions>

2. The Board must consider the request within twenty (20) days and determine whether the change is “substantial” or “insubstantial.” In Somerville, this is typically done during a regularly scheduled public meeting of the Board.
  - a. If the Board determines that the change is “insubstantial,” the change is permitted with no additional steps necessary.
  - b. If the Board determines that the change is “substantial,” the Board must then schedule and hold a public hearing regarding the request.

This application was deemed complete on July 7, 2025, and is scheduled to be discussed by the Board on July 16, 2025. If the Board determines that any of the proposed changes are substantial, the public hearing will likely be held at the next meeting on August 6, 2025.

## **ANALYSIS**

Each of the changes proposed by the Applicant are addressed individually. The Board may determine that all, some, or none of the proposed changes are insubstantial. Staff recommends that all the proposed changes are found insubstantial.

## **Document Summary**

The documents submitted as part of this Comprehensive Permit Change application include the following:

1. Narrative: Clarendon Hill Thoroughfares Revision Narrative from ICON Architecture (dated July 11, 2025)
2. Zoning Phasing Plan (Sheet G-202) from Icon Architecture (revised July 10, 2025)
3. Site Plan (Sheet C-107) from ICON Architecture (revised July 11, 2025)
4. Illustrative Plan, Section & Planting Plan: New Street 1 from Icon Architecture (revised July 11, 2025)

## **Proposed Changes**

### *Change 1: Revised Phasing*

In the original September 2020 approval, the project was approved with the following phasing:

#### Phase 1

- Demolition of six (6) existing buildings on Lots B1 and C1
- Construction of Buildings A, B, and E
- Construction of Thoroughfare 1 (Stephenson Aman Street) to the eastern edge of Lot B1 and Thoroughfare 2 (Mary Loise Daly Street)

#### Phase 2

- Demolition of three (3) existing buildings on Lots D1, E1, E2, and F1

- Construction of central civic space, Building D, and the town houses
- Completion of three internal streets (Thoroughfares 1, 2, and 3)

In the requested revision, the project is now proposed to have the following phasing - see the Zoning Phasing Plan – Sheet G-202 (Revised July 11, 2025) of the submittal:

### Phase 1

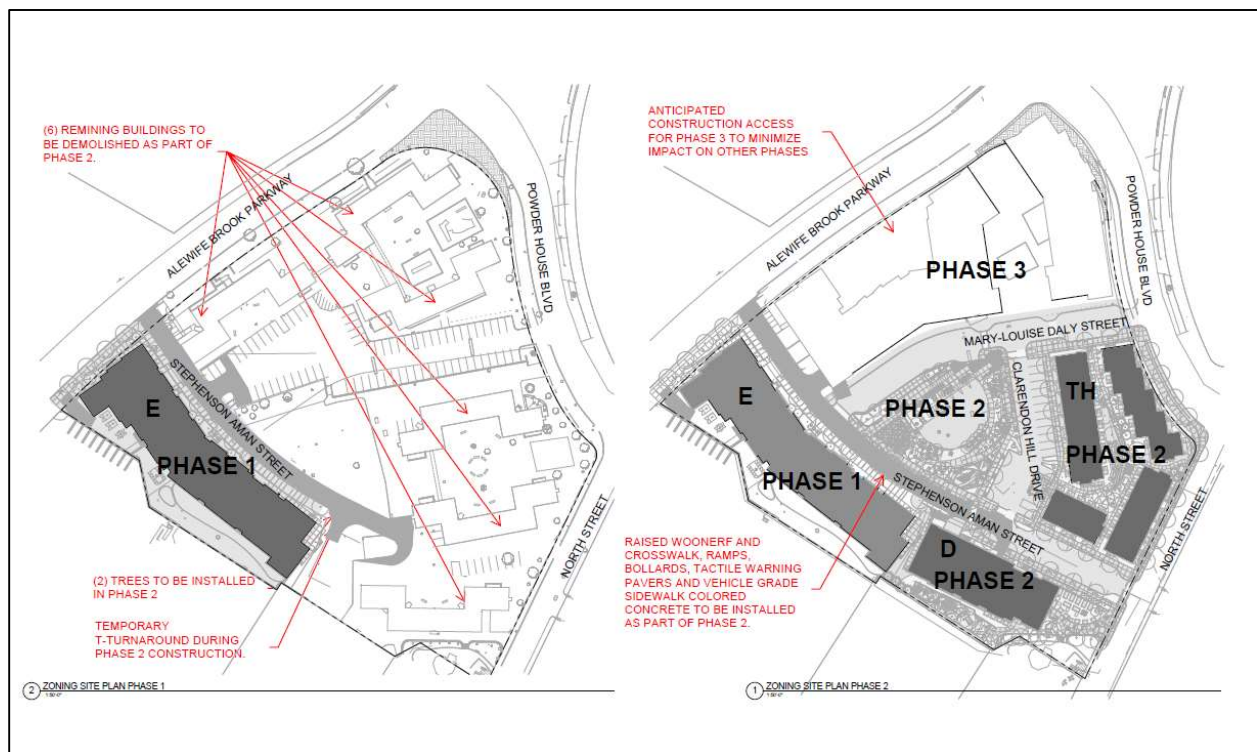
- Demolition of three (3) existing buildings on Lot B1 (completed)
- Construction of Building E (nearly complete)
- Partial construction of Thoroughfare 1 to the eastern edge of Lot B1

### Phase 2

- Demolition of six (6) existing buildings on Lots C1, D1, E1, E2, and F1
- Construction of central civic space, Building D, and the town houses
- Completion of three internal streets

### Phase 3

- Construction of Buildings A & B



*Proposed Phasing Plan - Sheet G202*

The most significant change in the phasing plans is that Buildings A & B, which are proposed to be 295 market-rate units, are now proposed to be part of a newly proposed Phase 3 of the project, instead of Phase 1. The reason for this change is a change in ownership of the property, with the market-rate developer Redgate dropping out of the project. (Conditions of approval are recommended to be changed accordingly below.)

Phase 2 remains largely the same, and includes the construction of the civic space, Building D, and town houses and the completion of the internal streets.

Additionally, the reconstruction the intersection of Alewife Parkway and Powder House Boulevard, initially anticipated to be constructed in tandem with the Phase 1 construction of Buildings A&B, has already been completed. The Phase 3 construction of Buildings A & B will interact only with the built condition of the intersection and the change in right-of-way.

Inspectional Services requests that the newly proposed phasing be documented in the decision. Accordingly, the proposed changes necessitate that Finding #6 and Condition #13 be modified – see below under Recommended Modifications of Findings, Conditions of Approval, and Waivers.

*Change 2: Modification of the woonerf*

A portion of Thoroughfare 1 between its intersection with Thoroughfare 2 and the parking entrance to Building D is designed as a “woonerf,” or a street that is designed to promote the shared use of the space with a focus on pedestrians. The woonerf provides a more pleasant pedestrian connection between buildings D and E and the civic space on lot D1 and encourages traffic to drive more slowly in the area.

In the original September 2020 approval, the woonerf was approved to be completed as part of Phase 1. In the revised proposal, the woonerf is proposed to be completed as part of Phase 2, in coordination with the development of the civic space.

The location of the woonerf has also shifted further east to be closer to the building entrance and now abuts the striped asphalt crosswalk. Phase 2 will add bollards and tactile warning strips on both sides. Phase 2 will also include tactile pavers on the abutting crosswalk.

The Mobility Division is broadly supportive of the proposal for the woonerf; they will have additional comments on the details of the woonerf but will reserve these for a Phase 2 review.

There are no findings, conditions of approval, or waivers affected by this change.

*Change 3: Modification to pedestrian crossing at the intersection of Thoroughfare 1 and Alewife Brook Parkway, additional crosswalk on Thoroughfare 1, and relocation of bike racks.*

The proposed changes affect Thoroughfare 1 at its intersection with Alewife Brook Parkway. In the original September 2020 approval, the thoroughfare was designed to have a triangular traffic island at the intersection. The project now proposes to have no

traffic island and instead a raised crosswalk added. This reduces the overall crossing distance for pedestrians. The Mobility division has stated their support for this change.

Another change to Thoroughfare 1 is the addition of a crosswalk along at the north side of its intersection with Thoroughfare 2, with a speed hump within Thoroughfare 1 just north of the crosswalk to be added during Phase 2.

The bike racks were moved to accommodate revised plantings, discussed below.

The Mobility Division supports the proposed changes for Phase 1 of the project and they have requested that the proposed “no parking” zone in the surface parking lot adjacent to the crosswalk has appropriate signage and pavement striping. In response the Applicant has added the installation of this signage to their submitted narrative.

The Mobility Division will have additional comments on Phase 2 improvements as part of their Phase 2 review.

There are no findings, conditions of approval, or waivers affected by this change.

#### *Change 4: Modification of proposed trees and plantings*

In the original September 2020 approval, the Phase 1 portion of Thoroughfare 1 was proposed to include eight (8) trees in front of Building E along the street, to be spaced at 25-30 FT apart. The project now proposes to have four (4) trees in front of Building E as part of Phase 1, to be spaced approximately 40-45 FT apart, with all but one tree planted at the curblane. The change in spacing is to accommodate the newly proposed crosswalk (discussed above).

An additional two (2) trees will be planted at the eastern end of Building E along the street at the curblane as part of Phase 2, instead of a raingarden, in accordance with comments from the Public Space and Urban Forestry (PSUF) Division.

PSUF requested the applicant provide the total number of trees and their calipers proposed for the entire project. In response the Applicant has provided this information in their submitted narrative.

This change affects Waiver #38 from the original approval – see below under Recommended Modifications of Findings, Conditions of Approval, and Waivers.

### **Recommended Modifications of Findings, Conditions of Approval, and Waivers**

#### Findings

Staff recommends modifying Finding #6 from the original approval, which relates to the project’s phasing, as follows:

The project will be constructed in ~~threetwo~~ phases. Phase 1 will include the demolition of ~~36~~ of the 9 existing buildings and the construction of ~~Building A/B and Building E~~ for a total of ~~168499~~ new rental units, ~~approximately 41100%~~ of which will be affordable. ~~This Phase is tied to the redesign of the Alewife Brook Parkway / Powder House intersection, as a portion of Building A/B sits within the current intersection footprint.~~ It will also include ~~the construction of the entirety of Thoroughfare 2,~~ a portion of Thoroughfare 1, and stormwater and other infrastructure that is necessary to support the buildings constructed as part of this phase. ~~SixThree~~ of the existing buildings will continue to be inhabited during Phase 1. Once Phase 1 is complete, existing residents will be either moved into Building E or relocated off-site until Phase 2 is complete.

Phase 2 will include the demolition of the ~~63~~ remaining ~~existing~~ buildings and the construction of Building D, all 5 series of row houses, the central civic space, the remainder of Thoroughfare 1, and the entirety of Thoroughfare 2 and Thoroughfare 3. At the end of Phase 2, there will be a total of ~~260594~~ rental units, ~~approximately 51100%~~ of which will be affordable. ~~Phase 2 will also include the completion of any remaining work necessary to achieve the project as proposed to the Board.~~

Phase 3 will include the construction of Buildings A & B, which are proposed to include 295 market-rate units. Phase 3 will also include the completion of any remaining work necessary to achieve the project as proposed to the Board.

As not all existing buildings are being demolished as part of Phase 1, the Applicant will work with City staff to ensure that, throughout the course of construction, the utility services are maintained to the buildings not demolished as part of Phase 1. Dividing the project into ~~two~~ phases makes construction more economical and reduces the number of residents that are displaced from the site at any given time. The Applicant has stated that, barring any extenuating circumstances, there will be minimal delay between the conclusion of Phase 1 and the beginning of Phase 2. If possible, Phase 2 may begin prior to the conclusion of Phase 1, and Phase 3 may begin prior to the conclusion of Phase 2.

### Conditions of Approval

Staff recommends the following modifications of the conditions of approval from the original approval:

Condition #13:

13. The project will be constructed in ~~threetwo~~ phases. "Phase 1" will include the demolition of ~~threesix~~ (36) existing buildings and the construction of ~~Lots C1 and B1, Thoroughfare 2,~~ and the portion of Thoroughfare 1 from Alewife Brook Parkway to the eastern edge of Lot B1. Phase 1 may also include other site-

enabling or site-wide work (e.g., temporary thoroughfares, stormwater management facilities, etc.) necessary to construct the buildings and thoroughfares that are part of this phase. "Phase 2" will include the demolition of the remaining ~~sixthree~~ (63) existing buildings and construction of Lots D1, E1, E2, F1, Thoroughfare 2, Thoroughfare 3, and the remainder of Thoroughfare 1 between the eastern edge of Lot B1 and North St. ~~Phase 2 will also include any remaining site-wide work necessary to complete the project in its entirety.~~ "Phase 3" will include the construction of Lot C1. Phase 3 will also include any remaining site work necessary to complete the project in its entirety.

Phase 2 may begin prior to the conclusion of Phase 1. Phase 3 may begin prior to the conclusion of Phase 2. Exhibit 3 Zoning Phasing Plan – Sheet G-202 (Revised July 11, 2025) is hereby incorporated into this condition as a graphical depiction of the phasing plan. If Phase 2 does not begin prior to the completion of Phase 1, the site work must be completed as shown in ~~Exhibit 3~~ the Zoning Phasing Plan. Individual buildings in each phase will receive their own building permits and certificates of occupancy and will be subject to the relevant project, phase and building conditions of this approval.

Condition #22:

22. The Applicant shall submit design and construction phasing of the stormwater management and erosion & sediment control systems to the City Engineer for review and approval to ensure compliance with City standards and best practices for design and ongoing maintenance. All Site Construction Permit rules and regulations must be complied with for Phase 1, ~~and for~~ Phase 2, and Phase 3.

Condition #113:

113. The thoroughfare will be constructed in two phases, as described in Condition #13 and depicted in Zoning Phasing Plan – Sheet G-202 (Revised July 10, 2025) Exhibit 3. POAH/SCC shall submit to the City Engineer for review and approval a plan for the phasing of Thoroughfare 1 that clearly indicates the work to be done as part of each Phase.

Conditions #35:

35. Redgate, its successors and/or assigns, shall comply with the Mobility Management Plan submitted for Clarendon Hill Building A/B dated August 2020, as approved and conditioned by the Director of Mobility.

Conditions #37 - #51 (inclusive), #126, #128 - #137 (inclusive), to be modified in the same manner:

Redgate, its successors and/or assigns, ...

### Waivers

Staff recommends modifying Waiver #38, which was a waiver granted from the minimum tree spacing requirement of 35-40 FT. The waiver should be updated by the Board to grant a waiver from the *maximum* tree spacing requirement, as the trees are now proposed to be spaced approximately 45 FT apart.

### **CONSIDERATIONS & FINDINGS**

The Zoning Board of Appeals is required to determine whether the proposed changes are substantial or insubstantial. If a change is deemed *insubstantial*, it is permitted. If a change is deemed *substantial*, the Board must hold a public hearing regarding the change prior to approving or denying it.

760 CMR 56.07(4)(c) and (d) provide guidance that the Board must consider when determining whether a change is substantial or insubstantial:

- (c) The following matters generally will be substantial changes:
  1. An increase of more than 10% in the height of the building(s);
  2. An increase of more than 10% in the number of housing units proposed;
  3. A reduction in the size of the site of more than 10% in excess of any decrease in the number of housing units proposed;
  4. A change in building type (e.g., garden apartments, townhouses, high-rises); or
  5. A change from one form of housing tenure to another.
- (d) The following matters generally will not be substantial changes:
  1. A reduction in the number of housing units proposed;
  2. A decrease of less than 10% in the floor area of individual units;
  3. A change in the number of bedrooms within individual units, if such changes do not alter the overall bedroom count of the proposed housing by more than 10%;
  4. A change in the color or style of materials used; or
  5. A change in the financing program under which the Applicant plans to receive a Subsidy, if the change affects no other aspect of the proposal.