

Balance Architects

July 28, 2025

Zoning Board of Appeals

City of Somerville

93 Highland Ave

Somerville, MA 02143

Re: 872 Broadway – Transformer Revision Narrative – ZP25-000064

To Whom This May Concern:

This project seeks a variance from SZO 2.4.3.d.v. to allow mechanical equipment (a pad-mounted transformer) within the frontage area of the lot.

a) Special Circumstances

Special circumstances exist that are unique to this property and its development. The originally approved design located the transformer in the rear yard, accessible through an access easement over the abutter's property. Following Planning Board approval, however, the easement agreement could not be finalized. Alternative locations were carefully evaluated, but each presented unusual site-specific challenges. Locating the transformer in the public sidewalk was prohibited by regulation, and a pole-mounted transformer was not allowed by the utility company due to the building's unit count. These conditions—arising from the combination of site layout, utility requirements, and access constraints—are unique to this parcel and are not generally applicable to the zoning district.

b) Substantial Hardship

Literal enforcement of SZO 2.4.3.d.v. would create substantial hardship, both financial and practical. Without relief, the building would require significant redesign to house a 15' x 15' transformer room directly off Broadway, reducing ground-floor retail space and eliminating residential units (all studios), including affordable units. Additionally, a sidewalk transformer vault was pursued but proved infeasible due to the utility company's 1–3 year lead time for manhole transformers. These limitations would reduce the viability of the project and compromise its ability to provide housing and retail space as intended.

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c) No Detriment to Public Good

The requested relief will not cause substantial detriment to the public good, nor will it nullify or substantially derogate from the purpose and intent of the Ordinance. The transformer will be located in the frontage zone but designed to minimize visual impact, including an artistic wrap that complements the streetscape. The retail space will remain functional, the full number of residential units (including affordable units) will be maintained, and the project as a whole will remain viable and consistent with the City's development goals

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Philip Sima". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Philip" and last name "Sima" clearly distinguishable.

Philip Sima, RA + CPHC

Balance Architects, Inc.