

Balance Architects

July 28, 2025

Zoning Board of Appeals

City of Somerville

93 Highland Ave

Somerville, MA 02143

Re: 872 Broadway – Transformer Revision Narrative – ZP25-000065

To Whom This May Concern:

This project seeks a variance from SZO 4.1.8.d. for relief from the 70% ground-story primary facade fenestration requirement. Due to site-specific constraints related to transformer placement and utility company requirements, the ground-story fenestration has been reduced to 59.5%.

a) Special Circumstances

Special circumstances unique to this parcel and its development necessitated the reduction in ground-story fenestration. As explained in ZP25-0000064, the project's only viable option was to locate a pad-mounted transformer in the front yard within the property line due to the loss of access to a rear yard location. The utility company requires clearance around all sides of the transformer, prohibits windows within that clearance, and mandates that any nearby walls be 3-hour fire-rated. To maintain the viability of the ground-floor retail and the units above, the transformer was placed as far from the building as possible while still meeting utility company requirements. The exterior wall design was pushed to the minimum allowable distance, which resulted in the elimination of some windows and a reduction of the ground-story fenestration from 70% to 59.5%. These conditions are specific to the utility company's technical requirements and the site layout and are not characteristic of the zoning district as a whole.

b) Substantial Hardship

Literal enforcement of SZO 4.1.8.d. would result in substantial hardship, both financial and practical. Without the variance, compliance with the 70% fenestration requirement would be impossible while accommodating the required transformer, and the building would not receive electrical service. To achieve 70% fenestration while maintaining clearance, the building

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footprint would have to be significantly altered, reducing ground-floor retail area and eliminating residential units (including affordable units), which would compromise the project's financial feasibility and community benefits.

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 intent and purpose of the Ordinance. The building retains a high level of ground-floor transparency, with 59.5% fenestration, ensuring a vibrant streetscape and an active ground-level presence. The ground-floor retail remains fully functional, and the same number of residential units, including affordable units, is preserved. The overall design continues to align with the goals of the zoning district by promoting street-level activity and a pedestrian-friendly environment.

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.