



City of Somerville

PLANNING BOARD

City Hall 3rd Floor, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

TO: Planning Board
FROM: Planning, Preservation, and Zoning Staff
SUBJECT: 379 Somerville Ave, ZP25-000078
POSTED: July 31, 2025

RECOMMENDATION: None (Major Amendment to Site Plan Approval)

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.

This memo summarizes the Major Amendment to a Site Plan Approval application submitted for 379 Somerville Avenue, identifies any additional discretionary or administrative development review that is required by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, and provides related analysis or feedback as necessary. The application was deemed complete on July 21, 2025, and is scheduled for a public hearing on August 7, 2025. Any Staff recommended findings, conditions, and decisions in this memo are based on the information available to date prior to any public comment at the scheduled public hearing.

LEGAL NOTICE

Brickstone Builders Corp proposes a Major Amendment to previously approved plans (CZC20-000104) to construct an Apartment Building in the MR5 zoning district, which requires Site Plan Approval.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

In 2021, the Applicant received Site Plan Approval and a Special Permit (CZC20-000104) to construct a General Building in the MR5 zoning district. Since that time, the Applicant received a building permit and constructed the building. However, the building was not constructed to be consistent with the approved plans and was required to return for a Plan Revision.

The Applicant, Brickstone Builders Corp, has constructed a non-conforming pad mounted transformer in the frontage area, which resulted in several other zoning nonconformities. The Applicant argues that Eversource's requirements for pad-mounted transformers resulted in a recessed pad mounted transformer having to be constructed within the alcove along Somerville Avenue. These changes during construction require a Plan Revision to previously approved plans (case number CZC20-000104).

Pursuant to SZO §15.2.4, the Planning Director determined that the Plan Revision application was a Major Amendment and required board review and a public hearing. The project is currently noncompliant; the changes require Hardship Variances from the Zoning Board of Appeals prior to approval from the Planning Board. Changes include

the transformer location, changes to the ground story fenestration, changes to the front yard setback, changes to the commercial space requirement for a Pedestrian Street, and non-compliance with Site Plan Approval Condition #2 (utility meter location) of the previously-approved plans (case number CZC20-000104).

Prior to the issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy, the project, requires four (4) Hardship Variances and a Major Amendment to Site Plan Approval. The Hardship Variances are set to be heard by the Zoning Board of Appeals at the August 6th, 2025 meeting. Staff will provide an update on the status of these applications following that meeting.

BACKGROUND

379 Somerville Avenue is located on a Pedestrian Street and in the 0.05mi Transit Area in the Mid-Rise 5 (MR5) zoning district in the Prospect Hill neighborhood represented by Ward 2 Councilor JT Scott. Establishing an Apartment Building in the MR5 district requires Site Plan Approval. Site Plan Approval is the administrative review and approval of conforming development to address any potential impacts as necessary. The Planning Board is the decision-making authority for all (non-variance) discretionary or administrative permits required for the MR5 zoning district.

The Applicant previously received Site Plan Approval for a 5-story general building with an underground transformer and zoning compliant façade (case number CZC20-000104). After constructing a pad-mounted transformer and non-conforming façade, the Applicant was required to apply for a Plan Revision.

The initial Plan Revision application (case number ZP25-000051) was reviewed on May 15, 2025 and the proposed changes to the previously approved plans for 379 Somerville Avenue (case number CZC20-000104) were deemed a Major Amendment by the Director of Planning, Preservation, and Zoning. As such, the proposed changes require additional Board Review by the Planning Board and a public hearing.

For the project to be compliant, the Applicant must receive four (4) Hardship Variances. Applications for these variances are set to be reviewed at the August 6th, 2025, Zoning Board of Appeals meeting.

The Applicant submitted an application for Site Plan Approval (ZP25-000078) to address the changes to this project on July 21, 2025, and the Applicant requested to be on the August 7, 2025 Planning Board meeting agenda. Due to the short amount of timeline prior to the hearing, City Staff have not yet completed their reviews.

Comments and recommendations from City Staff could not be provided in time for this memo's July 31st, 2025 publishing date. If review comments are provided prior to the hearing date, PPZ Staff will provide an update at the Planning Board meeting.

No neighborhood meetings or design review are required for plan revisions prior to a public hearing.

ANALYSIS

The Applicant has constructed several revisions to the previously approved Site Plan Approval for the apartment building at 379 Somerville Avenue. Along with Site Plan Approval, these revisions will require multiple Hardship Variances from the Zoning Board of Appeals. The project's transformer location shown on the previous Site Plan Approval case proposed the transformer be underground. All changes included are along the front façade and first level floorplan.

Changes to (case number CZC20-000104) include:

- Transformer location on the front facade
- Ground story fenestration changes
- Increase in the front yard setback
- Decrease in commercial space on first floor facade to accommodate transformer alcove



CONSIDERATIONS & FINDINGS

The Planning Board is required by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance to deliberate each of the following considerations at the public hearing. The Board must discuss and draw

conclusions for each consideration but may make additional findings beyond this minimum statutory requirement.

When considering a revision to a previously approved development review application that required Site Plan Approval, the Planning Board shall limit their review to the proposed changes to the previously approved application – in this case, the changes include the transformer location and changes to the façade.

Site Plan Approval Considerations

1. The comprehensive plan and existing policy plans and standards established by the City.
2. The intent of the zoning district where the property is located.
3. Mitigation proposed to alleviate any impacts attributable to the proposed development.

Site Plan Approval:

1. *The comprehensive plan and existing policy plans and standards established by the City.*

Relevant goals established in SomerVision 2040, the City's Comprehensive Master Plan, include the following:

- Significantly increase housing stock to keep up with demand while pursuing the goals of increasing the proportion of affordable housing and housing stock diversity.
- Promote a dynamic urban streetscape that embraces public transportation, reduces car dependence, and is accessible, inviting, and safe for all pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders.

2. *The intent of the zoning district where the property is located.*

The intent of the MR5 zoning district is, in part: "To create, maintain, and enhance areas appropriate for moderate scale, multi-use and mixed-use buildings and neighborhood- and community-serving uses."

Site Plan Approval Specific

3. *Mitigation proposed to alleviate any impacts attributable to the proposed development.*

Staff believe the proposal produces impacts that may require additional mitigation through design changes.

PERMIT CONDITIONS

Staff have not yet completed their review of the application. Staff will provide recommended conditions upon completion of their review.

Standard Conditions for Major Amendment to Site Plan Approval include the following:

Permit Validity

- This Decision must be recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.
- A written narrative or descriptive checklist identifying the completion or compliance with permit conditions must be provided to the Inspectional Services Department at least ten (10) working days in advance of a request for a final inspection.
- All prior conditions attached to [original permit] remain valid.

Public Record

- One (1) digital copy of all required application materials reflecting any physical changes required by the Board, if applicable, must be submitted to the Planning, Preservation & Zoning Division for the public record. Materials must be submitted in accordance with the document format standards of relevant Submittal Requirements.
- A copy of the recorded Decision stamped by the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds must be submitted to the Planning, Preservation & Zoning Division for the public record.

In addition to these conditions, any approval would require, at a minimum, revision to Condition #2 from the original Site Plan Approval for the project (CZC20-000104):

2. 'Utility meetings are not permitted on any facade or within the frontage area of the lot'

Link to Decision (CZC20-000104):

[OriginalDecision \(CZC20-000104\) 2021](#)