



City of Somerville
ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS
City Hall 3rd Floor, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

20 AUGUST 2025 MEETING MINUTES

This meeting was conducted via remote participation on Zoom.

NAME	TITLE	STATUS	ARRIVED
Susan Fontano	Chair	<i>Present</i>	
Anne Brockelman	Vice Chair	<i>Absent</i>	
Ann Fullerton	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Zachary Zarembo	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Brian Cook	Alt. Member	<i>Present</i>	
Sisia Daglian	Alt. Member	<i>Present</i>	

City staff present: Kit Luster (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning); Madison Anthony (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning)

The meeting was called to order at 6:01pm and adjourned at 6:55pm.

Member Cook sat as the Acting Clerk. Member Daglian sat as a voting member.

GENERAL BUSINESS: Meeting Minutes

Following a motion by Acting Clerk Cook, seconded by Member Daglian, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the 16 July 2025 and the 6 August 2025 meeting minutes, as presented.

GENERAL BUSINESS: Draw Seven Park Signature

The applicant team explained that the Draw Seven Park project recently underwent an extensive permitting process, and the project is underway. Plans to improve the park include updated site amenities, utilities, and pedestrian connectivity. The project also looks to address some flooding issues with the river systems that are located adjacently. This will include the development of a flood barrier through a natural berm and the creation of a living shoreline, to mitigate some of the riverbank erosion occurring on the park's eastern side. The project is serving to increase community access, with a goal of connection to the Mystic River Reservation Greenway. The team noted that the last permit being sought from an environmental perspective is from Chapter 91, known as the Public Waterfront Act. Part of the project is seeking to do beach cleanup and beach nourishment. There is currently debris on the beach in the form of bricks, glass, concrete, etc. The proposal is to clean this up and augment the entirety of the beach area with a matching grain size material, approximately 397 cubic yards of beach nourishment material. This Chapter 91 license requires both a Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals signature.

Following a motion by Acting Clerk Cook, seconded by Member Zarembo, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to approve a signature from the Zoning Board of Appeals for a Chapter 91 approval for Draw Seven Park Improvements, to facilitate the Department of Conservation Recreation permitting process with the Department of Environmental Protection.

RESULT:

APPROVED

PUBLIC HEARING: 872 Broadway (ZP25-000064) (ZP25-000065)

Following a motion by Acting Clerk Cook, seconded by Member Zaremba, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the request for a continuance to the 17 September 2025 meeting for 872 Broadway.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC HEARING: 8-8a Melvin Street (ZP25-000047) (ZP25-000048) (ZP25-000049)

(continued from 16 July 2025)

The applicant team explained that they previously submitted plans for a dormer in the kitchen area on the third floor of the building. This was a 16' wide dormer, with three zoning code violations. The feedback received from the Board was that the proposal, in that configuration, would not be approved. The proposal is now to shift the dormer wall, as shown on the left side of the plans, over 35". This will drop the dormer width to 13' 1" from the originally approved drawings of 11' 7". This request will mean that the cabinets and size of the kitchen island will be modified, but the windows will remain in their locations. The new dormer will not be more than 50% of the total dormer ridge length. However, the proposal is still in violation of the dormer separation, which went from 1' 11" to 4' 10", and the window ratio with the side wall being over 36".

Chair Fontano opened public testimony.

Meredith Porter (104 Josephine Ave) – asked how this proposal would meet the Hardship Variance criteria, as there does not seem to be a compelling condition relating to the building that requires the construction in this fashion.

Staff stated that they do not believe the proposal fits the criteria for a Hardship Variance. There is nothing about the property which gives it special circumstances to qualify for a hardship.

Seeing no additional public comment at this time, Chair Fontano closed public testimony.

The Board stated that the change made was substantial in that it removes one of the variance requests, however, there does still seem to be a question as to the overall hardship criteria. In the past, the Board has worked with applicants to try to manage these items when good faith efforts are shown. There was discussion that the windows, as proposed, seem unbalanced. The left hand window could be dropped and the window dimension relative to the face of the façade could be made conforming. The dormer width is wider than it needs to be. The two Hardship Variances that remain are for the dormer face width and the dormer separation standards. It is difficult to stretch the Hardship Variance criteria to fit this type of situation. The applicant team suggested that it was the nature of the building itself which forced the design of the dormers. While it is unfortunate that the building has a steep slope in the roof, requiring the dormer to be raised in order to obtain a third floor apartment with a kitchen, this is a problem of design, and not a problem of zoning. There seems to be justification for criteria 3 that there will not be significant detriment to the neighborhood, the public good, and the zoning ordinance, but there does not seem to be justification for the other hardship criteria.

The Board suggested eliminating the existing cabinetry on the refrigerator wall and potentially tucking the refrigerator into the eave. There is a path to make a 12' dormer work for the kitchen. Based on these possibilities, it would be difficult to approve the variance requests. The Board requested a picture of the outside of this space and a picture of the inside, to determine the interchange between the two and if there are things that could be modified. The applicant team should also work to demonstrate something about the unusual nature of the

structure that only allows the redesign to go so far without still creating a problem with one of the dormer standards.

The applicant team requested a Certificate of Occupancy for unit 2, in order to place it on the market while working on the third unit. Staff stated that this Board does not have that authority. This will need to be handled by the Inspectional Services Department (ISD).

Following a motion by Acting Clerk Cook, seconded by Member Fullerton, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the request for a continuance to the 17 September 2025 meeting in the matter of 8-8A Melvin Street.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

NOTICE: These minutes constitute a summary of the votes and key discussions at this meeting. To review a full recording, please contact the Planning, Preservation & Zoning Division at ZoningBoard@somervillema.gov