



City of Somerville  
**ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS**  
City Hall 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

**15 OCTOBER 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>Present</i>	
Ann Fullerton	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Zachary Zaremba	Member	<i>Absent</i>	
Brian Cook	Alt. Member	<i>Present</i>	
Sisia Daglian	Alt. Member	<i>Present</i>	

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

The meeting was called to order at 6:00pm and adjourned at 7:12pm.

*Vice Chair Brockelman sat as the Acting Clerk. Member Daglian sat as a voting member.*

**GENERAL BUSINESS: Meeting Minutes**

Following a motion by Vice Chair Brockelman, seconded by Member Daglian, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the 17 September 2025 meeting minutes, as presented.

**PUBLIC HEARING: 36 Beacon Street (ZP25-000075) (ZP25-000084)**

The applicant team explained that this is an historic row house. It is unique from the abutting row houses in that it has an extension out the back which was built after the original structure. An interior ladder is currently being used for egress, which is not code compliant, and an exterior stair is required to be constructed for egress, which requires a Hardship Variance. The rear forested area is proposed to be kept as is. There is an existing door on the structure which will be reused for the exterior stair access point. There is land in the back of the property, which is owned by the City, but effectively functions as “no man's land”. It is 4’ below the elevation of the City parking lot and is in line with the elevation of the rear yard. The staircase will sit within the 20’ rear setback but it should not be directly against any fence lines of the neighbors. The stairs will be 12’ to the lot line and approximately 23’ to the rear fence. A switchback stair is proposed to be built to the code minimums, with a small platform beside it. The second Hardship Variance is for an impermeable area. The existing usage is 70.4, and the request is 65. The applicant is seeking relief from an additional 6.8% to be able to construct the stairs. The construction should be quick and there should be no undue issues with noise.

Chair Fontano opened public testimony.

Sonia Dalley (4 Farrar Street, Cambridge) – explained that her family has owned 34 Beacon Street for years. Her tenants are concerned regarding the proposal. They are alarmed at the possibility of an additional structure being built behind 36 Beacon St. It is important to know that the roof of the entire row of apartments is designed to drain stormwater to the back of the buildings. Years ago, an addition was built behind 36 Beacon St which created an L-shaped section of the roof that creates a huge waterfall of stormwater runoff onto her property. This creates considerably more flooding in the basement of 34 Beacon Street in comparison to 32 or 30 Beacon Street. A large,

deck-type stairway would aggravate the situation by not allowing the water to infiltrate into the ground. She is concerned that the backyard at 36 Beacon will be paved, similar to the front yard, creating additional runoff onto her property. She instead suggested a fire escape, or restoring the internal egress point. The community of tenants at 34, 32, 30, and 28 Beacon Street benefit from and appreciate the privacy of the backyard and gardens. Constructing a three-story deck overlooking a private area is highly disturbing and aesthetically objectionable. She stated that the previous construction projects have created vibration, and cracks.

The applicant team stated that they are aware that water is leaking into nearby basements, though they are unsure of the cause of it. It is unclear if the rebuilt roof caused this issue. They continue to work to improve the roof, and they do not believe a stairway would exacerbate this issue. Also, the stairs will be built with gaps between the decking, so water will permeate into the ground.

The Board asked how people are allowed to occupy the structure with a ladder egress. The applicant team explained that the building currently has a main single staircase for egress. The code allows for one staircase for egress, but the Inspector is requiring the second egress to be appropriately built out. There is a third unit in the building with an interior staircase that accesses it. The interior staircase was determined to be "grandfathered in", though it does not meet current code. Building an interior staircase between the first two floors was considered, but this could not be completed appropriately to meet code. The applicant team also stated that they have spent \$12,000 in the past six months renovating the roof to install proper tapering to try to redirect the water.

The Board asked the setback distance from the living area of the exterior porch to the lot line. The applicant team stated that this is approximately 18'7". Some Board members stated that they would be disinclined to approve the application without that distance being 20' in compliance with the setbacks. Creating a small livable area on the porch should not be part of the hardship request. Also, installing a drywell under the porch may help drainage issues. The applicant team stated that the porch area could be reduced by approximately 1' and a gravel drywell could be installed.

The Board noted that the narrowness of the lot in question is not the reason for the Hardship Variance; it is the depth. The inherited property has gradually eaten into the rear setback. The unusual character of the existing structure creates the hardship.

The applicant team explained the technical constraints of fitting a stairway within the existing structure, noting that a U-shaped stairwell was considered but would not work due to space limitations and structural requirements. It was agreed that the hardship documentation should be clarified that the issue is not specifically due to the historic nature of the row houses, but rather the existing property massing that makes it difficult to build an exterior stair within the 20' lot line.

There was discussion regarding clarifying lot coverage and the permeable area requirements for a property. The applicant team reviewed the current state of the backyard, which is covered in gravel and earth. 100% of the water on-site is infiltrated. There have been front yard improvements including hardscape, bike paths, and vegetation. The lot coverage calculations were revised to include the permeable surfaces.

The Board noted that the applicant team may be creating an additional building code issue by building more into the backyard as there is not an egress to the public way from the front of the property. The applicant team stated the minimum safe distance in the code will be reviewed. The existing concrete walk is proposed to remain as it is. The Board suggested that removing some of the concrete slab could help the applicant comply with the second variance requirement. The applicant team stated that the concrete slab could be cut back, though this could also lead to additional drainage concerns.

The Board expressed concern about what the second Hardship Variance is requested for. This is not about lot coverage; it is about permeable versus non-permeable space. The applicant team stated that only considering permeable surfaces would allow the site to be in compliance. For lot coverage, which may or may not include permeability, the site is not in compliance. Staff explained that the Inspectional Service Department (ISD) Zoning

Review Planner left the following review comment: the lot has an existing non-conforming lot coverage of 70.4%, where the maximum is 65% per Somerville Zoning Ordinance 3.2.11. A Hardship Variance for relief from SZO 14.1.7.B.ii for further reducing non-conforming landscape and permeable area is needed.

The Board discussed continuing this item in order to obtain additional information. The Board requested that someone from ISD be available to explain the second variance request.

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

Following a motion by Vice Chair Brockelman, seconded by Member Fullerton, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to grant a request for the applicant to continue this hearing to 5 November 2025.

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>CONTINUED</b>
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*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](mailto:ZoningBoard@somervillema.gov).*