



City of Somerville

ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS

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

TO: Zoning Board of Appeals
FROM: OSPCD Staff
SUBJECT: 148 Morrison Avenue, ZP25-000089
POSTED: February 10, 2026

RECOMMENDATION: Approve with Conditions

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 special permit application submitted for 148 Morrison 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 November 20, 2025, and is scheduled for a public hearing on February 18, 2026. 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

Andrea Morelli, representative of MBA Building Group, proposes modifications to an existing non-conforming building in the NR district, which requires a Special Permit.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

The Applicant is proposing to modify a single family two-story rowhouse by demolishing two rear additions with fire entrances on Clifton Street, three (3) concrete block car garage, and three (3) asphalt parking spaces, and replace them with one (1) rear addition connected to the original structure. This new structure will create additional living space to the main dwelling, also it will be dug out to create a basement apartment. Lastly, in the rear of the lot, the Applicant will build one (1) rear dwelling (backyard cottage) as well as landscaping along the front of Clifton Street.

BACKGROUND

148 Morrison Ave. is located in the 0.5 mi Transit Area in the Neighborhood Residential (NR) zoning district in the Davis neighborhood represented by Ward 6 Councilor Lance L. Davis. The Zoning Board of Appeals is the decision-making authority for all discretionary or administrative permits required for the NR zoning district.

The property is part of the Pierce, William Rowhouses Local Historic District. Any modification to the exterior of the property that is visible from a public way requires a

Certificate of Appropriateness from the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC). The HPC issued a Certificate of Appropriateness (CA) for Local Historic District Alteration on April 1st, 2025. The mentioned CA is attached with the materials package.

NEIGHBORHOOD MEETINGS

This application required one (1) neighborhood meeting. The meeting was hosted by the applicant on September 8, 2025, via the Zoom meeting platform. Neighbors and residents provided comments on the appreciation for relocation of the rooftop mechanical units, and had clarifying questions about stormwater management on site, and the foreseen façade materials on the east elevation. All questions and concerns raised in the meeting were addressed by the applicant's team. The detailed neighborhood report is included with the materials package.

ANALYSIS

The property at 148 Morrison Avenue is a single-family two-story dwelling and part of a five- (5) unit rowhouse located at the corner of Morrison Avenue and Clifton Street, in a residential area between Davis Square and Ball Square. The existing rowhouse is not a permitted building type in the NR district; therefore, the building is existing nonconforming, and any modifications or development are governed by Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO) §14.1.5. The applicant proposes to demolish the rear additions and garage and expand the main house, which may be permitted by Special Permit pursuant to SZO §14.1.5.e.i.

In addition to the expansion of the main house, the applicant proposes adding two (2) additional residential units. One unit will be a basement apartment in accordance with state regulations for a "Protected Use Accessory Dwelling Unit" under 760 CMR 71.00 (Code of Massachusetts Regulations). This unit has been reviewed by the Inspectional Services Department (ISD) and meets the required criteria. The second unit will be a "Backyard Cottage," constructed by right in the rear of the lot, with a design that complies with SZO §3.1.12.

The figure below illustrates the existing neighborhood context and provides a clear aerial view of the rear portion of the property. As noted above, the building is part of a Local Historic District and underwent review by the HPC. The HPC found that the proposal is compatible with the character of the existing rowhouse architecture. This decision was issued on April 1, 2025. The staff memorandum and meeting minutes to the HPC meeting referenced are available to the Board [through this link](#).

In summary, the applicant's overall objective is to add two residential units and create additional living space while removing later-constructed additions while creating a more cohesive structure consistent with the main rowhouse architecture. Additionally, the proposed plans include a landscape buffer and fencing along Clifton Street, extending the

existing landscape buffer along Morrison Avenue, and replacing the existing paved area. The proposed landscape improvements appear consistent with the surrounding context, as abutting properties feature similar front and side yard landscape buffers.



Figure 1 - Aerial picture of locus

Upon analysis of the material submitted by the Applicant, PPZ staff does not believe that granting the Special Permit would result in a substantial detriment to the public good, nor would it nullify or substantially derogate from the intent and purpose of the Neighborhood Residential (NR) district, as outlined below:

Intent:

- To implement the objectives or the comprehensive plan of the City of Somerville.
- To conserve already established areas of detached and semi-detached residential buildings.

Purpose:

- To permit the development of one-, two-, and three-unit detached and semi-detached residential buildings on individual lots.
- To permit contextual modifications to existing detached and semi-detached residential buildings.
- To permit the adaptive reuse of certain existing nonconforming buildings for arts & creative uses compatible with residential areas.
- To create dwelling unit types, sizes, and bedroom counts ideal for larger households in houses, semi-attached houses, duplexes, and triple-deckers.
- To create dwelling unit types, sizes, and bedroom counts ideal for smaller households in cottages and backyard cottages.

CONSIDERATIONS & FINDINGS

The Zoning Board of Appeals 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.

Special Permit 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. *The extent and nature of the proposed alteration.*
4. *The ability of conforming alterations to meet the demonstrated need of the Applicant.*
5. *Consistency of the proposed alterations with the evolution of neighboring structures.*
6. *Establishment of permeable lot surface, to the maximum extent possible.*
7. *Conformance to design guidelines applicable to the district where the property is located.*

Information relative to the required considerations is provided below:

Special Permit

1. *The comprehensive plan and existing policy plans and standards established by the City.*
 - a. Staff believes that this project supports the goals laid out in SomerVision 2040, the City's Comprehensive Master Plan, including the following:
 - i. *"Celebrate the unique character of our neighborhoods and the strength of our community as expressed in our history, cultures and vibrant civic engagement."*
 - ii. *"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.*
 - a. *To conserve already established areas of detached and semi-detached residential buildings.*
3. The extent and nature of the proposed alteration.
 - a. *Staff believes the extent of the proposed alterations is consistent with the existing footprint and lot size, and that the additions follow the architectural characteristics of the building and surrounding neighborhood.*

4. The ability of conforming alterations to meet the demonstrated need of the Applicant.

- a. *Staff has no comment on this item.*
- b. *The applicant addressed this item in the project narrative, noting that the basement unit may be used by their children in the future and that the additional units may provide supplemental rental income.*

5. Consistency of the proposed alterations with the evolution of neighboring structures.

The proposed expansion and backyard cottage are architecturally consistent with the main rowhouse structure and align with the overall pattern of historic renovation and maintenance within the neighborhood.

6. Establishment of permeable lot surface, to the maximum extent possible.

- a. *The proposed plans show an increase in landscaping along the Clifton Street side of the property, removal of existing paved parking areas, and reconfiguration of surfaces between the backyard cottage and main structure to incorporate permeable materials. These changes appear to maximize permeable lot surfaces.*

7. Conformance to design guidelines applicable to the district where the property is located.

- a. *Staff believes that the criteria discussed in Item 5 demonstrate that the proposed project conforms to the design guidelines of the district.*

PERMIT CONDITIONS

Should the Board approve the required Special Permit to establish modifications to an existing non-conforming building in the NR district for the two-story rowhouse building, Planning, Preservation & Zoning Staff recommend the following conditions:

Permit Validity

- 1. This Decision must be recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds

Public Record

- 2. A digital 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.