



City of Somerville

# ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS

City Hall , 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

**TO:** Zoning Board of Appeals  
**FROM:** Planning, Preservation, & Zoning (PPZ) Staff  
**SUBJECT:** 47 Trull, ZP26-000024  
**POSTED:** June 9, 2026

**RECOMMENDATION:** None

Staff memos are used to communicate background information, analysis, responses to public comments, review of statutory requirements and other information from PPZ staff to the Review Board members.

This memo summarizes the Hardship Variance request(s) submitted for 47 Trull, identifies any additional discretionary or administrative development review that is required by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO), and provides related analysis or feedback as necessary. The application was deemed complete on April 24, 2026, and is scheduled for a public hearing on June 17, 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

Adam Dash on behalf of Maxwell D. Bridges & Stefanie J. Bridges seeks relief from SZO § 3.1.8, regarding the minimum front setback in the Neighborhood Residence (NR) zoning district, which requires a Hardship Variance.

## SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

The Applicant is proposing to enclose the existing front porch on the second-floor unit of a 2.5 story structure, which would change the current front setback from ten feet nine inches (10' 9") to five feet seven inches (5'7") and requires a Hardship Variance.

## BACKGROUND

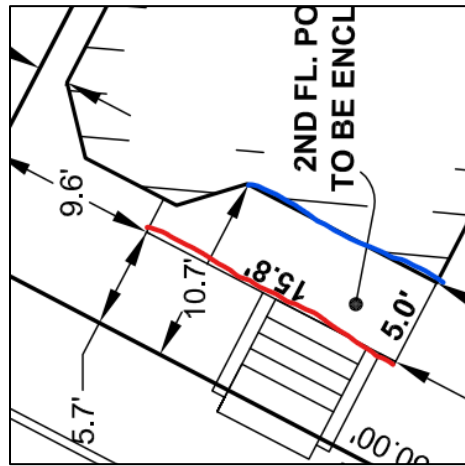
47 Trull Street is located in the .25 mile Transit Area in the Neighborhood Residence (NR) zoning district in the Magoun Square neighborhood represented by Ward 5 Councilor Naima Sait. Following the Board's decision regarding the Hardship Variance, the proposal will be by-right.

## ANALYSIS

The parcel at 47 Trull Street contains a three-unit condominium housed in two structures. The main house that fronts Trull Street contains two of the three units. The rear building contains the third unit. The Applicant currently resides in Unit 2 on the

second and third floors of the main building and is seeking to enclose the front porch on the second floor.

Pursuant to SZO § 3.1.8 , in the NR district, the minimum front setback is ten (10) feet. The current front setback is ten feet and nine inches (10' 9"). If the front porch is enclosed, the porch becomes a building component and is considered part of the main massing of the building. The setback of the main massing would be measured from the outside of the enclosed front porch instead of the front wall of the building and would create a new front setback of five feet and seven inches (5'7"). Shown in the figure below, the current front setback is measured from the blue line, where the new front setback would be measured from the red line.



Submitted Plan

The Applicant provided a narrative as part of this application addressing the review criteria for the requested Hardship Variance.

Pursuant to MGL Chapter 40A, § 10, the Applicant must meet the following criteria to qualify for a Hardship Variance:

- a. Special circumstances exist relating to the soil conditions, shape, or topography of a parcel of land or the unusual character of an existing structure but not affecting generally the zoning district in which the land or structure is located;
- b. Literal enforcement of the provision of this Ordinance for the district where the subject land or structure is located would involve substantial hardship, financial or otherwise, to the petitioner or appellant due to said special circumstances; and
- c. Desirable relief could be granted without causing substantial detriment to the public good and without nullifying or substantially derogating from the intent and purpose of a specific district in this Ordinance or the Ordinance in general.

The following is PPZ staff's analysis related to the review criteria for the requested Hardship Variance.

In the narrative, the Applicant addresses criterion 1 of M.G.L. c 40A noting “the existing property is unusual in that it has two structures on it, which crowds the lot...[a] situation not shared by other properties in the neighborhood or the [NR] district”. PPZ staff does not believe that the nature of the parcel with multiple structures creates a special circumstance relating to the minimum front setback.

The Applicant address criterion 2 by describing the details of the existing structure, citing that the unit layout creates a hardship by lacking a functional entry way and storage space in the entry of their unit. The Applicant contends that the granted relief would allow the family more space to remain in the home. Generally, PPZ staff do not provide analyses or recommendations concerning the existence of actual hardship, financial or otherwise, regarding the second Hardship Variance criterion.

The Applicant address criterion 3 saying the proposed modification aligns with the NR districts goals by supporting a larger household through a contextual modification to an existing home. The Applicant states the enclosure does not expand the building footprint or move the structure closer to the street in any practical sense, and the Hardship Variance provides significant benefit to the applicant without adding detriment to the neighborhood or the public good.

Upon analysis of the material submitted by the Applicant, PPZ staff do not believe that the granting of the requested Hardship Variance would cause a substantial detriment to the public good or nullify or substantially derogate from the intent and purpose of the NR district, copied here:

Intent:

- To implement the objectives of the Comprehensive Plan of the City of Somerville.
- To conserve already established areas of detached an 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 create dwelling units types, sizes, and bedroom counts ideal for larger households in houses, Semi-Attached Houses, Duplexes, and Triple Deckers

Additionally, PPZ Staff do not believe granting the requested hardship variances would undermine the broader intent of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, including, but not limited to, the following:

- To permit development and redevelopment according to plans that are collaboratively developed with the Somerville community.
- To protect the health, safety, and general welfare.

Massachusetts courts have stated that variances will naturally deviate from the intent and purpose of a zoning ordinance to some degree and that the discretionary approval of a variance is defensible if the deviation is not substantial or significant in comparison to the intent and purpose for the district in appraising the effect of the proposal on the entire neighborhood, including future impacts and other development approved or denied in the general vicinity of the development site.

**CONSIDERATIONS & FINDINGS**

In accordance with the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, the Zoning Board of Appeals may grant a Hardship Variance only upon deliberating and finding all of the following at the public hearing for each requested variance:

Hardship Variance Considerations

1. Special circumstances exist relating to the soil conditions, shape, or topography of a parcel of land or the unusual character of an existing structure but not affecting generally the Neighborhood Residence zoning district in which the land or structure is located;
2. Literal enforcement of the provision of this Ordinance for the district where the subject land or structure is located would involve substantial hardship, financial or otherwise, to the petitioner or appellant, Maxwell D. Bridges & Stefanie J. Bridges, Trustees of the Bridges Family Trust due to said special circumstances; and
3. Desirable relief could be granted without causing substantial detriment to the public good and without nullifying or substantially derogating from the intent and purpose of the Neighborhood Residence district in this Ordinance or the Ordinance in general.

**PERMIT CONDITIONS**

Should the Board approve the required Hardship Variance for relief from the minimum front set back enclosure, PPZ 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, and Zoning Division for the public record.