

2 Carver St

Hardship Variance Narrative

Somerville Zoning Board of Appeals

Rear addition Roof Raise / Half-Story Rafter Wall-Plate Height

Property Address	2 Carver St, Somerville MA 02143
Owner / Applicant	Athanasios Dousis
Zoning District	NR (Ward 5)
Existing Use	Two-family residential
Proposed Use	No change
Relief Requested	Hardship Variance from SZO Section 2.4.4 Massing & Height, half-story standard, to permit roof rafters on one side of the existing rear addition roof to intersect the wall plate/top of wall frame at greater than two (2) feet above the finished floor of the half-story.
Scope of Relief	Limited roof-raise relief for the existing rear addition.

Hardship Variance - Overview

The Applicant seeks a Hardship Variance from the Building Dimensional Standards of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, specifically SZO §2.4.4 Massing & Height, to raise the roof of the existing rear addition of the principal dwelling to match the roof height of the half-story. The rear addition is located at the rear of the existing structure, adjacent to the existing garage/driveway area, and occupies only part of the rear floor plate rather than extending uniformly across the full floor width. As shown on the plot plan, the rear addition runs from the rear-left portion of the structure toward, but not fully across, the rear-right portion of the building.

The proposed roof raise is intended to create a coherent pitched roof over the rear addition that matches the ridge line of the principal building's gabled roof. Because the existing rear floor plate is asymmetric, matching the existing principal roof geometry causes the proposed rafters on the east exterior wall of the rear addition to intersect the wall plate/top of wall frame at more than two feet above the finished floor, exceeding the two-foot maximum for a half-story. Based on feedback from the Somerville Zoning team, the half-story area of the rear addition is not considered an extension of the dormer on the left side due to the offset of the exterior wall, and it does not otherwise comply with the half-story regulations under SZO Section 2.4.4.a.viii.b.i.

The requested variance is narrow. The project does not seek a change in use, does not seek a new dwelling unit, and is not proposed as a general increase in the building footprint. The proposed work will not change existing setbacks, lot coverage, parking, or access. The purpose of the requested relief is to allow a modest, contextual roof form over the existing rear addition that adds crucial living space while maintaining the existing residential use of the property.

Description of Work

The existing structure includes a principal gabled roof with a half-story and a rear addition that is not aligned symmetrically with the principal building's rear floor plate. The proposed work would raise/reframe the roof

of the rear addition to align with the principal roof ridge and roof pitch. The proposed roof would remain a pitched roof and would be designed as part of the same architectural composition as the existing dwelling.

The proposed roof configuration would improve the usability, code-compliant layout, and weather-tight construction of the rear upper-level area over an existing portion of the building. A roof designed to satisfy the two-foot wall-plate height on both sides would require lowering or distorting the rear addition roof in a manner that conflicts with the existing gabled roof geometry, creates a less coherent roof transition, and requires disproportionate structural and design changes relative to the limited relief requested.

Applicable Hardship Variance Criteria

Pursuant to Somerville Zoning Ordinance Section 15.2.3, the Zoning Board of Appeals may grant a Hardship Variance only upon finding all of the following:

- 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;
- 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
- 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.

Responses to Review Criteria

Criterion A - Special circumstances

Special circumstances exist because of the unusual character of the existing structure. The principal building has a centered gable ridge, but the existing rear addition is partial-width and offset to one side. Its two exterior bearing walls are therefore not equidistant from the principal ridge. That geometry is a pre-existing structural condition particular to this property and is not a condition affecting the zoning district generally.

With the principal ridge held in its existing location and elevation, a rear roof with equal roof pitches cannot meet both offset extension walls at the same wall-plate elevation. To place both rafter intersections at or below two feet, the project would have to shift the rear ridge away from the principal ridge, use unequal roof pitches, lower the rear ridge enough to eliminate usable headroom, or relocate and reconstruct an existing exterior bearing wall and associated floor framing. A full-width or symmetrically centered rear addition would not create this condition. The requested relief is therefore caused by the existing structure.

Criterion B - Substantial hardship, financial or otherwise

Literal enforcement would impose substantial financial and practical hardship because a strictly compliant design would require substantial work beyond reframing the roof over the existing extension. A centered rear ridge would require an offset ridge and new valleys or hips at the connection to the principal roof; unequal pitches would require a bespoke asymmetrical roof and more complex framing, flashing, and drainage; lowering the ridge would materially reduce or eliminate habitable headroom; and moving an exterior bearing wall would require demolition and reconstruction of the existing rear addition and connected floor framing.

Criterion C - No substantial detriment to public good; no derogation from ordinance purpose

The requested relief can be granted without substantial detriment to the public good. The proposed work is limited to raising the roof of the existing rear addition and is intended to match the principal dwelling's

gabled roofline. The project will maintain the existing residential use of the property, will not add a new dwelling unit, and will not expand the building footprint, alter parking/access, or create additional traffic impacts.

Matching the existing roof ridge and pitch produces a more orderly and contextual architectural result than a lowered or irregular roof designed solely to satisfy the two-foot wall-plate measurement. The relief therefore supports the zoning ordinance's massing purpose by preserving a pitched-roof form.

The requested variance also would not nullify or substantially derogate from the intent and purpose of the district or the zoning ordinance. The relief is limited to one dimensional/massing measurement for a half-story roof condition; it does not authorize a prohibited use or a materially more intensive development pattern.

Conclusion

For the reasons set forth above, the Applicant respectfully requests that the Zoning Board of Appeals grant a Hardship Variance from SZO Section 2.4.4.a.viii.b.i. to allow the roof rafters on one side of the raised roof over the existing rear addition to intersect the wall plate/top of wall frame at greater than two (2) feet above the finished floor of the half-story. The requested relief is caused by the unusual character and asymmetric floor-plate geometry of the existing structure; literal enforcement would impose substantial financial and practical hardship due to that special circumstance; and the relief can be granted without substantial detriment to the public good and without derogating from the intent and purpose of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance.