



City of Somerville

# ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS

City Hall, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

**TO:** Zoning Board of Appeals  
**FROM:** Planning Division  
**SUBJECT:** Clarendon Hill (34 North Street)  
**POSTED:** July 30, 2026

**RECOMMENDATION:** Insubstantial Change (Revision to Comprehensive Permit)

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

## SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

Preservation of Affordable Housing (POAH) is requesting a revision to the Comprehensive Permit. The original Decision can be linked [here](#).

## BACKGROUND

A Comprehensive Permit under MGL Chapter 40B was issued for Clarendon Hill on September 30, 2020. Since then, the Applicant has been moving forward with construction documents and addressing other items that must be completed before applying for a building permit. In doing so, the Applicant has identified some items included in the original decision from 2020 that they wish to modify. The project has already received three (3) revisions in October 2022, January 2023, and August 2025, for changes that the ZBA determined to be insubstantial.

The process for modifying Comprehensive Permits is as follows:

1. The Applicant submits a request to change the permit.
2. The Board must consider the request within twenty (20) days and determine whether the change is “substantial” or “insubstantial”. In Somerville, this is typically done during a regularly scheduled public meeting of the Board.
  - a. If the Board determines that the change is “insubstantial”, the change is permitted with no additional steps necessary.
  - b. If the Board determines that the change is “substantial”, the Board must then schedule and hold a public hearing regarding the request.

This application is scheduled to be heard by the Board on August 5, 2026. If the Board determines that any of the proposed changes are substantial, the public hearing will likely be held at the next meeting on August 19, 2026.

## ANALYSIS

Each of the changes proposed by the Applicant are addressed individually. The Board may determine that all, some, or none of the proposed changes are insubstantial. Staff recommends that all the proposed changes are found insubstantial.

### Document Summary

The documents submitted as part of this Comprehensive Permit Change application include the following:

- Original Clarendon Hill Decision
- Updated Plan Set 06-16-2026/07-22-2026
- Revised Waiver List 06-16-2026
- Zoning Revision Narrative
- 07-22-2026 Responses to Comments from City of Somerville

### Proposed Changes

#### Site Revisions on Lot B2:

- Woonerf:
  - The design of the woonerf (shared street) has been updated to incorporate City comments and accommodate for utilities. Changes include updating curbing, pavers, bollards, and pedestrian crossings.
- Setbacks
  - Changes to the setbacks are proposed. Details can be found below.
- Street Trees
  - An amended waiver is requested to reduce the total number of street trees throughout the development.
- Transformer Location
  - As previously stated, the Applicant now requests a waiver for the relocation of the transformer, which is proposed in a frontage zone on North Street.
  - *Note: this item requires a new Zoning Waiver.*
- Play Area Location
  - The proposed Play Area and Community Garden location are proposed to be swapped. This will provide the Play Area more security, and better community access to the garden area.
- Lighting Photometric Plan
  - The Applicant has updated the building and site lighting photometric plans with more detail, per the original approval.

#### Building D Architectural Revisions:

A number of revisions to Building D are proposed, which provide a greater level of detail from the original 2020 Approval.

- Entrance:

- New entry door at the rear of the building to accommodate for the change in location of the Play Area.
- Color Palette
  - An updated color palette is proposed to complement Building E. Staff have received the material samples photos have been provided to the Board. There are no concerns from City Staff regarding the updated material choice.
- Façade Updates
  - Two bays are proposed to be combined into a single larger bay.

#### Site Revisions on Lots E1 and E2:

- Access
  - The townhouse building is proposed to be shifted to maintain a pathway behind the townhomes. The townhomes will have private patios, and streets are interconnected via internal walkways through the block.
- Number of Buildings
  - As previously mentioned, the townhouse buildings #4 and #5 are proposed to be combined into one continuous building. There is no change in the number of units. An additional waiver is requested from the number of townhomes permitted per building. The standard in the Zoning Ordinance is ten (10), and this building proposes eleven (11).
    - *Note: This item requires a new zoning waiver.*
- Trash Location
  - An updated trash location is proposed after discussion with City Agencies. The proposed change decreases the amount of parking on Clarendon Hill Drive to 23 spaces. This does not affect the previously approved parking range.
- Bicycle Storage
  - Additional details for the proposed bicycle storage have been provided. The original approval showed the bicycle parking in the interior of the block. The updated plan shows the bicycle parking at the perimeter of the furnishing zone.
- Setbacks
  - Changes to the setbacks are proposed. Details can be found below.
- Street Trees
  - Changes to the number in street trees are proposed.
- Lighting Photometric Plan
  - The Applicant has updated the building and site lighting photometric plans with more detail, per the original approval.

#### Townhouse Building Architectural Revisions:

- Front Entrances
  - Revisions include further details from original approval. Entrances are proposed to maximize accessibility and air-tight detailing by removing the inset doorways.
- Color Palette

- An updated color palette is proposed to complement Buildings D & E. Staff have received the material samples photos have been provided to the Board. There are no concerns from City Staff regarding the updated material choice.

#### Additional Staff Comments and Analysis:

As part of this application, City Staff have reviewed the proposal and have the following comments for this application or as part of a future application.

#### Public Space and Urban Forestry (PSUF):

PSUF Staff provided their review comments which the Applicant replied to in a separate memo. That document is attached to this staff memo for the Board's review.

#### Mobility:

1. The Mobility Division is supportive of the Applicant's revisions to the woonerf and bike storage as described in the Clarendon Hill Phase Two Zoning Revision Narrative. The Applicant shall coordinate with the Mobility Division to finalize site plan design details through the project's Streetscape Construction Permits, including the final design of the woonerf and final bike parking locations.
2. The Mobility Division recommends removing Waiver #22 from the waivers list, as there are no longer minimum vehicle parking requirements for residential uses outside of a Transit Area, and this waiver is no longer necessary.
3. The Mobility Division does not recommend broad waivers from bicycle parking dimensional and installation standards, as currently requested in Waivers #23 and #25. We recommend revised, more targeted waiver requests that address specific development challenges and/or goals.

These items are informational for future submittals for the applicant and do not require any action by the Board at this time.

### **RECOMMENDED MODIFICATIONS OF FINDINGS, CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL AND WAIVERS**

Staff recommends modifying the following waivers:

Waiver #6, concerning building setback requirements, to change the secondary front setback from 74'0" to North Street, to **73'9"**, and the rear setback from 16'6" to **15'3"**.

Waiver #12, concerning the Gross Floor Area/Dwelling Unit requirements, to change the maximum number of Dwelling Units permitted per Building Type

- Building D: 57 maximum units. **Proposed: 58 units**
- Building E: 165 maximum units. **Proposed: 168 units**

Waiver #16, concerning the building setback requirement, to change the primary front setback of the Townhomes on Lot E1 from 4'-2" to New Street #3 (at curve) to 2.4' to TH-1 building face and 1.5' at bay on Clarendon Hill Drive, the rear setback from 2'-2" to Townhomes of Lot E2 to TH-1 to 2'0" to E2 Property Line, and the Townhomes on lot E2, changing the primary front setback from 0'-10" to Powder House Boulevard (5'-4" to the back of sidewalk) to TH-3 to 4" to property line and 4.5' to back of sidewalk on Powderhouse Blvd, the left setback from 5'-4" to New Street #1 to TH-2 to 5.2' to property line/ back of sidewalk on Stephenson Aman St, and the rear setback from 10'00" to Townhomes on lot E1 to TH-2 to 7.4' to property line.

Waiver #18, concerning the allowed maximum number of row houses in sequence.

- Current maximum: 10. Proposed: 11
- Waiver from Ground Story Elevation requirement and from the maximum Row Houses in Sequence requirement.
- Revision to combine 8-dwelling unit building and 5-unit dwelling building into a single 11-dwelling unit building.

Waiver #19 concerning the maximum number of dwelling units per site requirement. The current waiver allows 16 Dwelling Units on Lot E1 (combination of 3-Dwelling Unit, 8-Dwelling Unit, and 5- Dwelling Unit buildings). The proposed waiver would allow 16 units in two buildings: combination of 11-Dwelling Unit building and 5-Dwelling Unit building.

New Waiver #20A

- Topic: Standards & Measurements
- Sub-Topic: Building Placement – Setback Encroachment
- Ordinance Section: 2.4.3(d) v.
- Requirement: Mechanical equipment associated with residential uses, such as an HVAC unit, is not permitted in the frontage area of a lot, but may encroach into a required side or rear setback, provided that at least two (2) feet or the distance provided in the manufacturer's specifications, whichever is greater, is maintained from the vertical plane of any lot line.
- Relevant Lots: D1; E2
- Requested Waiver: Waiver to locate transformers in frontage area.
- Details: Ground-mounted transformers will be sited throughout the Development Site Area, per coordination with utility company.

Waiver #22, concerning the amount of parking on New Street #3. The approved number calls for approximately 25 spaces. The requested modification and design would reduce the parking to 23 spaces to account for the trash enclosure and ADA parking.

\*Note: Only the section of the waiver with a proposed modification has been included in this section.

## CONSIDERATIONS AND FINDINGS

The Zoning Board of Appeals is required to determine whether the proposed changes are substantial or insubstantial. If a change is deemed insubstantial, it is permitted. If a change is deemed substantial, the Board must hold a public hearing regarding the change prior to approving or denying it.

760 CMR 56.07(4)(c) and (d) provide guidance that the Board must consider when determining whether a change is substantial or insubstantial:

(c) The following matters generally will be substantial changes:

1. An increase of more than 10% in the height of the building(s);
2. An increase of more than 10% in the number of housing units proposed;
3. A reduction in the size of the site of more than 10% in excess of any decrease in the number of housing units proposed;
4. A change in building type (e.g., garden apartments, townhouses, high-rises);  
or
5. A change from one form of housing tenure to another.

(d) The following matters generally will not be substantial changes:

1. A reduction in the number of housing units proposed;
2. A decrease of less than 10% in the floor area of individual units;
3. A change in the number of bedrooms within individual units, if such changes do not alter the overall bedroom count of the proposed housing by more than 10%;
4. A change in the color or style of materials used; or
5. A change in the financing program under which the Applicant plans to receive a Subsidy, if the change affects no other aspect of the proposal.

Any considerations, waivers, and previous conditions not subject to this amendment remain in effect.

FROM: Meg Koglin, Public Space Planner

DATE: July 08, 2026

ADDRESS: 34 North Street Somerville, MA 02144

RE: Zoning Permit Informal Comments for ZP26-000059 Clarendon Phase 2

Following are comments in response to the Zoning Narrative and Waiver List revision requests dated June 16, 2026. PSUF will provide more detailed comments via construction permitting reviews when documentation is submitted for those.

### **2026-07-22 Clarendon Hill Team Responses in green below.**

**Reviewer:** Meg Koglin, Public Space and Urban Forestry

**Review Status:** Resubmittal Required

1. *20260708PSUFmk; corresponding document: Z-003 - Zoning Setback Comparison* Submission is not clear enough to review. Please improve the clarity of how "Approved" vs "Proposed" are presented in drawings by: 1) Increasing resolution so it is legible. 2 Indicating the date of the approved plan on the side-by-side "approved" vs "proposed" comparison images. Include revision history dates if there were changes between original approval and the proposal so we can see the approval changes over time. 3) Using Rev cloud or a suitable alternative to point out the changes between approved and proposed on the image. Revise and resubmit.
  - **Provided on 7/22 Submission Materials. Resolution improved where possible, and Dates are added for previous modifications.**
2. *20260708PSUFmk; corresponding document: Z-002 Site Layout* Improve clarity of how "Approved" vs "Proposed" are presented in drawings. 1) Indicate the date of the approved plan on the side-by-side "approved" vs "proposed" comparison pages. 2) List the date and content of changes in the "approved" plan history if there were any changes between the original approval and most recently approved. Revise and resubmit.
  - **Provided on 7/22 Submission Materials. Resolution improved where possible, and Dates are added for previous modifications. Note additional pages are added for reference only (C-107 Approved Thoroughfares and Approved Thoroughfares (Tree Planting)).**
3. *20260708PSUFmk; corresponding document: Z-002 Site Layout, Narrative* PSUF supports the 6/16/26 proposed relocation of the Headstart playground and community garden and will provide more detailed review comments during construction permitting.
  - **No response required.**

4. *20260708PSUFmk; corresponding document: Building Placement -- Building Setbacks (Waiver List "topic 6", ordinance section 3.2.10.b.(A-D), Z-002 Site Layout, Narrative* The most recent site plan (Sheet C302 dated 12/23/2025) does not show an ADA accessible route between the Headstart playground and the southeast side of Building D. The revision request to Waiver 6 would further decrease the space between the southeast corner of Building D and the retaining wall. We recommend that the Headstart space can be used as a playground when children are not in school, such as afternoon, evening, weekend and holiday. Thus, space for an ADA accessible route should be considered with setback and building placement requests.
  - **The accessible route to the Head Start playground is provided through the adjacent playground. Due to security requirements associated with Head Start operations, exclusive use of the Head Start playground may limit or preclude public access to this play area.**
5. *20260708PSUFmk; corresponding document: Building Placement -- Building Setbacks (Waiver List "topic 16", ordinance section 3.2.11.b.(A-D), Z-003 Zoning Setback Comparison, Narrative* Insufficient documentation to see how the setback revision requests impact the ability to plant street trees. Please update Z-003 to be a legible scaled drawing that shows the distance between the property line, tree pit, approved building placement, and proposed building placement. The goal is to ensure that there remains space for street trees.
  - **The proposed dimensional modifications to the Zoning Setbacks do not impact the scale, location, or spacing of proposed Tree Pits. We have provided a higher resolution site plan. Please refer to Landscape drawings for dimensions of tree pits and distance to buildings.**
6. *20260708PSUFmk; corresponding document: Z-002 Site Layout, Narrative* PSUF supports relocation of Building D transformer to the proposed location in frontage area and recommends plant screening if possible, while acknowledging that the applicant was previously granted a waiver from SZO 10.8.4(c) requirement to screen transformers. Applicant must ensure that adjacent paths remain ADA accessible.
  - **Plantings will visually screen transformers where possible, while complying with Eversource clearance requirements. Adjacent pathways will remain ADA accessible.**
7. *20260708PSUFmk; corresponding document: Z-003 Zoning Setback Comparison, and Narrative* Page Z-003 is too blurry to review the proposed dimensional adjustments of the previously approved setbacks. Revise and resubmit.
  - **Please refer to 7/22 Zoning Setback Comparison for higher resolution site plan.**
8. *20260708PSUFmk; corresponding document: Z-002 Site Layout, Narrative* PSUF supports the proposed schematic-level relocation of the bike storage on Blocks E1 and E2 to accommodate the reconfiguration of space to be a plaza, but bike storage must still meet review conditions under purview of Mobility, and conditions must meet construction permitting to follow.

- **No response required.**
9. 20260708PSUFvb; corresponding document: Z-004 Illustrative street tree plan includes trees along Powder House Blvd and North Street. However, those trees are not included in any phase. If those trees are to be installed as part of the project, consider adding them in Phase 2.
- **Street trees are included as part of Phase 2 project, along both North Street and Powderhouse Boulevard.**
10. 20260708PSUFvb; corresponding document: Z-004 Comparison of Illustrative Street Tree Plans, Narrative We have continuously been assured that sitewide, the project will plant at least as many, if not more, caliper inches of trees as are being removed. This was also a promise to the community. The comment in the narrative that fewer trees development-wide will be provided than previously approved is concerning. Compliance with the requirements of the Tree Preservation Ordinance is a condition of the Comprehensive permit (Approval Conditions 29, 31). Provide an overall site plan with significant tree removals (trees 8 inches and larger) and an overall tree planting plan for comparison.
- **The project will exceed the replacement caliper of trees being removed site-wide. Sheet L-000 Tree Preservation Plan illustrating significant tree removal was provided as part of Permit Set dated 12/23/2025.**
- Landscape plans illustrating proposed tree planting have been provided as sheets L-301, L-302, L-303 as part of Permit Set dated 12/23/2025.**
11. 20260708PSUFvb; corresponding document: Z-004 Cannot determine street tree spacing based on conceptual design, but Waiver #28 states that Street Trees within sidewalk furnishing zones will be typically spaced at 25-30 feet.
- **Scaled landscape plans illustrating street tree spacing have been provided on L-301, L-302, L-303 as part of Permit Set dated 12/23/2025. Typical tree spacing is between 25-30' O.C.**
12. 20260708PSUFvb; general note Condition 132 of the Comprehensive Permit requires a tree planting plan for Thoroughfare 2 (now called Mary-Louise Daly Street) to be submitted to PSUF and the Urban Forestry Committee for review and approval. All plants must be native species.
- **Proposed Street Tree Planting for the south side of Mary-Louise Daly Street is illustrated on L-302 and L-303 and will be submitted. Street tree planting for the north side of Mary Louise Daly Street shall be provided as part of Phase 3.**

**Please do not reply to this email. All resubmittals should be done using our online service.**

Please contact me with any questions you may have, I can be reached by email [mkoglin@somervillema.gov](mailto:mkoglin@somervillema.gov).

Sincerely,  
Meg Koglin  
Public Space Planner