



City of Somerville

ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS

City Hall, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

TO: Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA)
FROM: Planning Division
SUBJECT: 6 Wheatland Street, ZP26-000018 & ZP26-000019
POSTED: July 9, 2026

RECOMMENDATION: ZP26-000018: None
ZP26-000019: None

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

This memo summarizes the Hardship Variances requests submitted for 6 Wheatland Street, 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 March 25, 2026, and is scheduled for a public hearing on July 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

6 Wheatland Street - ZP26-000018

Adam Dash, Esq., on behalf of Nelson Group Construction Corp. seeks relief from SZO 4.1.7.c, to build a primary front facade of 74.7% where 80% is the minimum per SZO 4.1.7.c in the Mid-Rise 3 (MR3) zoning district, which requires a Hardship Variance.

6 Wheatland Street - ZP26-000019

Adam Dash, Esq. on behalf of Nelson Group Construction Corp. seeks relief from SZO 10.3.6.a.i, to build a new three (3) story apartment building that does not meet the landscape buffer requirements in the Mid-Rise 3 (MR3) zoning district, which requires a Hardship Variance.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

Nelson Group Construction Corp. is requesting relief from requirements [SZO 4.1.7.c](#), to build a primary front facade of 74.7% where 80% is the minimum in the Mid-Rise 3 (MR3), and [SZO 10.3.6.a.i](#), to build a new three (3) story apartment building that does not meet the landscape buffer requirements as its abutter in the northeasterly (right) side is a residential condominium building in the Neighborhood Residence (NR) district. As mentioned before the Applicant is proposing to construct a new three (3) story, five (5) unit building with five (5) motor vehicle and long-term bicycle parking spaces, plus two (2)

short-term bicycle parking spaces. The proposed building type is a multi-unit apartment building.

BACKGROUND

6 Wheatland Street is not located in any Transit Area nor a Pedestrian Street. This property is located in Mid-Rise 3 (MR3) zoning district in the Winter Hill neighborhood, represented by Ward 4 Councilor Jesse Clingan. Following the Board's decision regarding the requested Hardship Variances, the proposal will require Site Plan Approval and Special Permits for a Residential use. The Planning Board is the decision-making authority for all (non-variance) discretionary or administrative permits required for the MR3 zoning district.

Due to its construction date (sometime between 1852-1874) this building went through the Demolition Review Step 1 (Determination of Significance) on May 6, 2025. The Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) found the existing structure not to be Historic Significant, therefore there was no demolition delay imposed. The staff memo and decision related to this hearing can be found [here](#).

ANALYSIS

As noted above, the current project seeks two (2) variances. Permit ZP26-000018 requests a variance from SZO 4.1.7.c which requires a primary façade build out minimum of 80%, and this project proposes a 74.7%.

Permit ZP26-000019 requests a variance from SZO 10.3.6.a.i which requires any lot in MR districts among others to be screened by a landscape buffer if their side or rear of the lot if it neighbors a NR district.

The Applicant is required to provide an argument addressing each of the review criteria for the requested Hardship Variances. The Applicant's arguments are provided in the Development Narratives, which have been submitted to the ZBA as part of the application, and summarized below.

Pursuant to MGL Chapter 40A, Section 10, the Application 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 Mid-Rise 3 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, Adam Dash, Esq., on behalf of Nelson Group Construction Corp, 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 the Mid-Rise 3 zoning district in this Ordinance or the Ordinance in general.

Criteria A

ZP26-000018

Planning Staff believe that the lot narrowness mentioned by the Applicant and its side lot line abutting the NR zoning district are special circumstances to its parcel of land which influence the façade project design and its ability to meet SZO 4.1.7.c.

ZP26-000019

Similar to the façade buildout variance request, Planning Division staff believe that the lot narrowness and its side lot line abutting a NR district parcel do create special circumstances for the Applicant to meet SZO 10.3.6.a.i.

Criteria B

ZP26-000018 & ZP26-000019

Generally, Planning Division staff do not provide analysis or recommendations concerning the existence of actual hardship, financial or otherwise, regarding the second Hardship Variance criterion.

Criteria C

ZP26-000018 & ZP26-000019

Upon analysis of the materials submitted by the Applicant, Planning Division Staff do not believe that the granting of the requested hardship variances would cause a substantial detriment to the public good or nullify or substantially derogate from the intent and purpose of the Mid-Rise 3 (MR3) district, copied here:

Intent

- To implement the objectives of the comprehensive plan of the City of Somerville.
- To create, maintain, and enhance areas appropriate for smaller scale, multi-use and mixed-use buildings and neighborhood serving commercial uses.

Purpose

- To permit the development of multi-unit and mixed-use buildings that do not exceed three (3) stories in height.

- To provide quality commercial spaces and permit small- scale, neighborhood serving commercial uses.
- To create dwelling unit types, sizes, and bedroom counts ideal for larger households in apartment buildings.
- To create dwelling unit types, sizes, and bedroom counts ideal for smaller households in general buildings.
- To permit increased residential density for buildings that meet the definition of both net zero ready and LEED Platinum Certifiable buildings.

Additionally, Planning Division Staff believe that granting the requested hardship variances would support 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 develop and maintain complete, mixed-use, walkable, transit-oriented, and environmentally sustainable neighborhoods that foster a strong sense of community throughout the city.
- To provide a range of housing types, unit sizes, and price points to accommodate the diverse household sizes and life stages of Somerville residents at all income levels.
- To provide and protect housing that is affordable to households with low and moderate incomes.
- To preserve and enhance the existing character of Somerville's traditional housing and respect existing built form and development patterns.
- To encourage the use of public transportation, bicycling, and walking in lieu of motor vehicle use when a choice of travel mode exists.
- To balance the supply of off-street parking with local thoroughfare network capacity.
- To encourage contemporary architectural design for new construction that compliments the established character of existing buildings.

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

- 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 Mid-Rise 3 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, Adam Dash, Esq., on behalf of Nelson Group Construction Corp, 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 the Mid-Rise 3 zoning district in this Ordinance or the Ordinance in general.

PERMIT CONDITIONS

ZP26-000018

Should the Board approve the required Hardship Variance **to build a primary front facade of 74.7% where 80% is the in the Mid-Rise 3 (MR3) zoning district**, Planning Staff recommend the following conditions:

Permit Validity

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

Public Record

- A digital copy of the recorded Decision stamped by the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds must be submitted to the Planning Division for the public record.

ZP26-000019

Should the Board approve the required Hardship Variance **for a landscape buffer as the side of the lot neighbors a NR district**, Planning Staff recommend the following conditions:

Permit Validity

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

Public Record

- A digital copy of the recorded Decision stamped by the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds must be submitted to the Planning Division for the public record.