



City of Somerville

ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS

City Hall, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

TO: Zoning Board of Appeals
FROM: Planning Staff
SUBJECT: 333 Highland Ave, ZP26-000048
POSTED: September 25, 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 staff to the Review Board members.

This memo summarizes the Special Permit request submitted for 333 Highland 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 August 13, 2026, and is scheduled for a public hearing on September 30, 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

Fan Wang proposes alterations and additions to an existing non-conforming principal building which has 4 units when the maximum is 3 units in the Neighborhood Residence (NR) zoning district, which requires a Special Permit.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

The Applicant is proposing an alteration and addition to the existing building, the proposed changes are:

- an addition of a side wing and two bay projections along Lesley Avenue;
- replacement of the existing hip roof for a gable roof, two dormers on the west side of the building;
- excavation of the building to finalize the basement and create finished living space and a mechanical area;
- modifications to fenestration and doors;
- construction of rear decks in the northern yard and
- create space for two compact parking spaces with curb cuts on the Lesly Avenue side.

The principal building has 4 units when the maximum is 3 units per [SZO 3.1.8.d](#), which is considered a nonconforming use, therefore this building requires a Special Permit for the

alteration mentioned above per [SZO14.1.6.c.i](#). The Applicant is not proposing to create additional dwelling units, only increase gross floor area for the existing 4 units.

BACKGROUND

333 Highland Avenue is located in the 0.5 mi Transit Area in the Neighborhood Residence (NR) zoning district in the Davis Square neighborhood represented by Ward 6 Councilor Lance Davis. The Zoning Board of Appeal is the decision-making authority for all discretionary or administrative permits required for the NR zoning district.

On September 15, 2026, this property was determined *Historically Significant* and will be going in front of the Historic and Preservation Commission (HPC) for a *Preferably Preserved* hearing on a date to be determined. All the materials provided to the HPC can be found [here](#), and the meeting recording is [here](#).

NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING

The neighborhood meeting was held on April 9, 2026. Planning Staff, and the Applicant's team members were present among abutters and residents. The Applicant's architect presented that the property was owned by the same family for 80 years and for the last few years is being rented. The objective of the proposed changes is to modernize the interior and exterior of the house and add livable space. Abutters present inquired about construction timeframes, mitigation strategies for dust, noise, pests etc., potential impacts to the pavement of the streets and sidewalks when constructions start, if solar panels were considered for the building, and if it was possible to maintain the trees in the property. A next-door abutter inquired if the proposed changes would impact their existing solar panels, the architect of the project explained that there will not be significant impacts as the height of the roof won't be changed, and the proposed dormers shouldn't block a substantial amount of sunlight to the abutting property. Another comment brought up was a request for consistent communications to the neighbors from the Applicant.

ANALYSIS

The property at 333 Highland Avenue is a two-and-a-half story, four-unit residence pre-existing non-conforming detached house. As described above the applicant proposes to expand the existing livable space by approximately 1610 sf, through the finalization of the basement, addition of side wing, bay windows, change of hip to gable roof and dormers. In addition, to this work, the Applicant also proposed the creation of two compact parking spaces and a rear deck.

As noted above, the building is going through the demolition review process by the HPC. During the zoning revision by staff, it was determined that the proposed additions and changes to the exterior surface area (including walls and roof) of the building are over 50% of the total structure. The final determination by the HPC and respective process will need to be completed prior to release of a building permit.

As shown in the materials provided by the Applicant and the summary of the application, the proposal is to maintain the existing number of dwelling units, while create additional living space through the expansion of various areas of the existing house and adding a couple of external features such as the parking spaces and rear deck.

Upon analysis of the material submitted by the Applicant, Planning Staff does not believe that the granting for the Special Permit would cause a substantial detriment to the public good or nullify or substantially derogate from the intent and purpose of the Neighborhood Residence (NR) district, copied here:

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 semidetached 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 enterprise and retail 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 relating 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. *Support modernization of the existing housing.*
2. *The intent of the zoning district where the property is located.*
 - b. *To conserve already established areas of detached and semi-detached residential buildings.*
3. The extent and nature of the proposed alteration.
 - a. *Staff believe the extent of the proposed alterations functions with the existing lot size, and that the additions do not denaturize 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 have no comment on this item.*
 - b. *The applicant addressed this item during the neighborhood meeting explaining that the house needs interior work as it lacks modern amenities to meet the necessities of the resident's day to day.*
5. Consistency of the proposed alterations with the evolution of neighboring structures.
 - a. *The proposed expansions are consistent with the overall pattern of development of the neighborhood.*

6. Establishment of permeable lot surface, to the maximum extent possible.
 - a. *The proposed plans show an increase of around 10%, (from 37% to 47%) the maximum ground coverage allowed in this zone is 60%.*
7. Conformance to design guidelines applicable to the district where the property is located.
 - a. *Staff believes that the proposed project conforms to the design guidelines of the district.*

PERMIT CONDITIONS

Should the Board approve the required Special Permit Finding to increase the main massing of an existing nonconforming structure, Staff recommend the following conditions:

Validity

1. This decision must be recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.
2. Alteration does not allow for any additional dwelling units.
3. Cost affidavit provided shows that project does not currently qualify as a substantial renovation as defined in SZO 2.1 - Glossary and thus does not trigger green score requirement from SZO 10.4. Once a building permit is applied for, any updated cost affidavits or contracts will be reviewed to determine whether project requires green score review.
4. The patio will need to be physically separated from the driveway by either landscaping plantings, some sort of elevated curbing, or other barrier. Otherwise, it would be interpreted as part of the driveway and would be between the facade and the front lot line in the frontage area which is not allowed per SZO 3.1.18.c.iii and would be over the allowed max width of 12 ft from SZO 3.1.18.c.iv. Parking in the patio area would also not adhere to the minimum parking setback from SZO 3.1.8.b.
5. Project is under demolition review on HP26-00004. That process will need to be completed prior to release of a building permit.

Public Record

6. 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.