



City of Somerville
ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS
City Hall 3rd Floor, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

5 AUGUST 2026 MEETING MINUTES

This meeting was conducted via remote participation on Zoom.

NAME	TITLE	STATUS	ARRIVED
Susan Fontano	Chair	<i>Absent</i>	
Anne Brockelman	Vice Chair	<i>Present</i>	
Olivia Mobayed	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Zachary Zarembo	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Brian Cook	Alt. Member	<i>Present</i>	
Sisia Daglian	Alt. Member	<i>Absent</i>	

City staff present: Kit Luster (Planning Division); Alvaro Esparza (Planning Division); Lexie Payne (Planning Division)
Kelly O'Laughlin (Planning Division)

The meeting was called to order at 6:00pm and adjourned at 7:31pm.

Vice Chair Brockelman sat as Acting Chair. Member Cook sat as Acting Clerk.

GENERAL BUSINESS: Meeting Minutes

Following a motion by Acting Clerk Cook, seconded by Member Zarembo, the Board voted unanimously (4-0) to approve the 17 June 2026 meeting minutes.

RESULT:

APPROVED

PUBLIC HEARING: 22 Park Avenue (ZP26-000035)

This hearing was continued to 19 August 2026.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC HEARING: 17 Monmouth Street (ZP26-000043)

This hearing was continued to 19 August 2026.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

GENERAL BUSINESS: Clarendon Hill – 34 North Street Comprehensive Permit Revision

Staff explained that the Board must determine if the proposed changes are substantial or insubstantial, based on the criteria that was provided in the Staff Memo.

The applicant team explained that the project is currently starting its second phase. The first phase, Building E of 168 unit, has been built and opened to great fanfare last fall. The project has been through a number of iterations. The initial 40B approval came through on 30 September 2020. The applicant returned to the Zoning Board in 2022, 2023, and 2025 for some minor modifications for the first phase.

The request today is for some minor revisions to the phasing. Specifically, the parcel for Buildings A and B has shifted from being in the first phase to being in Phase 3. Phase 2 consists of three blocks, including Building D with 58 new apartments, townhomes with 34 new homes, new streets, and the central park. Head Start programming has been included at Building D, and the intention is to locate a play area proximate to the indoor space, shifting the community gardens to the corner by the North Street Park. The Woonerf Plaza would thus shift up the hill, closer to the front door of Building E. Eversource requirements call for greater access to the transformer, with a new location off North Street. The applicant team stated that a waiver will be requested for this location being in the frontage zone. The proposal is to combine two buildings into a single building that will have 11 houses in a row. As the maximum allowed in a row is ten, a waiver would be requested for the 11th. The applicant team worked with the City to best configure the trash and recycling enclosure, and to include ADA parking spaces, resulting in a parking reduction by two spaces. Nothing changed in terms of the transformer location on the townhouse parcel. The frontage zone waiver request was missed earlier in the process and is being made at this time. The bike storage is proposed to be shifted to the perimeter of the block in the frontage zone, creating an internal plaza for residents to use and enjoy. In terms of zoning setbacks, a few adjustments are proposed around Building D. All of these dimensions comply with the underlying zoning and are less than about an 8" change. At the townhouse area, the buildings have shifted to accommodate ADA access at the front doors and to provide a pathway through the site behind the buildings and through the plaza. These revisions range from less than 2" to just under 4' in a shift between the buildings.

The project's Chapter 40B approval is based on maintaining the site's overall tree caliper, a commitment that will be upheld. When the project began, there were no streets and no street trees on the site. The proposed development adds both new streets and new street trees, with locations carefully reviewed by the City's Public Space & Urban Forestry and Mobility Divisions. The exterior building material color selections for Building D will align with the colors selected for Phase 1, with warm tones at the building base and accents on the bays. At the townhouses, a simple palette is proposed, arrayed by building, rather than by random arrangement.

In response to a question from the Board regarding the first waiver request, the applicant team stated that the intention will be to include plantings around the proposed transformers in the frontage zone, as allowed, within compliance with the utility company. There were no concerns from the Board.

In response to a question from the Board regarding the second waiver request, the applicant team explained that this is a steeply sloping site. Accessible front entries are proposed at each of the front doors for the townhomes. The proposed arrangement of the 11 units in a row allows for this. The Board explained that the spirit of the ordinance is to limit the number of units in a row in order to break down the scale. There were no concerns from the Board.

There were no concerns expressed by the Board in terms of the proposed changes to the site layout.

Following a motion by Acting Clerk Cook, seconded by Member Zaremba, the Board voted unanimously (4-0) to approve as insubstantial the 40B Comprehensive Permit waiver modifications and new waivers for 34 North Street, Clarendon Hill, based upon the conditions, findings, and recommendations as discussed and found in the 30 July 2026 Staff Memo.

RESULT:	INSUBSTANTIAL
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PUBLIC HEARING: 88 Winslow Avenue (ZP26-000044)

The applicant team stated that this is an existing 3.5-story, two-unit, detached triple-decker. The structure was constructed in 2004. It currently has a very large roof deck, accessible through the upper floor unit by means of a ladder. The roof deck has no shade. The proposal is to expand the existing top floor living space by approximately 104 s.f. and to change the roofline from pitch to flat. Changing this from pitched to flat technically changes the building from 3.5-stories to 4-stories, which requires a Special Permit under MA General Law Chapter 40A, Section 6. To make the roof deck more usable, the applicants are proposing trellises, a pergola, and an exterior staircase. All of those items are by-right. This Special Permit is only to expand the existing nonconforming roofline, to expand the living space, and to change the roofline from pitch to flat. The roof deck is currently accessed from the top floor, approximately 4'-5' below the level of the deck. The intention is to move the end wall with the door out 4', reducing the size of the roof deck by 4', and giving that 104 s.f. to the top floor. The resulting slot in the floor will be used for a more serviceable sideways staircase to allow for better access from the top floor to the deck. Also, better access from the main living level on the third floor up to the top floor. The team stated that this will be an overall improvement of circulation in the middle of the space. In changing to a flat roof, the height of the existing ridge will be matched. This will create a very deep overhang over the south-facing entry doors, providing a bit more protection and cover. The applicant team noted that the shadow studies show that any change will be minimal.

The applicant team explained that the proposal meets the criteria for a Special Permit because it conforms with the purpose of SomerVision and the Neighborhood Residence (NR) zoning district by better configuring the unit to make the top floor roof deck more usable. The 104 s.f. increase has little impact on the large roof deck but allows for a real staircase to the roof deck, and a home office in the space. The structure is already nonconforming in terms of height. The team stated that by changing from a pitched roof to a flat roof, the roof type will be brought into compliance for a detached triple-decker building type. The creation of a fourth story, which requires a Special Permit, is a technical change because the building is not getting any taller. This proposal facilitates transit-oriented infill development and ensures the property can change to meet the needs of the residents. The number of units in the building remains at two. The proposal is not substantially more detrimental to the neighborhood, because the change will not be readily discernible from the street. The roof type will be brought into conformity with the zoning ordinance by being flat.

The applicant team stated that there was no appreciable change seen in the shadow study. The increase in the size of the top floor is very small, but the benefit to the applicant is large, because then they will be able to use the roof deck and have a well-laid-out top floor through the change. A Neighborhood Meeting was held and some comments were received.

Acting Chair Brockelman opened public testimony.

The Board agreed that there is not much of a change dimensionally, but there could have been a perspective of the scale shown from the street. A pitched roof does give a different feeling in relationship to the neighbors. Some members of the Board noted that, with respect to Section 6, the proposed alterations are not more substantially detrimental than the existing nonconforming use in the neighborhood.

Seeing no public comments at this time, Acting Chair Brockelman closed public testimony.

Following a motion by Acting Clerk Cook, seconded by Member Zaremba, the Board voted unanimously (4-0) to approve a Special Permit to expand a roofline nonconformity to add livable and usable space of a two-family dwelling in the Neighborhood Residence (NR) zoning district, based on the findings for the required Section 6 criteria, as discussed and incorporating the findings and permit conditions as detailed in the Staff Memo dated 30 July 30 2026.

RESULT:

APPROVED

PUBLIC HEARING: 2 Carver Street (ZP26-000071)

The applicant team stated that the requested Hardship Variance is from SZO Section 2.4.4: Massing and Height. The proposal is for relief to permit roof rafters on one side of the existing rear addition roof to intersect the plate at the top of the wall frame at greater than 2' above the finished floor. The property is located in the NR zoning district (Ward 5) and contains a two-family, 2.5-story home. In terms of the unusual conditions of the house, the existing floor plate is uneven in one section. There is a rear extension which is off centered with a side gable roof and a dormer on the side. Part of the proposal is to extend the dormers which is permitted by-right. The issue is how this connects to the rear extension of the house. The intention is to raise this to add more livable space. The side elevation shows the off centered rear extension, meaning that the roof does not extend to the edge of what would have otherwise been the side dormer.

In terms of the first hardship criterion regarding special circumstances and unusual characteristics of the existing structure, the plot plan shows a centered gable ridge that goes through the house, with the existing rear addition being of partial width and offset. As a result, the bearing walls are not equidistant from the principal ridge. The applicant team stated that this geometry is a pre-existing structural condition and not one that affects the zoning district generally. With the principal ridge held in its existing location elevation, the rear roof with the equal roof pitches cannot meet both offset extension walls at the same wall plate elevation. Criterion two is that literal enforcement of this provision would involve substantial hardship. In terms of the unequal pitches would be to line this up so that the roof matches the wall at 2' above the floor, which would require an asymmetrical roof, which is more complex to frame, and adding flashing and drainage. Lowering the ridge would reduce or eliminate habitable headroom in that part of the house. The team noted that another alternative would be to move the exterior bearing wall to be more in line with the main floor plate of the house, but this would require an extensive demo and reconstruction. Criterion three is that 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 specific district. Raising the roof of the existing rear addition to match the gabled roofline of the principal structure will create a more orderly and contextually pleasing architectural result. The team stated that it will not nullify or substantially derogate from the intent and purpose of the district or zoning ordinance. Two other homes on Carver Street have also raised their roofs to the rear extension. Staff recommended approval with conditions, being that the decision must be recorded with the Registry of Deeds, and a digital copy of the decision must be stamped and submitted to the Planning Division for public record.

Acting Chair Brockelman opened public testimony.

Betsy Helfaer (4 Carver Street) – asked how high the structure will go on her side of the building.

The applicant team explained that the roof height will not be raised in comparison to the roof height of the overall structure.

Walter Zahn (8 Carver Street) – stated that his home was approved for a similar change in 2005 and he is in support of the proposal. This will not change any shading to the neighbors.

Seeing no additional public comments at this time, Acting Chair Brockelman closed public testimony.

The Board asked if any alternatives were explored that would make the proposal compliant with zoning. The applicant team stated that a thorough analysis, terms of the cost, was not completed, but it seemed to be very challenging to find an alternative. There was a lot of discussion with Staff on the proposal.

The Board noted that this is a 2.5-story principal building. The roof rafters have to intersect no greater than 2'. The question is if the proposal will make this structure three stories. The applicant team explained that the only way to make the half-story habitable is with the proposed change, without going to a completely different type of building

altogether. The dormer helps, but due to the unusual geometry of the footprint, the space it creates is essentially a closet. In order to make the half-story truly habitable, this is the only solution that has been found.

Following a motion by Acting Clerk Cook, seconded by Member Mobayed, the Board voted unanimously (4-0) to approve a Hardship Variance in the Neighborhood Residence (NR) zoning district for relief from SZO 2.4.4, regarding the roof-rafter intersection height of a half-story, based on the findings regarding the required criteria as discussed, and incorporating the conditions as detailed in the Staff Memo dated 27 July 2026.

RESULT:	APPROVED
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PUBLIC HEARING: 74 Moreland Street (ZP26-000049)

The applicant team stated that there is an outstanding Special Permit for the original 2018 construction that they are looking to finalize. At least one Hardship Variance is required to finalize the approvals for the Special Permit. There is a shared driveway for 74 Moreland Street and 72 Moreland Street. The existing AC condensers are located on the building, and the issue is that these need to be 3' set back from the property line. This is an issue, as neither 74 Moreland Street nor 72 Moreland Street own the driveway; it is a right-of-way driveway. The existing AC condensers are only 1.5' back from the property line. The request is to leave the condensers in place, as it would be a substantial financial investment to have to move them. Also, there is not necessarily another location that would allow for the 3' setback and that would fit the existing condensers. The proposal meets the spirit of the criteria, as there will be no impact on aesthetics or quality of life. There were letters attached from both the owner and occupant of 72 Moreland Street in support of the variance request. In terms of criterion one and the special circumstances of the property, the driveway is not owned by either property owner. The property line abuts the driveway as a shared right-of-way for both occupants. There will never be construction on the driveway, and at no time would it ever be impeded. The condensers will always be more than 3' from the adjacent property. There is not necessarily anywhere else on the property to place the AC units at this time that would be 3' away without causing incurring substantial costs from running the AC lines and keeping them cool or displacing the garage in some way.

Acting Chair Brockelman opened public testimony.

Azelene Edouarzin (64 Moreland Street) – stated that she has nothing to add but was interested in learning about the project and any impact on her property. She does not believe this proposal will impact her property.

Seeing no additional public comments at this time, Acting Chair Brockelman closed public testimony.

The Board asked if this is being requested retroactively. The applicant team explained that the development for this property took place in 2019-2020. The current owners purchased the property in 2023, and it was closed on with a fake Certificate of Occupancy, as it was forged by the developer. Inspection was waived at the time, which is why these items were not caught. At the time, the second floor unit was still owned by the developer and was eventually foreclosed on. The current owners are working diligently with the bank, which owns the second floor unit, to catch up on outstanding issues with the existing Special Permit.

The Board noted that, given the easement that abuts the property and the support received from the neighbors at 72 Moreland Street, there does not seem to be any issues with the request.

Following a motion by Acting Clerk Cook, seconded by Member Zaremba, the Board voted unanimously (4-0) to approve a Hardship Variance to locate mechanical equipment within 3' of a lot line in the Neighborhood Residence (NR) zoning district, based on the findings regarding the required criteria and incorporating the conditions as detailed in the Staff Memo dated 31 July 2026.

RESULT:	APPROVED
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NOTICE: These minutes constitute a summary of the votes and key discussions at this meeting. A recording of these proceedings can be found online here: [Agendas, Minutes, & More.](#)