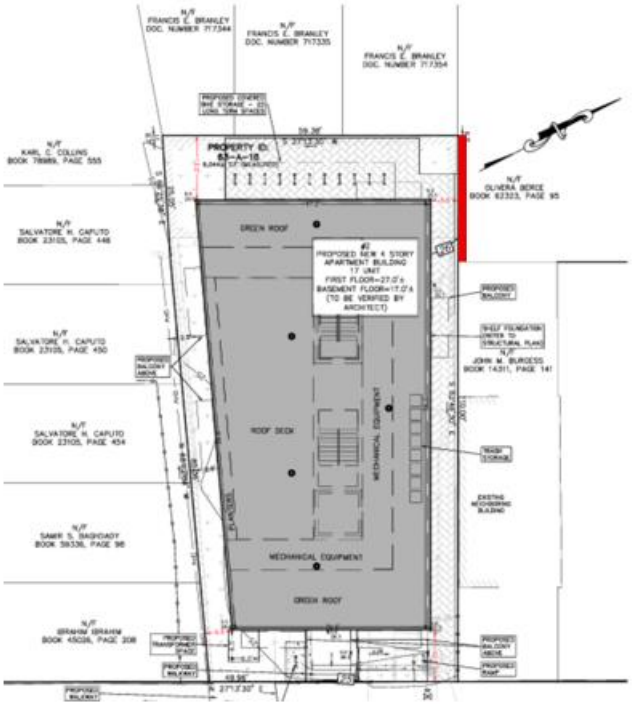
City of Somerville
STRATEGY & DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
MAYOR JAKE WILSON

To: Zoning Board of Appeals
From: Planning Division
Date: November 17, 2026
Subject: 2 Quincy Street Variance Application; ZP26-000096, ZP26-000114, ZP26-000115

Planning Division staff have reviewed the variance applications for 2 Quincy Street. This memo provides analysis and supporting information for weighing the benefits versus detriments of issuing the requested variances subject to the statutory requirements of M.G.L. 40A.

Zoning Analysis

Strict enforcement of the zoning ordinance for 2 Quincy Street would permit a 2.5 story apartment house with up to ten (10) dwelling units as a maximum build out. The lot at 2 Quincy Street is 49.96' wide where the minimum lot width for an Apartment Building is 55'.
The existing lot is also trapezoidal in shape; the front of the site is 49.9 feet wide while the back is 59.3 feet wide. The narrower front lot line constrains the shape of the lot and limits the building types that can be placed on the property. The lot previously had a large multi-family historic home on the property and a four-car concrete block garage. The historic home burned down in 2020, and the garage was approved to be demolished this year. (ZP26-000096) Ground story elevation is provided at 1' 7" where 2' is required, per SZO 3.2.10.c. (ZP26-000114) As per SZO 3.2.10.b, Apartment Buildings in the UR must observe a 20' setback when abutting NR property to the side. 2 Quincy St. abuts an NR parcel (13 School St.) towards the rear of the right-side lot line, therefore the 20' setback is applicable to a portion of 2 Quincy St. If if the zoning ordinance was strictly enforced, it would require a design change in the rear right corner and likely lead to a loss of units in the building. (ZP26-000115) Due to the distance the neighboring house is located from 2 Quincy, the proposed design still achieves the intent of the required setback.





Variance Requirement	Required	Proposed	Variance
ZP26-000096 Minimum lot width for an Apartment Building (SZO 3.2.10.a)	55' minimum lot width for an apartment building	49.96' wide lot width	Front lot line width is 5.04' narrower than required
ZP26-0000114 Ground Story Elevation Requirements (SZO 3.2.10.c)	2' ground story elevation	1'7" ground story elevation	0.3" relief of ground story elevation
ZP26-000115 Setback Requirements (SZO 3.2.10.b)	20' setback from a rear portion of the right lot line abutting the NR district.	5'6" setback along the rear portion of the right lot line abutting the NR district.	14'6" less than required.

Benefits to the Applicant

The Planning Division has identified the following benefits to the Applicant:

- Allows the Applicant to construct the proposed apartment building on the property.
- Increased property value
- Increase project financial feasibility due to higher density

Benefits to the Public Interest

Massachusetts case law treats the public interest as relating to the general public, extending beyond the boundaries of a municipality. Zoning defines the public interest by the purpose that zoning ordinances are adopted and the statutory limits of what zoning can regulate.

The Planning Division identified the following benefits to the public interest:

- Permits the construction of an apartment building on the property, which without relief would be prohibited.
- Increased in taxbase.
- Additional housing in the community.
- Creation of transit-oriented living opportunities.
- Furthering the state-wide housing-production goals
- Furthering the goals of SomerVision 2040.
- Infill development on a vacant lot.
- Creation of at least 3 total price-restricted dwelling units, 1 additional unit than what is permitted by right.
- Creation of 17 total dwelling units, 7 more than what is permitted by right

Detriments to the Health, Safety, and Welfare of the Neighborhood

Massachusetts case law treats the word "neighborhood" as an elastic geographic area that may alter in size according to the nature of the impact of a proposed variance. For the context of the requested variance, staff analysis identifies public health, safety, and welfare consequences of the proposal that are experienced in the geographically relevant area.

The Planning Division identified the following detriments to the Health, Safety, and Welfare of the Neighborhood:

- No detriments were identified to the Health, Safety, and Welfare of the Neighborhood.

Other Considerations

To make the required practical difficulty finding, the Zoning Board may also consider the following:

- whether strict enforcement would impose a financial hardship on the applicant
- whether the practical difficulty relates to soil conditions, shape, or topography of the land or structures
- whether the practical difficulty was self-created
- whether the benefit sought by the applicant can be achieved by some other method feasible to achieve

2 Quincy Street is trapezoidal in shape.