City of Somerville
STRATEGY & DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
MAYOR JAKE WILSON

To: Zoning Board of Appeals
From: Planning Division
Date: November 17, 2026
Subject: 599 Somerville Ave Variance Application; ZP26-0000108

Planning Division staff have reviewed the variance application for 599 Somerville Ave. This memo provides analysis and supporting information for weighing the benefits versus detriments of issuing the requested variance subject to the statutory requirements of M.G.L. 40A.

Zoning Analysis

Strict enforcement of the zoning ordinance for 599 Somerville Ave would require the ground-story entranceways to be no more than 30' apart. Per SZO 4.1.9.d., Ground Story Entrances are required to be spaced no more than 30' apart. Two of the five entrances along the building's Somerville Avenue frontage were previously constructed 35 feet apart, differing from the original proposed spacing of 29' on the approved 2022 plans. Without relief, these entrances would have to be adjusted to be 30' apart in accordance with the SZO.

Variance Requirement	Permitted	Proposed	Variance
ZP26-0000108 Ground Story Entrance Spacing (SZO 4.1.9.d)	No more than 30' spacing between ground story entrances	35' spacing between ground story entrances.	5' of relief for two ground story entrances

Benefits to the Applicant

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

- Allows the Applicant to maintain the previously constructed front entrances without demolishing a portion of the ground story to adjust said entrances by 5'.
- Avoid additional construction costs.
- Avoid further delay of final Certificate of Occupancy .
- Maintain LEED compliance.

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:

- No additional construction activity occurring at the property and disrupting the streetscape.

- Occupancy of a vacant commercial unit.

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.