



City of Somerville

ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS

City Hall 3rd Floor, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

MINUTES

Wednesday, March 25, 2020 at 6:00 pm

GoToWebinar

Pursuant to Governor Baker's March 12, 2020 Order suspending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. C. 30A, s. 18, and the Governor's March 15, 2020 Order imposing strict limitations on the number of people that may gather in one place, as well as Mayor Curtatone's Declaration of Emergency, dated March 15, 2020, this meeting of the Zoning Board of Appeals was conducted via remote participation.

Board Members present: Susan Fontano (Chair), Danielle Evans (Clerk), Elaine Severino, Anne Brockelman, Josh Safdie, Drew Kane

Board Members absent: none

City staff present: George Proakis, Melissa Woods, Charlotte Leis, Sarah White

Meeting was opened at 6:02pm.

GENERAL BUSINESS

Ms. Evans made motion to reschedule the next Zoning Board meeting from April 8, 2020 to April 15, 2020. Ms. Brockelman seconded. The Board took a roll-call vote: Danielle Evans - aye; Anne Brockelman - aye; Drew Kane - aye; Susan Fontano - aye; Josh Safdie - aye; Elaine Severino - aye. Motion passed 6-0.

Ms. Leis stated that she and the Chair would attend the April 8th meeting to continue the one case scheduled for that night to April 15th.

Chair Fontano stated that public comment is limited to 2 minutes per person per case. She reminded people to state their name before speaking, and that they would be called on one by one to give comment.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

DRA2020-0013

10 Oak Street

Rich DiGirolamo, attorney for the applicant, requested a continuance to April 22, 2020.

Ms. Evans made a motion to continue the case to April 22, 2020. Ms. Severino seconded. The Board took a roll-call vote: Danielle Evans - aye; Anne Brockelman - aye; Drew Kane - aye; Susan Fontano - aye; Josh Safdie - aye; Elaine Severino - aye. Motion passed 6-0.

DRA2020-0018

3 Hawkins Street

Ms. Leis explained that, because visuals are very important to this case, the applicant wishes to continue to April 22, 2020 with the hope of meeting in person at that time.

Ms. Evans made a motion to continue the case to April 22, 2020. Ms. Severino seconded. The Board took a roll-call vote: Danielle Evans - aye; Anne Brockelman - aye; Drew Kane - aye; Susan Fontano - aye; Josh Safdie - aye; Elaine Severino - aye. Motion passed 6-0.

AA2020-0001

515 Somerville Ave.

Mr. Proakis, Executive Director of OSPCD, explained the reasons for 515 Somerville Avenue requesting a continuance. Originally Claudia Murrow wanted to participate remotely but since then she has expressed concern to do so due, in part, to her need to show visuals that she has no capacity to show via her computer screen virtually. Mr. Proakis is confident we can get to a point where this case can be heard.

Ms. Evans made a motion to continue the case to April 15, 2020. Ms. Severino seconded. The Board took a roll-call vote: Danielle Evans - aye; Anne Brockelman - aye; Drew Kane - aye; Susan Fontano - aye; Josh Safdie - aye; Elaine Severino - aye. Motion passed 6-0.

ZBA 2018-138-E1

1 McGrath Hwy

Rich DiGirolamo, attorney for SomerBridge Hotel, LLC, explained why they are requesting the extensions. He noted that on March 6, 2019 the ZBA granted the SPSR and 4 variances for a 100-room, extended-stay hotel. They are requesting a 6-month time extension for all 4 variances because the environmental issues were far worse than contemplated and precluded the applicant from securing the financing needed to proceed. The applicant is pursuing a more aggressive site clean-up program and it's currently anticipated to be completed by late spring. They hope that despite Covid19 they are still on-target. The variance extensions would last until September 6, 2020.

Chair Fontano asked for public comment. Ms. Leis explained the process for commenting and then went through and offered each person attending an opportunity to speak. No one spoke.

The Board discussed the case. They were all willing to grant the extensions.

Ms. Evans made a motion to approve the 6-month variance extensions. Ms. Severino seconded. The Board took a roll-call vote: Danielle Evans - aye; Anne Brockelman - aye; Drew Kane - aye; Susan Fontano - aye; Josh Safdie - aye; Elaine Severino - aye. Motion passed 6-0.

ZBA2018-85-R1-03/20

54 Dane Street

Ms. Leis shared the applicant's plans on screen for the public and unmuted the applicant, Ronald Axelrod. Mr. Axelrod appeared to have technical difficulties that made him unable to be heard, so Ms. Woods gave a staff presentation on the request. The project is substantially completed, and the request is about the location of the electrical meter. The existing meter is on the front façade, but a condition of the ZBA decision required that the new meter not be on the front façade. The applicant believes that the meter location on the front façade is sufficiently screened by landscaping, and so he would like to change the condition so that he may keep it there.

The applicant continued to have technical difficulties preventing him from being heard by the Board, so Ms. Woods offered to answer any questions that the Board may have.

Chair Fontano asked if any member of the public wanted to speak on this proposal.

Jessica Fjeld said she is under contract to purchase the unit and that she and her husband wrote a letter about this issue. They are very sensitive to aesthetic issues regarding landscaping; the meter is easier to screen if it is on the front façade rather than on the side of the house since the side of the house is all paved. She said there is also a safety issue with having small children next to the electric meter on a daily basis. Having the electric meter on the side may also reduce the amount of usable interior space.

Ms. Leis asked attendees to raise their hands virtually using the GoToWebinar "raise hand" function. Ms. Leis said that she saw no one "raise their hand" requesting to speak. Chair Fontano closed the public portion of the hearing.

The Board deliberated.

The Board discussed whether how to ensure the meter is screened if it is on the front façade, since most of the landscaping was removed during construction. The Board decided to condition the decision to require that a landscaping plan showing the meter being screened will be reviewed and approved by staff. Ms. Woods suggested the following condition: "The applicant shall submit a landscape plan to be reviewed and approved by staff. The intent is to visually screen the electrical meters on the front face." The Board was satisfied that the condition addressed their concerns.

Ms. Evans made a motion to remove existing Condition 11 regarding putting meters on side of structure and replacing it with the landscaping condition read into the record by Ms. Woods. Ms. Severino seconded. The Board took a roll-call vote: Danielle Evans - aye; Anne Brockelman - aye; Drew Kane - aye; Susan Fontano - aye; Josh Safdie - aye; Elaine Severino - aye. Motion passed 6-0.

OTHER BUSINESS

The Board discussed the March 11, 2020 minutes. The Board noted that they are not in favor of transcription-like minutes and instead preferred summaries of discussion and important points. Ms. Evans made a motion to approve the minutes from March 11th. Ms. Brockelman seconded. The Board took a roll-call vote: Danielle Evans - aye; Anne Brockelman - aye; Drew Kane - aye; Susan Fontano - aye; Josh Safdie - aye; Elaine Severino - aye. Motion passed 6-0.

Chair Fontano asked if there were any further comments from members of the public. No one spoke.

Ms. Evans made a motion to close the meeting. Ms. Severino seconded. The Board took a roll-call vote: Danielle Evans - aye; Anne Brockelman - aye; Drew Kane - aye; Susan Fontano - aye; Josh Safdie - aye; Elaine Severino - aye. Motion passed 6-0.

Meeting was adjourned at 6:45pm.

Plans and reports are available to view in person in the Planning & Zoning Office, 3rd Floor of City Hall or at the City of Somerville website via the following link: <https://www.somervillema.gov/departments/ospcd/planning-and-zoning/reports-and-decisions>