



City of Somerville

PLANNING, PRESERVATION & ZONING

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

TO: Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA)
FROM: OSPCD Planning, Preservation, and Zoning Division Staff
DATE: November 3, 2021
RE: Procedural Requirements for Backyard Cottages

Backyard Cottages are permitted in the Neighborhood Residence district by Site Plan Approval. Site Plan Approval requires two Neighborhood Meetings and a Design Review meeting prior to a public hearing with the relevant review board.

At the ZBA's February 26, 2020, meeting the Board discussed possible changes to the procedural requirements for Backyard Cottages, including requiring one Neighborhood Meeting rather than two, requiring only direct abutters to be notified about required Neighborhood Meeting(s), and eliminating the requirement for Design Review.¹ The Board declined to make any changes to the procedural requirements for Backyard Cottages at that time.

Now that the ZBA is scheduled to review its first Backyard Cottage, Staff believes this is an opportune time for the Board to begin considering whether it wishes to change its Rules of Procedure regarding Backyard Cottages. Staff anticipates that the ZBA will see additional Backyard Cottages in the near future, as four other proposals for Backyard Cottages are working their way through the required pre-submission procedural steps.

As the Board reviews more proposals, the Board may determine that one or more of the required pre-submission procedural steps are not necessary for Backyard Cottages. Backyard Cottages are an accessory building type and, as such, are smaller and less visible from the public-right-of-way than any of the principal building types permitted in NR districts, all of which are permitted by-right. The Board may revise its Rules of Procedure to exempt Backyard Cottages from any procedural steps the Board feels are unnecessary for development of this scale and type.

Staff welcomes any questions the Board has regarding this topic, either at the Board's November 17th meeting or at a future date.

¹ The minutes for that meeting can be found here:
<https://www.somervillema.gov/sites/default/files/2020%2002%2026%20ZBA%20Minutes.pdf>