

TO: Belmont Zoning Board of Appeals  
FROM: Doug Koplou and Michele Houdek, 18 Oak Ave.  
RE: Case No. 23-28, 45 Trapelo Rd.  
DATE: November 8, 2023

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Dear Members of the ZBA:

We are near-abutters to 45 Trapelo Road. The applicant's backyard is in close proximity to ours due to the small lot size though the property lines don't touch.

The extensive planned renovations will be a significant improvement to the current structure. We are supportive of their effort, and fine with three of the four special permits requested. However, we are quite concerned about the fourth request, which is to reduce the already very small ten foot rear setback down to just four feet. With the roof overhang, the margin is even smaller.

Every construction project would benefit financially by increasing interior livable or rentable square footage by pushing the required second egress into the required setback area. However, this close proximity is problematic for neighbors. We are also concerned that allowing a four-foot setback will create a troubling precedent for other projects around town.

The applicants have noted a pre-existing garage with zero setback. It is true that during the period 80 to 100 years ago when many of the homes in this neighborhood were built, there were no formal zoning rules and garages were routinely placed at the property line. This may have been one of the reasons that more formal setbacks were put into Belmont's zoning bylaws. The existence of a garage should not imply that very small setbacks today are therefore justified. Indeed, allowing new renovations, expansions, or construction to bypass the setback rules in such a significant way would be problematic.

Further, Belmont will be undergoing unprecedented changes in its built environment due to mandated bylaw changes under the MBTA 3A Zoning. An important remaining area of uncertainty in those regulations is how existing setbacks will be applied to 3A structures. We ask that the ZBA also take care to avoid material erosion of setbacks for standard construction under our current zoning districts, as the impacts on abutters will be even more significant if the larger buildings under 3A are able to follow precedents like this in arguing that they, too, should be allowed extremely small buffers.

The good news is that because the planned renovation at 45 Trapelo is extensive, with wonderful new space in what is the basement level and many modifications to the layout of interior space, the architect should have the flexibility to fit egress stairs within the existing shell. While this may result in some reductions in room sizes, it seems quite feasible for them to retain the same number of rooms and for those rooms to remain an attractive size for residents.

Thank you for your consideration.

With regards,

Doug Koplou and Michele Houdek  
18 Oak Ave.