

Docket No. 3876 - 19 Farrington Street

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DECISION OF THE ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS
TOWN OF ARLINGTON MASSASCHUSETTS

Docket No.	3876
Address of Property:	19 Farrington Street
Location of Property:	Morningside
Applicant(s)	Frank C. Sarnowski and Cindy S. Hung
Date of Application	October 16, 2025
Hearing Date(s)	November 25, 2025
Decision Date:	December 9, 2025

Summary

The applicants, owners of the dwelling units at 19 Farrington Street, sought a special permit to enclose the first- and second-floor porches on the front of the house. The Board found that the application met the requirements of §§ 5.3.9.D and 3.3.3 of the Zoning Bylaw and granted a special permit with conditions.

Like many homes in Arlington, Frank C. Sarnowski and Cindy S. Hung’s double-decker, two-unit house at 19 Farrington Street currently has a front porch with another porch over it on the second floor. And like many other owners of similar homes have wanted to do, Mr. Sarnowski and Ms. Hung would like to enclose these two porches to create more living space. But because these porches are within the required front yard setback, Mr. Sarnowski and Ms. Hung must get a special permit before construction begins. After reviewing their application, the Board grants the requested special permit under § 5.3.9.D of the Zoning Bylaw.¹

I. SUMMARY OF THE HEARING

The Chair called the public hearing on Docket No. 3876, 19 Farrington Street to order. The members of the Board present were the Chair (Mr. Klein), Mr. Hanlon, Mr. Holi, Mr. LeBlanc, Mr. Baranowski (Associate), and Mr. Rosenberg (Associate).²

¹ Although Mr. Sarnowski and Ms. Hung’s contractor, Raul Zarate Sheen, submitted the application under his name, he did so on his clients’ behalf. Therefore, we refer to Mr. Sarnowski and Ms. Hung as the applicants throughout this opinion.

² Mr. DuPont was absent.

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A. Presentation of Applicants

The Chair recognized the applicants' contractor, Raul Zarate Sheen, and asked him to explain what the applicants proposed to do.

Mr. Sheen detailed the project. In its current state, the house at 19 Farrington Street has a front porch that runs the width of the house. There is a second-floor porch over the entirety of that porch and a roof over that porch. Two doors are accessible from the front porch: one to the home's first-floor dwelling unit, the other to its second-floor unit. Neither the first- nor second-floor porch is enclosed.

As Mr. Sheen explained, the proposal would enclose most of the first-floor porch (save for a landing area to access the two front doors) and all the second-floor porch to create more living space for both units on the property. A few design features were of note. The enclosed first-floor porch would have a set of three windows centered on the front wall. The enclosed second-floor porch would have two sets of three windows with some space between the sets in the center. Both porches would be clad in board and batten along roughly their bottom thirds and then with shaker shingles covering the rest of their exterior walls. Thick trim will cover the enclosures' corners. A similarly thick piece of trim will cover the water table. The sides of the enclosed porches will carry the same designs as their fronts, though without any windows.³

With Mr. Sheen's presentation complete, the Chair asked a few follow-up questions. First, the Chair confirmed that the square footage of the footprint would remain the same, though the height of the roof over the enclosed second-floor porch would be increased. Second, the Chair confirmed that the proposal did not include the possibility of adding a deck on top of the enclosed porches. Third, the Chair asked whether the applicants had considered adding windows to the sides of the enclosed structures, but Mr. Sheen responded that adding windows here would not work architecturally.

The Chair then asked whether the Board had any questions. Mr. LeBlanc noted that this proposal more closely approximated what the Board had meant when it applied § 5.3.9.D of the Zoning Bylaw in past cases. Specifically, the Board has interpreted that section to require that an enclosed porch still "read" like a porch.⁴ These enclosed porches do. Next, Mr. Holi asked whether the first-floor windows could be aligned with those on the second floor. Mr. Sheen said that it was possible, but it would not be symmetrical if he did so. After the Chair noted that moving the window to the right would make the window align better in the room, Mr. Sheen said that he would investigate this idea.

³ For a visualization of all this, see the images from the applicants' plan in Appendix D.

⁴ As it happens, there were two other § 5.3.9.D cases that had hearings on the same night as this one. See Opinion in No. 3872, 15 Foster Street, Unit 1 (Dec. 9, 2025); Opinion in No. 3877, 20 Nicod Street (Dec. 9, 2025). The Board applied the same approach that Mr. LeBlanc referenced in those cases.

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B. Public Comment

With the Board's questions addressed, the Chair opened the hearing for public comment. There were no public comments, and so the Chair closed the public comment period.

C. Discussion by the Board

The Chair began by summarizing the matter before the Board.

As the Chair explained, the application is for a special permit for a porch expansion under § 5.3.9.D of the Zoning Bylaw. Because that section has no required findings of its own, the Chair reviewed the requirements set forth in § 3.3.3 of the Zoning Bylaw. Additionally, the Chair noted that the house currently has no usable open space, the house will not have any such space moving forward, and that the Board would need to weigh this accordingly. Because the Board ultimately adopted the Chair's proposed findings, this opinion discusses them more fully in the next part.

After covering the grounds on which the application could be approved, the Chair asked whether other members of the Board had any questions or comments about the proposed findings. Two members had comments or questions.

First, Mr. Hanlon underscored the extent to which the applicants had worked to address the Board's interpretation of § 5.3.9.D's requirements in advance of the hearing. Specifically, the size of the windows on the proposed enclosures helped to make them appear to be more open and thus more porch-like. Other applicants with similar projects would do well to consult this precedent.

Second, Mr. Baranowski asked for clarification on the basis for one of the findings. Section 3.3.3.B requires that "The requested use is essential or desirable to the public convenience or welfare." The Chair had noted that the increase to the Town's tax base from this project would be a benefit of the project. Mr. Baranowski wondered whether the Board would be setting a precedent that the additional the tax revenue would always justify a porch enclosure under this part of § 3.3.3. If so, then that seemed overly broad given that such a benefit would always be present and might threaten to overshadow the extent to which a porch enclosure encroaches on the required setback and the detriment to the Zoning Bylaws posed by this encroachment.

The Chair responded that the Board would not be making such a sweeping finding. Rather, the balance merely tips in the favor of this project because of how well designed it is to meet the purpose of § 5.3.9.D of the Zoning Bylaw, which aims to keep enclosed porches appearing like a porch, not an addition. Mr. Hanlon echoed the Chair's understanding of the findings, noting that the Board would only be saying that the tax benefit was one aspect

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among several in this project that helped it pass § 3.3.3.B's test. Satisfied by these responses, Mr. Baranowski agreed to the findings.

With the conversation having run its course, and Chair having reviewed the Standard Conditions for special permits in the previous hearing that evening, the Chair asked whether the Board had additional proposed conditions.⁵ The Board had none. The Chair then asked Mr. Hanlon whether he would oversee the drafting of an opinion on this matter. Mr. Hanlon agreed to do so.

Finally, the Chair moved that the public hearing on docket number 3876, 19 Farrington Street be closed. Mr. Hanlon seconded the motion, which the Board approved unanimously. Mr. Hanlon, Mr. Holi, Mr. LeBlanc, Mr. Baranowski, Mr. Rosenberg, and the Chair voted on the motion.

II. THE BOARD'S FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Frank C. Sarnowski and Cindy S. Hung have requested a special permit under § 5.3.9.D of the Zoning Bylaw. Mr. Sarnowski and Ms. Hung are the owners of the property at 19 Farrington Street, a two-family home in the R2 zoning district.

Attached to the front of the dwelling unit is a porch that runs the width of the house on the first floor. There is also a porch on the second floor that runs the entirety of the first-floor porch. Mr. Sarnowski and Ms. Hung plan to enclose 16'-4.5" of the first-floor porch and all the second-floor porch. (They will leave the rest of the first-floor porch open as a landing area for the home's two front doors.) The enclosed spaces will function as additional living area for the first- and second-floor units. The porch is also within the front yard setback.

Although this enclosure will increase the home's gross floor area from 3,534 square feet to 4,080 square feet, it will not change the footprint of the first-floor porch or, by extension, the second-floor porch. That is because the unenclosed porches are not currently considered part of the gross floor area of the home. Additionally, there are three existing nonconformities—the existing lot is a nonconforming lot of 4,275 square feet (6,000 square feet required), the existing street frontage is nonconforming at 50 feet (60 feet required), and the existing left side setback is 7.7 feet (10 feet required)—that will not be altered by this project. The house also does not have any usable open space

The Board now examines the special permit request under the applicable legal framework and grants the request.

⁵ The Standard Conditions are set forth and briefly explained in Appendix C.

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A. Legal Framework

As noted above, the porch at 19 Farrington Street is currently within the front yard setback. Hence the need for a special permit under § 5.3.9.D, which provides that “Porches, decks, steps, and landings in the required setback are not considered to be within the foundation wall and may not be enclosed, extended, or built upon except by special permit.”

Because § 5.3.9.D has no required findings of its own, the Board must determine whether the general requirements for a special permit under § 3.3.3 are met. But that does not mean that § 5.3.9.D fades from view. Instead, the Board has consistently interpreted the demands of § 3.3.3 considering § 5.3.9.D’s purposes. As the Board has found, those purposes include preserving a porch’s resemblance to a porch when it is enclosed and preventing § 5.3.9.D from being used as a basis for building large additions within the required setbacks.

Consequently, the Board examines the application using the two-step test set out in § 3.3.3, mindful of the overarching concerns animating § 5.3.9.D as it does so.

B. Section 3.3.3’s Threshold Balancing

First, § 3.3.3 allows the Board to grant a special permit only if it finds in a written determination that “the adverse effects of the proposed use will not outweigh the beneficial impacts to the town or the neighborhood, in view of the characteristics of the site and the proposal in relation to that site.”

To that end, the Board finds that this is a well-conceived enclosure of two existing porches. On the adverse-effect side of the ledger, this porch does move the house’s living area into the front yard setback, putting it at odds with the purpose of that set back. On the beneficial-effects side, this porch enclosure is thoughtfully designed to ensure that the façade continues to present as a porch. Its use of cladding and fenestration help to lighten the appearance of the enclosure. This lessens the intrusion into the required setback. Additionally, as noted below, the enclosure will increase the Town’s tax base. Therefore, the proposal’s adverse effects will not outweigh its beneficial effects.

C. Section 3.3.3’s Discrete Findings

Second, the Board must make a series of discrete determinations under § 3.3.3. Those requirements and their subsections are listed below with the Board’s accompanying findings:

- **A. The use requested is listed as a special permit use in the use regulations for the applicable district or is so designated elsewhere in this Bylaw.**
 - Section 5.3.9.D of the Zoning Bylaw covers this proposal.

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- **B. The requested use is essential or desirable to the public convenience or welfare.**
 - Although this porch-enclosure project does move the house's living area into the front yard setback, the enclosure proposed will allow for an orderly expansion of the Town's tax base. When combined with the proposal's design, this tilts this factor in the application's favor.
- **C. The requested use will not create undue traffic congestion or unduly impair pedestrian safety.**
 - This proposal will not increase traffic congestion: this will add a modest amount of living space to the house, but not new dwelling units to it. The proposal will reduce visibility: it encloses a porch that is currently near the driveway. Because the corner of the enclosure will be 12.7 feet from the front edge of the property, which is on the inside edge of the sidewalk, there will be sufficient distance to view the sidewalk. There are also no schools nearby, lessening concerns about pedestrian traffic being affected. Therefore, those in the driveway, on the sidewalk, and on the road will continue to have sufficiently clear sightlines.
- **D. The requested use will not overload any public water, drainage or sewer system or any other municipal system to such an extent that the requested use or any developed use in the immediate area or in any other area of the Town will be unduly subjected to hazards affecting health, safety or the general welfare.**
 - This proposal will increase the gross-floor area of the house by 546 square feet. That increase will not negatively impact any of the public systems.
- **E. Any special regulations for the use as may be provided in this Bylaw are fulfilled.**
 - There are none here.
- **F. The requested use will not impair the integrity or character of the district or adjoining districts, nor be detrimental to the health or welfare.**
 - This is a thoughtful porch-enclosure request. It encloses two porches while embodying their original spirit. The ample fenestration, different kinds of cladding, and thick side trim all provide passersby with a lighter, more open feel to the structure. The proposal is also in keeping

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with the character of the house and the surrounding neighborhood, which has plenty of examples of enclosed porches.

- **G. The requested use will not, by its addition to a neighborhood, cause an excess of the use that could be detrimental to the character of said neighborhood.**
 - The requested use, like the current one, is residential. That use is the one for which the district was intended and will thus not lead to excess.
 - Additionally, although the property currently has no usable open space, this is a common occurrence in the Town. The increase in the gross floor area without adding to the structure's footprint here is not more detrimental to neighborhood than the property's current state. Accordingly, the applicants' proposal may be justified under § 8.1.3.B of the Zoning Bylaw.

Therefore, the requirements under § 3.3.3 of the Zoning Bylaw are met. And with that, so too are the requirements of § 5.3.9.D.

III. DECISION OF THE BOARD

The Board hereby grants the applicants' request for a special permit under § 5.3.9.D of the Zoning Bylaw, to allow the proposed porch expansion, subject to the conditions stated below:

1. The final plans and specifications approved by the Board for the permit shall be the final plans and specifications submitted to the Building Inspector of the Town of Arlington in connection with this application for zoning relief. There shall be no deviation during construction from approved plans and specifications without the express written approval of the Arlington Zoning Board of Appeals.
2. The Building Inspector is hereby notified that they are to monitor the site and should proceed with appropriate enforcement procedures at any time they determine that violations are present. The Building Inspector shall proceed under Section 3.1 of the Zoning Bylaw, under the provisions of Chapter 40 Section 21D, and institute non-criminal complaints. If necessary, the Building Inspector may also approve and institute appropriate criminal action, also in accordance with Section 3.1.
3. The Board shall maintain continuing jurisdiction with respect to this special permit grant.

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SIGNATURE PAGE/CERTIFICATION

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Christian Klein, R.A., Chair

Under the authority granted by the Board in its resolution of July 22, 2025, the Chair signs this decision on behalf of the Board and attests that it was duly adopted by the Board on December 9, 2025, by a vote of 5-0. The members voting were: Christian Klein, Patrick Hanlon, Venket Holi, Adam LeBlanc, and Brad Baranowski.

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APPENDIX A: DOCUMENTS BEFORE THE BOARD

1. Legal Advertisement
2. Certified Abutters List and Map
3. Special Permit Application SP-25-26
4. Plot Plan
5. Proposal Plans

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APPENDIX B: DEFINITIONS

“Applicants” means Frank C. Sarnowski and Cindy S. Hung.

“Board” means the Zoning Board of Appeals of the Town of Arlington, Massachusetts.

“Building Inspector” means the Director of ISD or their designee.

“ISD” means the Inspectional Services Department of the Town of Arlington, Massachusetts

“Zoning Bylaw” or “ZBL” means the Zoning Bylaw of the Town of Arlington, Massachusetts, as amended through April 25, 2025.

Note: All terms used in the foregoing decision have the meanings, if any, provided in the Zoning Bylaw. The additional definitions in this opinion are supplemental to and do not modify definitions in the Zoning Bylaw.

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APPENDIX C: STANDARD CONDITIONS

The Zoning Board of Appeals of the Town of Arlington includes certain standard conditions in special permit grants. These conditions and a brief explanation of each one are set forth below.

Final Plans

1. The final plans and specifications approved by the Board for the permit shall be the final plans and specifications submitted to the Building Inspector of the Town of Arlington in connection with this application for zoning relief. There shall be no deviation during construction from approved plans and specifications without the express written approval of the Arlington Zoning Board of Appeals.

This condition ensures that the plans and specification submitted to the Building Inspector are the same as the plans and specifications approved by the Board. Any changes need to receive express written approval by the Board.

Enforcement

2. The Building Inspector is hereby notified that they are to monitor the site and should proceed with appropriate enforcement procedures at any time they determine that violations are present. The Building Inspector shall proceed under Section 3.1 of the Zoning Bylaw, under the provisions of Chapter 40 Section 21D, and institute non-criminal complaints. If necessary, the Building Inspector may also approve and institute appropriate criminal action, also in accordance with Section 3.1.

This condition provides for the effective enforcement of the special permit or variance grant, using the various means that the law provides to the Building Inspector.

Continuing Jurisdiction

3. The Board shall maintain continuing jurisdiction with respect to this special permit [and/or variance] grant.

This condition provides for continuing jurisdiction of the Board to oversee the special permit and or variance granted by the Board. Any changes to the terms of the approval, including all conditions, must receive the Board's approval.

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APPENDIX D: IMAGES

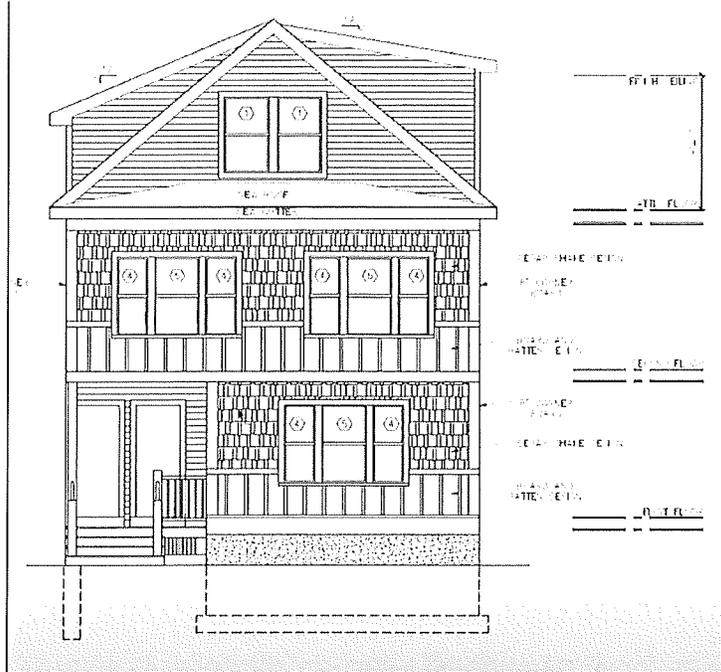


Image One: Front View

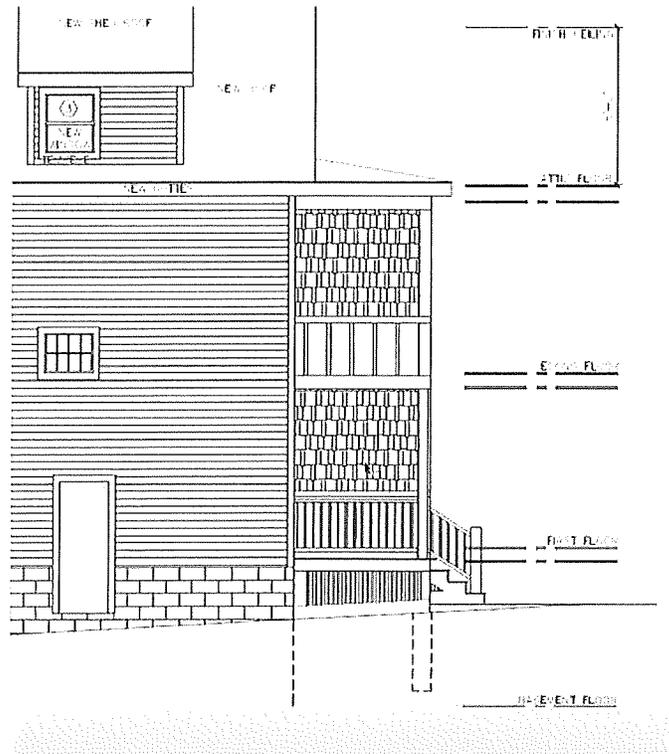


Image Two: Left Side View

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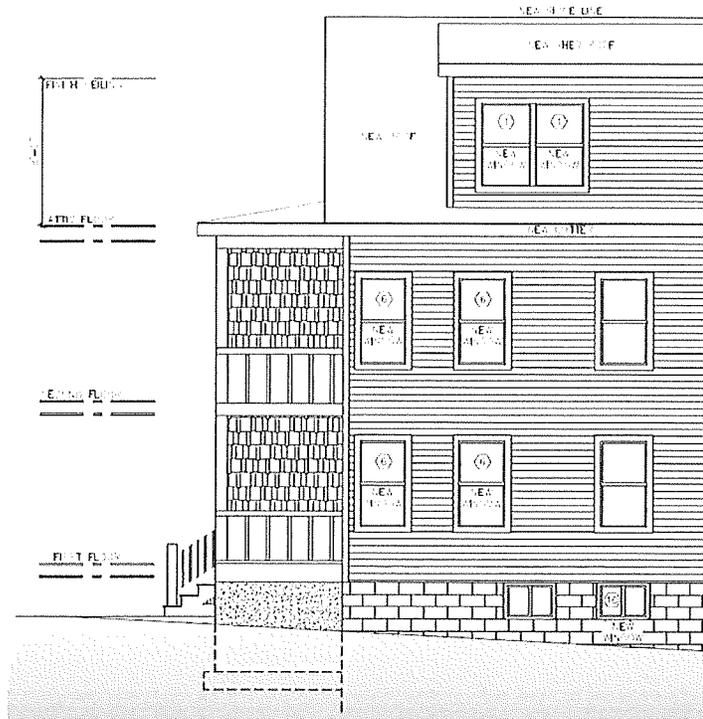


Image Three: Right Side View