



C H A T H A M C O U N T Y - S A V A N N A H

METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION

"Planning the Future - Respecting the Past"

M E M O R A N D U M

DATE: JANUARY 29, 2019

TO: THE MAYOR AND ALDERMEN OF THE CITY OF SAVANNAH

FROM: METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION

SUBJECT: MPC RECOMMENDATION

PETITION REFERENCED:

Text Amendment to the City of Savannah Zoning Ordinance

Re: Section 8-3030(n)(2) Figure 3 Historic District Height Map

Applicant: River Street Hotel LLC dba HOS Management.

Neil Dawson, Agent

File No. 19-000080-ZA

MPC ACTION:

Denial of the request to amend the Historic District Height Map regarding the subject properties at 114 West Bay Street and 126 West Bay Street.

MPC STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Denial of the request to amend the Historic District Height Map regarding the subject properties at 114 West Bay Street and 126 West Bay Street.

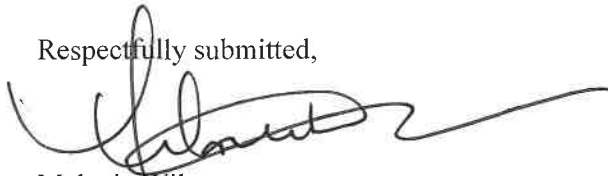
MEMBERS PRESENT: 11 + Chairman

Joseph Ervin, Chairman	Lee Smith
Thomas Branch	Linder Suthers
Travis Coles	Tom Woiwode
Ellis Cook	
Karen Jarrett	
Lacy Manigault	
Tanya Milton	
Wayne Noha	
Eula Parker	

PLANNING COMMISSION VOTE: Approve Staff Recommendation (8-4)

APPROVAL Votes: 8	DENIAL Votes: 4	ABSENT
Ervin Cook Jarrett Manigault Milton Noha Parker Suthers	Branch Coles Smith Woiwode	Hernandez Welch

Respectfully submitted,



Melanie Wilson
Executive Director

/jh

Enclosure

cc Luciana Spracher, Interim Clerk of Council
Lester B. Johnson, Assistant City Attorney
Jennifer Herman, Assistant City Attorney
Beth Barnes, Department of Inspections





Chatham County - Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission

January 29, 2019 Regular MPC Meeting

Title

ZONING TEXT AMENDMENT | Section 8-3030(n)(2) Figure 3 | Historic District Height Map

Description

TO: The Planning Commission

FROM: MPC Staff

DATE: January 29, 2019

SUBJECT: Text Amendment to the City of Savannah Zoning Ordinance

Re: Section 8-3030(n)(2) Figure 3 Historic District Height Map Applicant: River Street Hotel LLC dba HOS Management. Neil Dawson, Agent

File No. 19000080-ZA

Marcus Lotson, MPC Project Planner

Recommendation

Staff recommends **denial** of the petition to amend Section 8-3030(n) (2) Figure 3 Historic District Height Map.

Contact

Financial Impact

Review Comments

Attachments

- 📎 [Exhibits.pdf](#)
- 📎 [Staff Report - 0080.pdf](#)
- 📎 [Picture 001.jpg](#)



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METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION

"Planning the Future - Respecting the Past"

M E M O R A N D U M

TO: **The Mayor and Aldermen, City of Savannah**

FROM: **The Planning Commission**

DATE: **January 29, 2019**

SUBJECT: **Text Amendment to the City of Savannah Zoning Ordinance**
Re: Section 8-3030(n)(2) Figure 3 Historic District Height
Map Applicant: River Street Hotel LLC dba HOS
Management.
Neil Dawson, Agent
File No. 19-000080-ZA

Marcus Lotson, MPC Project Planner

ISSUE:

The petitioner is requesting a text amendment to the zoning ordinance specifically regarding the Historic District Height Map (height map) found in Section 8-3030(n)(2). They are proposing to amend the map for certain properties located at 114 West Bay Street (117 West River Street) and 126 West Bay Street (125 West River Street).

BACKGROUND:

In the 1990s, the Mayor and Aldermen of the City of Savannah made the decision to engage a preservation consultant to provide recommendations on policy changes that would help protect and preserve the Landmark Historic District. In 1992, the city was presented with the Chadbourne Report authored by Christopher Chadbourne of Clarion Associates, Inc. Among a number of recommendations, the Chadbourne Report recommended a proposed height map. Relative to height, the report emphasized the importance of establishing guidelines. It stated specifically that height regulations would provide *"predictability to the development community, surety to the neighborhoods and continuity to the historic city which is at the root of the city's tourist economy."* Subsequently, a citizen led stakeholder group was established and this committee revised the original proposed height map from the report and this revised map was adopted by City Council

in 1997.

FINDINGS:

1. The area in which the height map is proposed to be amended includes two parcels developed with contributing buildings originally constructed in the mid-19th century. The westernmost property, 126 West Bay Street is the existing Cotton Sail hotel. Beginning in 2005, the Historic District Board of Review (HDBR) considered several COAs for this property [H-05-3477-2, H-11-4500-2, H-11-4500-2 amended, and 12-000377-COA]. The HDBR recommended approval to the Zoning Board of Appeals for a one-story variance to the height map to allow for the rooftop addition. The Board stated that they recommended *“approval of a Finding-of-Fact that the additional story as presented is compatible, based on its ability to be removed without adversely affecting the main structure, its lack of visibility from the public right-of-way, and the greater public good in the recreation of Factors Walk at this location.”* The ZBA subsequently granted the variance [B-070829-43067-2]. The Cotton Sail hotel with rooftop addition was completed in May 2014. It does not appear that a variance was ever granted for the standard that reads: *“Additions to roofs shall not be visible from the front elevation.”* The easternmost property, 114 West Bay Street was purchased by the petitioner with the intent to expand the hotel into this property. The petitioner has stated that their intent is to extend the existing rooftop addition from the Cotton Sail to the east to cover the adjacent building. Again, this proposed extension, if visible from the public right of way, would require a variance from the previously mentioned standard.
2. The building on the easternmost property is currently permitted to be two stories above Bay Street. The petitioner is proposing that this property’s designation be changed to permit three stories above Bay Street. While this would permit a new rooftop addition at the subject property, it should be noted that a variance from the Historic District Ordinance would also be required. Section 8-3030(n)(11) states, in part, that *“Additions to historic buildings shall be located to the rear of the structure or the most inconspicuous side of the building. Additions to roofs shall not be visible from the front elevation.”*
3. The existing addition above the Cotton Sail hotel was specifically permitted through the variance process, based on findings of fact related to the structures visual and physical characteristics, and its limited visibility from the public right of way. In addition, it was reviewed in context of the overall redevelopment of the historic structure and the then proposed improvements to Factors Walk. Subsequent to this approval, on November 21, 2017 the Mayor and Aldermen amended the zoning ordinance to prohibit variances from the Historic District Height Map (File No. 17-002807). The intended consequence of this action is that the only way to amend the height map is through the zoning text amendment process.
4. The Historic District Board of Review has not had the opportunity to review the proposed change to the Height Map. The current review process allows the petitioner to submit directly to the MPC and City Council, as it is considered a text amendment. However, the proposed addition was on the HDBR’s December 12th agenda and staff was recommending

denial. The petitioner withdrew the request for the addition prior to review by the HDDBR.

5. The proposed amendment of the height map, in staff's opinion, could allow a more substantial increase in building scale although the petitioner's stated intent is only to extend the existing non-historic addition. A blanket change to these properties' allowed height could, in the future, jeopardize the historic integrity of these contributing buildings.

POLICY ANALYSIS:

The establishment of a Historic District Height Map within the zoning regulations that govern the district, was one of the most critical outcomes of the Chadbourne Report. Height, as it relates to historic development patterns, is an important aspect of visual compatibility. It is the single-most important tool the City has to maintain the character and integrity of the District. Very recently, the governing body has determined that changing the permitted height of structures in the historic district should not be a matter of discretion by any unelected body but should only be changed through the most strenuous process available for amending local regulations. Specific to the subject properties, non - historic additions that are visible from the public right of way are not permitted under the current regulations. The impact of these additions on the historic integrity of contributing buildings and the greater historic district can have long lasting negative effects. Staff cannot recommend a change that risks negatively impacting contributing structures or the integrity of the district at large.

Additionally, the National Park Service Department of the Interior changed the Savannah Historic Landmark District's status from Satisfactory (Priority 3) to Threatened (Priority 1) last year. One specific risk noted in the report is rooftop additions on historic buildings. "There has also been a surge in applications for rooftop additions to historic commercial building within the SNHLD which are becoming more prominent... This ultimately changes the mass and scale of the building, when additions are visible." The NPS notes that, "Considered individually many impacts may seem minor, but cumulatively they can be substantial. Stewards must be careful to guard against incremental changes that over time can lead to a severe loss of integrity." They go on to recommend that "when changes to the height map in one area of the District are proposed, it would be beneficial to consider the height map and the district as a whole."

ALTERNATIVES:

1. Approval of the request to amend the Historic District Height Map as proposed.
2. Approval of the staff recommendation to maintain the existing height map.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Planning Commission recommends **denial** of the request to amend the Historic District Height Map regarding the subject properties at 114 West Bay Street and 126 West Bay Street.