



METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION

"Planning the Future - Respecting the Past"

M E M O R A N D U M

DATE: JUNE 8, 2021

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: Amendment to the Section 7.10, Cuyler-Brownville
District Historic Buildings Map**

Applicant: Staff initiated

MPC File No: 21-001516-ZA

MPC ACTION:

Approval to amend the Cuyler-Brownville District Historic Buildings Map to include 90 buildings constructed prior to 1937 and not previously listed as contributing with an effective date of September 1, 2021.

MPC STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Approval to amend the Cuyler-Brownville District Historic Buildings Map to include 90 buildings constructed prior to 1937 and not previously listed as contributing with an effective date of September 1, 2021.

MEMBERS PRESENT: 8 + Chairman

Joseph Welch, Chairman
Laureen Boles
Elizabeth Epstein
Karen Jarrett
Wayne Noha
Eula Parker
Lee Smith
Dwayne Stephens
Maliak Watkins

PLANNING COMMISSION VOTE: Approve Staff Recommendation (8-0)

APPROVAL Votes: 8	DENIAL Votes: 0	ABSENT
Welch Boles Epstein Jarrett Noha Parker Smith Stephens		Brown Coles Ervin Joyner Watkins Woiwode

Respectfully submitted,



Melanie Wilson
Executive Director

/jh

Enclosure

cc Mark Massey, Clerk of Council
Lester B. Johnson, Assistant City Attorney
Jennifer Herman, Assistant City Attorney
Beth Barnes, Department of Inspections





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: **June 8, 2021**

SUBJECT: **Text Amendment to the City of Savannah Zoning Ordinance**
Re: Amendment to the Section 7.10, Cuyler-Brownville District
Historic Buildings Map
Applicant: Staff initiated

Leah G. Michalak, Director of Historic Preservation

Report Status: Council Report

ISSUE:

A petition to amend the Cuyler-Brownville District Historic Buildings Map to include 90 buildings of historic and architectural significance that were built in the Cuyler-Brownville District prior to 1937 and not previously listed as “contributing/historic.”

BACKGROUND:

The Cuyler-Brownville Local Historic District was created in 1999 as part of the Zoning Ordinance for the City of Savannah. The purpose of the district is to promote sensitive rehabilitation of existing historic buildings and ensure the visual compatibility of new construction within the area.

Within the Cuyler-Brownville District, all buildings are classified as either contributing (historic) or non-contributing (non-historic) on the Cuyler-Brownville District Historic Buildings Map. The map was adopted in 1999 by City Council and the status of buildings has not been updated since that time; the map itself was transferred to ArcGIS in 2016.

The age of the current map and the realization that the areas outside the boundary of the National Register Historic District had not been properly surveyed spurred this update. The State Historic Preservation Office recommends that surveys be updated a minimum of every 10 years; the current Cuyler-Brownville District survey/map is 22 years old.

Taking no action leaves many buildings unprotected. The state enabling legislation provides for the preservation and protection of historic buildings, structures, appurtenances, and places that are of basic and vital importance for the development and maintenance of Savannah’s tourism industry, its culture, and for the protection of property values because of their association with history, and their unique architectural details. An on-going update of the Cuyler-Brownville District Historic Buildings Map is vital to this mandate.

Staff received one objection from the property owner at 617 West 31st Street which is the westernmost end unit of a quadplex. The owner stated (see attached objection) that the building was constructed in the 1990s (he believes 1997), not 1915 as research indicates. After discussing this with the owner, staff performed additional research. Although it is likely that the building was altered in the '90s, research indicates that the row was originally constructed in 1915. Staff located the deed from 1994 which indicates that there is a protective covenant placed in 1994; this is possibly where the confusion originates. Staff has also included the survey form current survey form from the most recent survey project in 2018-2020 which indicates a construction date of 1915. Staff recommends that this building remain on the Proposed Contributing Resources Map for inclusion in the amendment.

FINDINGS:

1. Currently, all buildings within the local design review area for the Cuyler-Brownville Historic District are reviewed for any exterior changes visible from a public right-of-way. However, only those buildings that are listed as contributing on the Historic Buildings Map require Historic Preservation Commission Review for demolition.
2. All buildings listed as non-contributing on the Historic Buildings Map that fit within the current Period of Significance (1867-1937) were analyzed by the MPC Historic Preservation Department following the 2018-2020 historic preservation fund grant project to resurvey the Cuyler-Brownville District. The consultant that performed the resurvey recommended an update to the map in their survey report. Staff used criteria based on the "National Register Criteria for Evaluation" as follows:
 - a. Is the building associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad pattern of history?
 - b. Is the building associated with the lives of persons significant in the past?
 - c. Does the building embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction?
 - d. Does the building possess integrity of location?
 - e. Does the building possess integrity of design and materials?
 - f. Does the building possess integrity of setting?

Also consulted were the following documents: The 1997 "Cuyler-Brownville District National Register Nomination" by Beth Lattimore Reiter, the 1997 "Cuyler-Brownville Urban Redevelopment Plan" by the City of Savannah Department of Planning and Community Development, the 1999 MPC file regarding the adoption of the Cuyler-Brownville Planned Conservation District by City Council [File No. 99-12759], the 2011 "A Survey Report for the Western Boundary of the Cuyler-Brownville Planned Neighborhood Conservation District in Savannah, Georgia" by Savannah Development and Renewal Authority.

3. 59 of the 90 buildings proposed to be added are single or two-family residential buildings. Other proposed additions include 16 outbuildings (garages and accessory dwelling units), eight (8) multi-family rowhouses buildings, five (5) institutional buildings (which include four (4) religious buildings and one (1) former museum), and two (2) commercial buildings (a former service station and a restaurant).
4. All 90 buildings proposed to be added fall within the current Period of Significance. Buildings proposed to be added which are within the National Register District boundary were likely overlooked when the map was originally created; buildings outside of the National Register

District boundary (but within the local Historic District boundary) were never properly surveyed and added to the map since the local district's inception. Staff located several attempts to survey this area within the MPC's records; however, the project (for reasons unknown) was never completed.

POLICY ANALYSIS:

1. Taking no action leaves many buildings unprotected especially with regard to demolition. This neighborhood contains valuable affordable housing opportunities that, if demolished, would be difficult to replicate. The buildings have smaller footprints on larger parcels with existing infrastructure that is expensive to build with new construction development.
2. The State enabling legislation for the Cuyler-Brownville Historic District provides for the preservation and protection of historic buildings, structures, appurtenances, and places that are of basic and vital importance for the development and maintenance of Savannah and Chatham County's heritage tourism industry, its culture, and for the protection of property values because of their association with history, their unique architectural details, or their being a part of or related to a park or area, the design or general arrangement of which should be preserved and/or developed according to a fixed plan based on economic, cultural, historical motives or purposes.

Creating a plan for on-going review, evaluation, and protection of these historic resources is consistent with the policy of protecting the City's historic buildings.

ALTERNATIVES:

1. Recommend approval of the request to amend the Zoning Ordinance as proposed.
2. Recommend an alternate amendment.
3. Recommend denial of the request.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Planning Commission recommends approval of the amendment to the Cuyler-Brownville District Historic Buildings Map to include 90 buildings constructed prior to 1937 and not previously listed as contributing with an effective date of September 1, 2021.