



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

TO: Mayor and Aldermen of the City of Savannah

FROM: Metropolitan Planning Commission

DATE: December 12, 2017
Updated April 5, 2018

SUBJECT: Text Amendments to the City of Savannah Zoning Ordinance
Re: Amendments to Section 8-3030 Historic District Ordinance
including the following sections:

- Table of Contents
- Definitions
- Application for Certificate of Appropriateness
- Design Standards
- Variances
- Amendments

Petitioner: MPC Staff
File No.: 17-006200-ZA

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ISSUE:

An amendment to the Historic District Ordinance for the purposes of: 1) correcting typographical errors; 2) clarifying definitions; 3) adding/revising standards to address changing technologies; 4) allowing ‘R’ zoning districts outside the Landmark District to qualify for a bonus story; 5) strengthening the bonus story criteria, particularly in regards to the ‘active use’ criterion; 6) adding additional standards for large scale development; 7) providing the Historic District Board of Review (HDBR) some flexibility in the strict application of certain standards; 8) strengthening the standards applicable to Monumental Buildings to ensure the protection of the Oglethorpe Plan; 9) revising the boundaries of the “Factors Walk Character Area” to reflect the historical boundaries of Factors Walk; and 10) requiring that amendments to the Historic District Ordinance are reviewed by the HDBR in addition to MPC and City Council.

BACKGROUND

The last major update to the Historic District Ordinance was adopted in 2009 and focused primarily

on the large-scale development standards. At that time, major projects in the City had slowed down or halted altogether due to the downturn in the economy. Over the last few years, new projects have been through the review process under the new standards, and many have been constructed. In that regard, we have had the opportunity to assess the effectiveness of the 2009 revisions. Development has continued to increase every year since then and additional inconsistencies or areas of improvement in the ordinance have been identified. The HDBR has been regularly discussing these revisions in public meetings since 2016 and is ready to move forward with the review process and their implementation.

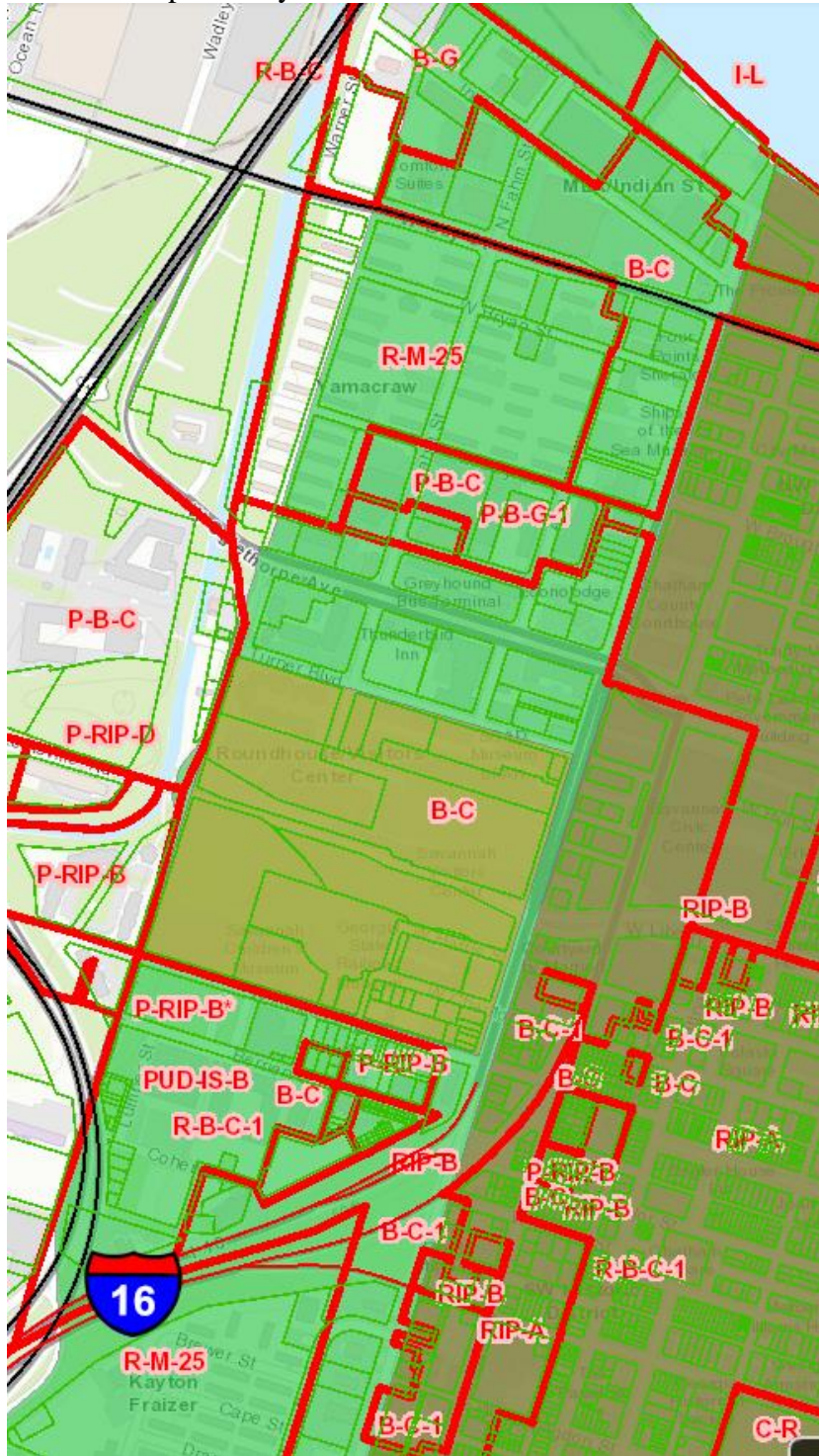
MPC staff presented the revisions at the MPC Planning Meeting on November 21st and solicited wide community feedback throughout the process, much of which has been incorporated.

City Council reviewed the petition on February 14, 2018 and continued the item to allow for additional public comments. The MPC hosted two open houses on March 21st and 28th and staff met with numerous stakeholders. The Historic District Board of Review reviewed all public comments at a special called meeting on April 4, 2018 and supported the incorporation of most public comments.

FINDINGS:

1. Correcting typographical errors: many of the proposed revisions correct typographical errors and ensure consistency within the ordinance, such as updating the Table of Contents with correct titles and page numbers. This is typical with any ordinance revision.
2. Clarifying definitions: additional language has been added to existing definitions and additional definitions have been incorporated. For example, the “active use” definition has been clarified and strengthened to better reflect the intent while “canopy”, “primary façade” and “shade structures” are new definitions which refer to specific terms used in the design standards.
3. Adding/revising standards to address changing technologies: several revisions address changing technologies, such as the revision to allow through-the-wall air conditioners on buildings to be incorporated into the overall design and not simply the window design. As technology changes and improves, the ordinance should reflect this, and not require petitioners to go through a separate variance process.
4. Allowing ‘R’ zoning districts outside the Landmark District to qualify for a bonus story: currently, the zoning designation determines if a building can qualify for a bonus story. In all non-residential districts, buildings can qualify for a bonus story. In residential districts (as determined by an ‘R’ in the zoning nomenclature), bonus stories are only permitted if a property is located on Oglethorpe Avenue, Liberty Street and Trust Lots. The proposed revision would allow projects to qualify for bonus stories in an ‘R’ district if also located outside the Landmark District boundaries. This area is limited to the portion of the district located west of Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. extending to West Boundary Street. Much of this area is currently B-C and therefore bonus stories are already permitted. Notably, both Yamacraw Village and Kayton Homes are R-M-25 which would not allow a bonus story.

There are smaller parcels scattered throughout the area that are P-RIP-B and R-B-1 which would not allow a bonus story. This area is seeing increased development and by allowing a bonus story in the 'R' districts in this area, it is anticipated that there would be fewer requests for rezoning to non-residential districts. This area is also the appropriate location for larger and taller buildings, as it is outside the Landmark Historic District proper, but within close proximity.



5. Strengthening the bonus story criteria, particularly in regards to the ‘active use’ criterion: Currently, there are four criteria which may qualify a project for a bonus story. These include:
- An historic street or lane is restored and dedicated back to the City of Savannah as a public right-of-way;
 - Affordable Housing, as defined and quantified by the City of Savannah, is provided within the development and so certified by the City Manager;
 - Multiple ground floor active uses permitted in the base zoning district (including but not limited to retail, office, lobby, restaurant) span the length of the façade on all street fronting elevations (not including lanes) and maintain individual primary exterior entrances.
 - Exterior building walls incorporate 100 percent modular masonry materials [see (n) 16. f. ii. Exterior Walls] on all sides with the use of granite, marble, or other natural quarried stone over a minimum of 30 percent of all street fronting facades and roofs incorporate sustainable technologies such as green roofs, rooftop gardens, and solar roofs (including solar shingles, roof tiles, or membranes) over a minimum of 50 percent of roof area and so certified by the City Manager.

The proposed revision will strengthen the active use criterion by revising the language and also requiring better materials. The revision will strengthen the sustainable criterion by requiring LEED Gold accreditation.

6. Adding additional standards for large scale development: Currently, large scale development is required to select two from a possible five massing standards. However, one of those massing standards is a requirement elsewhere in the ordinance for commercial buildings. Therefore, the revision proposes to only allow that massing standard for residential development.

Currently there is a maximum building footprint of 13,500 square feet within the Oglethorpe Plan Area. The proposed revision will expand that to the Landmark Historic District.

Currently there is no maximum building footprint outside of the Oglethorpe Plan Area. The proposal will create a maximum footprint of 40,500 square feet outside the Landmark District boundaries.

7. Providing the Historic District Board of Review (HDBR) some flexibility in the strict application of certain standards: Currently, any variances from the Historic District require Zoning Board of Appeals approval, after HDBR review. The HDBR regularly reviews requests for variances from the provisions which state:
- “Exterior building walls shall use window groupings (including curtain walls), columns, and/or pilasters to create multiple bays not less than 15 feet nor more than 20 feet in width.”
 - “The distance between windows shall be not less than for adjacent historic buildings, nor more than two times the width of the windows.”

The proposed revision would allow the HDBR to vary strict compliance with these two provisions provided that a historic precedent exists and the design is visually compatible.

8. Strengthening the standards applicable to Monumental Buildings to ensure the protection of the Oglethorpe Plan: Currently monument buildings, defined as *an institutional building such as a church, sanctuary, governmental building, school or institution of higher learning with the primary use as education, theater or museum, having special or unique form because of the nature of its use*, are only subject to the visual compatibility, height, and setback requirements. They are exempt from all other design standards. The proposed revisions would ensure they are also subject to the provisions requiring the preservation of the Oglethorpe Plan.
9. Revising the boundaries of the “Factors Walk Character Area” to reflect the historical boundaries of Factors Walk: Currently the Factors Walk Character Area boundaries extend to Randolph Street on the east and MLK Jr. Blvd. on the west. The proposed revisions amends those boundaries to East Broad Street on the east and Montgomery Street on the west, reflecting the historical boundaries of Factors Walk.
10. Requiring that amendments to the Historic District Ordinance are reviewed by the HDBR in addition to MPC and City Council: Currently any amendment to the Historic District Ordinance is required to be reviewed by MPC and City Council. The proposed amendment requires review by the HDBR as well. The HDBR would make a recommendation only to MPC and City Council and their recommendation would not be binding.

ALTERNATIVES:

1. Recommend approval of the amendments as proposed.
2. Recommend approval of alternate amendments.
3. Recommend denial of the proposed amendments.

POLICY ANALYSIS:

The proposed amendments provide clarity, correct errors, and strengthen the Historic District ordinance standards to ensure better quality designs within the Historic District.

RECOMMENDATION:

Approval of amendments to the City of Savannah zoning ordinance as proposed.