



TO: Mayor and Alderman

FROM: Bridget Lidy, Planning and Urban Design

DATE: April 24, 2025

SUBJECT: Petition of Bridget Lidy on Behalf of the Mayor and Aldermen of the City of Savannah, GA to Amend the City of Savannah's Zoning Map to include the Affordable Housing Overlay District (AHOD) (File No. 25-001546-ZA)

REQUEST:

The Petitioner requests an amendment to the Zoning Map to apply the Affordable Housing Overlay District (AHOD) to the West Victorian, East Victorian, Metropolitan, and Thomas Square neighborhoods and a portion of the Live Oak neighborhood. The AHOD applies standards as defined in text amendment (File No. 24-004284-ZA) approved by the Mayor and Aldermen on March 27, 2025.

By applying the standards to specific neighborhoods, the AHOD will enable a ‘density bonus’ program that encourages affordable housing development within Savannah’s Traditional zoning districts. The requested map amendment would allow property owners to apply alternate standards or seek special exceptions to allow a reduced lot area per unit below the minimum specified by the zoning districts where the overlay is applicable. This density bonus program is only available to developments which include affordable housing units as defined by the Housing Services Department of the City of Savannah.

BACKGROUND

According to the Housing Savannah Task Force, *affordable housing* is housing in good condition that can typically be rented or purchased without households paying more than 1) 30% of gross income or 2) Fair Market Rents. Fair Market Rents (FMR) for the Savannah MSA (HUD 2021) and the household income required to rent dwellings without being cost burdened are shown below.

Rents/Incomes	1-Bedroom	2-Bedroom	3-Bedroom	4-Bedroom
FMR Rents	\$921	\$1,050	\$1,442	\$1,671
Annual Incomes	\$36,840	\$42,000	\$57,680	\$66,840
Hourly Full Time	\$17.70	\$20.20	\$27.70	\$32.10

In Savannah, about 45% of renters are cost-burdened, spending over 30% of their income on housing (Savannah Affordable Housing Fund Report, 2021), with the fair market rent for a two-bedroom apartment around \$1,000 per month (HUD, 2021). Additionally, there is a considerable shortfall in affordable rental units, indicating a need for thousands more to meet the current demand (Chatham-Savannah Authority for the Homeless). The City faces a significant affordable housing

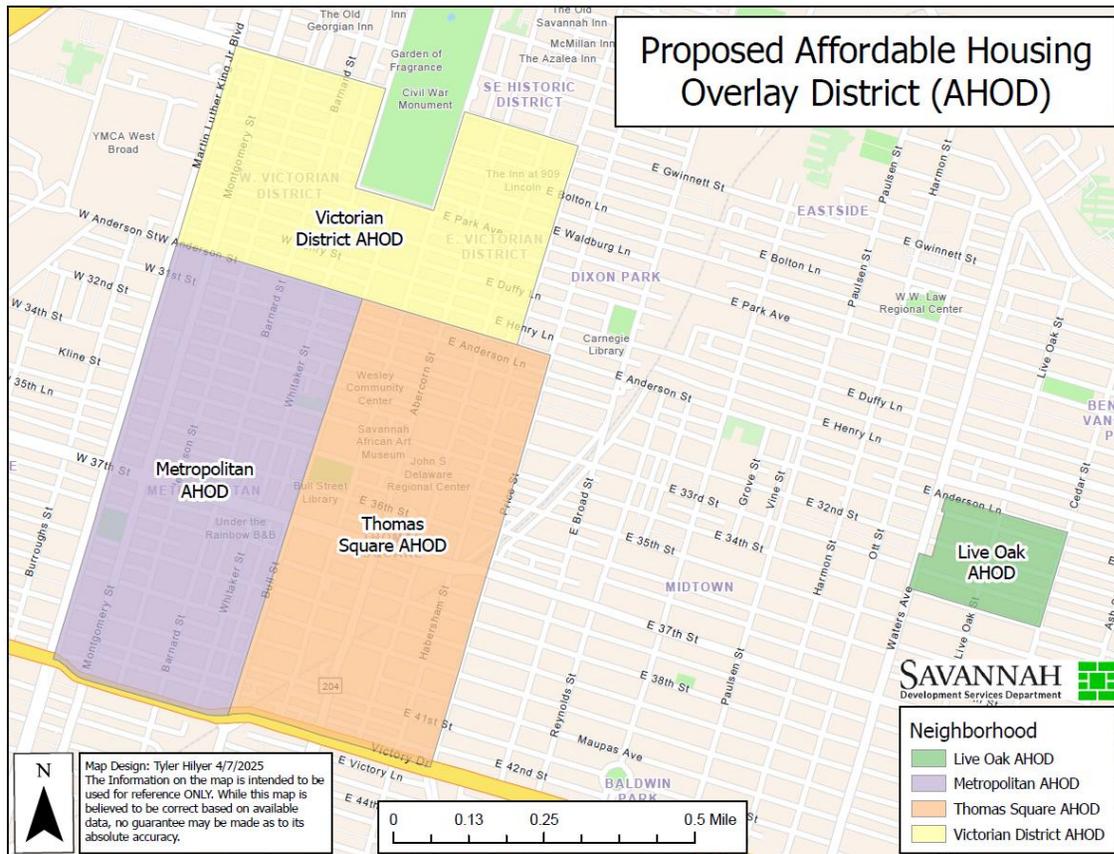
deficiency, with thousands of additional rental units needed to accommodate low-income residents and alleviate cost burdens.

A strategy highlighted by the Housing Savannah Action Plan (July 2021) for facilitating affordable housing includes the following recommendation:

“5A.4 Support, where appropriate and possible, zoning, development standard, licensing and similar ordinance amendments and/or new ordinances that promote housing affordability

- *Define affordable housing in City Code*
- *Provide flexibility in affordable housing development standards including in PD districts*
- *Provide bonuses or incentives for affordable housing*
- *Allow increased density and dwelling units per lot/parcel*
- *Allow smaller, narrower, lot widths and lot areas*
- *Allow smaller building setbacks*
- *Allow larger lot coverage for buildings*
- *Reduce off-street parking requirements when alternatives exist, or none is necessary*
- *Encourage development of “missing middle” housing in neighborhoods*
- *Provide incentives for smart growth, mixed use, transit oriented and walkable development”*

However, the current Zoning Ordinance lacks comprehensive integration of these strategies to effectively address affordable housing. With the proposed map amendment, the Petitioner proposes revisions to the zoning map that would apply alternate zoning standards and allow special exceptions. The alternate standards and special exceptions would allow higher residential densities tied to provision of covenanted affordable housing in select traditional zoning districts. Ultimately, this would create a pathway within the existing regulatory framework for implementation of the strategy outlined by Housing Savannah above.



Parcels impacted by the proposed map amendment

FACTS AND FINDINGS:

Public Notice: In accordance with the City of Savannah Zoning Ordinance, a public notice advertisement was published in the *Savannah Morning News* on April 9, 2025, announcing that a hearing for the subject petition will be held before the City Council on Thursday, April 24, 2025. Signs were posted in impacted neighborhoods and mailed notices were sent to property owners in accordance with notification procedures established in the Zoning Ordinance. S

Neighborhood Meeting: The Petitioner conducted multiple meetings with neighborhood groups to inform the community and solicit perspectives about housing needs and goals of the proposed Zoning Ordinance map amendment and associated density bonus program.

ORDINANCE ANALYSIS:

Per Section 3.5.8 of Article 3, Savannah’s Zoning Ordinance offers six (6) review criteria for proposed map amendments:

- a. **Suitability and Community Need**
 - i. Whether the range of uses permitted by the proposed zoning district is more suitable than the range of uses that is permitted by the current zoning district.

- ii. Whether the proposed zoning district addresses a specific need in the county or city.

Staff Comment: *The need for affordable housing is a recognized priority for the jurisdiction, and codification of the proposed modified development standards reflects the acknowledged public benefit which ultimately drives the relaxation of development standards where there is an intent to provide covenanted affordable housing within the scope and meaning of the density bonus program. In large part, the map amendment allows the same uses as are currently permitted in the zoning districts where it applied. The additional units enabled by the overlay are equally suited to the subject neighborhoods as those permitted in the absence of the overlay. To the degree that additional affordable housing will be provided through the density bonus program, the permitted uses are well-suited to the Traditional neighborhoods because they have historically been accessible to households with a range of incomes and in all stages of life.*

b. Compatibility

- i. Whether the zoning proposal will adversely affect the existing use or usability of adjacent or nearby property.
- ii. Whether the zoning proposal is compatible with the present zoning pattern and conforming uses of nearby property and the character of the surrounding area.
- iii. Whether there are other existing or changing conditions affecting the use and development of the property which give supporting grounds for either approval or disapproval of the zoning proposal.

Staff Comment: *The neighborhoods where the AHOD is proposed have a range of housing types that have been present for decades. Those housing types do not adversely affect the usability or character of the neighborhoods. The Traditional zoning districts reaffirm the desire for and appropriateness of diverse housing types and enforce an organized building through the use of maximum front setbacks. The proposed overlay does not alter the approach to front setbacks, and the majority of the affected neighborhoods are subject to historic review that will further solidify the orderly pattern of development. The overlay enables additional housing units within that well-define pattern. The alternate standards allowed by the overlay are likely to be used primarily on existing lots as an alternative to subdivision or recombination.*

- c. **Consistency** – Whether the zoning proposal is in conformity with the policy and intent of the Comprehensive Plan and other adopted plans, such as a redevelopment plan or small area plan.

Staff Comment: *The Housing section of Comprehensive Plan states “Maintaining a mix of housing types is one of the most important housing strategies. It helps to boost a socially and economically diverse community. . .”. The AHOD enables a greater variety of housing for more properties while encouraging the provision of housing that will be accessible to a greater range of Savannah’s residents. The newly enabled housing types are also generally*

already permitted in the areas where the AHOD is proposed. The overlay would not significantly alter the land use pattern recommended by the Future Land Use Map for the neighborhoods where it is applied.

- d. **Reasonable Use** – Whether the property to be affected by the zoning proposal has a reasonable use as currently zoned.

Staff Comment: *The properties affected by the proposed overlay can currently be used for single-family detached housing. Many of the areas where the overlay is proposed have a historic development pattern that includes a variety of housing types, including on similarly situated lots to those that currently only allow single-family detached development.*

- e. **Adequate Public Services** – Whether adequate school, public safety and emergency facilities, road, ingress and egress, parks, wastewater treatment, water supply and stormwater drainage facilities are available for the uses and densities that are permitted in the proposed zoning district.

Staff Comment: *The AHOD is proposed in areas that are already served by City services. The additional density enabled by-right would be marginal and would not substantially alter the existing demand profile of the affected neighborhoods. Special exceptions enabled by the overlay which could lead to a greater increase in density would be reviewed by the Planning Commission for service sufficiency.*

- f. **Proximity to a Military Base, Installation or Airport** – In accordance with the O.C.G.A. §36-66-6, when a rezoning is proposed for property located within 3,000 feet of a military base, installation or airport, or within the 3,000 foot Clear Zone and Accident Prevention Zones Numbers I and II as prescribed in the definition of an Air Installation Compatible Use Zone that is affiliated with such base, installation or airport the following shall occur:
- i. The commander of such military base, installation or airport, including Hunter Army Airfield, shall be requested to provide a written recommendation and supporting facts at least 30 days prior to the public hearing.

Staff Comment: *The proposed overlay district will not be applied within any of the areas listed in this criterion.*

POLICY ANALYSIS:

At present the Zoning Ordinance inadequately accommodates the development of affordable housing typologies and lacks incentives for developers to prioritize affordability (*density bonus for Cluster Development in Sec 8.10.2 excluded*). The present map amendment aims to relax relevant development standards for explicit allowance of affordable housing creation through thoughtfully targeted provisions. This map amendment is prompted by the needs of key groups of stakeholders without whom our region cannot function socially or economically.

RECOMMENDATION:

Recommend approval of the Affordable Housing Overlay District (AHOD) zoning map amendment which identifies the applicable neighborhoods and zoning districts for the program and supports the zoning text amendment approved on March 28, 2025.