



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: Jay Melder, City Manager

FROM: Melanie Wilson

DATE: July 27, 2023

SUBJECT: Recommendations by the Historic Preservation Commission for a Text Amendment to the City of Savannah Zoning Ordinance Section 7.9, Victorian District Contributing Resources Map

This memorandum serves as a recommendation from the Historic Preservation Commission to amend the City of Savannah’s Victorian District Contributing Resources Map. In accordance with City Ordinance Section 3.16.7, Amendments to a Contributing Resources Map, the Historic Preservation Commission may initiate the process of amending the Contributing Resources Map for a local historic district.

On July 26, 2023, the Historic Preservation Commission voted to submit a recommendation to the City Council for a Text Amendment to the City of Savannah Zoning Ordinance Section 7.9, Victorian District Contributing Resources Map. The Historic Preservation Commission desires to amend the Contributing Resources Map to include three (3) resources of exceptional importance (with regard to historic and architectural significance) that were built in the Victorian District outside of the Period of Significance (1870-1923) and not previously listed as “contributing/historic.” These resources are 1001 Whitaker Street, 124 West Park Avenue and 1015 Whitaker Street.

BACKGROUND:

The Victorian Local Historic District (formerly named the Victorian Planned Neighborhood Conservation District) was created in 1981 as part of the Zoning Ordinance for the City of Savannah. The Contributing Resources Map was originally adopted in 1981 by City Council. 912 Drayton Street was added as contributing in 2004. In 2018, the map was updated to include an additional 60 buildings built within the current Period of Significance that were discovered during the 2016 re-survey grant project. That survey grant project did not include buildings that were outside of the Period of Significance but also older than forty (40) years. Since the 2016 survey, MPC Preservation Staff recently completed a survey of resources outside of the Period of Significance but also older than forty (40) years; this consists of 132 resources.

Prior to the adoption of the new zoning ordinance (NewZO) on September 1, 2019, it was not possible for resources outside the Period of Significance to be added as contributing; however,

with the adoption of NewZO came the ability to add resources outside of the Period of Significance if they are of “exceptional importance”. For example, 1001 Whitaker Street, was deemed eligible for individual listing on the National Register of Historic Places in 2011; however, the local historic district did not have the authority to amend the Contributing Resources Map to add it as contributing.

The City of Savannah Zoning Ordinance, as adopted on September 1, 2019, provides for the evaluation of all non-contributing resources to be considered for contributing status. Resources outside of the Period of Significance are evaluated using the following standard from Sec. 3.18.8: *Exceptional Importance. Contributing buildings include a select group of exceptional resources constructed outside the district’s Period of Significance. These resources possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and meet one of more of the above criteria.*

PROJECT HISTORY:

At the Historic Preservation Commission June 28, 2023, meeting the following petitions to demolish these three (3) buildings were considered and denied by the Commission:

- Petition of Greenline Architecture | 23-003038-COA | 1001 Whitaker Street | Demolition of a Non- Contributing Building
- Petition of Greenline Architecture | 23-003040-COA | 1015 Whitaker Street | Demolition of a Non- Contributing Building
- Petition of Greenline Architecture | 23-003047-COA | 124 West Park Avenue | Demolition of a Non- Contributing Building

The denial of demolition of these three (3) buildings by the HPC in effect requires the amendment of the Contributing Resources Map. Therefore, in accordance with Section 3.16.7, the HPC is initiating the process of amending the map to include these three (3) buildings as contributing resources.

FINDINGS:

1. Currently, all buildings within the local design review area for the Victorian 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 Contributing Resources Map are guaranteed protection against demolition.
2. The three (3) resources listed as non-contributing on the Contributing Resources Map, outside of the Period of Significance but older than forty (40) years, were analyzed by the MPC Historic Preservation Department for “Exceptional Importance.” Per Sec 3.18.8 of the ordinance, resources must possess integrity of location, design setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and meet one of more of the following criteria:
 - a. Are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
 - b. Are associated with the lives of significant persons in our past; or
 - c. Embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
 - d. Have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in historic or prehistory.

The Commission has determined that in addition to possessing integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, the resources meet the following:

- 1001 Whitaker Street meets criterion ‘c’.
- 1015 Whitaker Street meets criterion ‘b’.
- 124 West Park Avenue meets criterion ‘a’.

3. All resources proposed to be added fall outside of the district’s current Period of Significance but are within the boundaries of the National Register and local Historic Districts.

POLICY ANALYSIS:

1. Taking no action leaves these three (3) resources unprotected especially with regard to demolition. This neighborhood contains valuable resources 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 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 Victorian District Contributing Resources Map and the periodic comprehensive evaluation of all of the district’s resources (regardless of age) is vital to this mandate.
3. On June 28, 2023, the HPC Board denied the petitions for demolition of these three (3) resources finding that they had exceptional importance.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Historic Preservation Commission recommends that the City Council amend the Victorian Historic District Contributing Resources Map to include the three (3) resources of exceptional importance that were built in the Victorian District outside of the Period of Significance (1870-1923) and not previously listed as “contributing/historic” with an immediate effective date.

We have attached a draft Ordinance for review and approval by the City Council. We ask that this matter be placed on the next Council Agenda for review. The Mayor and Aldermen shall schedule the public hearing and give public notice in accordance with Sec. 3.2, Public Notice.

The Mayor and Aldermen shall evaluate the request based upon the criteria in Sec. 3.16.4.b. After consideration of the review criteria required by Sec. 3.16.4.b., the Mayor and Aldermen shall take one of the following actions:

1. Approve the Contributing Resources Map as recommended by the Historic Preservation Commission; or
2. Approve the Contributing Resources Map with modifications; or
3. Deny the Contributing Resources Map.