



METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION

"Planning the Future - Respecting the Past"

M E M O R A N D U M

DATE: November 21, 2023
TO: THE MAYOR AND ALDERMEN OF THE CITY OF SAVANNAH
FROM: METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION
SUBJECT: MPC RECOMMENDATION

PETITION REFERNCED:

Petitioner: Bridget Lidy, City of Savannah
Owner: Historic Savannah Foundation, Inc.
Aldermanic District: 1 - Bernetta Lanier
County Commission District: 2 - Commissioner Malinda Hodge
Neighborhood/Subdivision: Cuyler-Brownville Historic District
Current Zoning District: TR-1 (Traditional Residential-1)
Future Land Use (FLU) Category: Traditional Neighborhood (TN)
File No. 23-005399-ZA
Location: 505 West 36th Street
PINs: 20066 48011
Acreage: 0.11 acres

MPC ACTION:

Approval of the request to rezone to Traditional Commercial - 1 (TC-1) with the following conditions:

1. The historic Kiah House shall be preserved.
2. The only TC-1 allowed uses will be museum and apartment.

MPC STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Approval of the request to rezone to Traditional Commercial - 1 (TC-1) with the following conditions:

1. The historic Kiah House shall be preserved.
2. The only TC-1 allowed uses will be museum and apartment.

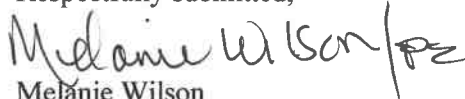
MEMBERS PRESENT: 12 + Chairwoman

Dwayne Stephens
Laureen Boles Jay Melder
Karen Jarrett Joseph Welch
Wayne Noha
Jeff Notrica
Michael Kaigler
Elizabeth Epstein
Shedrick Coleman
Travis Coles
Shedrick Coleman
Traci Amick

PLANNING COMMISSION VOTE: Approval staff recommendation (13-0)

APPROVAL Votes: 11	DENIAL Votes: 0	ABSENT
Stephens Coles Boles Noha Kaigler Epstein Woiwode Notrica Jarrett Amick Coleman Melder Welch		Ervin

Respectfully submitted,



Melanie Wilson
Executive Director

MW/sh

Enclosure

cc: Mark Massey, Clerk of Council
Lester B. Johnson, Assistant City Attorney
Jennifer Herman, Assistant City Attorney
Bridget Lidy, Planning of Urban & Design



CHATHAM COUNTY-SAVANNAH
METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION

“Planning the Future, Respecting the Past”

STAFF REPORT

To: The Savannah City Council

From: The Planning Commission

Date: November 21, 2023

Subject: Zoning Map Amendment

Owner: Historic Savannah Foundation, Inc.

Agent: Bridget Lidy, City of Savannah

Address: 505 West 36th Street, Savannah, GA

PIN: 20066 48011

Site Area: 0.11 acres

Alderman District: 1 - Bernetta Lanier

Chatham County Commission District: 2 - Malinda Hodge

File Number: 23-005399-ZA-MAP

Request

The Petitioner requests rezoning of the property at 505 West 36th Street from a Traditional Residential – 1 (TR-1) zoning classification to Traditional Commercial 1 (TC-1) zoning classification in association with a proposed use as a museum. The property, 0.11 acres, will be restored as an African American historic and cultural arts museum with a renovated carriage house that contains an apartment.

Facts and Findings

Site

The subject parcel consists of 0.11 acres (4,792 sf) and contains the Kiah House, a residential building constructed in 1910, the residence of Dr. Calvin L. Kiah and Virginia Kiah and one of the first African American museums in Savannah. The museum was opened by Virginia Kiah in 1959 and closed in 2001 once she passed. Both the main building and carriage house have been unoccupied and deteriorating since the closure. The parcel is in the Cuyler-Brownville Historic District, established in

1997, and it is one of Savannah’s oldest African American neighborhoods. As of 2021, both structures are listed as contributing resources to the district. Per the Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation,

“Notable visitors included Civil Rights activist Rosa Parks and artist Margaret Burroughs. Originally a Prairie style home, Virginia Kiah put a two-story addition on the front, with a full wall of windows to accommodate the museum... Unoccupied and in probate for nearly 20 years, the house is in an advanced state of deterioration, which has not gone unnoticed by the City. Due to the issues surrounding the probate, concerned citizens have been unable to apply for grants, conduct archaeological research, or perform any maintenance to the property. There is strong community support for the preservation and recognition of this resource, yet the house remains in danger of being lost.”

The Historic Savannah Foundation hopes to restore the house to its use as a museum. Any construction, demolition, or renovation will need to be reviewed by the Historic Preservation Commission, and any other exterior work will be reviewed by Historic Preservation staff.

Existing Zoning and Development Pattern

The subject parcel is currently zoned TR-1, which allows for a variety of housing types including single-family detached, single-family attached, two-family over/under and three-four family. A museum is not allowed as a principal use. The TC-1 district is a mixed-use district and provides for commercial areas that are developed at a mass and scale harmonious with nearby residential neighborhoods. A museum is an allowed principal use. The parcel is adjacent to a TC-1 district to the east.

Location	Land Use	Existing Zoning
North	Single-family Dwellings	TR-1
South	Single-family Dwellings	TR-1
East	2 Chefs Gullah Geechee Soul Food Restaurant & Souls for the Kingdom Ministries	TC-1
West	Single-family Dwellings	TR-1

Public Notice

Mailed notice of the Planning Commission meeting was sent to all property owners within 300-feet of the subject property, signs were posted on site and required newspaper advertisements were run at least 15 but not more than 45 days prior to the meeting. The mailed notice included instructions on how to access the public meeting via the internet.

Neighborhood Meetings

The Petitioner’s Agent reported to MPC Staff that they requested a meeting by phone with the Executive Committee of the Cuyler-Brownville Neighborhood Association on October 12, 2023. This was due to the next meeting with the full neighborhood association falling on November 8, 2023, one day after the Planning Commission meeting on November 7, 2023. The Petitioner stated the

neighborhood association executive committee was accepting of the idea to renovate the Kiah House as a museum. MPC Staff have not received any public comments about the rezoning.

Impact and Suitability

Public Servies and Facilities

The museum will be served by City water, sewer and stormwater systems. Any needed improvements will be identified and addressed during the specific development plan review process.

Transportation and Transit

The subject parcel is within 0.1 miles of four existing CAT bus stops along Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard (Route 25) with a continuous sidewalk available from West 36th Street to Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard.



10/26/2023, 1:37:50 PM
Parcel Weekly Update CAT Bus Routes
CAT Bus Stops
12. Henry
25. MLK Jr Blvd - Westlake Apts
4. Barnard
1:4,514
0 0.03 0.07 0.13 mi
0 0.05 0.1 0.2 km
City Community Maps, Cartographer: Savannah Area GIS, © OpenStreetMap, Microsoft, Esri, HERE, Garmin, Swisstopo, GeoEye, AeroGRID, IGN, IGT

CAT bus stops and routes

Comprehensive Land Use Plan Element

The rezoning request was filed concurrently with a request to amend the Future Land Use Map. At the time of the request, the subject parcel was designated Traditional Neighborhood. This character area is identified by the Comprehensive Plan for residential areas close to downtown or in outlying historically

settled areas. This category includes non-residential uses that are compatible with the residential character of neighborhoods. The requested amendment to Traditional Commercial represents an effort to realign the future use of the parcel with its historic use as an African American culture and arts museum dating back to 1959. Traditional Commercial includes commercial uses that should be compatible with the character and scale of adjacent neighborhoods, most often found along collectors and arterials. Characteristics include walkability, limited or on street parking, and multi-tenant retail. The property is adjacent to a Traditional Commercial district on the Future Land Use Map.

Existing Zoning District

- Intent of the TR-1 Zoning District: Residential development in the TR-1 district allows for a variety of housing types including single-family detached, single-family attached, two-family over/under and three-four family. This district may be applied only to the following neighborhoods: Benjamin Van Clark Park, Cuyler-Brownville, Eastside and Midtown.
- Allowed Uses: The uses allowed in the TR-1 zoning district appear in the attached chart.
- Development Standards: The development standards of the TR-1 zoning district appear in the attached chart.

Proposed Zoning District

- Intent of the TC-1 Zoning District: The TC-1 district is established to ensure the vibrancy of historic mixed use neighborhoods with traditional development patterns characteristic of Savannah during the streetcar and early automobile eras. The district provides for commercial areas that are developed at a mass and scale harmonious with nearby residential neighborhoods.
- Allowed Uses: The uses allowed in the TC-1 zoning district appear in the attached chart.
- Development Standards: The development standards of the TC-1 zoning district appear in the attached chart.

Zoning Ordinance Review

The following review criteria for rezoning are prescribed in the Savannah Zoning Ordinance Sec. 3.5.8

Suitability and Community Need

- Whether the range of uses permitted by the proposed zoning district is more suitable than the range of uses that are permitted by the current zoning district.

MPC Comment: *In the present circumstance, the range of uses permitted in the TC-1 zoning district is more appropriate for future restored use of the site as a museum than those permitted in the current zoning district. Approval of the petition, however, should be conditioned on development in accordance with the conceptual plan provided for zoning review. Thus, any future change would require approval of the Planning Commission and City Council.*

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

MPC Comment: *Preservation of historic and cultural resources is a priority of The City of Savannah. The subject parcel is within a the Cuyler-Brownville Historic District, demonstrating the significance of preserving the historic structure on the property.*

- Whether the zoning proposal will adversely affect the existing use or usability of adjacent or nearby property.

MPC Comment: *The proposed development is likely to have less adverse impact on the neighborhood than the current use as an unoccupied and deteriorating building.*

- Whether the zoning proposal is compatible with the present zoning pattern and conforming uses of nearby property and the character of the surrounding area.

MPC Comment: *The proposed use as presented is consistent with the existing (historic) pattern of development in the neighborhood and surrounding area.*

- 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.

MPC Comment: *The structure has not been maintained and the Historic Savannah Foundation hopes to restore the building to its use as an African American culture and arts museum with the support of the City of Savannah. The building and carriage house are severely deteriorating. Without intervention, the buildings may be beyond repair and lost.*

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.

MPC Comment: The following goals and strategies of Plan 2040 are relevant to the present request:

- Quality of Life:
 - Historic Resources: HP.3.3
 - Promote and support reinvestment in older and historic places as a key component of community resiliency.

The Kiah House and carriage house are contributing historic structures to the Cuyler-Brownville Historic District and is identified as a significant part of Savannah's cultural and architectural legacy. The requested proposal offers the opportunity to restore the historic structure and enhance the site in a manner consistent with the character and vibrancy of the historic district in which it is situated.

Reasonable Use

- Whether the property to be affected by the zoning proposal has a reasonable use as currently zoned.

MPC Comment: *The subject parcel is a residential home that was converted to a museum. The building could not be restored for the purpose of the historic use in the current zoning district; however, the home and parcel could have reasonable use as a residence.*

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.

MPC Comment: *Adequate City services are available for the property. The Petitioner will need to provide 1 parking space per 400 square feet with a minimum of 5 spaces. The lot currently has 2 parking spaces in the back and will need to provide 3 more spaces at a minimum. The building is 2,914 sf and the carriage house is 936 sf. If the entire main building is used as a museum, excluding the carriage house, 7 spaces will be required. Bicycle parking should account for 10% of vehicle parking. Street parking is available on West 36th Street. These challenges will be addressed in the site plan review process and variances could be required.*

Proximity to a Military Base, Installation or Airport

MPC Comment: *The subject parcel is not within an installation AICUZ or APZ, nor is it in proximity of an airport.*

Policy Analysis

The location of the parcel within the Cuyler-Brownville Historic District and the express desire to preserve the historic structures within this neighborhood is likely the most significant and compelling point in support of the present petition. Zoning action (whether through MPC or ZBA) is required to make any use of the property other than a residential building, community garden, park, library, community center, police or fire substation at this point. The Historic Savannah Foundation and City of Savannah will work together to restore the property for use as a museum. If rezoned to TC-1 it should be under the condition that the use will be restricted to museum and apartment to ensure the building will be restored to its historic use.



*The Kiah House in the 1960s (left) vs. now (right),
Images from the Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation*

Recommendation

MPC recommends **approval** of the request to rezone to Traditional Commercial - 1 (TC-1) with the following conditions:

1. The historic Kiah House shall be preserved.
2. The only TC-1 allowed uses will be museum and apartment.