



METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION

"Planning the Future - Respecting the Past"

M E M O R A N D U M

DATE: October 25, 2023
TO: THE MAYOR AND ALDERMEN OF THE CITY OF SAVANNAH
FROM: METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION
SUBJECT: MPC RECOMMENDATION

PETITION REFERNCED:

Petitioner: Joshua Yellin, Agent
Owner: Gould Cottage, LLC
Aldermanic District: 4 - Alderman Nick Palumbo
County Commission District: 1 - Commissioner Helen Stone
Neighborhood/Subdivision: Ardmore, Gould Estates, Olin Heights
Current Zoning District: RSF-6 (Residential Single-Family - 6)
Future Land Use (FLU) Category: Residential-Suburban Single Family
File No. 23-004627-ZA
Location: 505 East 54th Street
PINs: 20086 27004
Acreage: 1.37 acres

MPC ACTION:

Approval of the request to rezone the subject property from RSF-6 to RMF-2-19 with the following condition:

1. The historic Gould Cottage and carriage house shall be preserved.
2. Any new construction shall not exceed 2 stories with a maximum ridge height not to exceed that of the historic structures on the property.
3. Future development shall be substantially consistent with the conceptual plan provided in association with the rezoning.

MPC STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

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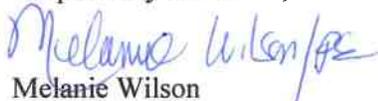
MEMBERS PRESENT: 10 + Chairman

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

PLANNING COMMISSION VOTE: Approval staff recommendation (11-0)

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

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: October 25, 2023

Subject: Zoning Map Amendment

Owner: Gould Cottage, LLC

Agent: Joshua Yellin

Address: 505 East 54th Street, Savannah, GA

PIN: 20086 27004

Site Area: 1.37 ac

Alderman District: 4 – Nick Palumbo

Chatham County Commission District: 1 – Helen Stone

File Number: 23-004627-ZA

Request

The Petitioner seeks to rezone the property at 505 East 54th Street from Residential Single-family – 6 (RSF-6) use to Residential – Multi-family 2 – 19 (RMF-2-19) to develop the subject parcel and its existing historic children’s home as multi-family residences. Restoration of the principal structure with up to 11 dwelling units is proposed along with construction of 3 quadraplex (4-unit) apartment buildings and restoration of the existing carriage house with up to 2 dwelling units. The total proposed maximum unit count is 25 with a resulting gross density per acre of 18.23 units.

Facts and Findings

Site

The subject parcel consists of 1.37 acres (59,677 sf) and contains a historic orphanage built in or around 1930. Most recently the facility served as the Habersham School, which served primary and

secondary students. The principal facility is listed by the Board of Assessors as having 11,926 sf of area and the carriage house at the rear of the property as having 748 sf.

Existing Zoning and Development Pattern

The subject parcel is currently zoned RSF-6, which requires lots with a minimum frontage of 60’ and area of 6,000 sf. The district permits single-family residential development at a gross density of 7.26 dwelling units per acre. While there are minor variations in parcel size within the Ardmore District – lot widths ranging from 60 to approximately 105 feet and lot depths ranging from approximately 95 feet to 120 feet – the neighborhood’s parcel fabric is very consistent, with even existing multi-family structures situated in a manner that is largely undetectable amongst single-family dwellings.

Location	Land Use	Existing Zoning
North	Single-family and Quadraplex Dwellings	RSF-6
South	Single-family Dwellings	RSF-6
East	The Living Vine Christian Maternity Home	RSF-6
West	Hull Park	RSF-6

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 initial discussions were held with the neighborhood association President. Subsequently, an open house was held where reportedly as many as 50 members of the community toured the property and asked the Petitioner questions about the proposed development. The Petitioner’s Agent stated that the overall sentiment for the project was positive after rumors and misinformation were addressed.

MPC Staff has received several public comments in opposition to the FLUM amendment and associated rezoning. Most comments center on the historically single-family character of the area and express a desire to see the property developed in this manner. Pursuit of another institutional user of the existing facility with no further expansion was also mentioned as a perceived option, citing concerns that approval of multi-family use at 505 E 54th would encourage a similar petition at nearby 535 E 54th Street.

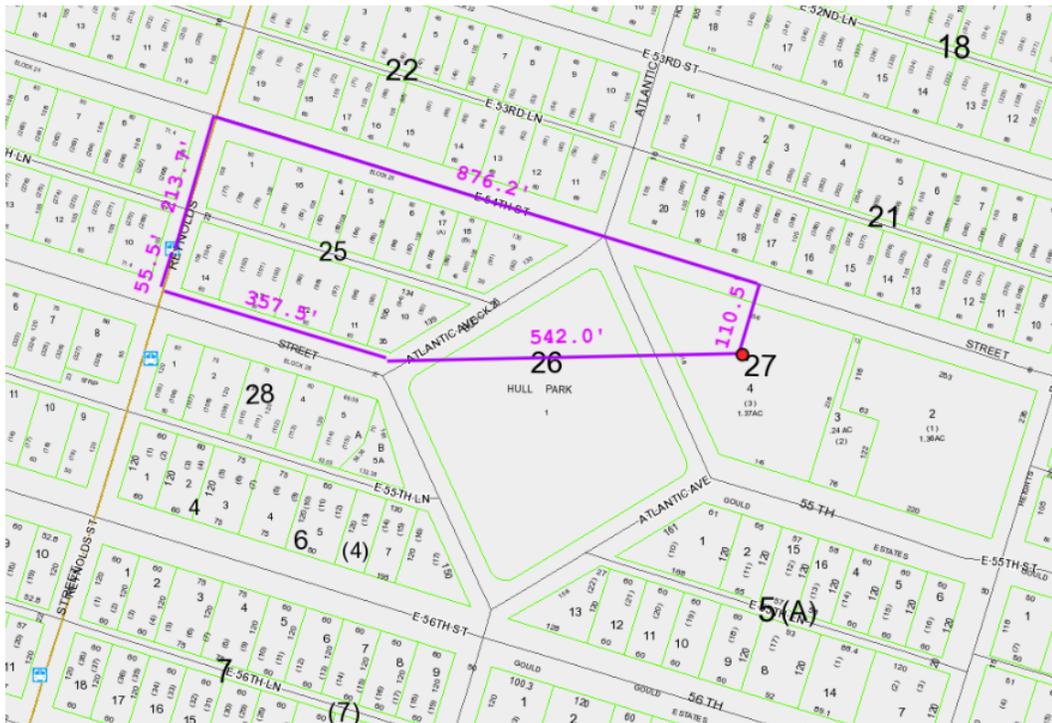
Impact and Suitability

Public Services and Facilities

The proposed apartments would 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 property is within ¼ of a mile of existing CAT Bus Stops along Reynolds Street (Route 11) with continuous sidewalk available from the front entrance of the development.



Distance to the closest bus stops

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 Residential – Suburban Single-family. This character area is identified by the Comprehensive Plan for single-family detached residential dwellings at a density not to exceed five (5) gross dwelling units per acre. The Residential – General character area is envisioned as suitable for areas with a wide range of residential uses including multi-family dwellings, attached dwellings, small lot single-family dwellings, and mixed-use with upper story residential at densities greater than ten (10) units per gross acre. The requested amendment represents an effort to realign the future use of the parcel with its historic use as a large-footprint institutional structure dating back to the 1930s.

Existing Zoning District

- Intent of the RSF Zoning District: The RSF- districts are established to preserve and create areas of single-family detached development. The five districts (RSF-30, RSF-20, RSF-10, RSF-6, RSF-5, and RSF-4) within the RSF- designation provide for varying development standards but generally permit the same uses. A limited number of nonresidential uses are allowed that are compatible with single-family residential uses.
- Allowed Uses: The uses allowed in the RSF-6 zoning district appear in the attached chart.
- Development Standards: The development standards of the RSF-6 zoning district appear in the attached chart.

Proposed Zoning District

- Intent of the RMF Zoning District: The Residential Multi-family (“RMF-”) districts are established to allow multi-family development in addition to other types of residential development. The districts (RMF-1, RMF-2 and RMF-3) within the RMF- designation provide for varying development standards and generally the same uses with a few exceptions. The specific density (a whole number) shall be established at the time of rezoning. Such density shall be represented as a numeric suffix after the zoning district (e.g. RMF-3-14). With the exception of RMF-1, the RMF- districts are intended to be placed on higher classifications of streets and in close proximity to mass transit corridors, retail services and employment opportunities. The RMF-3 district is intended to be used primarily for institutional residential uses. A limited number of nonresidential uses are allowed that are harmonious with multi-family residential areas.
- Allowed Uses: The uses allowed in the RMF-2 zoning district appear in the attached chart.
- Development Standards: The development standards of the RMF-2 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 RMF-2 zoning district is more appropriate for future redevelopment of the site 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 Conservation 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 previous school use.*
- 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 in the conceptual plan 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 been maintained and repurposed over the course of its lifetime for group living and institutional uses, but present circumstances are such that its restoration and improvement are most likely through non-institutional residential redevelopment. It is possible that another institutional user could be identified, but this comes at the risk of further deterioration until that use and user are identified.*

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 Gould Cottage is likely a contributing historic structure and is identified as a significant part of Savannah's cultural and architectural legacy. The structure has been maintained and repurposed over the course of its lifetime and has likely reached an age where renovation and maintenance by most small institutional uses is financially infeasible. 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 could have reasonable use as single-family homes as currently zoned. Some other parcels adjoining Hull Park have been successfully developed for single-family use. However, adjacency to the rhomboid-shaped park makes the resulting configurations of adjoining homes less than ideal. Because the triangular corner lots do not always have a typical front, side, and rear orientation, variances are often required and meaningful use of the full property is challenging.*

Significant to note in this instance is that the current zoning is inconsistent with the intent of the Historic Overlay within which the property is situated. Development as single-family homes would mean demolition of a historic structure where its preservation is expressly desired.

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.

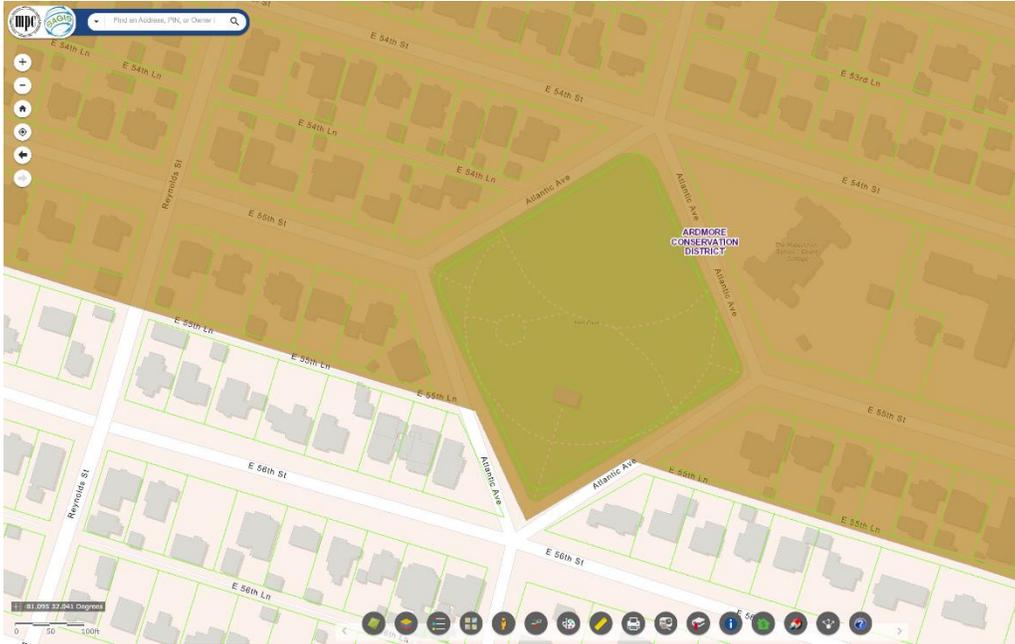
MPC Comment: *Adequate City services are available for the proposed development. Students in this neighborhood are districted for JG Smith Elementary, Myers Middle and the School of Liberal Studies for High school. Additionally, any needed infrastructure improvements will be identified and addressed during the specific development plan review process.*

Proximity to a Military Base, Installation or Airport

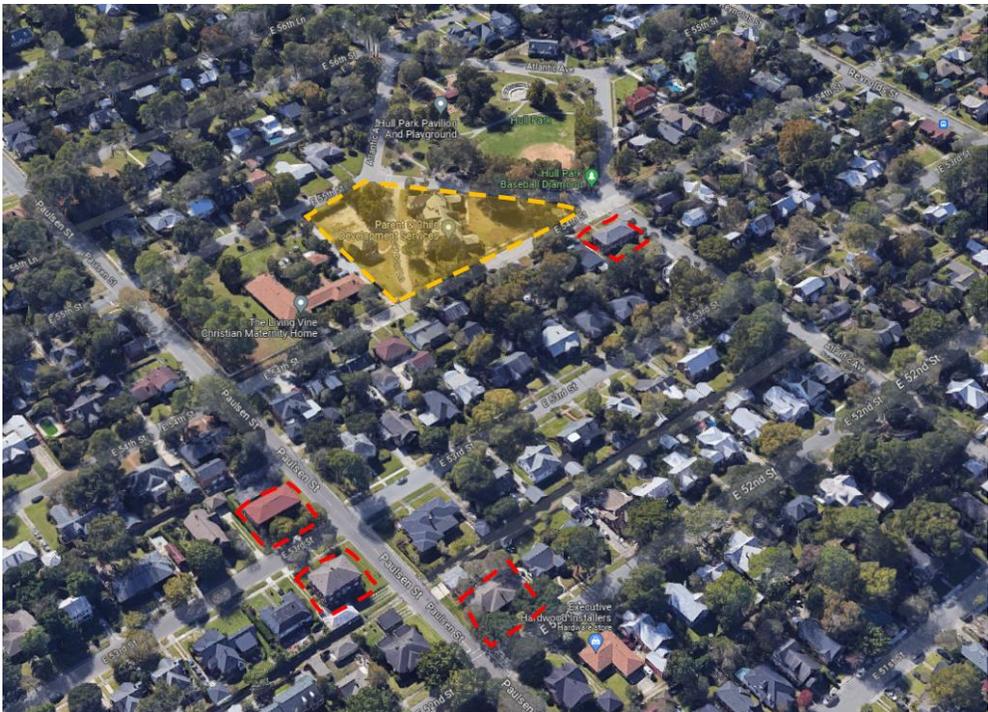
MPC Comment: *The subject parcel is not within an installation AICUZ or APZ, nor is it in proximity of an airport.*

Policy Analysis

The location of the parcel within the Ardmore Conservation 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 park, library, community center, police or fire substation at this point, and approval for demolition of the historic structure through HPC would be required to construct detached single-family homes.



In consideration of whether multi-family development is appropriate in what is perceived as an exclusively single-family district, it is helpful to look at examples of existing multi-family developments in proximity of the site. These can be found in the form of the neighboring Living Vine Maternity Home, various carriage homes and ADU's, and even quadraplex structures within the neighborhood.



Quadraplex dwellings in the vicinity of the subject parcel (outlined in red).



601 E 53rd Street



602 E 53rd Street

The quadruplex at 502 E 54th Street is two stories with a footprint of 1,864 sf. It is situated on a lot that is 8,505 sf (.1952 ac). This equates to a gross density of 20.49 units per acre, and a land area of 2,126 sf per dwelling unit. At a lot area of 1.37 acres and maximum unit count of 25, the proposed Gould Cottage multi-family development will have a slightly lower gross density of 18.23 and slightly higher per-unit land area of 2,387 sf per dwelling. Quadruplex units could very likely be developed on the property in a manner that is consistent with the existing character and development pattern.



Quadruplex dwelling at 502 E 54th Street

Recommendation

MPC recommends **approval** of the request to rezone to Residential – Multi-family 2-19 (RMF-2-19) with the following condition:

1. The historic Gould Cottage and carriage house shall be preserved.
2. Any new construction shall not exceed 2 stories with a maximum ridge height not to exceed that of the historic structures on the property.
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