



## MEMORANDUM

TO: The Mayor and Aldermen of the City of Savannah  
FROM: Bridget Lidy, Director  
DATE: November 1, 2024  
SUBJECT: Revisions to Savannah Downtown Historic District Overlay Ordinance

### Request

The City of Savannah requests a text amendment to the Zoning Ordinance to correct a scrivener's error in Section 7.8 Savannah Downtown Historic District Overlay to ensure consistency with the definition of large-scale development provided in Section 13.5 Definitions of the Zoning Ordinance, as well as to ensure the correct large-scale development standards are applied in the appropriate zoning districts. This correction will impact these sections of the Savannah Downtown Historic District Design Standards:

1. Section 7.8.10.t.iii.(2) Large-Scale Development Standards
2. Section 7.8.10.v.(1) Height
3. Section 7.8.10.v.(2)(a)(i) Height
4. Table 7.8-1 Height Standards for Large-Scale Development

The revisions will ensure that design regulations are appropriate for commercial corridors, and require larger developments to harmonize with the smaller-scale residential areas of the historic district. This was the original intent of the large-scale development standards and prioritizes the needs of more sensitive residential areas while promoting a respectful integration with the residential context.

### Background

Staff determined that there was a scrivener's error in the Sections 7.8.10.t.iii.(2), 7.8.10.v.(1), Section 7.8.10.v.(2)(a)(i) and Table 7.8-1 related to large-scale development within the Downtown Historic Overlay District which will impact design and height standards.

The current language contradicts the definition of "Large-Scale Development" in Section 13.5. This amendment is intended to align the definition of "Large-Scale Development" with the Large-Scale Development Sections (7.8.10.t) of the ordinance for the Savannah Downtown Historic District Overlay.

The current definition for Large Scale Development in Section 13.5 states:

***Large Scale Development:*** *Development whose combined ground floor footprint is equal*

*to or greater than 9,000 square feet within a single parcel or is four stories or greater in D-R and D-N zoning districts or is five-stories or greater in all other zoning districts. In the case of an addition to an existing building, the combined footprint and height of both the existing building and the addition located on the same parcel apply.*

The impacted sections of the ordinance only reference the D-C (Downtown Commercial) and D-N (Downtown Neighborhood) zoning districts. The correct districts should be D-R (Downtown Residential) and D-N based on the definition of large-scale development.

The Zoning Ordinance established five districts for the downtown area:

**Downtown Residential (D-R):** D-R is established to accommodate residential and limited non-residential uses in a downtown setting. This district recognizes the predominance of residential uses within certain areas of downtown and also acknowledges the historic inclusion of nonresidential uses. By continuing this land use pattern in the present day, the D-R district ensures that residential and non-residential uses can continue to co-exist harmoniously within the Downtown.

**Downtown Neighborhood (D-N):** D-N is established to accommodate residential, mixed use and limited commercial development along certain arterial and collector streets that are adjacent to predominantly residential areas within downtown. Uses in this district are generally less intensive than those found in the D-C district, but more intensive than those found in the D-R district

**Downtown Commercial (D-C):** D-C is established to accommodate commercial, residential and mixed-use development in areas of the downtown that have a business focus, but are outside of the Central Business District and Waterfront areas. Uses in this district are generally less intensive than those found in the D-CBD and D-W districts, but more intensive than those found in the D-R district.

**D-CBD (Downtown Central Business District):** The D-CBD district is established to reinforce downtown Savannah's position as the commercial hub of the metropolitan region. The district is intended to ensure harmonious development, redevelopment and rehabilitation of uses in the historic downtown core by integrating an appropriate mix of retail, office, entertainment, civic and residential uses.

**D-W (Downtown Waterfront):** D-W is established to promote entertainment-oriented commercial development along River Street and Factors Walk. The D-W district emphasizes entertainment, lodging, and retail uses while also allowing an array of other compatible uses, including offices, upper story residential and marine-oriented businesses.

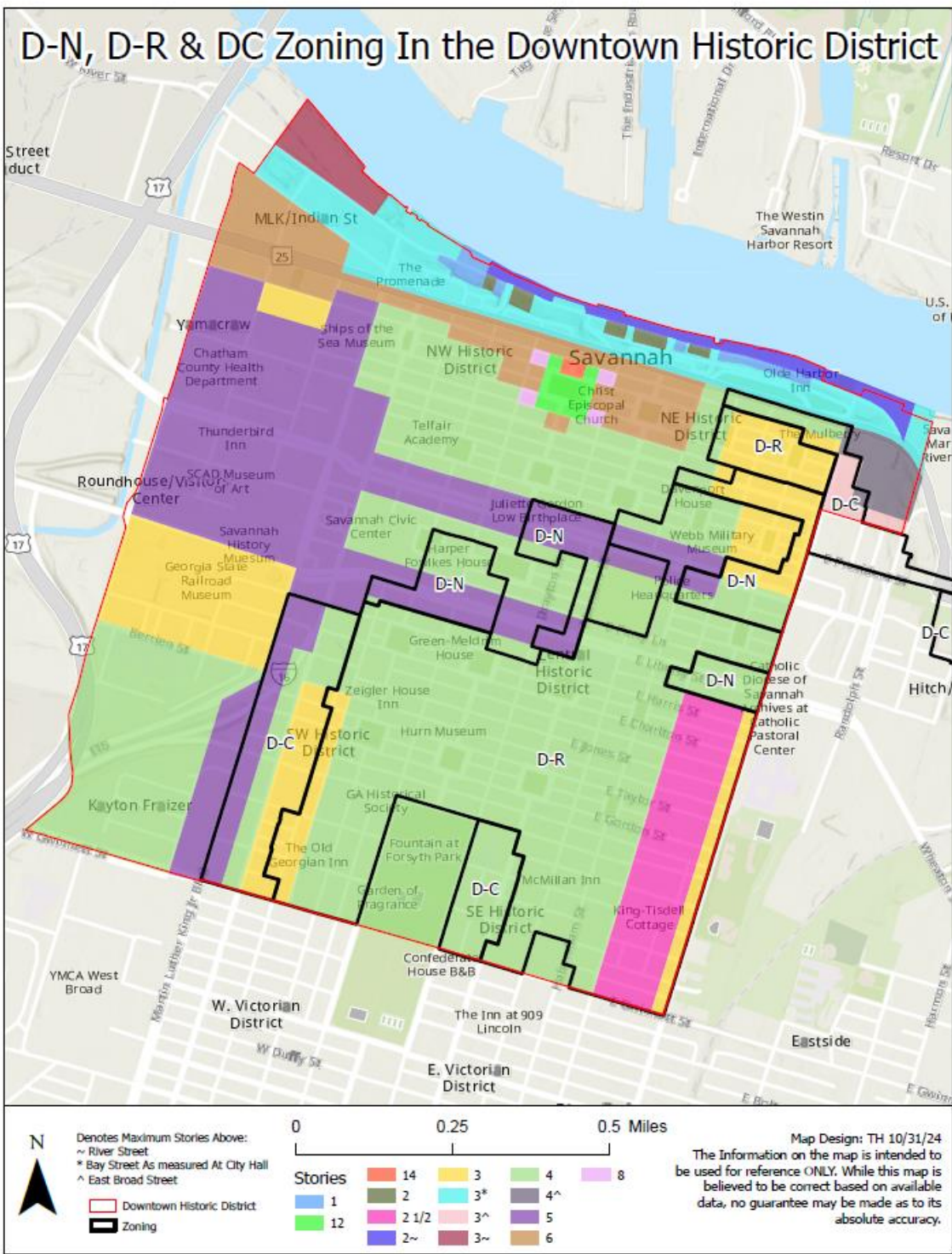
D-X (Downtown Expansion): D-X is intended to promote the expansion of the Central Business District by accommodating larger buildings and additional uses. These areas are intended to be compatible and interconnected with the Downtown area and surrounding neighborhoods.

The D-R district is the least intensive, while the D-X district is the most intensive. In the scrivener's error, the D-N district was inadvertently replaced with the D-C district, thus allowing more intensive development in the D-N district, and less intensive development in the D-C, contrary to the intent of these districts.

All D- Districts have the same Development Standards (Section 5.14) regarding setbacks and lot dimensions. D-R and D-N districts (less intense districts) have a 75% building coverage maximum, while D-C (more intense district) has a 100% building coverage maximum.

The intent behind the Large-Scale Development section of the Design Standards is to provide regulations to larger buildings that will allow for development but also safeguard the lower scale and density of the residential buildings in the Savannah Downtown Historic District Overlay.

As depicted in the map, the D-N zoning districts are located along edges of the D-R districts and are intended to provide limited commercial uses within and adjacent to residential areas of the Savannah Downtown Historic District. Only a few areas are designated as D-N, typically located along wider arterial streets. These locations offer broader sightlines, making them suitable for buildings that can accommodate both residential and commercial uses.



The map also depicts varying heights in the D-N and D-R zoning districts ranging between three and five stories. By rectifying the scrivener's error in Table 7.8-1 Height for Large-Scale

P.O. BOX 1027, SAVANNAH, GA 31402

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912-525-3097

Development, the maximum building height will be capped at one story more than the height of an abutting contributing building in the D-R and D-N districts, provided it does not exceed the limits established in the Height Map, as was the original intention. This maintains aesthetic consistency within the Savannah Downtown Historic District while permitting development that respects the lower-height character of the D-R and D-N districts.

The revision will also allow the D-C zoning district to better accommodate more intensive large-scale development within the Height Map.

### **Zoning Analysis**

Per Section 3.7.7 of Article 3, Savannah's Zoning Ordinance offers four (4) review criteria for proposed text amendments:

***Consistency.*** The extent to which the proposed text amendment is consistent with the remainder of the Zoning Ordinance, including any purpose and intent statements.

City Staff: The proposed amendments are intended to provide greater clarity and coherence to the city's regulations regarding development in the Savannah Downtown Historic District. They are not in conflict with other Ordinance provisions, but rather ensure the Historic District Board of Review makes decisions that are within the scope of their purview and that standards are applied to the areas for which the code was intended.

***New or Changing Circumstances.*** The extent to which the proposed text amendment represents a new idea not considered in the existing Zoning Ordinance or represents a revision necessitated by changing circumstances over time.

City Staff: The proposed text amendment does not represent the introduction of a new idea not previously considered or a revision necessitated by changing circumstances over time.

***Error or Inappropriate Standard.*** Whether or not the proposed text amendment corrects an error in the Zoning Ordinance, or otherwise improves upon existing requirements or standards.

City Staff: The amendment represents a correction of what was likely a scrivener's error, and the correction more accurately aligns all parts of the Historic Overlays zoning regulations. This correction will allow for large-scale development to continue in the Savannah Downtown Historic District while also ensuring that height, and massing elements of large-scale development are more thoroughly examined and are responding to lower-scale lanes, and residential portions of downtown.

***Compliance with the Higher Law.*** Whether or not the proposed text amendment revises the Zoning Ordinance to comply with the state or federal statutes.

City Staff: The proposed amendment is not a revision to bring a local ordinance into conformance with state or federal law.