



METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION

"Planning the Future - Respecting the Past"

M E M O R A N D U M

DATE: June 11, 2024
TO: THE MAYOR AND ALDERMEN OF THE CITY OF SAVANNAH
FROM: METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION
SUBJECT: Text Amendment

PETITION REFERENCED:

Petitioner: Robert McCorkle III

Property Owner: Kris Patel, HOS Management, LLC

Address: 0 Cohen Street

Alderman: District - 2 – Detric Leggett

County Commission: District - 3– Bobby Lockett

Property Identification Number: 20045 14003

Petition File No.: 24-000559-ZA-TEXT

MPC ACTION:

The Planning Commission recommends **approval** of the request to amend Section 7.8, Figure 7.8-4, Savannah Downtown Historic District Height Map, to permit 5-story development adjoining the identified portions of Cohen and Selma Streets.

MPC STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

The MPC Staff recommends **Denial** of the request to amend Section 7.8, Figure 7.8-4, Savannah Downtown Historic District Height Map, to permit 5-story development adjoining the identified portions of Cohen and Selma Streets.

MEMBERS PRESENT: 11

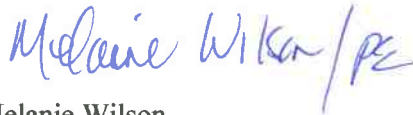
Traci Amick	Jeff Notrica
Stephen Plunk	Joseph Welch
Travis Coles- Vice Chair	Dwayne Stephens
Karen Jarrett – Chairwoman	Michael Kaigler
Laureen Boles	Tom Woiwode
Wayne Noha	

PLANNING COMMISSION VOTE: Deny Staff Recommendation.
(7-4)

APPROVAL Votes: 7	DENIAL Votes: 4	ABSENT
Notrica Plunk Welch Kaigler Noha Stephens Woiwode	Boles Amick Coles Jarrett	Ervin Melder Ross



Respectfully submitted,



Melanie Wilson
Executive Director and CEO

MW/sh

Enclosure

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



METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION

"Planning the Future - Respecting the Past"

M E M O R A N D U M

TO: The City Council

FROM: The Planning Commission

DATE: June 11, 2024

SUBJECT: Map Amendment to the City of Savannah Zoning Ordinance
Re: Amendment to Article 7, Section 7.8, Figure 7.8-4,
Savannah Downtown Historic District Height Map
Applicant: Robert McCorkle for HOS Management, LLC

MPC FILE NO: 24-000559-ZA-TEXT

REQUEST:

A petition to amend Article 7, Section 7.8, Figure 7.8-4, Savannah Downtown Historic District Height Map, to permit 5-story development on parcels adjoining Cohen and Selma Streets.

BACKGROUND:

The purpose of the Savannah Downtown Historic Overlay District, referred to herein as "Savannah Downtown Historic District," is to promote the educational, cultural, economic, and general welfare of Savannah pursuant to the provisions of the amendment to the Georgia Constitution Article XI, ratified November 5, 1968 (1968 GA Laws, page 1591) and continued as part of the Constitution of the State of Georgia (GA. L. 1986, p. 5077).

These provisions provide 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 the community's vacation-travel industry, its tourism, its culture, and for the protection of property values because of their association with history; their



unique architectural details; or their being a part of or related to a square, park, or area, the design or general arrangement of which should be preserved and/or developed according to a fixed plan based on economic, cultural, historical or architectural motives or purposes.

Among other aspects of development, Section 7.8 regulates the height of buildings in the Historic District utilizing a height map overlay that indicates the maximum permissible height for a structure within the identified geography. Current heights permitted range from a low of 1-story to a high of 14-stories depending upon urban context. Variances to height are not permitted and require amendment of the height map to exceed current established maximums.

FACTS AND FINDINGS:

1. The Petitioner proposes to construct a hotel on parcels adjacent to Savannah Station, a contributing historic resource (#1732) in Choctaw Ward originally constructed in 1912, and currently identified by the Board of Assessors as a ‘Cocktail Lounge.’ The facility consists of approximately 15,784 sf of area on an 18,700 sf lot.
2. The parcels proposed for development adjoin the historic structure and are also within the Landmark Historic District. They would require a COA from the Historic District Board of Review (HDBR) for recombination under recently adopted amendments to the City’s Subdivision Regulations (Sec.8-2030, 23-005697-ZA). The parcels, however, are not within the original Oglethorpe Plan area.
3. Approval of the requested amendment would authorize future development within the identified polygon to be 5-stories in height by-right.
4. The Blake, previously identified as Selma Street Housing, is a student housing development located at 540 Selma Street. This 2016 development achieved a partial 5th story through grant of a COA and variances to development standards from the HDBR (14-000634-COA) and Board of Zoning Appeals in 2014 (14-001000-ZBA). The development predates New ZO and its development standards which were adopted in 2019; however, it does not predate the height map.
5. Historic Jewish cemeteries are located on both the north (Levi Sheftall Family Cemetery - #1730) and south (Mordecai Sheftall Cemetery - #1731) sides of Cohen Street, both believed to date to the mid-1700s. Both are listed as contributing resources within Choctaw Ward.
6. Section 8.3.1 of New ZO requires that (new) burial plots be a minimum of 100’ from a residential use or residentially zoned parcel. Whether by intent or coincidence, the only structure within 100’ of either cemetery is a historic structure, the Savannah Station.



Green buffers represent 100’ boundary from Jewish cemeteries

ORDINANCE ANALYSIS:

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

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

MPC Staff Comment: The requested text amendment would not be inconsistent with the remainder of the Zoning Ordinance.

- b. 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.

MPC Staff Comment: The proposed amendment represents the extension and application of an existing Ordinance provision. At present, the height map permits 4-story construction by right.

- c. 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.

MPC Staff Comment: The proposed amendment does not correct any error in the Zoning Ordinance or improve upon existing requirements or standards.

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

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

POLICY ANALYSIS:

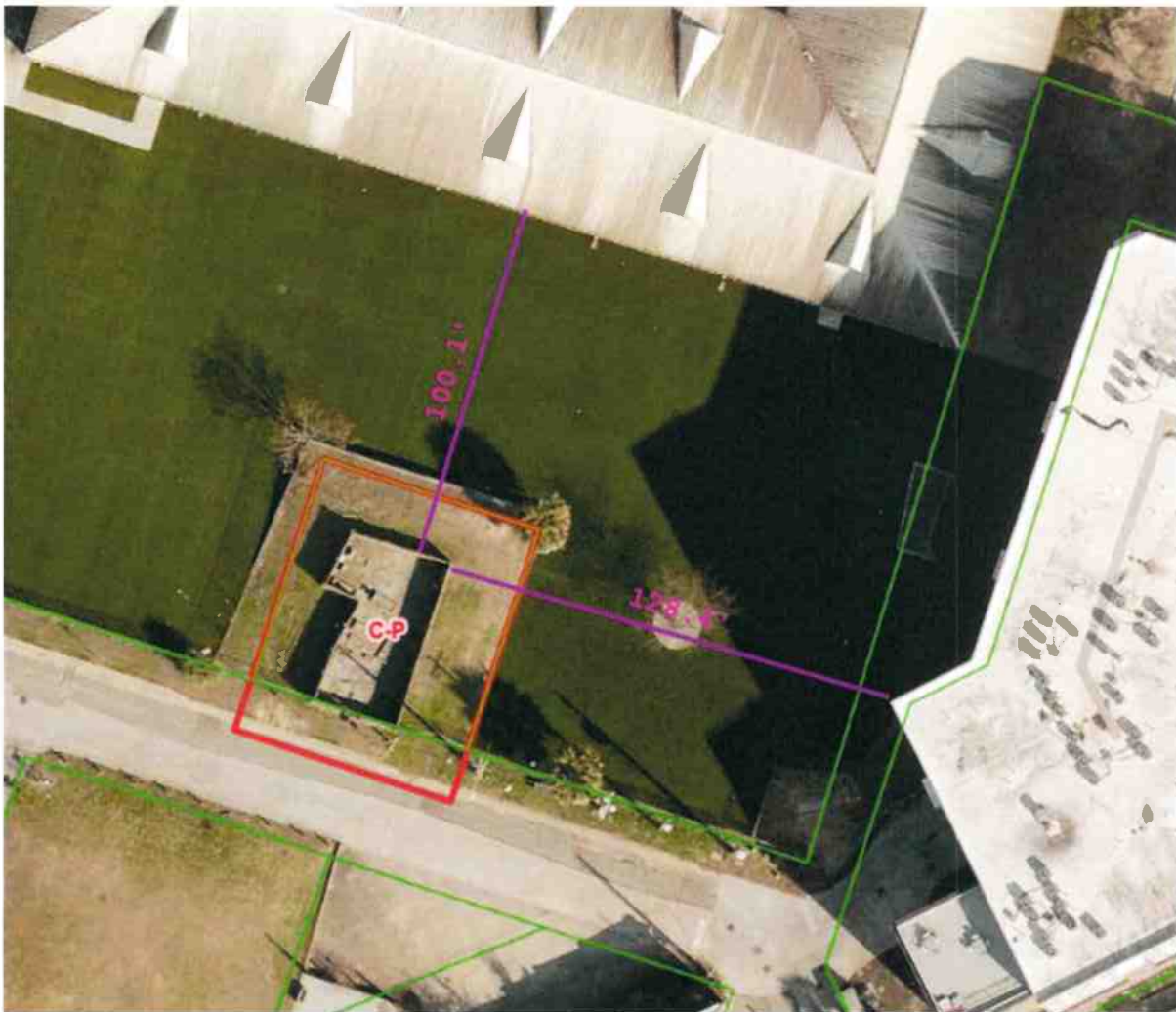
The Historic District design standards were explicitly adopted for preservation and protection of historic resources, thus, appropriateness for context is the principal determinate in reviewing any proposed development. Based on the record preserved, The Blake, being the closest new development to the specific parcel proposed for hotel construction, was partially reduced in height through conversations with MPC Historic Staff to make it more ‘visually compatible’ with the nearby historic structure of lesser height. Savannah Station is a partial 2-story building adjoining Selma Street with only 1-story adjoining the Mordecai Sheftall Cemetery and Cohen Street.

The end result of work with MPC Staff on The Blake was a 4-story structure on the side closest to Savannah Station. If this is any indication of appropriateness within this particular context, a 5th story immediately adjoining Savannah Station is likely inappropriate.

Added to this, a distinguishing factor from The Blake site is the proximity of the proposed development to the historic cemeteries. Section 8.3.1 of New ZO requires that burial plots be a minimum of 100' from a residential use or residentially-zoned parcel. This standard would ordinarily apply to the establishment of a new cemetery; however, in this instance, both The Blake apartments and Esther F. Garrison School happen to be outside of a 100' perimeter. The school appears to be set back exactly 100' from the Levi Sheftall Cemetery.

Alternatively, the parcel proposed for development is entirely within 100' of the cemeteries.

In the interest of preservation of noteworthy assets of historic and cultural significance, the current development standards and uses are likely most appropriate for the properties at issue.



Proximity of adjoining structures to the Levi Sheftall Family Cemetery



Oblique view of Savannah Station and proposed Cohen Street hotel site



A view of Savannah Station and The Blake from I-16.



A view of Savannah Station and The Blake from the site proposed for development on Cohen St (right).

ALTERNATIVES:

1. Recommend approval of the request or an alternate amendment.
2. Recommend denial of the request.

PLANNING COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:

The Planning Commission recommends approval of the request to amend Section 7.8, Figure 7.8-4, Savannah Downtown Historic District Height Map, to permit 5-story development adjoining the identified portions of Cohen and Selma Streets.