



METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION

"Planning the Future - Respecting the Past"

M E M O R A N D U M

DATE: DECEMBER 11, 2018

TO: THE MAYOR AND ALDERMEN OF THE CITY OF SAVANNAH

FROM: METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION

SUBJECT: MPC RECOMMENDATION

PETITION REFERENCED:

Text Amendment to the City of Savannah Zoning Ordinance

Re: To extend existing density, minimum lot area per dwelling unit and parking exemptions currently permitted in the Savannah Historic District to certain properties outside the historic district:

- **Section 8-3021(22) R-I-P-B residential, medium density**
- **Section 8-3025(d) Schedule of Development Standards**
- **Section 8-3090(a) Exempted uses and special off-street parking requirements for specified zoning districts.**

Harold Yellin, Agent
File No. 18-005939-ZA

MPC ACTION:

Denial of the request to extend existing density, minimum lot area per dwelling unit and parking exemptions currently permitted in the Savannah Historic District to certain properties outside the historic district:

MPC STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Denial of the request to extend existing density, minimum lot area per dwelling unit and parking exemptions currently permitted in the Savannah Historic District to certain properties outside the historic district:

MEMBERS PRESENT: 8+ Chairman

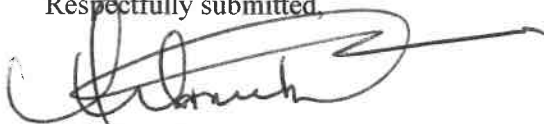
Joseph Ervin, Chairman
Travis Coles
Ellis Cook
Roberto Hernandez
Lacy Manigault
Wayne Noha
Eula Parker

Linder Suthers
Tom Woiwode

PLANNING COMMISSION VOTE: Approve Staff Recommendation (8-1)

APPROVAL Votes: 8	DENIAL Votes: 1	ABSENT
Ervin Cook Coles Hernandez Manigault Noha Parker Woiwode	Suthers	Branch Jarrett Milton Smith Welch

Respectfully submitted,



Melanie Wilson
Executive Director

/jh

Enclosure

cc Luciana Spracher, Interim Clerk of Council
Lester B. Johnson, Assistant City Attorney
Jennifer Herman, Assistant City Attorney
Beth Barnes, Department of Inspections



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

TO: **The Mayor and Aldermen**

FROM: **The Planning Commission**

DATE: **December 11, 2018**

SUBJECT: **Text Amendment to the City of Savannah Zoning Ordinance**
 Re: To extend existing density, minimum lot area per dwelling unit and parking exemptions currently permitted in the Savannah Historic District to certain properties outside the historic district:

- **Section 8-3021(22) R-I-P-B residential, medium density**
- **Section 8-3025(d) Schedule of Development Standards**
- **Section 8-3090(a) Exempted uses and special off-street parking requirements for specified zoning districts.**

ISSUE:

The petitioner is requesting to amend the zoning ordinance as outlined below, in order to extend existing density, minimum lot area per dwelling unit and parking exemptions currently permitted in the Savannah Historic District, to certain properties outside the historic district. The proposed text is related to the redevelopment of property at 601 East Liberty Street. The applicants proposed changes are in **bold** and underline:

Section 8-3021 (22) R-I-P-B residential, medium density

The purpose of this district shall be to stabilize land use intensity in R-I-P-B zoning districts to not more than 70 dwelling units per acre of residential land. Provided that when located within the boundaries of the Savannah Historic District, as referenced by Section 8-3030, **or for properties zoned RIP-B that are larger than 1.5 acres and located adjacent to the Savannah Historic District,** neither a minimum lot area per dwelling unit nor maximum density requirement shall apply. Site development plans shall be reviewed under the provisions of Section 8-3031 when located outside of the area bounded by East Broad Street and Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard, between the Savannah River and Gwinnett Street.

Section 8-3025(d), Schedule of Development Standards

*As of the November 21, 2017, a minimum lot area per dwelling unit shall not be required for residential dwellings within the Savannah Historic District (Section 8-3030), **or for properties zoned RIP-B that are larger than 1.5 acres in size and located adjacent to the Savannah Historic District,** provided that a total minimum lot area of 1,800 square feet shall apply.

Section 8-3090(a), Exempted uses and special off-street parking requirements for specified zoning districts.

RIP-A, RIP-A1, RIP-B, RIP-B-1, RIP-C, and RIP-D, R-B-C, and R-B-C-1 districts. Within the Historic District, as described in Sec. 8-3030, **or for properties zoned RIP-B that are larger than 1.5 acres in size and located adjacent to the Savannah Historic District,** but not to include the West River Street Area as described in (e) below, residential uses within the RIP-A, RIP-A1, RIP-B, RIP-B-1, RIP-C, and RIP-D, R-B-C and R-B-C-1 zoning districts shall provide off-street parking as follows:

(1) *New dwelling unit construction.* One off-street parking space per dwelling unit...

BACKGROUND:

In 2016, the City Council began to consider the potential impact of continuing hotel development in downtown Savannah. A concern grew regarding the fact that hotels were significantly outpacing residential development, potentially to the detriment of the character of the Historic District. A primary concern was that the zoning ordinance incentivized hotel development through the development standards and made residential development less attractive to the development community. By September 2017, 15 hotels were either under review, under construction, or had been proposed. The number of hotel rooms coming online outpaced the number of residential dwelling units under review at the time by a nearly 4:1 margin. The city was concerned that this may impose a negative long-term impact on the residential character of the Savannah Historic District.

Pursuant to these concerns, the City requested that the MPC staff conduct a hotel study and provide recommendations for zoning changes to address the size and location of new hotels in the Historic District. This study resulted in the Hotel Overlay that defines large and small hotels and identifies where they may be located in the Historic District. In addition, the City requested that the MPC work with City staff to “investigate measures” which could be taken “through the zoning ordinance to incentivize the construction of more housing for permanent residents in the area”.

The issues that staff considered were centered around the density and parking requirements and the development standards for multifamily and upper story residential uses in the historic district. The City’s position was that these were the primary disincentives to residential development. To address these problems, the Mayor and Aldermen adopted amendments to the ordinance in November 2017 to:

a: Eliminate a minimum lot area per dwelling unit requirement for most properties in the Savannah Historic District.

b: Eliminate a density maximum requirement. for most properties in the Savannah Historic District.

c: Amend the parking requirement for residential development to allow one space per dwelling unit.

FINDINGS:

1. The incentives that were adopted in 2017 were specific to the Savannah Historic District. The intent was to promote residential development within the district and allow it to compete on more equal footing with hotel development. The petitioners request is that these same exceptions be permitted on properties that meet three proposed criteria:
 - Be within the RIP-B zoning classification.
 - Be adjacent to the Savannah Historic District.
 - Be a minimum of 1.5 acres in size.
2. The zoning map indicates that only two properties match the criteria proposed by the applicant. Those properties are 601 Liberty Street, which historically was associated with Atlantic Coastline Rail, and more recently was purchased from the Catholic Diocese by the City of Savannah; and the East Broad Elementary School property immediately to the south.
3. The text amendment to create the exceptions for residential development, as adopted by council, did not consider properties outside the Historic District. Similarly, to the hotel overlay, only properties within this defined geographic area were included. Properties outside this area are required to meet the general development standards for the zoning district that they are in. It appears that the applicant is requesting the text changes so that density greater than 70 dwelling units per acre can be achieved, and so that the required parking for a future residential development can be reduced. As the existing amendment was a city initiated change to address specific development concerns in the Historic District, a policy decision should be made as it relates to all properties that abut the district.

POLICY ANALYSIS:

The removal of density requirements from residential dwellings in the Savannah Historic District was a city goal aimed at encouraging residential growth and density in the downtown area. By addressing zoning incentives that have supported lodging uses and by removing residential density requirements, along with other amendments, the zoning ordinance will incentivize the

development of high density residential uses in the historic district.

The Comprehensive Plan acknowledges the importance of supporting higher density in the downtown area, it states that “New development in historic neighborhoods must strike a balance between modern needs, such as off-street parking, and historic development patterns, such as high density and shallow building setbacks. As a community with significant historical resources, we need to preserve the integrity of pre-automobile land use patterns while providing modern infrastructure” (p.4-2).

The city has granted special exceptions related to development to facilitate more residential opportunity in the Savannah Historic District. The proposed amendments will expand the area where these exceptions were granted. The applicant proposal, however, does not consider if other properties in proximity to the district should be included.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Planning Commission recommends **denial** of the proposed text amendment.