



S A V A N N A H   H I S T O R I C   D I S T R I C T  
B O A R D   O F   R E V I E W

**REQUEST FOR CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS**

**Petitioner:**                               **SHEDD Architecture**

**MPC File No.:**                           **23-005414-COA**

**Address:**                                 **412 Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.**

**PIN:**                                       **20031 36010**

**Zoning:**                                  **D-C**

**Staff Reviewer:**                       **Caitlin Chamberlain**

**Date:**                                      **November 8, 2023**

**NATURE OF REQUEST:**

The applicant is requesting approval to demolish the non-contributing building at 412 Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard.

**CONTEXT/SURROUNDING AREA:**

The exact date of construction for 412 MLK Boulevard is unknown but was likely built in the early 1900s. It is listed as a non-contributing resource within the National Historic Landmark District and the local Savannah Downtown Historic District.

The Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from 1888 shows a two-story wood frame dwelling at the approximate site of 412. By 1898, 412 West Broad Street is still a two-story wood frame dwelling but with some alterations at the rear. The 1916 Sanborn Map shows a three-story masonry store on this lot. At some point between 1953 and 1973 Sanborn Maps, 412 was adjoined with the neighboring building, 414 MLK Blvd.

The 1916 Savannah City Directory notes an L. Mirsky at 412 West Broad Street, and a Mrs. E.B. Novak at 412 ½ West Broad Street. A photograph from the 1940s shows a sign on the building for a dry goods, shoes and luggage shop with the name Eisenman, who was the successor to Mirsky. At a later date, the building was acquired by the Blumenthals to become part of the B&B loan and pawn shop.

The Savannah Ward Notebook for the Berrien Ward has a note to omit 412 West Broad Street, but a reason is not given. This page does not include much detail about the structure except to note that it has a vague construction date of '20<sup>th</sup> Century.' Based on photographs starting in the 1930s, it appears that 412 has undergone major renovations where it is nearly unrecognizable from the earlier photos.

Board Decision - Certificate of Appropriateness  
MPC File No. 23-005414-COA  
November 8, 2023

In 2011, a COA was issued to repair and paint the stucco and window frames, add a new awning, and install the gooseneck lamps still seen on the building [File No. H-110822-4491 (S)-2]. No information was noted about the original form of the building, but staff noted that the building was listed as non-contributing due to the exterior alterations resulting in a loss of integrity.

As for the history of the area where the building is situated, West Broad Street was Savannah's Black business district from the early 1900s to the 1960s. It was a thriving district for Black-owned and immigrant-owned businesses and provided a sense of community in the era of segregation. Union Station was a bustling train station that brought visitors to the many businesses along this stretch of West Broad Street. The West Broad Street Corridor was a large stretch of today's Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard. Its epicenter was said to be at West Broad Street between the former Union Station and Bolton Street. Union Station was demolished as part of the project to build the I-16 flyover.

Besides the B&B businesses at 412 (and 414) MLK Blvd. some other prominent businesses and banks within this corridor included Wage Earner's Savings Bank (West Broad and Alice Streets); Carver State Bank; the Pekin, the Star, and the Air Dome theatres.

The Wage Earner's Savings Bank became one of the most profitable African American owned banks in the country. During the era of segregation, three Black-owned banks allowed this area to become the banking capital of Georgia for African Americans.

The decline of the West Broad Street Corridor can be attributed to the negative effects from the demolition brought about by constructing the I-16 flyover and Urban Renewal of the 1960s-1970s. This caused the corridor to be divided and no longer a walkable area on the grid pattern. Desegregation in Savannah also meant that Black owned businesses could operate elsewhere in the City. The train yards closed around this time as well, which led to a major loss of jobs in the corridor.

### **Historic Building Map Background**

The Savannah National Historic Landmark District was originally surveyed in 1966. In 1973, Section 8-3029 (Historic District) of the Savannah Zoning Ordinance was adopted. This section established the Historic District Board of Review and created the Historic Buildings Map. All structures within the Historic District were divided into two classes, "historic" and "non-rated." Historic structures included all those buildings listed in Historic Savannah; the architectural survey book published by Historic Savannah Foundation in 1968.

In 1985 an MPC staff study was adopted, and the Historic Buildings Map was amended to include all those buildings listed in the 1979 second edition of Historic Savannah, as well as those buildings identified by a consultant working on behalf of the National Park Service. The Park Service had extended the period of significance for contributing buildings in the National Historic Landmark District to 1935.

Demolition of a non-rated historic structure in the 500 block of Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard, and the attempted demolition of a non-rated historic cottage in the Beach Institute Neighborhood spurred the updating of the Historic Buildings Map. In April 2000 and September 2000, the Mayor and Aldermen approved the addition of a number of buildings previously omitted from the map in the eastern and western neighborhoods of the Historic District.

On April 20, 2000, the Building Map was amended to include buildings on MLK Boulevard and Montgomery Street, and the period of significance was extended locally to 1950 [File No. 00-

Board Decision - Certificate of Appropriateness  
MPC File No. 23-005414-COA  
November 8, 2023

103-S]. City Council Minutes from the April 20, 2000, meeting provide details of every building that was proposed to be added. Several of these are twentieth century commercial buildings on MLK Blvd, ranging from the 0-block through the 700-block, where only one from the 400-block was proposed (406). The buildings recommended for listing cover categories of significance such as 20<sup>th</sup> century commerce, local commerce, architecture, neighborhood business with living quarters above, early commerce on MLK, early 20<sup>th</sup> century business development of MLK, overall business development of the historic district, structures built by African American developers, and Black Heritage.

The Building Map was also amended on September 7, 2000, to include buildings in the Beach Institute [File No. Z-000524-55903]; on July 12, 2001 to include the Yamacraw Village Administration Building [File No. Z-10425-87171-2]; on September 5, 2002 to include carriage houses [File No. Z-010824-39270-2].

In 2010 the Historic Building Map was updated to include 112 new structures through a staff study. Buildings included carriage houses, commercial structures, residential buildings, mid-century modernism, and two buildings of exceptional importance [File No. Z-121213-36582-2].

During the updates to the Historic Building Map, at no point was 412 Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard noted to be added as a contributing resource. Georgia Historic Resource Survey sheets from 1994 exist for 412 MLK Blvd. Although three neighboring properties in the 400-block are considered contributing buildings, 412 was not included.

## **PROJECT HISTORY**

This request was first heard at the July 12, 2023, HDBR Meeting, where the Board had concerns over the lack of a structural assessment which was not provided by the applicant, as well as expressing a desire to see more information about 412 Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. Members felt that there was not enough information presented to be able to make a decision. It was stated that in the interior photographs, the fact that old knob and tube wiring can still be seen inside shows that the building dates to the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. There was also mention of the need to further explore the rich Civil Rights era history and African American history associated with what little remains of the West Broad Street corridor, which had not been destroyed by the I-16 flyover project. The Board stated that 412 could potentially still be saved and may be more intact under the stucco. Board members felt that not having criteria or guidelines for deconstruction made it difficult to approve that as a condition.

The HDBR Decision was as follows:

*The Downtown Savannah Historic District Board of Review does hereby continue the application for the request for demolition of the non-contributing buildings located at 412-414 Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard, for no more than ninety (90) days, to allow time for the applicant to provide information such as structural reports and photographs, and for staff to reevaluate whether these buildings qualify for contributing status.*

For the following meeting, on August 9, 2023, the applicant provided the requested information including structural reports for 414 MLK Blvd. and interior images of 412 MLK Blvd. A letter from a descendant of the family who owned the buildings stated that the property was not involved in the Civil Rights movement.

Board Decision - Certificate of Appropriateness  
MPC File No. 23-005414-COA  
November 8, 2023

Staff research included further archival searches through the Georgia Historical Society, City of Savannah Municipal Archives, Library of Congress, Digital Library of Georgia, and the Ralph Mark Gilbert Civil Rights Museum.

Further information was provided by the applicant including interior photos of 412. The petitioner presentation also included a presentation by Repurpose Savannah, detailing their work in general but also the specific plan for deconstructing the two buildings. After much Board discussion, and two failed motions the HDBR decision was as follows:

*The Savannah Downtown Historic District Board of Review does hereby continue the request for demolition of the non-contributing buildings located at 412-414 Martin Luther King, Jr. to the September 13, 2023, HDBR Meeting.*

The applicant reached out to MPC staff with a request to continue their application until October 11, 2023. On August 21, 2023, a structural analysis of 412 Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard was undertaken by F. Michael Sikes, a structural engineer. The report is now included in the submittal packet and has been incorporated into the staff report. The findings by Mr. Sikes indicated that *“the lack of capacity the existing building framing systems have, it is my professional opinion that this building should be demolished and rebuilt.”*

The HDBR Decision for the October 11, 2023, meeting was as follows:

*The Savannah Downtown Historic District Board of Review does hereby deny the request for demolition of the non-contributing buildings located at 412-414 Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard because the criteria for non-contributing demolition have not been met: the buildings are structurally sound, 412 has not been shown to be structurally unsound, and 414 has not been shown to meet the criteria for non-contributing buildings.*

The applicant has since applied with the same request, but with separate applications for each building. Staff notes that structural stability is not a factor in the demolition criteria for non-emergency demolitions.

## **FINDINGS:**

The following standards from the Sec 3.19.9 - HBR Criteria for Relocation or Demolition apply:

### ***Criteria for Relocation or Demolition.***

***Evaluation Required.*** Any non-contributing resource must first be evaluated and considered for contributing status prior to issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness for relocation or demolition (See Sec. 3.16.4.b.).

This is a non-contributing resource which will be evaluated.

*Sec. 3.16.4.b. Classification of Resources and Criteria for Resource Designation. All resources within the District shall be classified and designated on the District’s “Historic District Contributing Resources Map.” All resources shall be identified as contributing or non-contributing as follows:*

*Contributing. All resources identified on the “Historic District Contributing Resources Map” having historic significance shall be considered “contributing”*

Board Decision - Certificate of Appropriateness  
MPC File No. 23-005414-COA  
November 8, 2023

*and worthy of preservation and shall be classified as “historic” for purposes hereunder.*

*Period of Significance. Contributing buildings include those within the current Period of Significance, possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and meet one of more of the following criteria:*

The period of significance is 1733-1960. According to the Sanborn Maps, 412 MLK Blvd. was constructed within the period of significance. A reason for the lack of inclusion as a contributing building has not been discovered but the building has been surveyed previously and at no point was there an effort to add it as a contributing resource. MPC records indicate that 412 MLK Blvd. was surveyed in 1994.

A structural report was conducted for 412 MLK Blvd, on August 21, 2023. The structural engineer found that due to the capacity conditions, that 412 should also be demolished and rebuilt. Interior photographs show that it is in better condition than 414, but its condition does not change the fact that it was determined to be non-contributing.

*Are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or*

While there is indeed a rich history within the former West Broad Street Corridor, from African American history to immigrant history, transportation and commerce history, and the Civil Rights era, there were no specific events attributed specifically to 412 MLK Blvd that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history. Further, although hundreds of buildings were added to the Historic Building Map over the years, 412 MLK Blvd. was not, even though three neighboring structures within the 400 block have been noted as contributing.

*Are associated with the lives of significant persons in our past; or*

There is local significance to the B&B business, which began in 1945 by Herbert Blumenthal. The buildings went through many iterations as a pawn shop, clothing store, and the B&B Paint Company.

*Embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or*

The distinctive exterior characteristics of this building have largely been lost, based upon what is seen in older photographs compared to the present day. The front façade of 412 has been altered so heavily that it is not recognizable from its earlier, historic appearance.

*Have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in historic or prehistory.*

This is undetermined but there is the nearby history of urban renewal, Eisenhower’s Highway Plan (which led to the I-16 flyover) and its aftermath as well as the history of a long-running local business. Since the area has been highly disturbed by the highway construction, there is a low chance of recovering archaeological information in history or prehistory. Historic information has been noted about this property, but it must still meet each criterion for exceptional importance.

Board Decision - Certificate of Appropriateness  
MPC File No. 23-005414-COA  
November 8, 2023

*Exceptional Importance. Contributing buildings include a select group of exceptional resources constructed outside the district's Period of Significance. These resources possess integrity of:*

- *Location*

The integrity of the location was compromised when the portion of Berrien Street was demolished for the I-16 flyover.

- *Design*

The integrity of the design was destroyed when the original storefront, arches, columns, windows, and step-gable roof were removed and/or covered in stucco, and replaced with what is seen today.

- *Setting*

In the sense that the portion of the 400 block between 402-414 MLK is in the same configuration and order, this aspect of the setting still has integrity.

- *Materials*

The historic integrity of the exterior building materials has been lost due to the multiple alterations the building has undergone such as removal of the original storefront, columns, windows, and change of the parapet. The character defining features seen in the period of significance for the Downtown Historic District are largely lost, save for the potential of the historic brick that may still exist under the modern stucco.

- *Workmanship*

With the loss of the character defining features, the workmanship of the original building has been lost.

- *Feeling, and*

For the same reasons mentioned above, the complete change of the front façade has erased the original feeling of the structure.

- *Association,*

The building is associated with early 20<sup>th</sup> century commerce and the history of the West Broad Street Corridor. However, the association with the West Broad Street Corridor is lost in part due to the I-16 flyover and the destruction of the area that once existed.

- *And meet one or more of the above criteria.*

Though some of the criteria are met, all the criteria must be met to be considered exceptionally important. As mentioned above, due to the altered and current conditions, 412 cannot be considered an exceptional resource that possesses integrity of design, location, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, **and** association.

*Non-Contributing. New construction and all resources identified as non-contributing on the "Historic District Contributing Resources Map" are classified as non-historic for zoning purposed hereunder.*

This building is classified as non-contributing on the Historic District Contributing Resources Map.

Board Decision - Certificate of Appropriateness  
MPC File No. 23-005414-COA  
November 8, 2023

*Should the resource meet the criteria for contributing status, the criteria for relocating or demolishing a contributing resource shall apply.*

For the reasons mentioned above, the building does not meet all the required criteria for contributing status.

**Conditions.** *In granting a Certificate of Appropriateness for relocation or demolition, the Historic District Board of Review may impose, in addition to those listed below, reasonable conditions as will mitigate the negative effects of the relocation or demolition.*

Staff recommends the following conditions:

1. The building must be documented per the MPC Policy for Documenting Buildings.
2. Rather than traditional demolition, the building be deconstructed, and the materials salvaged for reuse.

**Demolition.** *In the case of the demolition of a contributing principal building, a Certificate of Appropriateness must first be issued for the new construction of the replacement building prior to approval of the demolition.*

The building is considered non-contributing; thus, the standard for new construction does not apply.

### **BOARD DISCUSSION:**

During the Board discussion, member Nan Taylor provided detailed research information that she had gathered regarding both 412-414 Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard. This was the basis of the Board Decision, as seen below.

Ms. Taylor's research is copied here.

412-414 MLK (formerly West Broad)

*Why these buildings should be contributing resources*

3.16.4b

*b. Classification of Resources & Criteria for Resource Designation*

*ii. Period of Significance – Must be within period of significance (1733-1960) and possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association and meet one of the following criteria:*

1. *Are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or*
2. *Are associated with the lives of significant persons in our past; or*
3. *Embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or*
4. *Have yielded, or may likely to yield, information important in history or prehistory*

*The buildings meet 1 and 3 criteria (highlighted above)*

Board Decision - Certificate of Appropriateness  
MPC File No. 23-005414-COA  
November 8, 2023

*1. Associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history*

*1907 – Harry Blumenthal (1876-1936) started a ready-to-wear clothing store at 414. Harry was a Polish immigrant who came to the USA at the age of 14, lived in Savannah and married his Polish-born wife Rose and had four children, including Herbert who later took over the business.*

*1914 – Business became B&B Pawn Shop (he attained a license for the pawn shop in 1910).*

*1936 – Business was renamed B&B Loan Co.*

*Harry was a Jewish business owner and part of the “West Broad Street Merchants Association” His picture (dated 1928) is included in “The Jewish Community of Savannah” Image of America Book, as a member of this organization. The excerpt states: “A large proportion of Jewish citizens have been merchants throughout the years. Many of the businesses were on West Broad, Broughton and City Market.” SEE PICTURES.*

*1946 – Harry’s son Herbert (1920-2013) takes over the business and expands it. He moves the loan company to 412 West Broad and opens B&B Paint Store at 414.*

*1988 – Herbert retired after operating businesses at this location for over 40 years.*

*The Blumenthal family owned/operated businesses at this location for over 80 years.*

*These two buildings are linked together through their shared history, as well as their connection to the neighborhood. The Blumenthals’ businesses represent the immigrant-owned businesses of the early 1900s to 1960s on West Broad Street, which has since been lost. Harry Blumenthal’s name still remains on the threshold tile of the corner entrance of 414.*

*When the I – 16 flyover was built in 1960, many buildings were destroyed, (including Union Station located directly across the street) and businesses forced to close. These two buildings (and entire eastern 400 block) remained. THESE TWO BUILDINGS SURVIVED.*

*3. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction.*

*These buildings are representative of the early 20th century neighborhood corner-store businesses with living quarters above. However, the buildings have changed over time and now represent a later era of 20th century commerce.*

*When son Herbert took over in 1946 and moved the loan business into 412 and opened the paint business in 414, significant alterations were made to both businesses. The bays facing Berrien Street the were removed, windows were covered on the front façade, eaves and brackets removed and stucco applied to the exterior.*

*The alterations Herbert made in the mid 1940s are representative of post WWII construction. This is the period of time the buildings currently represent and how they should be retained and preserved. This is in accordance with the Secretary of Interior Standard #4:*

*“Most properties change over time; those changes that have acquired historic significance in their own right, should be retained and preserved.”*

*Integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association*

*According to National Park Service (NPS):*

*“Loss of integrity is incremental, and it should not be assumed that because one or even two features that convey significance are extensively damaged or deteriorated, the building lacks*



Board Decision - Certificate of Appropriateness  
MPC File No. 23-005414-COA  
November 8, 2023

*integrity.” Further... “If a property retains the physical and historic characteristics if possessed in the past, then it has the capacity to convey association with historical patterns, or persons, architectural or engineering design and technology, or information about a culture or people.”*

*According to the NPS, determining integrity is a two-step process, first is to identify the character-defining features and second is to investigate if they still exist.*

*Applicable features for 412-414 (based on mid 1940s alterations)*

*Overall Shape of the Building(s)*

- *Both buildings still retain their overall shape, except with some alterations on the rear.*

*Projections/recesses*

- *Neither building has added or removed balconies or created new recesses in the elevations. 414 still retains its corner recessed entrance.*

*Setting/Building Site(s)*

- *They remain in their original locations and their immediate yard/site remains the same*

*Windows/Doors*

- *When the rehabilitation work was done in the mid-1940s, many windows on the second floor of 414 were covered, however, two steel casement windows that were installed then still exist. The four window locations on 412 (second and third stories) also still remain.*

*Storefronts*

- *The storefronts for both buildings have been altered, with 414 being partially covered on the north side, and the arched entrance on 412 removed and replaced with a display window.*

*Exterior Building Material*

- *Both buildings still retain the stucco covering that was initially applied in mid-1940s.*

*Signs/Friezes*

- *Sign and frieze above 414 storefront still exists.*

*In summary, there are a significant number of defining features left that contribute to the overall visual character of the building.*

*Could there be more defining features?*

*Additional investigation is needed to determine other character-defining elements that still exist. The structural reports do not show this, and no one has seen the interior to investigate. For example, are the former windows, doors or display windows still in existence (partially or fully), which could be rehabilitated to the 1940's time period?*

**THIS CAN BE DONE**

*In 2021, The Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation awarded the 300 block of MLK the “Excellence In Rehabilitation” for its significant contribution to the protection of Georgia’s historic resources. Constructed between 1910-1922, many of these buildings had roofs on the verge of collapse, exterior storefronts missing or severely deteriorated, and extensive structural damage from neglect. The before pictures of these buildings looked much like 412-414 do now.*

Board Decision - Certificate of Appropriateness  
MPC File No. 23-005414-COA  
November 8, 2023

*They were rehabilitated, occupied by new tenants, and “represent a significant part of Savannah’s history.”*

*<https://www.georgiatruster.org/preservation-awards/west-broad/>*

*Sources:*

*<https://Ancestry.com>*

*Frey, Valarie and Kaye Kole. The Jewish Community of Savannah. Image of America Book.*

*<https://www.georgiatruster.org>*

*<https://www.nPS.gov>*

*V&J Postcard Collection (City Archives online)*

*Written by Nan Taylor, HDBR member*

*November 8, 2023*

Board Decision - Certificate of Appropriateness  
MPC File No. 23-005414-COA  
November 8, 2023

**DECISION:**

The Savannah Downtown Historic District Board of Review does hereby deny the demolition request for the building located at 412 Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard because the property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represents the work of a master; and because the property possesses integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.


Further, the Savannah Downtown Historic District Board of Review recommends that an application to become a contributing building is completed.

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Ellie Isaacs, Chairwoman

November 8, 2023  
Date

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Melanie Wilson, Executive Director  
Chatham County-Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission

November 8, 2023  
Date

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Leah G. Michalak, Director of Historic Preservation  
Chatham County-Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission

November 8, 2023  
Date

This decision will expire on November 8, 2025.

**\*\* Any person adversely affected by any determination made by the Board may appeal such determination. Visual Compatibility Factors shall not be the basis for appeal. An appeal shall be made to the Zoning Board of Appeals by filing the appropriate application form detailing the specific error allegedly made by the Board and the different result which would have occurred if the appropriate procedures had been followed to the City of Savannah, Development Services Department within 30 calendar days of the date of the Board's decision.**

MW: LGM: cc