



CITY OF SAVANNAH

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

REQUEST FOR CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS

Petitioner: City of Savannah Code Enforcement, Scott Robinson

MPC File No.: 25-002376-COA

Address: 604 West 39th Street

PIN: 20073 08017

Zoning: TR-1

Staff Reviewer: Jonathan Mellon

Date: May 28, 2025

NATURE OF REQUEST:

The applicant is requesting approval for the demolition of the building located at 604 West 39th Street.

Per the applicant:

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Request for Demolition of 604 W 39th Street (20073 08017)

The City of Savannah Code Compliance Department is requesting approval for the demolition of the main Contributing Building built in 1925 at 604 W 39th Street due to substantial fire damage that occurred on June 22nd, 2024. Code Compliance began working with the property on May 13th, 2021, for multiple housing code violations. The listed owner, Elizabeth Hall, is deceased and her son Lemuel “Lem” Hall has been maintaining the property.

On June 24th, 2024, Code Compliance received a report of fire at the property. Upon responding to the area, the structure was badly damaged because of the fire and was immediately condemned for Life Safety concerns. The City of Savannah Building Official, Mike Rose, conducted a Building Observation and the report reads “Structure Fire 6/22/2024 1:50am. Report from Savannah Fire.

Multiple buildings on same PIN. Fire occurred in vacant 2 story wood frame main residence, extensive damage with roof collapse, interior wall collapse, partial exterior wall collapse at rear 2nd floor of structure. Recommend demolition of 2 story residential structure. Other structures on PIN have partial collapse and neglect not related to 6/22/2024 fire.” Due to this recommendation and the ongoing case on the property where the City of Savannah provided more than enough time for the caretaker of the property to acquire the necessary documentation to resolve the concern themselves, Recorder’s Court judge, Willie T. Yancy, signed the demolition order on November 13th, 2024.

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CONTEXT/SURROUNDING AREA:

604 West 39th Street was constructed in 1910 and is a contributing resource within the National Register Cuyler-Brownville Historic District and the local Cuyler-Brownville Historic District. The building suffered a serious fire in 2024 which resulted in considerable damage to the historic fabric and character-defining features.

604 West 39th Street was a two-story frame building with covered front entrance with masonry (brick) foundation and later metal replacement railings and columns, front two-story projecting bay, punched openings with double-hung two-over-two windows, clapboard siding, distinctive bracketed cornice, and topped by a main hipped roof and secondary rear shed roof.

The surrounding context includes one and two-story contributing frame buildings along West 35th Street which is the predominant building type in this section of the Cuyler-Brownville neighborhood.



Staff Site Visit Photos – Views of front elevation (West 39th Street) and side elevation (east facing)

The Sanborn Maps show how this area has evolved over the years, with the retention of the majority of the contributing buildings and residential character along this stretch of West 39th Street and surrounding blocks which consist of frame one and two-story buildings with covered front porches.

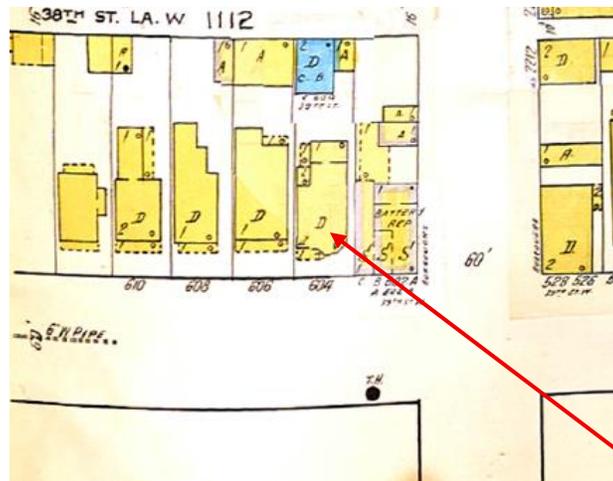


Figure 1 - 1916 Sanborn Map with paste-ins through 1953 showing 604 West 39th Street

While this more recent Sanborn Map shows the continued retention of the contributing buildings and residential character, the area has seen the loss of some buildings.

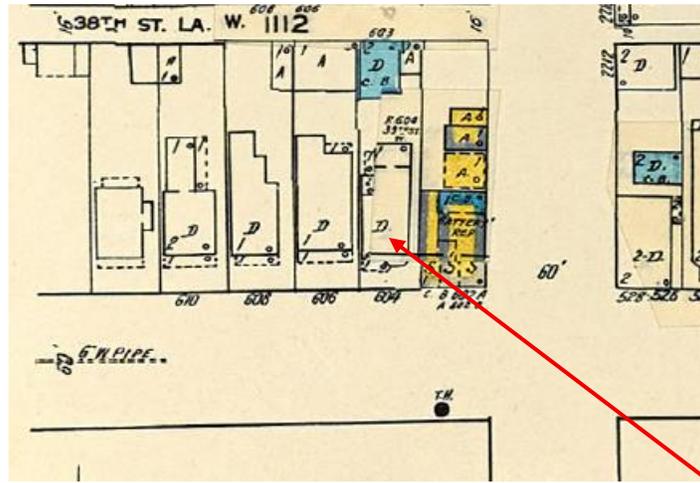


Figure 2 - 1955 Sanborn Map with paste-ins through 1966 showing 604 West 39th Street

FINDINGS:

The following standards from the Sec 3.18.8 - HPC 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.).

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" and worthy of preservation and shall be classified as "historic" for purposes hereunder.

The building has been identified as contributing on the Historic District Contributing Resources Map.

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 building was constructed in 1910 which is within the Period of Significance of 1867-1937 for the Cuyler-Brownville Historic District.

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

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

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

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

The building meets the criteria as an example of a type, period and method of construction which is found throughout the Cuyler-Brownville Historic District.

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, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and meet one or more of the above criteria.

The building is not one of Exception Importance, but rather a contributing resource along with its neighbors on this block of West 39th Street to the Cuyler-Brownville Historic District.

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.

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

The criteria for contributing status are met and as such the criteria for demolishing a contributing resource shall apply.

Criteria. *The Historic Preservation Commission shall determine that at least one of the criteria below has been satisfied when a contributing resource is proposed for relocation or demolition.*

The relocation or demolition is required to alleviate an immediate threat to public health or public safety;

The criteria are met. The building suffered a catastrophic fire on June 24, 2024, following which it was inspected by the City of Savannah Building Official undertook a thorough review of the conditions and recommended that it be demolished. The Recorder's Court judge signed the demolition order for the building on November 13, 2024.

The relocation is required to avoid demolition;

The relocation or demolition is required to avoid exceptional practical difficulty or undue hardship upon the owner of the property if all the following conditions are also satisfied:

The applicant has provided evidence sufficient to demonstrate that the application of the standards of this Section deprives the applicant of reasonable economic return on the subject property; and

The undue hardship is not of the property owner's own making.

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

The applicant should comply with the City of Savannah's documentation policy. Also, the applicant should salvage any historic materials that may remain and that were not heavily damaged in the fire.

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.*

A Certificate of Appropriateness for the new construction cannot be issued prior to the demolition due to the building posing a threat to public health and safety. Any proposed new construction on the site would be required to obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Historic Preservation Commission.

Application Requirements. *Except where a resource or portion of a resource poses an immediate threat to public safety, all applications for relocation or demolition of a contributing or non-contributing resource shall include the following information:*

Contributing Resource.

A detailed explanation for the relocation or demolition and why it cannot be avoided;

Information documenting the construction date, history and development of the property;

A report from a Georgia-licensed structural engineer with demonstrated experience in historic renovation, restoration, or rehabilitation, as to the structural soundness of the contributing resource. The report shall also identify any dangerous structural conditions;

A fair market value appraisal of the property from a Georgia-licensed property appraiser. The appraisal shall include a full market sales report to include comparable sales;

The amount paid for the property; the remaining balance on any mortgage or other financing secured by the property; and, the annual debt service for the previous two (2) years;

If the property is income producing, the annual gross income from the property for the previous two (2) years; the itemized operating and maintenance expenses for the previous two (2) years; and depreciation deduction and annual cash flow before and after debt service for the previous two (2) years. The Historic Preservation Commission may require details of past rental history;

The selling price asked and offers received within the previous two (2) years; the most recent assessed values of the property and real estate taxes (if applicable); and, evidence of listing for sale;

Any economic incentives and/or funding available to the applicant through federal, state, local or private programs.

In addition to the above, an application for relocation shall include:

A development plan of the proposed location in accordance with Sec. 3.8, Development Plan Review.

A report from a Georgia-licensed structural engineer with demonstrated experience in historic renovation, restoration, or rehabilitation, as to the capacity for relocation of the resource without irreparable damage to the resource.

The applicable standards are met. The City of Savannah Building Official determined after a thorough review of the conditions after the fire that the building needed to be demolished as a result of “extensive damage with roof collapse” in order to alleviate a threat to public health and safety.

Demolition Due to Immediate Threat. Any order for demolition by the City Manager of his or her designee in whole or in part, of any contributing resource within a local historic district or local historic property due to a dangerous, hazardous or unsafe condition shall not be issued until the order has been reviewed and signed by a Georgia-licensed structural engineer, Planning Director and City Manager.

The standard is met. The City of Savannah Building Official determined that a demolition due to immediate threat was required and demolition order was signed by the Recorder’s Court judge.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Approve the request for the demolition of the contributing building located at 604 West 39th Street with the following conditions because the criteria are met.

- 1. Rather than traditional demolition of 604 West 39th Street, the building should be deconstructed, and the materials salvaged for reuse, with the understanding that the fire damage and related safety concerns may severely limit this.**
- 2. Comply with the policy for documenting buildings over 40 years old for 604 West 39th Street.**

MW: JM

Note: This recommendation could change subject to new information provided at the Historic District Board of Review meetings. Final decisions will be made by the Historic District Board of Review at the public hearing based on information provided at the meeting, as well as information submitted for the staff recommendation.