



CITY OF SAVANNAH

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

REQUEST FOR CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS

Petitioner: J. Elder Studio, Jerome Elder

MPC File No.: 26-004410--COA

Address: 502 West 36th Street

PIN: 20066 42005

Zoning: TR-1

Staff Reviewer: Rohan Urs

Date: September 23, 2026

NATURE OF REQUEST:

The petitioner is requesting approval for the rehabilitation, alteration, and expansion of the existing non-contributing building located at 502 West 36th Street within the Cuyler-Brownville Historic District. The existing structure was built in 1955.

The work includes selective demolition of existing exterior walls and openings; construction of an approximately 546-square-foot addition; reconfiguration of window and door openings; reconstruction and extension of the roof; installation of new storefront glazing, windows, exterior wall finishes, cast-stone elements, and associated architectural detailing. The existing building footprint is approximately 1,134 square feet, or 31% of the lot, and the proposed footprint is approximately 1,680 square feet, or 47% of the approximately 3,603-square-foot lot.

The petitioner is also requesting that the Historic Preservation Commission provide a recommendation to the Zoning Board of Appeals regarding a variance from the TR-1 five-foot minimum front-yard setback to permit an approximately 16-foot-wide portion of the proposed addition to extend to a zero-foot setback along Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard. The existing nonconforming building is located approximately 3 feet 2 inches from the property line along MLK Jr. Boulevard.

CONTEXT/SURROUNDING AREA:

The building was constructed in 1955 and is a non-contributing resource within the National Register Cuyler-Brownville Historic District and the local Cuyler-Brownville Historic District.

The surrounding area contains a mixture of residential, institutional, commercial, and neighborhood-serving uses. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard functions as a significant north-south corridor through the western portion of Savannah and has historically accommodated a mixture of residential and commercial activity.

The existing building presents a relatively enclosed residential-scale condition toward the surrounding streets. The proposed adaptive reuse substantially increases transparency and pedestrian orientation, particularly at the corner and along Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, while retaining a one-story scale.

The City identifies the MLK/Montgomery corridor as an Urban Redevelopment Area focused on increasing economic viability and neighborhood sustainability. Current comprehensive-planning work also identifies MLK-Montgomery as a strategic corridor/node supporting commercial, institutional, housing, pedestrian-connectivity, and neighborhood-serving activity.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

The proposed project substantially rehabilitates and expands the non-contributing resource rather than removing the building in its entirety.

Selective demolition includes removal and infill of existing wall openings, removal of portions of exterior walls and roof construction, and modification of existing façades to accommodate the new floor plan and storefront configuration.

The proposed design includes:

- Smooth-finish stucco exterior walls.
- Cast-stone bases, water tables, and accent walls.
- Stained wood storefront framing.
- Stained wood casement windows and trim.
- Stained wood beams and corner elements.
- Asphalt-shingle hip roofs at approximately 4:12.
- Approximately 1-foot-4-inch roof overhangs.
- Tongue-and-groove soffit and ceiling boards.
- Aluminum gutters.
- Outdoor seating associated with the proposed café/lounge use.

FINDINGS:

The following standards from the Article 5 - Base Zoning Districts apply:

***(TR) Traditional Residential District Development Standards.** Development in any TR-district shall meet the development standards as set forth below.*

TR-1 Development Standards for Permitted Uses.

TR-1, Maximum Building Coverage.

Two-Family, Three & Four-Family: 40%

All housing types & uses (except Two-Family, Three & Four-Family: 50%

The submitted site plan identifies an approximately 3,603-square-foot lot and a proposed building footprint of approximately 1,680 square feet, resulting in approximately 47% building coverage.

The proposed commercial/civic use is subject to the 50% maximum building coverage.

Standard met.

TR-1, Building Setbacks (ft), All housing types & uses (except Single-family Detached).

Front yard: 5 (min); 10 (max)

Side (interior) yard: 5 (min)

Side (street) yard: 10 (min)

Rear yard: 20 (min)

From access easement: 5 (min)

TR-1, Height (max ft). 36

The existing building maintains an approximately **3-foot-2-inch setback** from the MLK Jr. Boulevard property line and is therefore presently nonconforming with respect to the five-foot minimum front-yard setback.

The proposed approximately 16-foot-wide addition is shown extending to the property line at a **zero-foot setback** along MLK Jr. Boulevard. A variance from the applicable front-yard setback requirement has therefore been requested.

Standard not met. Variance requested.

The following standards from the Sec 7.10 - Cuyler-Brownville Historic District Ordinance apply:

Visual Compatibility Criteria. *To maintain the special character of the Victorian Historic District as identified in the architectural survey and visual analysis, new construction and any material change in appearance shall be consistent with the standards, criteria and guidelines developed for the district. The applicable criteria below shall be used to assess new construction and material changes. These criteria shall not be the basis for appeal to any board, commission or administrator described in this Ordinance, or to the Mayor and Aldermen.*

Height. *The overall height and the height of individual components of the proposed building or structure shall be visually compatible with contributing buildings and structures to which it is visually related.*

The proposed rehabilitation and addition remain one story and maintain a low overall building profile. No additional story is proposed, and the resulting building height remains compatible with surrounding neighborhood-scale development.

Standard met.

Width. *The proportion of the overall width and the width of individual components of the proposed building or structure shall be visually compatible to the contributing buildings and structures to which it is visually related.*

The proposed addition increases the width and footprint of the existing building, particularly along the MLK Jr. Boulevard frontage. The resulting composition is articulated through storefront bays, window openings, changes in façade plane, roof forms, and differentiated exterior materials rather than appearing as a continuous uninterrupted wall mass.

The overall width remains visually compatible with the mixed residential and commercial development found along the corridor.

Standard met.

Scale. *The overall scale and the scale of individual components of the proposed building or structure shall be visually compatible to the contributing buildings and structures to which it is visually related.*

Although the building footprint increases from approximately 1,134 square feet to 1,680 square feet, the building remains one story and maintains a pedestrian-oriented scale.

Individual storefront bays, casement windows, stained wood elements, deep roof overhangs, cast-stone detailing, and varied façade planes reduce the perception of overall mass and provide human-scale articulation.

Standard met.

Setbacks. *The setbacks of the proposed building or structure shall be visually compatible with setbacks of contributing buildings and structures to which it is visually related.*

The proposed approximately 16-foot-wide portion of the addition extends to a zero-foot setback along MLK Jr. Boulevard. While the proposed setback does not meet the TR-1 minimum requirement, the resulting building placement strengthens the street edge along the commercial corridor and is visually compatible with other commercial building relationships identified along MLK Jr. Boulevard.

Final relief from the zoning setback requirement is subject to approval by the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Standard is visually compatible, subject to approval of the requested variance.

Rhythm of Building or Structure. *The relationship of a building or structure to the open space between it and adjacent buildings or structures shall be visually compatible with the open spaces between contributing buildings or structures to which it is visually related.*

The proposed storefront openings, windows, wall sections, and roof forms establish a consistent rhythm along the street-facing elevations.

The corner treatment and outdoor seating area provide additional articulation at the intersection while maintaining a clear relationship between the building and surrounding open space.

Standard met.

***Openings.** The rhythm and solid-to-void ratio of the proposed building or structure shall be visually compatible with contributing buildings and structures to which it is visually related.*

The proposal substantially modifies the existing fenestration pattern through infill of existing openings and creation of new storefront and window openings.

The proposed stained-wood storefront glazing and casement windows establish a consistent pattern across the public-facing elevations and increase transparency along MLK Jr. Boulevard and West 36th Street.

Because the existing building is non-contributing, the proposed alteration of existing openings does not result in the removal of identified character-defining historic fenestration.

Standard met.

***Projections.** Entrances, porches, and other projections of the proposed building or structure shall be visually compatible with contributing buildings and structures to which it is visually related.*

The proposed roof overhangs, stained wood beams, entrance elements, and associated projections are appropriately scaled to the one-story building and provide architectural depth and pedestrian scale.

Standard met.

***Materials.** The relationship of materials and textures of the proposed building or structure shall be visually compatible with the contributing buildings and structures to which it is visually related.*

The proposed exterior palette consists of smooth-finish stucco, cast stone, stained wood storefront framing, stained wood casement windows and trim, stained wood beams, asphalt shingles, tongue-and-groove soffit and ceiling boards, and aluminum gutters.

The proposed materials and textures are visually compatible with the architectural character of the surrounding district while providing a distinguishable contemporary treatment for the non-contributing building.

Standard met.

***Roof Shapes.** The roof shape of the proposed building or structure shall be visually compatible with contributing buildings and structures to which it is visually related.*

The proposed roof consists primarily of interconnected hip roof forms with approximately **4:12 pitches** and 1-foot-4-inch overhangs.

The roof configuration maintains a low residential scale and is compatible with roof forms found within the surrounding district.

Standard met.

Cuyler-Brownville Historic District Design Standards.

New Construction, Additions, and Alterations. The intent of these standards is to ensure appropriate new construction, additions, and alterations within the Cuyler-Brownville Historic District. They are not intended to promote copies of the architectural designs of the past, but to encourage contemporary designs that protect and complement existing contributing resources. They are further intended to protect the historic integrity of the contributing resource.

The following design standards shall apply to new construction, additions, alterations to contributing and non-contributing buildings and structures, and site alterations, unless otherwise specified. Though certain building materials are prescribed below, the Historic Preservation Commission may approve alternative materials that are not listed as prohibited upon a showing by the applicant that the material or product is visually compatible with historic building materials and has performed satisfactorily in the local climate.

Exterior walls, New construction, alterations to non-contributing resources, and additions.

Permitted materials, Exterior walls, New construction, alterations to non-contributing resources, and additions. *Brick, stone, wood, true stucco, painted concrete block, precast concrete panels, metal shingles, and wood or fiber cement siding.*

The proposed exterior wall treatment includes **smooth-finish stucco** together with cast-stone bases, water tables, and accent elements.

True stucco is a permitted exterior wall material. The proposed treatment is compatible with the scale and architectural character of the building and district.

Standard met.

Windows, New construction, alterations to non-contributing resources, and additions.

Materials, Windows, New construction, alterations to non-contributing resources, and additions.

Window casings and sashes shall be made of PVC, metal, wood or clad wood material.

Window glass shall be transparent with no dark tints or reflective effects (except for stained glass windows). This provision does not preclude the use of Low Emissivity or laminated glass.

Solid vinyl windows are prohibited.

The proposal identifies **stained wood casement windows** along the renovated and expanded building.

Wood is a permitted window material.

Standard met.

Configuration, Windows, New construction, alterations to non-contributing resources, and additions.

Windows shall be taller than they are wide, except for accent windows, which may be round or other shapes.

Windows shall be single-hung, double-hung, triple hung, awning, or casement, except for accent windows which may also be fixed or hopper.

Simulated divided light windows shall be permitted provided that the muntin is 7/8 inches or less, the muntin profile shall simulate traditional putty glazing, the lower sash rail shall be wider than the meeting and top rails, and there shall be a spacer bar in between double panes of glass. Between-the-glass, snap-in or applied muntins shall not be permitted.

Framing members shall be covered with appropriate trim; trim shall feature a header, surrounds, and pronounced sill where appropriate.

Window sashes shall be inset a minimum of three (3) inches from the façade of a building, except for wood frame buildings.

Bay windows shall extend to the ground unless they are oriel, beveled or are supported by brackets.

All residential facades visible from a street shall incorporate transparent features (windows and doors) over a minimum of 30% of the ground floor façade.

Retail uses shall incorporate transparent features (windows and doors) over a minimum of 70% of the ground floor façade.

All other nonresidential facades shall incorporate transparent features (windows and doors) over a minimum of 50% of the ground floor façade.

The proposed casement windows are generally vertically proportioned and are organized with compatible trim, headers, surrounds, and pronounced sill conditions.

Casement windows are expressly permitted under the applicable standard.

The proposed storefront and window openings substantially increase transparency along the public-facing façades. The exact required ground-floor transparency percentage will depend upon the final classification of the individual façade areas as retail or other nonresidential use, but the proposed elevations demonstrate substantial transparent area along the principal street frontages.

Standard appears met.

Storefront, New construction, alterations to non-contributing resources and additions.

Storefront materials, New construction, alterations to non-contributing resources and additions.

Storefronts shall be constructed of wood, cast iron, Carrera glass, glass block, tile, aluminum, steel or copper as part of a glazed storefront system.

Storefront bases shall consist of wood, bronze, glazed brick or tile.

Exterior burglar bars, fixed or roll-down security devices or similar security devices shall not be permitted.

The proposed storefront system is identified as **stained wood storefront framing with transparent glazing**.

Wood is a permitted storefront material. No exterior burglar bars, roll-down security devices, or similar security devices are proposed.

Standard met.

Storefront Configuration, New construction, alterations to non-contributing resources and additions.

Storefront glazing in subdivided sashes shall be inset a minimum of four inches from the face of the building.

Storefront glazing shall be transparent; provided, however, opaque glass may be used in the storefront window transoms.

The proposed storefront glazing is incorporated into defined bays along the MLK Jr. Boulevard and West 36th Street-facing portions of the building.

The glazing is shown as transparent and forms an integral component of the proposed pedestrian-oriented commercial/civic façade.

Standard met.

Doors/Entrances, New construction, alterations to non-contributing resources and additions.

Doors/Entrances, Materials, New construction, alterations to non-contributing resources and additions.

Doors shall be made of glass, wood, clad wood or steel (without wood grain simulation).

Doors shall not have a decorative diamond or half-moon inset.

The proposed primary entrances are integrated within the stained wood storefront system and are compatible with the material palette of the renovated building.

The proposed entrance design does not include prohibited decorative diamond or half-moon inset configurations.

Standard met.

Doors/Entrances, Configuration, New construction, alterations to non-contributing resources and additions.

Entrances shall face the primary street on which the building is located (normally the street from which it takes its address).

Entrances on corner lots shall be oriented in the same direction as entrances of adjacent buildings, toward the corner of the intersection, or based on historic precedent.

Angled entrances shall only be permitted at intersections of streets or lanes.

There shall be a primary entrance along the primary street at intervals no greater than 60 feet.

The proposal establishes clearly identifiable pedestrian entrances along the public street frontages. The principal entrance is integrated into the street-facing storefront composition and strengthens the relationship between the building and the MLK Jr. Boulevard commercial corridor.

The entrance placement is appropriate for the corner-lot condition and maintains a pedestrian-oriented street relationship.

Standard met.

Roof, New construction, alterations to non-contributing resources and additions.

Roof, Materials, New construction, alterations to non-contributing resources and additions.

Roof coverings shall be standing seam metal, v-crimp, slate or equivalent synthetic, or architectural asphalt or similar shingles.

Metal roofs shall have a metal drip edge covering all edges and a maximum seam height of one (1) inch.

The proposed roof is clad in **asphalt shingles**, which are permitted under the Cuyler-Brownville standards.

Standard met.

Roof, Configuration, New construction, alterations to non-contributing resources and additions.

Shed and porch roofs, subordinate and attached to the primary building, shall be pitched between 2:12 and 6:12.

Where historically appropriate, flat roofs may be utilized.

Gable and hip roof shall be symmetrically pitched between 4:12 and 10:12.

Skylights and roof vents may be permitted if integrated into roof design.

Pergolas and roof decks shall not be permitted on the street façade.

Eaves shall extend no less than 12 inches beyond supporting walls.

Gable end rakes shall overhang at least eight (8) inches.

Eaves and rakes on accessory buildings and dormers shall overhang at least eight (8) inches.

Soffits shall be placed perpendicular to the building wall, not sloping in plane with the roof (except for gable end rakes).

Applied mansard roofs shall not be permitted.

The proposed roof consists primarily of symmetrical hip roof forms pitched approximately **4:12**, which falls within the permitted 4:12 to 10:12 range.

The submitted drawings indicate approximately **1-foot-4-inch eave projections**, exceeding the required 12-inch minimum. The proposed soffits are shown perpendicular to the exterior walls.

No applied mansard roof, roof deck, or incompatible street-facing roof feature is proposed.

Standard met.

Martin Luther King, Jr Boulevard-Montgomery Street Redevelopment Plan.

The land use recommendations from the Martin Luther King, Jr Boulevard-Montgomery Street Redevelopment Plan provides for permitted and prohibited uses.

Permitted Uses. The permitted uses are the same as those in the base zoning district unless otherwise specified in this Section. The use standards listed below shall apply to any properties having frontage on Martin Luther King, Jr Boulevard or Montgomery Street in addition to any use standard found in Article 8.0, Use Regulations.

Parking Facility. Within the TC-2 district, any parking facility, approved after the Effective Date of this Ordinance, that is not structured shall provided a six (6) foot high opaque fence along any property line adjacent to a residential property. Pre-existing (non-conforming) parking facilities in existence as of the Effective Date of this Ordinance shall not be required to comply with the requirements of this Section unless substantial modifications are proposed.

Place of Worship. In buildings not originally constructed for a place of worship, such use shall not be allowed on a ground floor. This standard shall not apply to such uses existing as of the Effective Date of this Ordinance.

Private Club/Lodge/Membership Club (with or without facility rental). Such use shall not be allowed on the ground floor.

Hall, banquet or reception. Such use shall not be allowed on the ground floor.

Prohibited Uses. In addition to any use not permitted in the base zoning district in Sec. 5.4, Principal Use Table, the following uses are additional uses that are prohibited on any properties having frontage on Martin Luther King, Jr Boulevard or Montgomery Street:

Substance Recovery Facility;

Emergency Medical Services (EMS) substation/Ambulance service;

Hospital;

Day Labor Employment Center;

Flea Market, not including farmer's market;

Outdoor Sales;

Package Store;

Check cashing/Title pawn;

Funeral Home; mortuary (not including crematorium);

Crematorium;

Nightclub;

Heavy equipment/Heavy vehicle sales, rentals and leasing;

Watercraft sales, rentals, and service;

Vehicle service, major. Those uses legally existing as of the Effective Date of this Ordinance shall not be considered nonconforming.;

Self-Service Storage Facility; and

Broadcast Transmission Tower.

Additional Regulations Applicable to Martin Luther King, Jr Boulevard and Montgomery Street.

Parking and Access. New curb cuts along Martin Luther King, Jr Boulevard shall be limited to one (1) curb cut per 100 feet of street frontage. Such curb cut shall not exceed 20 feet in width unless otherwise required by the City Manager or his or her designee.

The subject property has frontage on Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard and is therefore subject to the applicable provisions of the MLK Jr. Boulevard-Montgomery Street Redevelopment Plan.

The proposed creative hub includes coworking, office, café/lounge, conference, and related civic/commercial functions. None of the prohibited uses identified in the submitted ordinance provisions are proposed.

No new curb cut along Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard is shown as part of the proposal.

Applicable standards met.

VARIANCE RECOMMENDATION

The petitioner requests that the Historic Preservation Commission provide a recommendation to the Zoning Board of Appeals for a variance from the **TR-1 five-foot minimum front-yard setback** to permit an approximately **16-foot-wide portion of the proposed addition to extend to a zero-foot setback along Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard.**

General Consistency

The requested relief supports the adaptive reuse of an existing non-contributing building and establishes a stronger pedestrian-oriented building edge along Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard.

The proposed one-story scale, storefront treatment, and limited extent of the zero-setback condition do not appear injurious to the surrounding historic district or detrimental to the public health, safety, or welfare.

The proposal is also consistent with the broader planning objective of encouraging reinvestment, neighborhood-serving commercial activity, and pedestrian-oriented development along the MLK corridor.

Special Conditions

The property is a relatively small corner parcel containing an existing nonconforming building located approximately **3 feet 2 inches from the MLK Jr. Boulevard property line.**

The existing building placement and constrained corner condition influence the organization of the proposed addition and adaptive reuse. These conditions existed prior to the present proposal.

Literal Interpretation

Literal application of the five-foot minimum front-yard setback would require the proposed addition to be recessed from the MLK Jr. Boulevard frontage and would alter the street-oriented building relationship proposed as part of the adaptive reuse.

Compliance with the setback would not eliminate reasonable use of the property; however, the requested relief allows the new commercial/civic frontage to establish a more continuous relationship with the existing MLK corridor.

Minimum Variance

The requested zero-foot setback is limited to an approximately **16-foot-wide portion of the proposed addition** along MLK Jr. Boulevard and does not apply to the remainder of the site.

Determination of whether the requested relief constitutes the minimum variance necessary remains with the Zoning Board of Appeals. From the historic-district perspective, the limited location of the requested relief does not create an incompatible building form or adversely affect the character of the district.

Special Privilege

The applicant identifies nearby commercial buildings along MLK Jr. Boulevard that maintain zero-setback relationships to the street. These conditions provide contextual examples of the established commercial street edge along the corridor.

The requested relief does not introduce a building relationship visually foreign to MLK Jr. Boulevard.

Historic and Architectural Integrity

The existing building is non-contributing, and the proposed work does not remove or alter an identified contributing resource.

The one-story height, hip roof configuration, storefront treatment, material palette, and pedestrian scale are visually compatible with the Cuyler-Brownville Historic District. The requested setback relief therefore does not appear to adversely affect the architectural or historic integrity of the district.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Approve the rehabilitation, alterations, and addition to the non-contributing building at 502 West 36th Street as requested, as the proposal is visually compatible and meets the applicable standards, subject to approval of the required zoning variance.

AND

Staff further recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission provide a favorable recommendation to the Zoning Board of Appeals for the requested variance from the TR-1 five-foot minimum front-yard setback to allow an approximately 16-foot-wide portion of the proposed addition to extend to a zero-foot setback along Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, as the requested relief supports the compatible adaptive reuse of a non-contributing resource, strengthens the pedestrian-oriented relationship with the MLK corridor, and does not appear to adversely affect the historic character or integrity of the Cuyler-Brownville Historic District.

MW: CC: RU

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