

**CITY OF SAVANNAH
HISTORIC DISTRICT BOARD OF REVIEW
REQUEST FOR CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS**

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PETITIONER: GM Shay Architects
1719A Abercorn Street
Savannah, GA 31401

FILE NUMBER: 15-001384-COA

ADDRESS: 600 East Bay Street

PIN: 2-0005-02-006

ZONING: B-B (Former Zoning)

STAFF REVIEWER: Leah G. Michalak

DATE: September 9, 2021

NATURE OF REQUEST:

The applicant is requesting approval to amend the previous approval for 600 East Bay Street (AC Hotel) and adjacent areas in order improve public safety and public access at the request of the City of Savannah.

Per the applicant:

The City of Savannah has requested that Northpoint Hospitality co-develop the proposed improvements during the construction of the AC Hotel for the following public benefits:

- *Connectivity from the existing Savannah Riverwalk to River Street at the foot of the East Broad Street Ramp, and from the corner of Bay Street and East Broad Street to Emmet Park.*
- *Public accessibility for the district as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).*
- *Public safety to eliminate the dangerous pedestrian bottleneck at Bay Street and East Broad Street that now results in people walking in Bay Street to reach Emmet Park.*

The proposed solutions to the above public concerns are as follows:

- *Sidewalk from Riverwalk to River Street, crosswalks at River Street and the lower range of the East Broad Street Ramp, and a pedestrian bridge across East Broad Street Ramp.*
- *Installation of a public-access elevator with stops at the level of Bay Street and River Street, similar in function to those at Montgomery Street and at the Bull Street Ramp.*
- *Installation of a pedestrian footbridge that will connect the historic Harbor Light and Emmet Park, and Trustees Garden to the public elevator and River Street safely.*

In terms of the impact on the previously approved AC Hotel, the design has been crafted to have a minimal impact on the open “valley” and granite-stepped stairway. The elevator shaft and access vestibules will be similar or same materials as the previously approved designs. The pedestrian bridge has been carefully designed to be a visually compatible “cousin” of the existing pedestrian bridges over Factor’s Walk and the Abercorn Ramp, while at the same time being clearly differentiated from those historic bridges. Pedestrians moving along River Street or the Riverwalk will see the pedestrian bridge and be guided with appropriate wayfinding signage up through the valley and back to the Harbor Light and Emmet Park, which are currently inaccessible from the east. The existing historic stone walls will be carefully protected, and the steep curved historic stairway preserved, but closed to pedestrians. The result will be a safe and pedestrian-friendly place for the public to enjoy.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

The subject property was historically the site of Novelty Iron Works of Rourke and Sons which was established between 1884 and 1888. The site evolved to contain a number of wood and masonry buildings of varying heights through 1960. The buildings were demolished in circa 1960 for the headquarters for Savannah Electric Power Company (SEPCO). The SEPCO building was built in 1962 by Stone & Webster and was designed by Emory Ireland.

The property is located outside the National Historic Landmark District, but within the local Savannah Historic District. There are few contributing buildings within the immediate context, except across Bay Street in the Trustees Garden area.

PROJECT CONTEXT:

On April 8, 2015, the HDBR denied the request for demolition of the SEPCO building “because the building meets the criteria for historic status and the information provided regarding asbestos abatement does not justify the demolition.” On May 28, 2015, the petitioner appealed the decision of the HDBR to the Zoning Board of Appeals [File No. 15-002278-COA]. The ZBA reversed the HDBR’s decision stating that the Board “abused its discretion in denying the demolition permit to the petitioners solely on the unrealized historic potential of the SEPCO building.”

After the denial of the demolition at the April HDBR meeting, the petitioner requested a continuance for New Construction Part I: Height and Mass for the proposed new hotel. At the December 9, 2015, HDBR Meeting Part I: Height and Mass was approved with conditions. The Board also recommended approval to the ZBA for a variance from the following window standard: *The distance between windows shall be not less than for adjacent historic buildings, nor more than two times the width of the windows. Paired or grouped windows are permitted, provided the individual sashes have a vertical to horizontal ratio of not less than 5:3.* In order to maintain the proposed areas of “white” space on the north, east, and west facades. The ZBA granted the variance on February 25, 2016 [File No. 16-000577-ZBA].

The project then received a 12 month extension from the Board on November 9, 2016. The petitioner returned to the Board on November 8, 2017 with amendments to Part I: Height and

Mass and Part II: Design Details. The Board approved Part I with conditions and Part II was continued. The Board asked the applicant to consider the following for the Part II continuance (the applicant did not provide comments for the items listed below):

1. Redesign all exterior building materials to be visually compatible with the industrial character of the area and to be masonry to meet the Character Area material standard.
2. Redesign all windows to be an operable type as permitted in the standards. Provide a full-sized sample and detailed specifications for the proposed Pella 450 window as this window has not been submitted for review by the Board in the past.
3. Redesign the storefront systems to extend from the sill or from an 18 to 24 inch tall base of contrasting material and to be inset a minimum of 4 inches from the face of the building to the glazing.
4. Redesign the wood louver awnings to be constructed of canvas, other equivalent cloth, metal, or glass.
5. Provide additional information regarding balusters and railings.
6. Ensure that all fences and walls meet the standards.
7. Incorporate additional solids on the ground level between the two supporting columns to better form a wall of continuity at the valet parking area along River Street.
8. Incorporate a string course on all roof parapet walls.

At this meeting, the Board also recommended approval to the Zoning Board of Appeals for a variance from the standard that reads: *Through-the-wall air conditioners may be installed in new construction when they are incorporated into the design of the window system and screened by a decorative grate.* It does not appear that this variance has been granted.

On August 8, 2018, the Board approved a series of amendments (with conditions) to the Part I approval; the conditions were as follows:

1. Add more articulation to the full width of the end architectural bays on the east facade.
2. Redesign the path from the stairs between the building to River Street to have a more direct route and be more open.
3. Remove the parapet wall at the courtyard roof.
4. Ensure that the base under the storefront along the Bay Street façade is 18-24 inches high.
5. Add a string course to the parapet walls.
6. Ensure that the sidewalk is a continuous uninterrupted pathway across the valet driveway in materials, configuration, and height.
7. Provide solar PV array calculations and a green roof certification from the City Manager.

On December 12, 2018, the Board approved Part I and II with conditions as follows:

Part I conditions to be submitted to staff for final review and approval:

1. Receive a variance from the Zoning Board of Appeals from the standard that reads: *Through-the-wall air conditioners may be installed in new construction when they are incorporated into the design of the window system and screened by a decorative grate.*
2. Revise the storefront base to have a contrasting design or material.
3. Add a string course to all portions of the building that have a parapet wall or flat roof that reads as a parapet wall.

4. Provide a copy of the City Manager's sustainable roof certification.

Part II conditions to be submitted to staff for final review and approval:

1. Revise the spandrel panels to a visually compatible material.
2. Provide a sample of the architectural concrete awning or change to be a permitted material.
3. Revise the flush steel door on the Bay Street façade to be a type and style more commonly found on a front façade.
4. Revise fixed storefront windows on the tower elements to be an operable type.
5. Provide detailed drawings of all fence types proposed including but not limited to those in the area between this building and the hotel to the east and at the valet area. Ensure that all fence standards are met.

As of the writing of this report none of the above conditions are met.

City Council adopted a series of changes to the Historic District ordinance at their July 5, 2018 meeting. Because this project was under review prior to the changes, the project can continue its review under the previous ordinance; however, the applicant stated in a previous submittal packet that "...where possible, we will try to comply with the 2018 guidelines." Under the previous ordinance, new construction on Factors Walk is exempt from commercial and large-scale development standards.

FINDINGS:

The following standards from the Historic District Section (8-3030) of the City of Savannah Zoning Ordinance apply:

Preservation of historic structures within the historic district. An historic structure, portion of a structure, additions, outbuildings, or any appurtenance related thereto which meet the historic criteria defined in Section 8-3030(d)(f)(1), visible from a public street or lane, including but not limited to walls, fences, light fixtures, steps, paving, sidewalks, and signs, shall only be moved, reconstructed, altered, or maintained in a manner that will preserve the historical and exterior architectural features of the historic structure or appurtenance thereto and are consistent with the current edition of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Rehabilitation published by the U.S. Department of the Interior. The visual compatibility factors [Section (m)] and the design standards [Section (n)] shall apply.

For the purposes of this section, exterior architectural features shall include but not be limited to the architectural style, scale, general design, and general arrangement of the exterior of the structure, including the kind and texture of the building material, the type and style of all roofs, windows, doors and signs. In considering proposals for the exterior alterations of historic structures in the historic district the documented original design of the structure may be considered.

Secretary of the Interior's Standards 2– Historic Character. *The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.*

Secretary of the Interior's Standards 3– Physical Record. *Each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken.*

Secretary of the Interior's Standards 4– Historic Changes. *Most properties change over time; those changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved.*

Secretary of the Interior's Standards 5– Distinctive Features. *Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property shall be preserved.*

Secretary of the Interior's Standards 9– New Additions to not Damage. *New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.*

Secretary of the Interior's Standards 10– New Additions Reversible. *New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.*

The walls, stairs, paving, and other appurtenances associated with Emmett Park and the East Broad Street ramp are historic structures. The proposed work maintains these elements in a manner that will preserve the historical and exterior architectural features of the historic structures and appurtenances. Although the historic masonry stair adjacent to East Bay Street will no longer be accessible for human use, it is proposed to remain intact and unaltered; the new sidewalks, bridge, sidewalk café elements, stairs are reversible. The new elements, particularly the bridge, are compatible with but differentiated from the historic bridges in the vicinity and do not create a false sense of historical development.

Secretary of the Interior's Standards 6– Deteriorated Features. *Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.*

No elements (historic or otherwise) are proposed to be repaired or replaced.

Secretary of the Interior's Standards 7– Chemical Treatments. *Chemical or physical treatments, such as sandblasting, that cause damage to historic materials shall not be*

used. The surface cleaning of structures, if appropriate, shall be undertaken using the gentlest means possible.

Ensure that any physical disruptions to the historic elements, when installing the new elements (particularly the bridge), do not cause damage. If historic elements must be temporarily removed to installed new elements, ensure that they are reinstalled in their current configuration.

Visual compatibility factors. *New construction and existing buildings and structures and appurtenances thereof in the historic district which are moved, reconstructed, materially altered, repaired or changed in color shall be visually compatible with structures, squares and places to which they are visually related. The following factors shall be considered in determining the visual compatibility of such a building, structure or appurtenance. These factors shall not be the basis for appeal of an adverse decision. Greater weight shall be given to adjacent historic structures.*

Relationship of materials, texture and color. *The relationship of materials, texture and color of the facade of a structure shall be visually compatible with the predominate materials, textures, and colors used on contributing structures to which the structure is Visually Related.*

The following materials, textures, and colors are proposed and are visually compatible:

1. Brick – Modular and Pavers (Basket Weave or Running Bond Pattern) - Taylor Clay Products, INC, Color: French Gray, Smooth Texture
2. Exposed Aggregate 'Tabby' Concrete (Sidewalk).
3. Granite (2” Stair Treads) - Color: Charcoal
4. Typical paving at crosswalks and on Bridge to match existing along River Street
5. Ornamental Metal – Color: Savannah Green – RGB: 2, 37, 2
6. Storefront - Color: EFCO Ultrapon, 2 Coat Mesa Brown, PNTKY2C35

Design standards. *The following design standards shall apply to new construction, additions, and alterations to historic and non-historic buildings and structures unless otherwise described herein. Though certain building materials are prescribed herein, the Board 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.*

Streets and lanes shall not be bridged by development, except on Factor’s Walk. Such bridges shall be for pedestrian use only. Factor’s Walk bridges shall not be covered by a roof, awning, or any other type of extension from a building.

The standards are met.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Approval to amend the previous approval for 600 East Bay Street (AC Hotel) and adjacent areas in order improve public safety and public access at the request of the City of Savannah with the following condition because the proposed work is otherwise visually compatible and meets the preservation and design standards:

- 1. Ensure that any physical disruptions to the historic elements, when installing the new elements (particularly the bridge), do not cause damage. If historic elements must be temporarily removed to installed new elements, ensure that they are reinstalled in their current configuration.**

MW: LGM