



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: Robert Johns
MPC File No.: 25-006062-COA
Address: 207 Bull Street
PIN: 20015 13002
Zoning: D-CBD
Staff Reviewer: Rohan Urs
Date: January 14, 2026

NATURE OF REQUEST:

The applicant requests approval for the installation of an exterior ADA accessible ramp at the front entry of the Independent Presbyterian Church building. The proposed ramp wraps along the Oglethorpe Lane side of the structure with a single switchback configuration and includes associated landscape modifications.

CONTEXT/SURROUNDING AREA:

The subject property is a contributing historic church located within the Savannah Downtown Historic District. The building is characterized by a prominent front façade with a symmetrical composition, arched openings, and classical detailing. The surrounding context includes civic and institutional structures with strong architectural presence. The proposed ramp is primarily oriented along the lane side of the building and has the shorter side visible from the primary street frontage.

FINDINGS:

The church building was constructed in 1894 and is a contributing resource within the National Historic Landmark District and the local Savannah Downtown Historic District.

The following standards from the Sec 7.8 - Savannah Downtown Historic District Ordinance apply:

Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Rehabilitation. Material changes to contributing resources and resources that are eligible for listing as contributing shall be evaluated by use of the current edition of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Rehabilitation as published by the U.S. Department of the Interior. In

considering proposals for alterations to contributing resources, the documented original design of the resource 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.*

The proposed ramp is located along the side elevation and does not alter or obscure the defining architectural features of the primary façade, including its symmetry and entry composition.

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.*

The ramp utilizes granite paving and dark painted steel elements that are compatible with the building's material palette while remaining clearly contemporary in design.

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 ramp is designed as a freestanding structure with minimal contact at the upper landing and is otherwise separated from the building, allowing for removal without damage to historic fabric.

Visual Compatibility Criteria. *To maintain the special character of the Savannah Downtown 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.*

Rhythm of solids to voids in front façades. *The relationship of solids to voids in the façades visible from the public right-of-way shall be visually compatible with the contributing buildings and structures to which the structure is visually related.*

The ramp follows the edge of the site along the lane and integrates within existing circulation patterns without disrupting the primary entry axis or the ratios of solids to voids.

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

The proposed ramp incorporates granite paving and dark painted steel elements that are visually compatible with the surrounding material palette. The selected materials complement the existing masonry structure while remaining clearly distinguishable as contemporary additions.

Scale of a building. *The mass of a building or structure and size of windows, door openings, porches column spacing, stairs, balconies and additions shall be visually compatible with the contributing buildings and structures to which the structure is visually related.*

The ramp maintains a low horizontal profile and remains subordinate to the overall mass of the church.

Directional expression of front elevation. *A building or structure shall be visually compatible with the buildings and structures to which it is visually related in its directional character, including vertical character, horizontal character, or nondirectional character.*

The ramp's linear configuration aligns with the side elevation and does not conflict with the building's primary symmetrical front expression.

Savannah Downtown Historic District Design Standards. *The intent of these standards is to ensure appropriate new construction, additions, and alterations within the Savannah Downtown 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 resources.*

The following design standards shall apply to new construction, additions, alterations to contributing and non-contributing buildings and structures, unless otherwise specified. 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.

For the purposes of evaluating the visual compatibility and design standards of exterior fenestration, where voids (windows, doors, and storefronts) in the exterior façade are substantially blocked by interior walls or built-in furniture, these may be considered part of the exterior wall if they are built within three feet of the exterior wall. For example, if an interior wall is built abutting the storefront, that interior wall is impacting the exterior design of the fenestration and may be subject to review by the Historic Board of Review.

Additions to Contributing Resources. *Additions shall comply with the above standards and the following standards:*

Additions shall not be on the primary or front façade of the resource, and shall be located to the rear of the resource or the most inconspicuous façade.

Additions shall be subordinate in mass and height to the resource.

Additions shall not obscure or damage any character-defining features.

Additions to roofs shall not be visible from the front elevation.

An addition shall be sited such that it is clearly an appendage and distinguishable from the contributing building.

Additions shall be reversible with minimal damage to the contributing building.

The ramp is located mainly on the secondary elevation and is designed to be subordinate and visually unobtrusive relative to the primary façade. Does not obscure or damage any character defining features.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Approve the request for an exterior ADA ramp at the Independent Presbyterian Church, as requested, as the proposed design is visually compatible and meets the standards.

MW: CC: RU

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.