



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: Ward Architecture + Preservation, Josh Ward

MPC File No.: 26-001289-COA

Address: 20 West Gaston Street

PIN: 20032 43010

Zoning: D-R

Staff Reviewer: Caitlin Chamberlain

Date: April 8, 2026

NATURE OF REQUEST:

The applicant is requesting approval to install motorized, retractable mesh insect screens on the second and third story side porches located at 20 West Gaston Street.

CONTEXT/SURROUNDING AREA:

20 West Gaston Street was built in 1857 for William Brantley and is a contributing resource within the National Historic Landmark District and the local Savannah Downtown Historic District. It is significant in its location facing Forsyth Park as well as being credited to John S. Norris, a prolific architect in Savannah in the 1840s and 1850s. Some of his other notable Savannah buildings include the Custom House, the Green-Meldrim House and the Mercer-Williams House.

The submittal packet notes that the residence at 20 West Gaston Street “has broad side porches on the second and third floors of the east façade, which is secondary to the primary south façade. The second-floor porch has large square stucco columns and is partially enclosed on its north end. The second-floor railing is made of wood louvers with a chamfered top rail. This porch is distinguishable from the upper porch because of the existing louvered shutters which encompass its entire south facing bay. The third-floor porch, which is not original to the house, has square wood columns



with cap and base trim, its railing made of 1-inch pickets which sit on a thick base with a rounded top rail. This porch's ceiling is almost a foot lower than the porch below."

FINDINGS:

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.

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 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 applicant is proposing the motorized screen system in an effort to best conceal the components, and to be able to retract the screens when not in use. This installation will maintain the historic character of the porches by keeping the mechanical parts installed behind the columns and above the porch bay openings. The aluminum can be painted the same color as the exterior paint on the porch to further conceal it.

As per the applicant: "The motorized screen system is appropriate for this project because it helps preserve the look of the existing open porches by reducing the need for traditional static screen framing members. The housing and tracks can all be mounted behind the existing columns allowing them to be out of sight from the public right-of-way. This system also allows

the screens to be rolled up when not in use. The motorized screen system is easily reversible if future owners choose to remove it.”

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 entrance and/or porch projection. *The relationship of entrances, porch projections, and walkways to buildings or structures shall be visually compatible with the contributing buildings and structures to which they are visually related.*

The inclusion of the screen system will not change the relationship of porch projections to the contributing buildings to which it is visually related.

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 motorized screen system has three components:

- Housing (aluminum box which holds the screen roller; painted to match existing stucco)
- Tracks (aluminum guides for the screen to keep taut as it is lowered and raised; painted to match existing stucco)
- Black mesh screens

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.

Porches, Stoops, Balconies, Porticos, Exterior Stairs and Decks - Alterations to contributing resources.

Front porches shall not be enclosed. Historic side and rear porches may be screened with fine wire mesh, lattice or shutters, provided the porch continues to read as a porch and character-defining features (including but not limited to columns, balustrades, entablature, etc.) are retained and not obscured or damaged. Historic rear porches may also be enclosed with glazing.

The screening will be fine black mesh and will allow the side porches to continue to read as such. The ability to retract them will also ensure that the porches will still read as porches. Character defining features such as the columns will be retained, and their look will not be altered from the perspective of the right of way. The screen housing and tracks could also be removed and reversed in the future without damaging the porches.

Prohibited materials: Fiberglass (including Perma-Cast), vinyl and PVC.

These materials are not being proposed.

Staff Report - Certificate of Appropriateness
MPC File No. 26-001289-COA
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STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Approve the request to install motorized, retractable mesh insect screens on the second and third story side porches located at 20 West Gaston Street as requested because the work is visually compatible and meets the standards.

MW: CC

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.