



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: Better Tomorrow Solar, Gaines Moore
MPC File No.: 26-002947-COA
Address: 23 Montgomery Street
PIN: 20016 03008
Zoning: D-CBD
Staff Reviewer: Alexander Merced
Date: August 12, 2026

NATURE OF REQUEST:

The applicant would like to install 80 solar panels on the roof of 23 Montgomery Street. They have also applied for a special exception due to the potential visibility of the panels from the public right-of-way.

CONTEXT/SURROUNDING AREA:

The building was constructed in 1859 and is a contributing resource within the National Historic Landmark District and the local Savannah Downtown Historic District. It sits on the northwest trust lot facing Franklin Square and is surrounded by mostly contributing buildings around the square and a parking lot behind. It is home to the First African Baptist Church.

FINDINGS:

The following standards from the Sec 3.12 Special Exceptions apply:

Special Exceptions.

Review by Savannah Downtown Historic District Board of Review. Special Exceptions (as listed below) for the Savannah Downtown Historic Overlay District shall be considered by the Savannah Downtown Historic Board of Review.

Applicable Special Exceptions.

To increase the maximum building footprint where the footprint is limited in Article 5 or Secs. 8.1-8.8.

To adjust Preservation and Design Standards for local historic districts as follows:

Secs. 7.8.8, 7.9.8, and 7.11.8 Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Rehabilitation.

Secs. 7.8.10, 7.9.10, and 7.11.10 Design Standards.

To adjust side, front, and rear yard setback requirements where limited in Article 5.0 Base Zoning Districts as follows:

Up to a one (1) foot adjustment may be approved by the Planning Director in all local historic districts.

More than one (1) foot up to a two (2) foot adjustment may be approved by the Historic Preservation Commission.

Review Criteria for Special Exceptions. When reviewing a special exception request, a finding shall be made by the Savannah Downtown Historic District Board of Review for each of the criteria listed below.

Whether the use for which the special exception is being considered would be located, operated and maintained in a manner in conformance with the goals, policies, and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan and the provisions of this Ordinance.

Whether the special exception would not be detrimental to the public interest, health, safety, welfare, function, and appearance of the adjacent uses or general vicinity.

One of the goals of the Comprehensive Plan is to expand clean and renewable energy throughout Chatham County, with specific focus on streamlining permitting for rooftop solar installations. The proposed solar panels will be minimally visible and will have no negative impacts on the public or any surrounding structures. The above criteria are met.

Additional Conditions, Restrictions and Safeguards. The Savannah Downtown Historic District Board of Review may include conditions, restrictions or limitations as part of the approval in order to protect public health, safety, and welfare. When a special exception is approved with conditions, those conditions shall run with the land and shall be binding on the original applicant as well as any successor.

Staff does not recommend any additional conditions.

Time Limitations for Approved Special Conditions. Approval of a special exception pursuant to the provisions of this Ordinance shall become null and void unless the following is completed in the time period specified:

For any special exception that would require a building permit, the related building permit shall have been issued and have remained continuously valid thereafter within two (2) years from the date the special exception was granted.

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

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.*

There will be no alterations or removal of anything from the building and the historic character will remain unchanged. The standard is met.

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 solar panels will not damage any historic materials on the building. The standard is met.

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 solar panels can always be removed in the future. The standard is met.

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.*

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.*

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

The solar panels will not change the slope of the roof and will be very minimally visible from the street, maintaining visual compatibility with surrounding contributing resources. The above criteria are met.

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.

Roofs, Contributing Resources.

Roofs, Configuration.

Original roof configuration shall be maintained.

The roof configuration will remain unchanged. The standard is met.

Mechanical Equipment and Refuse. *Mechanical equipment and refuse shall comply with Sec. 9.5.3, Screening of Service Areas, except as provided below.*

Electrical vaults, meter boxes, communications devices, and similar equipment shall be located on the secondary and/or rear façades and shall be minimally visible from view.

The applicant states that the control equipment will go either next to the existing utility meter or on the back of the building where there is a parking lot. Either location is acceptable and the standard is met.

Roof mounted equipment and HVAC units shall be screened from view from the public right-of-way.

Alternative energy source devices may be permitted on new construction and non-contributing resources. Such devices may be permitted on contributing resources provided they are not visible from a street fronting elevation and do not damage or obscure any character-defining features.

The building is tall enough and the roof pitch is low enough to make it very difficult to see the solar panels once they are installed. The only possible view that staff can tell would be from behind the building on MLK Boulevard, and even that would be a very minimal view. This is why the applicant has applied for the special exception.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Approve the special exception request to install solar panels on the roof of 23 Montgomery Street as requested because it meets the criteria for special exceptions and is otherwise visually compatible.

MW: CC: APM

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.