



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

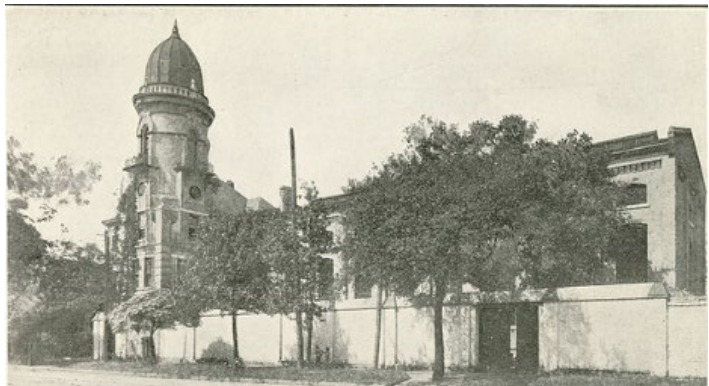
Petitioner: Brad Grant, SCAD
MPC File No.: 25-006052-COA
Address: 235 Habersham Street
PIN: 20015 16003
Zoning: D-R
Staff Reviewer: Jodie Brown, AICP
Date: January 14, 2026

NATURE OF REQUEST:

The applicant is proposing to add a means of access via an interior walkway, an existing elevator and proposed egress stairs to existing inaccessible area.

CONTEXT/SURROUNDING AREA:

Located in the Crawford Ward at the northwest corner of Habersham Street and Perry Lane, the subject building was constructed in 1887 as Chatham County Jail. A fire in 1898 destroyed the original Byzantine dome which was reconstructed in the Moorish Revival style. In 1957, the building was renovated by Bergen and Bergen Architects. The facility was used as the county jail until 1978 when the jail functions were moved to a new location. It is unclear when the roof and interior of the portion housing the cells was gutted. In 1986, the building was donated to SCAD which uses the indoor/outdoor space for events and performances.



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The subject building is listed as a contributing resource within the National Historic Landmark District and the local Savannah Downtown Historic District.

FINDINGS:

The following standards from §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 applicant is proposing to construct exterior stairs and access points at the southwest corner of the building, tucked into an alcove with limited visibility. The façade is secondary, and no character-defining features will be impacted by the introduction of new elements. Removal of historic materials will be limited to two new openings at each level, one opening at the elevator bay and one opening on the façade of the cell block building. The proposed work is consistent with Standard 2.

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.*

As noted, the proposed alterations will be located at the southwest corner with limited visibility. No distinctive or special techniques or craftsmanship features will be impacted by the proposed work. The proposed work is consistent with Standard 5.

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 applicant proposes to construct metal exterior stairs with black anodized aluminum louvers to cover the landings and a small awning roof. At each landing, there will be an opening to access the elevator and one to access proposed walkways on the interior of the shell. The doorways would be doorless and only at the bottom of the stairs would be metal mesh gate. The proposed work is compatible with the existing building and will not cause significant damage to its features and finishes. The work is compatible with Standard 9.

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 proposed work will be inconspicuous and reversible. The work is consistent with Standard 10.

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 proposed door openings will be evenly spaced on the wall plan replicating the solid to void relationship found on the historic portion of the building. The proposed work will be consistent with this criterion.

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 new exterior stair will painted black metal, with a painted aluminum louver, and a metal awning. The walkways will also be metal and enclosed with clear tempered glass. The rails will be topped with a metal rail. The metal rails and stairs are consistent with metal used on the historic portion of the building. The glass rail is modern in appearance but allows the space to be more open on the interior and recedes in the background. Glass enclosures will also be added to the cells to make them inaccessible from the walkways. The interior work is not reviewed by staff or the HDBR. The proposed work is consistent with this criterion.

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.

Entrances and Doors, Alterations to contributing resources.

Doors shall be repaired with in-kind materials rather than replaced, provided however, if the degree of degradation does not allow repair, the degradation of the door shall be photographically documented and verified by the Planning Director and the new door shall be of the same materials and configuration as the original.

If the original door material and/or configuration is unknown, or if a new door is proposed in an unoriginal opening, the new door material and configuration shall be based on historic context.

The applicant does not propose to alter any existing historic doors. They are proposing to open the walls at each level. The openings on the south elevation are new and would allow access to the proposed walkways on the interior of the gutted cellblock. The openings on the west façade would allow access to the extant elevator. These new openings would not have doors in them. Security would be provided via a metal gate on the stairs. The proposed openings are located at the rear of the building in an alcove with limited visibility. No character-defining features or surfaces would be impacted by the introduction of the openings. The proposed work is consistent with this historic district design standard.

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 stair addition will be located at the rear of the building in an alcove with limited visibility. The stair will be subordinate to the height and mass of the historic structure, and it will not damage any character-defining features. The use of metal for the stairs and their contemporary design will clearly indicate that they are a new appendage and will not create a false sense of history. The proposed addition is easily reversible with minimal damage. The proposed work is consistent with the historic district design standards.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

APPROVE construction of an exterior stair and add six door openings, three (3) on the south façade and three (3) on the west façade, two (2) at each level, at the southwest corner of the property at 235 Habersham Street **AS REQUESTED** because the work is visually compatible and meets the standards.

MW: CC: JB

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.