



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: James Hundsrucker
MPC File No.: 26-001847-COA
Address: 206 East Gwinnett
PIN: 20044 06006
Zoning: D-R
Staff Reviewer: Caitlin Chamberlain
Date: May 13, 2026

NATURE OF REQUEST:

The applicant is requesting approval to repair the fire escape stairs on the side of the building located at 206 East Gwinnett Street.

CONTEXT/SURROUNDING AREA:

206 East Gwinnett Street was built in 1883 and is a contributing resource within the National Historic Landmark District and the local Savannah Downtown Historic District. The house sits on a block of Gwinnett Street consisting entirely of other contributing historic houses in similar styles.

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.*

The standard is met. The work seeks to restore the fire escape staircase as it was, where it was. This work will not interfere with other character defining features of the house.

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.*

There are no conjectural features being proposed. The applicant documented the materials of the staircase and provided drawings to show it is going to be placed right back where it was. There is one difference proposed, which instead of leaving the top and bottom rails open, is to install marine grade plywood panels between to help prevent items from dropping on the narrow staircase and into the neighbors' yard, as the stair runs directly on the property line.

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.*

The standard is met.

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.*

This is a case where severe wood rot caused a level of deterioration that would not allow for total repairing rather than replacing. As the applicant stated, *“in the early 2020s, the stringers, treads, and risers were removed to allow for necessary repairs to the house prior to repainting. Rot had developed in the siding and lower band where one stringer ran against the house. The treads and risers were disposed of due to rot and damage sustained during removal. The stringers were similarly compromised, with one exhibiting deterioration from a repair made decades earlier.”*

Further, the two posts supporting the landing were out of plumb by 1 5/8” and 2 1/8” without adequate bracing and set on footings that were irregular in shape and height above grade. The repair work is consistent with the standards and will match the old in design, color, texture and wood materials.

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 rebuilding of the staircase will remain visually compatible as it had been before the repair work was necessary. It is appropriate for the house as well as within the context of the many surrounding contributing resources in the vicinity.

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 standard is met. This block is composed mainly of wood-frame houses similar to 206 East Gwinnett Street. The applicant will replace stringers, treads, and risers with pressure treated wood, sealed with a paintable water repellent, primed with oil-based primer, and finished with two coats of acrylic paint to match the existing.

The handrail and bottom rail will be milled from Honduran mahogany, and a solid ¾" marine grade plywood panel will be fitted between the rails as a subordinate infill element.

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.

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

If the original porch material and/or configuration is unknown, the new porch material and configuration shall be based on historic context.

The fire escape stairs, along with the top landing and lattice work will be partially repaired in terms of the lattice work and a repurposing of the uneven posts elsewhere on the property. There were many elements of the staircase though, that were rotted and not able to be repaired. The replacement material of painted wood is appropriate. Staff was invited to a site visit by the applicant where they observed the current condition of the stairs and can confirm that the current condition is requiring of many replacement materials that are befitting of the 1920s era fire escape.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Approve the proposed restoration of the fire escape stairs on the property located at 206 East Gwinnett 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.