SAVANNAH HISTORIC DISTRICT

BOARD OF REVIEW

REQUEST FOR CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS

Petitioner:	**Robert Johns**
MPC File No.:	**26-005197-COA**
Address:	**220 Whitaker Street**
PIN:	**20015 13013**
Zoning:	**D-CBD**
Staff Reviewer:	**Caitlin Chamberlain**
Date:	**November 10, 2026**

NATURE OF REQUEST:
The applicant is requesting approval for rehabilitation and alterations of the building located at 220 Whitaker Street. The scope of work includes:

- Restoration of trim, panels, siding, and doors on front façade
- Brick repointing in areas where needed
- Replacement of non-historic light fixtures
- Externally illuminated projecting sign installed on the corner of the front elevation closest to Hull Street.

CONTEXT/SURROUNDING AREA:

220 Whitaker Street was built in 1910 and is a contributing resource within the National Historic Landmark District and the local Savannah Downtown Historic District. The brick one-story building is situated on the corner of Whitaker and Hull Streets and is part of the Veritas Academy.

The Ward Notebook for the Brown Ward does not include an entry for this address, but on page 2, there are notes about several properties in the ward. 210-220 Whitaker Street are listed together, and it is noted that 210 Whitaker Street was built in 1903 and likely replaced an older building, whereas 220 Whitaker Street was noted to be "new" in 1962. Both addresses are listed as the west portion of lot 26, with the eastern half of lot 26 being 22 West Hull Street, built in 1903. The building listed as 210 Whitaker Street was demolished in 2008, and the current structure was built by 2012.

The storefront has been altered. An undated photograph from the MPC archives shows that sometime in the late 20th century, there were three entrances along the front, compared to the one center entrance seen presently. The older photo is on the left and the current configuration is seen

on the right, at the top of the next page. The current configuration has been in place since at least 2007, per the Google Street view images.





FINDINGS:

The following standards from the HDBR Repointing Policy apply:

> ***Historic District Board of Review Repointing Policy.*** *In an effort to meet the preservation standards and guidelines, the Historic District Board of Review adopted the following procedures with regard to repointing:*
>
> *Repointing of a historic building has the potential to alter the visual character of a structure in relationship with the neighboring contributing buildings, particularly when the structure to be repointed is part of a block or row of buildings. Additionally, the use of an incorrect mortar mix has the potential to cause permanent damage to buildings, causing the long-term erosion of soft paste brick. The Secretary of the Interior's Standard's for Rehabilitation and Preservation Brief 2: Repointing Mortar Joints in Historic Masonry Buildings are explicit concerning the manner, methods, and materials that are appropriate for the repointing of historic masonry and as such these Standards are incorporated into the historic district section of the city zoning ordinance.*

Staff recommends that the applicant provides photographs and further details about the areas of brick proposed to be repointed, as well as the proposed mortar mix.

> *A four-foot by four-foot test patch of the proposed repointing as it will appear finished (including final finish pointing style and relationship to the brick face) shall be installed in an inconspicuous location on the building.*

If it has been determined that a large area of the wall will need repointing, then staff recommends that the applicant adheres to the above standard.

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 building has undergone various alterations, but the proposed rehabilitation work will strive to maintain the existing historic character. The scope of work includes repainting the brick wall on the side elevation. Typically, staff would not support painting historic brick but in a case where it has already been painted it may be permitted.

> > ***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.*

Conjectural features are not proposed. Items such as modern lighting and signage will not give this impression.

> > ***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 wood panels on the front façade appear in older photos, though that does not provide photographic confirmation that they are original to the building. They appear to have remained unchanged and thus the proposed inscription directly into the paneling is a concern. Staff recommends that other options are explored such that could be reversed without damaging the panels.

> > ***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.*

The applicant proposes only to replace materials that have deteriorated beyond repair.

> ***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.*

The standard is met. Proposed materials include:

- Sherwin Williams paint colors as outlined on Page 10 of the submittal packet
- Bevolo light fixtures in "Williamsburg" in copper
- Nuwatt bronze bullet light for projecting sign

Signs. *Signs, where permitted, shall be visually compatible with contributing buildings and structures to which they are visually related.*

The standard is met, per the drawings.

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.

Exterior walls, Alterations to contributing resources.

Exterior Walls, Materials.

Exterior walls shall be repaired with in-kind materials 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 replacement materials and configuration shall be of the same materials and configuration as the original wall.

Any repairs to the exterior wall materials will be in-kind replacements rather than full-scale replacement of everything.

Exterior Walls, Finishes and Treatments.

Color changes to contributing resources shall be historically appropriate.

The colors proposed are similar to what is existing and are historically appropriate.

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 confirmed that the plan is to refurbish the existing doors. Though they are not original to the site, they are appropriate, and their restoration is appropriate.

Commercial Storefronts, Alterations to contributing resources.

Original storefronts 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 storefront shall be of the same materials and configuration as the original.

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

The existing storefront is not original, based on older photos. Even still, no major changes are proposed, just rehabilitation where needed and repainting.

Lighting. *In addition to the requirements set forth in Sec. 9.8, Lighting, the following standards apply:*

Configuration: Light fixtures shall be compatible with the scale of the subject property and with the character of the district.

Materials: Light fixtures shall be constructed of metal and/or glass.

Source Type: White light source only.

The lighting standards are met.

The following standards from the Sec. 9.9.17 - Special Sign Districts apply:

Special Sign Districts. *In Addition to the requirements of Sec. 9.9.1 through 9.9.13, signs in the following special sign districts shall comply with the provisions of this Section, provided that where such provisions are in conflict with any requirements of Sec. 9.9.1 through 9.9.13, the requirements of this section shall prevail.*

Historic Special Sign District Boundaries.

Savannah Downtown Historic Sign District. *The Savannah Downtown Historic Sign District shall include any area location within the Savannah Downtown Historic*

Overlay District, with the exception of City Market, Broughton Street, Factors Walk, and Plant Riverside Sign Districts.

Special Sign Standards for the Savannah Downtown Historic, City Market, Broughton Street, Factors Walk and Neighborhood Sign Districts.

Sign Illumination.

Signs shall not be illuminated unless specifically indicated below.

Where illumination is permitted, reverse silhouette or "cut-out" letters are encouraged to reduce glare where back lighting is applied.

The projecting sign is proposed to have exterior illumination.

Ground, Projecting and Wall Signs.

Savannah Downtown Historic and City Market Sign Districts.

Ground, Projecting and Wall Signs. Only one (1) ground, projecting or wall sign shall be permitted for each business establishment. Where a business establishment fronts on more than one (1) street or pedestrian walkway providing public access to the establishment, one (1) wall or projecting sign for each frontage providing public access shall be permitted.

One projecting and one wall sign are proposed. Clarification is needed regarding the side door entrance on Hull Street will provide public access. In this case, it may be possible to maintain the proposed projecting and wall sign. However, the placement of the projecting sign, being two-sided, would serve the purpose of wayfinding from the Whitaker Street and Hull Street elevations.

No portion of a sign shall be erected within two (2) feet of a curb line.

The standard is met.

The aggregate sign area shall not exceed a size of more than one (1) square foot of sign area per linear foot of lot frontage along a given street or shall meet the following size requirements, whichever is the most restrictive:

D-C, D-CBD, D-X, I-L, I-LT Zoning Districts:

40 sq. ft.: Wall sign (max)

30 sq. ft.: Ground or Projecting Sign (max)

6 ft.: Projecting Sign Distance from Wall or Ground Sign Width (max)

The standards are not met. The proposed projecting sign is 35 square feet; thus, it should be scaled down to meet the standard. The distance from the wall is 7 feet, whereas the maximum is 6 feet.

In addition to the above maximum sign size requirements for buildings with over 75 feet of lot frontage, one (1) additional square foot of wall sign area shall be allowed for every two (2) linear feet of building frontage within the D-CBD, D-C and D-X districts.

It does not seem likely that the building frontage exceeds 75 feet.

> *Wall and projecting signs shall be erected only on the signable area of the structure and shall not project over the roofline or parapet wall elevation of the structure.*

The standard is met.

> *Wall signs shall be mounted flat to a wall of the façade of the building.*

The total square footage of the engraved wall sign was not provided but it does not appear to exceed 40 square feet. There are concerns more with the direct engraving into the wood panel and if it is permissible to have two signs, staff recommends exploring options such as an engraved panel that could be installed over the existing to avoid permanently altering the building.

> *No portion of a projecting sign shall be less than eight (8) feet above the pedestrian walkway.*

The projecting sign would be 8 feet above the sidewalk. An encroachment permit would likely be needed.

> *Ground, projecting and wall signs in D-C, D-CBD, D-X, I-L, and I-LT districts may be illuminated in accordance with Sec. 9.9.6 and 9.9.17.g.i.*

The projecting sign is proposed to be externally downlit with one bullet light above it. The standard is met.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Approve the proposed rehabilitation and alterations project for 220 Whitaker Street with the following conditions to be reviewed by staff prior to starting the project, because the work is otherwise visually compatible and meets the standards:

1. **Provide further information about the areas where mortar repointing is needed to include photographs of areas in need, the proposed mortar mix, and if the area is large enough to warrant, to adhere to the policy regarding a 4' x 4' test area.**
2. **Clarify whether the side doors facing Hull Street will provide public access, which would allow for a wall and a projecting sign. If so, provide square footage of the sign and consider alternatives that would not include engraving directly into the wood on the building.**
3. **Scale down the size of the projecting sign to meet the 30 square foot maximum and to project no more than six feet from the wall.**

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.