



SAVANNAH HISTORIC DISTRICT
BOARD OF REVIEW

REQUEST FOR CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS

Petitioner: AAA Sign, Bobbie Stephens

MPC File No.: 26-003248-COA

Address: 102 West Bay Street

PIN: 20004 07001

Zoning: D-W

Staff Reviewer: Caitlin Chamberlain

Date: **October 14, 2026**

NATURE OF REQUEST:

The applicant is requesting approval to install a replacement sign for a hotel rebranding at 102 West Bay Street. This is for a rebranding of the hotel from the Bohemian to Hotel Orille. The sign request also includes a request for three variances to provide relief from the current standards which would not allow for the same size, location, and illumination compared to the Bohemian Hotel sign.

There is currently a temporary sign face on the old Bohemian Hotel sign cabinet.

The three requested variances are as follows:

1. *Except for Factors Walk, below the Bay Street level, wall signs shall be permitted one (1) square foot of sign area per linear foot of building frontage occupied by each ground level principal use up to a maximum sign area of 30 square feet.* [9.9.17.3.c.iv]
2. *Such signs may be externally illuminated in accordance with Sec. 9.9.6 and 9.9.17.g.i.* [9.9.17.3.a.vi]
3. *A projecting or wall sign shall be located upon the signable area of the building.* [9.9.17.3.a.ii]

CONTEXT/SURROUNDING AREA:

102 West Bay Street is a non-contributing resource within the National Historic Landmark District and the local Savannah Downtown Historic District, specifically on the west end of Upper Factors Walk. It is a newer building that initially opened as the Bohemian Hotel in 2009.

PROJECT HISTORY:

This project was first presented at the August 12, 2026, Historic District Board of Review Meeting where the original scope of work included the sign presented currently, as well as the removal of two illuminated 'Kessler' signs and a projecting sign on the River Street sign. These were approved at the last meeting, but the issue with the illuminated wall sign was that the presented sign could not be approved without variances.

The HDBR decision from the August meeting was as follows:

The Savannah Historic District Board of Review does hereby continue the request to install one new internally illuminated wall sign on the Bay Street elevation of the hotel located at 102 West Bay Street, to the September 9, 2026, Historic District Board of Review Meeting to allow the applicant time to address the following:

- 1. Change the internal illumination to external illumination to meet the ordinance or apply for a variance to potentially maintain the internal illumination.*
- 2. Scale down the sign to meet the 30 square foot maximum.*

The petitioner has chosen to pursue three variances to maintain the internal illumination, to have a larger sized sign than the 30 square foot maximum, and to maintain the location of the new sign in the same location on the Bay Street building frontage as the Bohemian sign.

AND

Approve the request to remove the 'Kessler' signs and associated repairs, and replacement of the externally illuminated projecting sign on the River Street elevation with the following condition to be reviewed and approved by staff for the final design, because it is otherwise visually compatible and meets the standards:

- 1. Select an approved material for the sign to either be wood or a material similar in texture or appearance to wood.*

The applicant is working on the redesign to use a wood grain background in order to make the sign compliant. There is a temporary sign decal in place as the hotel has already rebranded.

FINDINGS:

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

***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.*

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

The materials of the signs are standard for signage including aluminum, acrylic lettering, painted SW 6879 ‘Grenadine’ which is a pink shade. This color is like the Bohemian Hotel sign and would maintain a balance from the old to the new signage in color with no drastic change.

The rectangular shape of the sign is typical for a larger, newer hotel building and is compatible within the area. The larger size of the sign is still appropriate to the size of the building façade and does not overpower the Factors Walk area.

The applicant provided information about the square footage of the hotel next door, the Cotton Sail, whose wall sign is 70 square feet and the nearby Hyatt Regency sign which is 75 square feet. In terms of the visual compatibility of the Orielle sign’s size, it would not be a detriment to the historic integrity of the surrounding contributing buildings.

Historic Special Sign District Boundaries.

Factors Walk Sign District. *The Factors Walk Sign District shall include any area located within the Factors Walk Character Area of the Savannah Downtown Historic Overlay District. This area is divided into two (2) sectors:*

Sector “A” is that area located between Bay Street and the building line or extension thereof of the structures situated along Factors Walk and above a line equal to the ground elevation of the centerline of Bay Street

The Bay Street side of the building is part of Sector A.

Signs Allowed in Historic Special Sign Districts. *Sign types in historic special sign districts shall be allowed in accordance with the following table. Regardless of sign type, with the exception of decorative pole signs and signs painted on walls, non-illuminated signs that are three (3) square feet in size or less shall be permitted without a sign permit (COA).*

SEC. 15-10-20 (L. 2013) / ARTICLE 20-0 (OFFICIAL SITE STATUTES) / SEC. 20-2 (SIGNS) / 20-2.1 / SPECIAL SIGN DISTRICTS

Table 9.9-5 Signs Allowed in Historic Special Sign Districts

Sign Type	Savannah Downtown Historic and City Market	Broughton Street	Factors Walk	Neighborhood	Plant Riverside
✓ = Sign Type Allowed * = Sign Type Allowed for Nonresidential Uses Only -- = Sign Type Not Allowed COA = Certificate of Appropriateness Required					
Temporary Sign Not Requiring a Permit	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Permit Required					
Building Signs					
Incidental Sign	✓ COA	✓ COA	✓ COA	✓ COA	✓ COA
Canopy or Awning Sign	* COA	* COA	* COA	* COA	✓ COA
Under-Canopy or Under-Awning Sign	* COA	* COA	* COA	* COA	✓ COA
Above-Canopy or Above-Awning Sign	* COA	* COA	* COA	* COA	✓ COA
Hanging Sign	* COA	* COA	* COA	* COA	✓ COA
Marquee Sign	* COA Downtown Historic District Only	* COA	--	--	--
Projecting Sign	* COA	* COA	* COA	* COA	✓ COA
Signs Painted on Walls	* COA	* COA	* COA	* COA	✓ COA
Window Sign [1]	*	*	*	*	✓ COA
Wall Sign [1]	* COA	* COA	* COA	* COA	✓ COA

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.

Wall signs are allowed to be illuminated, but in the Factor's Walk District, they are only permitted as externally illuminated, hence the variance request to maintain the internal illumination like the previous sign had.

Restrictions on Materials.

Signs using reflective paint, lettering or graphics; and

Paper, cardboard and dry erase boards shall not be used as materials for signs.

None of the above prohibited materials are proposed.

Ground, Projecting and Wall Signs.

Factors Walk Sign District.

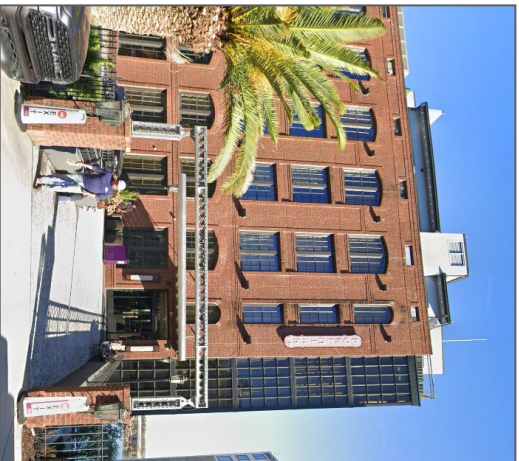
Projecting Signs and Wall Signs.

Only one (1) 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) projecting or wall sign for each frontage providing public access shall be permitted.

This is a large hotel with multiple frontages and public access points, from both the Bay Street and River Street elevations. Having a wall sign on one elevation, and a projecting sign on another elevation is appropriate and meets the standard in this case.

A projecting or wall sign shall be located upon the signable area of the building.

The standard is not met, per the ordinance. The proposed placement of the sign would not be within the signable area on the Bay Street façade based on the way “signable area” is defined in the ordinance:



“That area of the façade of a building up to the roofline, free of windows and doors or major architectural detail, to which a sign may be attached or erected; provided, however, that the ‘signable area’ shall be further restricted to the horizontal area along the building façade below any upper story windows or at the top of the façade above any window when a principal use structure is greater than one story in height.”

As seen in the image to the left, this would not be possible to achieve on this building, nor was the Bohemian Hotel sign able to meet the standard. The variance request for this is reasonable and the only solution to maintain a sign in this area.

Wall signs shall not extend to within one (1) foot of the edge of the building, nor shall it project out from the building façade more than 15 inches.

The standard is met.

Such signs may be externally illuminated in accordance with Sec. 9.9.6 and 9.9.17.g.i.

The standard is not met, thus the variance request. The proposed illumination would be similar to what was seen on the Bohemian Hotel sign, with individually lit letters on an opaque background.

Maximum Sign Area.

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The maximum sign area shall not exceed the following:

Except for Factors Walk, below the Bay Street level, wall signs shall be permitted one (1) square foot of sign area per linear foot of building frontage occupied by each ground level principal use up to a maximum of 30 square feet.

While the building frontage on the Bay Street elevation would allow for the 64 square feet of signage, the standard notes that the max is 30 square feet regardless.

VARIANCE CRITERIA

The following standards from the Sec 3.21.10 Variance Criteria apply:

Variance Criteria.

Criteria for Approval. *The responsible review authority shall make a finding that the variance criteria does comply or does not comply with each individual criterion provided below. The Zoning Board of Appeals shall consider the criteria below when determining whether a variance shall be provided:*

As noted previously, the three requested variances include:

1. *Except for Factors Walk, below the Bay Street level, wall signs shall be permitted one (1) square foot of sign area per linear foot of building frontage occupied by each ground level principal use up to a maximum sign area of 30 square feet.* [9.9.17.3.c.iv]

To allow a 64 square foot sign where the limit for Factor's Walk is 30 square feet.

2. *Such signs may be externally illuminated in accordance with Sec. 9.9.6 and 9.9.17.g.i.* [9.9.17.3.a.vi]

To allow for internal illumination.

3. *A projecting or wall sign shall be located upon the signable area of the building.* [9.9.17.3.a.ii]

To allow for placement of the sign on the side of the wall in the same location as the Bohemian sign.

General Consistency. The variance shall be consistent with the intent of this Ordinance and the Comprehensive Plan and shall not be injurious to the neighborhood or otherwise detrimental to the public health, safety, or welfare.

The standard is met. The variances are not detrimental to the public health, safety, or welfare. It aligns with the Comprehensive Plan's quality of life goals such as tourism, the hospitality industry, and economic development.

Special Conditions.

Special conditions and/or circumstances exist which are peculiar to the land, buildings or structures involved and which are not applicable to other lands, buildings or structures in the same zoning district.

The special conditions and/or circumstances do not result from the actions of the applicant.

With regard to the structure, the building frontage could typically allow for the ability to exceed the 30 square foot wall sign limit in other D-W locations that are not part of Factor's Walk. The ordinance definition of "signable area" is not possible to work within because the building elevation does not have the space available in a way that satisfies that condition.

Internally illuminated signs are found on surrounding hotels along the Factor's Walk sign district.

The condition of the building are not a result of actions of the applicant; they are existing conditions.

The special conditions and/or circumstances are not purely financial in nature so as to allow the applicant to use the land, buildings or structures involved more profitably or to save money.

While any business establishment has a financial interest, the proposed sign variances, if granted, are not purely financial in nature but also as a wayfinding sign for the building.

Literal Interpretation. Literal interpretation of the provisions of the regulations would deprive the applicant of rights commonly enjoyed by other properties in the same zoning district under the terms of the Ordinance and would result in unreasonable hardship on the applicant.

This is shown to be the case when the Cotton Sail Hotel next door to this building has a 70 square foot sign, and the Hyatt Regency has a 75 square foot sign.

Minimum Variance. The variance, if granted, shall be the minimum variance necessary to make possible the reasonable use of land, buildings, or structures.

The standard is met. The signage is not possible without the variance for the signable area under the current sign standards. The internal illumination request is not asking for more than what had already been there previously, and the size is still within reason of the Bay Street building frontage and not unlike its hotel neighbors with larger signs.

Special Privilege Not Granted. The variance shall not confer on the applicant's property any special privilege that is denied by this Ordinance to other lands, buildings or structures in the same zoning district.

The variance would not confer special privilege, as is seen by the larger hotel signs directly adjacent to the Orielle, with the Orielle sign being smaller than those it is visually related to.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Approve the request to install one (1) internally illuminated wall sign, along with the three requested variances from the standards that read:

1. *Except for Factors Walk, below the Bay Street level, wall signs shall be permitted one (1) square foot of sign area per linear foot of building frontage occupied by each ground level principal use up to a maximum sign area of 30 square feet.* [9.17.3.c.iv]

To allow a 64 square foot sign where the limit for Factor's Walk is 30 square feet;

2. *Such signs may be externally illuminated in accordance with Sec. 9.9.6 and 9.9.17.g.i.* [9.17.3.a.vi]

To allow for internal illumination;

3. *A projecting or wall sign shall be located upon the signable area of the building.* [9.17.3.a.ii]

To allow for placement of the sign on the side of the wall in the same location as the Bohemian sign;

because the design standards and the variance criteria are met.

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.