



Honorable Commissioners,

Pending before the Metropolitan Planning Commission is a petition to extend the Hotel Overlay to a substantial new boundary. While we do not object to the principle of an expansion, we are not able to support the petition in its current form.

The Hotel Overlay as it exists was created by a process that should be celebrated by our community as the model for collaboration and inclusion. That process included numerous conversations among residents, local businesses, impacted organizations, and hoteliers. The Tourism Leadership Council and the Savannah Area Chamber of Commerce were active supporters of the overlay as it presently exists, and our organizations stand ready to participate once again.

Collaboration and inclusion should be the foundation of this petition—and it still can be with input from all stakeholders. Yet, that process which has worked so well in the Historic District, and has stood the test of time and litigation, was not followed. The result is what we have today: a disjointed process without enough input from important stakeholder groups.

The residents and businesses that our organizations represent will be impacted by an expansion, just as the residents will be who support the overlay as proposed. In April 2021, a brief meeting was hosted by the City and a general conversation was held to gauge our organizations' interest in entertaining an expansion of the Hotel Overlay. The consensus from our perspective was that we were open to the discussion but would need to understand the details of the proposal. We discussed following the process that was followed last time and the great results it provided. That was the last time we heard anything of the proposal until the petition was recently filed—more than a year later. If a process was followed, it didn't include key stakeholders that we represent.

As is so often the case, details are important. To create the Hotel Overlay, representatives from business organizations, developers, community members, neighborhood associations, and members of the preservation community worked together in good faith for months to see to every possible detail we could. This petition does not reflect or boast a similar "whole of community" collaboration.

It is our collective position that this petition is premature. We respectfully request the petition be either denied or continued until such time that the tested and proven process that created the existing Hotel Overlay can be implemented for this attempted amendment.