



C H A T H A M C O U N T Y - S A V A N N A H
METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION

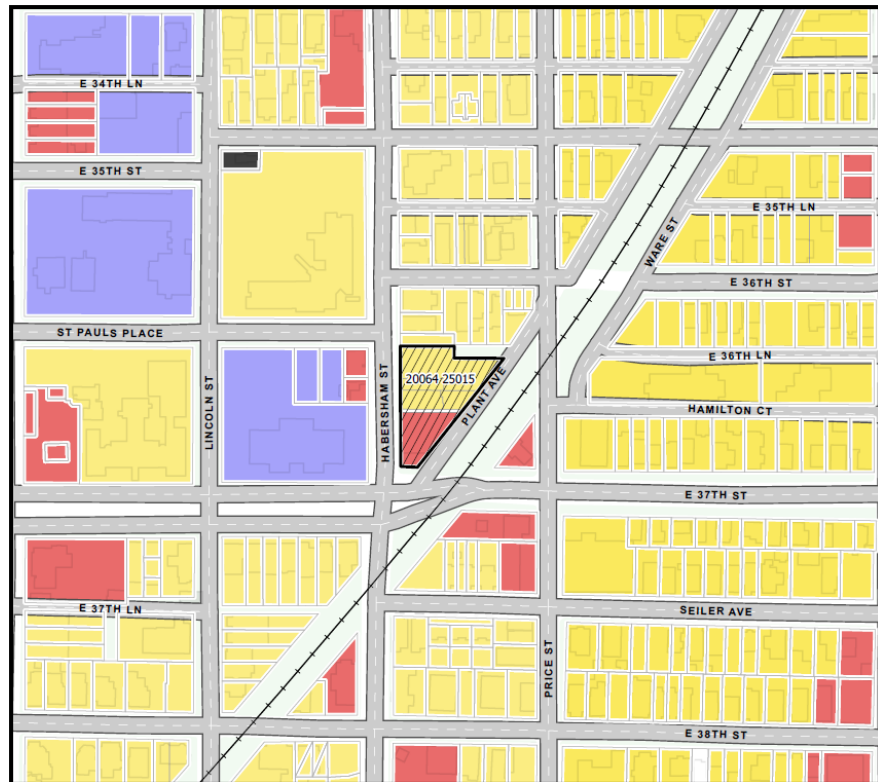
Planning the Future - Respecting the Past

To: The Metropolitan Planning Commission
Through: Melanie Wilson, Executive Director and CEO
From: DeAndrae Spradley, Senior Planner
Date: August 25, 2026
Subject: Special Use Permit Request
Petitioner: Key Heritage, Agent for Maizai, LLC. (Agent - Ellen Harris, Agent for Ethos Preservation)
Property Owner: Heath Shelton, Agent for The 912 Savannah, LLC.
Parcel ID No: 20064 25015
MPC File No: 26-003977-ZA
Address: 2018 Habersham Street, Unit C-1
Commissioner: Malinda Scott Hodge
Alderman: District 2 – Detric Leggett

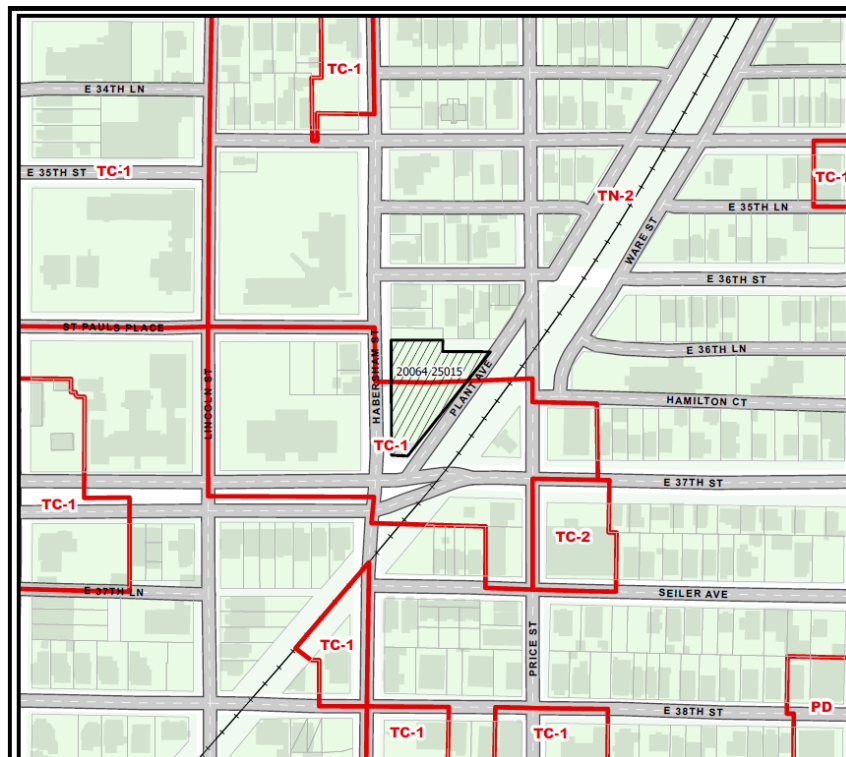
REQUEST: The Petitioner is requesting for approval of a Special Use Permit (SUP) located at 2018 Habersham Street, Unit C-1. The Petitioner is requesting a SUP to allow for a Hall, Banquet, or Reception Use in the Traditional Commercial 1 (TC-1) Zoning District. The Petitioner is also requesting a SUP to allow Retail Consumption Dealer (on premise consumption of alcohol) Use to the property with a separate application.



Aerial View of Property



Future Land Use Map of Property



Zoning Map of Property



Front of Building



Rear of Property

BACKGROUND: The overall property is 0.54 acres; however, the Petitioner will only be utilizing 1,334 sq. ft. of commercial space on the property. The property is within the Traditional Commercial Future Land Use category and the Traditional Commercial (TC-1) Zoning District.

The Petitioner plans to operate a 1,334 square feet restaurant on the property and operate Monday through Saturday from 7:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. and use the same space as a private event venue (hall, banquet, or reception use – private event venue) for catered events, generally from 3:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. on select evenings by reservation only.

The property is located within the Streetcar Historic District at the southwest corner of East 37th Street and Habersham Street and within the Thomas Square/Streetcar neighborhood. The property is part of a newly developed mixed-use commercial complex identified as, "The 912."

1. Existing Development Pattern

The surrounding area is characterized by a traditional urban development pattern consisting of a mixture of commercial and residential uses. The land uses and zoning districts surrounding the property are shown in the table below:

Location	Land Use	Existing Zoning
North	Commercial and Mixed-Use Development along E. 37th Street	Traditional Commercial (TC-1)
South	Commercial and Residential Uses	Traditional Commercial
East	Commercial and Residential Uses along Habersham Street	Traditional Commercial (TC-1)
West	Residential and Commercial Uses	Traditional Commercial

The surrounding neighborhood exhibits the characteristics intended by the TC-1 Zoning District, including pedestrian-oriented development, walkability, limited parking fields, and neighborhood-scale commercial establishments.

In 2019, the property received a zoning amendment from the Traditional Neighborhood-2 (TN-2) Zoning District to the TC-1 Zoning District. In 2025, the property was presented before the City of Savannah's Historic Preservation Commission and received a Certificate of Appropriateness to change the exterior wall material. The buildings at the Petitioner's property are newly constructed, non-contributing resources within the Thomas Square-Streetcar National Register Historic District and the local Streetcar Historic District.

The proposed coffee shop and gluten-free café is appropriately classified as a, "Restaurant Use" under the City's Zoning Ordinance. The City defines a restaurant as:

"An establishment that prepares and serves food and beverages to the public. This use may include table, counter, drive-thru, drive-in, take-away and delivery services either individually or some combination thereof. This term includes ice cream, yogurt, gelato

and smoothie shops; bakeries; bagelries; doughnut shops; coffee shops; and similar establishments."

The Petitioner's proposed operation is consistent with the characteristics of a restaurant use because it involves the preparation and sale of food and beverages for on-site consumption by customers. The use is not classified separately as a café within the City's Zoning Ordinance and therefore falls under the broader restaurant category established by the Code. Accordingly, Staff finds that the petitioner's proposed daytime coffee shop and café should be treated as a, "Restaurant Use" under the City's Zoning Ordinance, while the requested evening private event venue component is more appropriately classified as a Hall, Banquet, or Reception Use requiring Special Use Permit approval."

Many of the most intense additional uses permitted in the TC-1 Zoning District, such as bars, microbreweries, fraternity houses, gas stations, and vehicle repair are subject to special use review by the City's Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) and would likely be deemed inappropriate for the site. Other additional uses permitted by right in TC-1 like vehicle sales and larger-scale retail operations are extremely unlikely owing to dimensional constraints and land values. As a result, the range of new uses that would be permitted in the TC-1 district in this case is much more limited than it may otherwise appear.

Streetcar Historic District Analysis

The Streetcar Historic District developed historically as a mixed-use neighborhood organized around streetcar corridors. Commercial nodes along major corridors typically contained:

- Corner stores;
- Restaurants;
- Service businesses;
- Community gathering places; or
- Small-scale entertainment uses.

The Petitioner's proposal will continue this historic pattern by providing neighborhood-serving commercial activity within a pedestrian-oriented environment. The proposed operation:

- Maintains occupancy of a purpose-built commercial space;
- Supports neighborhood revitalization efforts;
- Encourages walkability;
- Reinforces the district's mixed-use development pattern; and
- Does not involve demolition or adverse impacts to historic resources.

Staff therefore finds the proposal compatible with the historic character and development pattern of the Streetcar Historic District.

2. Public Notice:

A mailed notice of the Planning Commission meeting was sent to all property owners within 300 feet of the subject property. Public notice signs were posted at the property and the required newspaper advertisements were posted by Staff. The referenced public notice included instructions on how to access the meeting via the internet.

3. General Provisions 3.10.2:

The proposed event venue and accessory alcohol service require Special Use approval prior to operation. The General Provisions for Special Uses identify the purpose of the process and are as follows:

- special uses within each zoning district are uses that would not be appropriate generally or without restriction but which, if controlled as to number, area, location, or relation to other uses may be appropriate in a particular zoning district;
- a special use permit shall be required for all special uses (identified with an “S” designation) as set forth in the permitted use table in Sec. 5.4, Principal Use Table or as part of a use condition in Article 8.0, Use Standards;
- specific use standards may be applicable to the approved special use; and
- any use or activity on the property not specifically permitted by Article 5.0, Base Zoning Districts, or the special use permit as modified, shall be deemed unlawful and subject to Article 12.0.

4. Review Criteria for Special Use Permits Section 3.10.8:

When reviewing a Special Use Permit request, the review authority shall consider the following criteria:

- a) Whether the Special Use is consistent with the intent, goals, strategies, policies, guiding principles and programs of the Comprehensive Plan and other adopted plans:

Staff Comment: The Petitioner’s request is generally consistent with the goals and policies of the City’s Comprehensive Plan and the Traditional Commercial Future Land Use designation. The Traditional Commercial category is intended for business districts located within historically developed urban neighborhoods and along collector and arterial streets. Typical characteristics include:

- Pedestrian orientation;
- Neighborhood-serving commercial activity;
- Mixed-use environments;
- Walkability;
- Adaptive reuse and reinvestment opportunities; and
- Compatibility with adjacent residential development.

The Petitioner’s proposal will support the continued economic vitality of the Thomas Square and Streetcar neighborhood by activating an existing commercial space, increasing neighborhood amenities, and providing opportunities for community gatherings. The proposed venue use is also consistent with the historic mixed-use development pattern traditionally found within the Streetcar Historic District, where neighborhood-scaled commercial activity has historically coexisted with adjacent residential development. Accordingly, Staff finds the Petitioner’s request consistent with the City’s currently adopted Comprehensive Plan and adopted planning policies.

- b) Whether specific use standards for the special use, if any, as provided in Article 8.0, Use Standards, can be achieved;

Staff Comment: Staff reviewed Article 8.0 Use Standards of the City's Zoning Ordinance. There are no specific supplemental use standards identified for a Hall, Banquet, or Reception use within the TC-1 Zoning District beyond Special Use review requirements. Based upon the information submitted, Staff finds the applicable standards appear to be satisfied by the Petitioner.

- c) Whether the special use is detrimental to the public interest, health, safety, welfare, function, and appearance of the adjacent uses or general vicinity by reason of any one or more of the following: the number, area, location, height, orientation, intensity (such as traffic, noise, odor, hours of operation), or relation to the neighborhood or other adjacent uses.

Staff Comment: The Petitioner's proposed venue use is not anticipated to be detrimental to the public interest, safety, welfare, or appearance of the surrounding area. Several factors support this conclusion and they are presented as follow:

Scale

The Petitioner's proposed event venue occupies a relatively small tenant space of only 1,334 square feet and this limits the intensity of events that can be conducted at the Petitioner's property.

Hours of Operation

Evening event operations are proposed primarily between 3:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. and this reduces the potential for late-night impacts often associated with larger entertainment venues.

Traffic and Parking

The property is located within a mixed-use, walkable urban neighborhood designed to accommodate pedestrian activity. The surrounding street network provides multiple access points and opportunities for on-street parking. Given the size of the venue, significant traffic impacts are not anticipated by the Petitioner's request.

The property is located within the established Thomas Square/Streetcar neighborhood, an urban area characterized by a traditional development pattern that predates contemporary parking requirements. As a result, parking resources in the immediate vicinity are generally limited and are primarily accommodated through a combination of on-street parking and a relatively small amount of off-street parking associated with individual commercial developments. Based on the Petitioner's submitted site plan, the development known as, "The 912", consists of three (3) commercial buildings arranged around a shared surface parking area. The site plan identifies ten (ten) parking spaces onsite serving the overall development. These parking spaces appear to be shared among all tenant spaces within Buildings A, B, and C and are not dedicated exclusively to the proposed coffee shop/event venue tenant space.

Due to the relatively small size of the tenant space and the limited hours of operation for private events, parking demand is anticipated to be lower than that generated by larger banquet facilities or entertainment venues. Additionally, the property is situated within a highly walkable commercial corridor where patrons may access businesses by foot, bicycle, rideshare services, or public transit.

While Staff acknowledges that parking availability in the surrounding area can be constrained

during peak business periods and special events, the shared on-site parking supply, combined with available on-street parking and the relatively modest scale of the proposed operation, is expected to adequately support the requested use. Nevertheless, the limited parking supply remains a factor that supports maintaining the venue as a small-scale, neighborhood-serving event space rather than a high-intensity assembly use.

There are additional parking opportunities for on-street parking for the Petitioner along Habersham Street, East 37th Street, and the adjacent neighborhood streets.

Compatibility

The proposed use combines a daytime coffee shop with a reservation-based event space. Such uses are commonly found within neighborhood commercial districts and are generally compatible with the intent of the TC-1 Zoning District.

Alcohol Service

Alcohol service is proposed only in conjunction with the private catered events and not as a stand-alone drinking establishment. This limitation substantially reduces potential impacts associated with bars or late-night entertainment venues. Therefore, Staff finds the proposed special use is unlikely to adversely affect the neighboring properties or alter the existing character of the area that's located immediately adjacent to the Petitioner's property.

- d) Whether the subject property is adequate in shape and size to accommodate the Special Use;

Staff Comment: The tenant space proposed for the event venue has already been constructed and was designed for commercial occupancy. Staff finds the property is adequate in size, shape, and configuration to accommodate the Petitioner's request.

- e) Whether adequate public facilities are available to serve the proposed use, including, but not limited to water; sanitary sewer; stormwater drainage facilities; public safety and emergency facilities; roadway capacity; vehicular ingress and egress; or, that the applicant will provide adequately for such services and for placement in an appropriate location.

Staff Comment: The property is served by existing urban infrastructure, including:

- public water service;
- sanitary sewer service;
- stormwater management facilities;
- police protection;
- fire protection;
- sidewalk infrastructure;
- transit access; and
- existing roadway connections.

The property fronts Habersham Street and East 37th Street and is located within an established service area where public facilities are readily available and capable of accommodating the Petitioner's proposed use. Therefore, Staff finds that there are adequate existing public facilities in place needed to support the Petitioner's request.

- f) Whether the Special Use will result in the destruction, loss, or damage of any feature determined by the review authority to be of natural, cultural, scenic, or historic importance.

Staff Comment: The Petitioner's Special Use Permit (SUP) request pertains to the operation of a commercial use within an existing building and does not propose any demolition, substantial exterior alteration, or redevelopment of the property. Because the Petitioner's request is operational in nature, Staff finds that the proposed use will not result in the destruction, loss, or damage of any natural, cultural, scenic, or historic resources. Furthermore, the activation of occupied commercial space within the historic district may reinforce the district's historic mixed-use character and contribute to the long-term economic sustainability of the area.

5. Policy Analysis

Based upon the review criteria established in Section 3.10.8 of the City's Zoning Ordinance, Staff finds that the proposed Hall, Banquet, or Reception use, together with accessory alcohol service associated with private catered events, satisfies the applicable standards for Special Use approval. The Petitioner's request:

- is consistent with the Traditional Commercial Future Land Use designation;
- can be adequately served by existing public infrastructure;
- is not anticipated to adversely affect historic resources within the Streetcar Historic District; and
- is compatible with the surrounding neighborhood when operated in accordance with the representations provided by the Petitioner.

ALTERNATIVES:

1. Approve the Petitioner's request as presented or with recommended and/or other conditions.
2. Deny the Petitioner's request.

RECOMMENDATION:

MPC Staff recommends **APPROVAL** of the Petitioner's Special Use Permit request for a Hall, Banquet, or Reception Use at 2018 Habersham Street, Building C-1, subject to the following conditions:

CONDITIONS

1. The Special Use Permit shall be non-transferable.
2. The approved use shall be limited to the approximately 1,334-square-foot tenant space identified as Building C-1.
3. Any substantial expansion of the venue use or modification of the operational characteristics reviewed herein shall require review and approval by the City of Savannah.

Based on the findings above, Staff determines that the Petitioner's request satisfies the Special Use review criteria contained in Section 3.10.8 of the City's Zoning Ordinance and is compatible with both the Traditional Commercial-1 (TC-1) Zoning District and the Streetcar Historic District.