



CHATHAM COUNTY-SAVANNAH METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION

"Planning the Future, Respecting the Past"

STAFF REPORT

To: The Planning Commission

Through: Melanie Wilson, Executive Director & CEO

From: Ely Zarka – MPC Staff

Date: August 4, 2026

Subject: Major Master Plan Amendment

Applicant/Agent: Ryan Thompson, T&H for 1776 Savannah Associates, LLC

Address: 265, 302, 520 & 540 Grand Prize of America Ave

PIN: 20436 01041, 20436 01040, 20436 01039, 20436 01015

Area: +/- 100.4 acres

Alderman District: District 1 – Bernetta Lanier

Chatham County Commission District: 3 – Bobby Locket

Request: Major Amendment to a Final Master Plan

File Number: 26-003473-ZA

Request

The Petitioner requests MPC consideration of a request for a Major Amendment to a Final Master Plan, identified as Parcels 3A, 4A, 4B, and 6A of the Savannah Harbor Master Plan.

The proposed amendment would establish two different districts, labeled as Mixed Use – Resort Oriented (MU-RO) and Mixed Use – Residential. These districts are proposed to allow a maximum of 1280 residential units, in a mix of forms, as well as a mix of nonresidential uses.

Background

Public Notice

Prior to the MPC public hearing, an advertisement was run in the Savannah Morning News, signs were posted on site and mailed notices were sent to adjoining property owners in accordance with notification procedures established in the City of Savannah Zoning Ordinance. Subsequent notice will occur prior to City Council hearings for the master plan amendment.

Zoning History

The subject properties are zoned PD as part of the Savannah Harbor Planned Development. Several revisions to the original master plan have occurred that deter from the original plan or split of pieces for individual development. A large portion of the original development has not actually occurred, despite some installation of infrastructure.

Existing Zoning and Development Pattern

Site

The site currently consists of multiple parcels totaling approximately 100 acres on Hutchison Island. While portions of the development and infrastructure have occurred, the vast majority of vertical construction has not.

The site's environmental context is highly sensitive. The property partially encroaches into FEMA AE Flood Zones (special flood hazard areas) and is adjacent to the waterfront on the North-East side of Hutchison Island. Much of the subject properties currently is vacant, with a portion of the existing Parcel 4 housing a driving range for the golf course with the adjacent club house and accessory buildings. While the vast majority of the subject parcels is designated as X by FEMA, ultimately the site is on an island.

Existing & Proposed Zoning

Intent of the Existing PD and Proposed Zoning

The properties are currently zoned PD (Savannah Harbor) and are proposing an amendment to the Master Plan.

The Savannah Harbor Planned Development and Master Plan was originally adopted in the late 90's but has not seen vertical construction for much of the plan. The proposed amendment is specifically for the areas previously identified as Parcels 3A, 4A, 4B, and 6A

Allowed Uses

Uses permissible in these districts can be found in the Planned Development Text attached to the MPC agenda packet.

Intent of the Proposed PD Zoning District

A Planned Development (PD) district allows projects that would not otherwise be permitted under this Ordinance because of the strict application of zoning district development standards or general site standards. Generally, the PD district is intended for sites where a developer proposes and the Mayor and Aldermen desire to achieve a certain mix of uses, appearance, land use compatibility and/or apply special sensitivity to the character of the site surrounding area.

In return for greater flexibility in site design requirements, planned developments are expected to deliver innovative and exceptional quality community designs that preserve environmental, historic and cultural resources; incorporate creative design in the layout of buildings, open space and vehicular and pedestrian circulation; assure compatibility with surrounding land uses and area character; and, provide greater efficiency in the layout and provision of roads, utilities and other infrastructure that would not otherwise be possible within a base zoning district.

Proposed Allowed Uses

The proposed Master Plan text includes the following two land use classifications and identifies the permitted uses for each, as outlined in the attached text.

Area	Acreage	Density	Maximum Units
Mixed Use – Resort Oriented (MU-RO)	+/- 55.3 AC	20 units/acre	1100
Mixed Use – Residential Oriented (MU-RES)	+/- 45.1 AC	4 units/acre	180
Total	100.4 AC	12.8 units/acre	1280

Establishment of PD Areas (Savanna Harbor Parcels 3A, 4A, 4B, and 6A PD Text)

Please refer to pages 4-8 of the Savanna Harbor Parcels 3A, 4A, 4B, and 6A PD Text (attached to the agenda packet) for the complete use table.

Impact and Suitability

Comprehensive Plan/FLUM Consistency

The Future Land Use Map (FLUM) designates the subject properties as "Planned Development and Downtown Expansion." According to *Plan 2040*, areas with the Planned Development designation are intended to serve as "master planned areas accommodating cluster development, neo-traditional development, or mixed residential, commercial, or civic uses" that are characterized by "internal or external linkages among residential, commercial, institutional, or recreational use components." Areas designated as Downtown Expansion are in close proximity to the Central Business District that are

identified for growth of retail, office, entertainment, opens spaces, institutional, civic and residential uses. This area is intended to be compatible with and interconnected with the Downtown area and surrounding neighborhoods, while also accommodating new forms of urban development.

The proposed Savannah Harbor Parcels 3A, 4A, 4B, and 6A PD is highly consistent with this designation. In the area proposed as Mixed Use – Resort Oriented, both residential and nonresidential uses will be permitted, whether as horizontal or vertical mixed use or either. The area designated as Mixed-Use Residential will also allow a limited range of nonresidential uses but will focus more on the residential and neighborhood scale character.

Plan 2040 specifically notes that Planned Developments provide the necessary regulatory flexibility to achieve innovative site planning, compact lot design, and mixed-use nodes. By utilizing the existing PD framework to cluster development, even if piecemeal, the 3A, 4A, 4B, and 6A development actively implements the Comprehensive Plan's primary Land Use Goal to "guide development and redevelopment in a responsible manner, encouraging compact/mixed-use development, as the transition from the downtown expansion area to the more residential side on the North side of Hutchison Island.

Savannah GPS Consistency

The proposal touches upon several goals of the *Savannah GPS Strategic Plan*:

- *Goal 2 (Equitable Community Development & Resiliency)*: The development aligns with the objective to expand access to housing availability by introducing up to 1,280 new residential units of varying types (detached, attached, multi-family). The development also potentially allows for the introduction of uses that will specifically serve the residents of the island, and by extension not require a commute into Downtown Savannah.
- *Goal 4 (Livable Environment & Infrastructure)*: The City requires equitable investments in the built environment that protect natural resources and mitigate flood risks. Given the site's topographical context and constraints, ensuring rigorous stormwater management and wetland preservation is critical to maintaining consistency with this goal.

Public Services and Facilities

The development is proposed to be served by City of Savannah Water and Sewer. Some of the infrastructure has been installed and accepted by the necessary agencies. Further improvement will be required and will be designed as part of the site plan process.

However, a concern that has come up historically with development on Hutchison Island is the access and effectiveness of Public Safety. Currently the nearest Police and Fire

stations are either on East Oglethorpe Ave, East Lathrop Ave, or Augusta Ave. While there are some water-based emergency personnel and equipment, not all of this development will be accessible directly from the waterfronts. The applicant has been in discussions with the relevant city authorities to address this potential issue.

Zoning Ordinance Review

A. Rezoning Standards Applicable ([Sec 3.5.8](#))

a. Suitability and Community Need

- i. Whether the range of uses permitted by the proposed zoning district is more suitable than the range of uses that is permitted by the current zoning district.*

MPC Comment: The property's current PD zoning limits and does not permit as much modern mixed use style developments.

The proposal addresses a regional need for additional housing units; while also giving the ability for uses that will serve the residents of Hutchison Island, services that currently do not exist on said Island.

- ii. Whether the proposed zoning district addresses a specific need in the county or City.*

MPC Comment: The proposal addresses an urgent need in the region for additional housing units to support rapid economic and population growth. The Savannah area is experiencing unprecedented industrial investment and job creation, which imports significant housing demand and places profound pressure on the region's finite housing stock. By aligning zoning to allow for higher density and introducing up to 1,280 new residential units of varying types, including single-family detached, single-family attached, and multi-family units, this development will directly supply necessary housing for the County's growing populace. Additionally, incorporating mixed use-scale commercial uses into the development addresses a specific need to serve these future residents locally, reducing vehicle trips to more distant retail and service outlets across the river.

b. Compatibility

- i. Whether the zoning proposal will adversely affect the existing use or usability of adjacent or nearby property;*

MPC Comment: While the proposed mixed-use development will increase the overall use intensity of the site and introduce a new volume of traffic compared

to the existing development, many of these impacts were expected with the original Planned Development.

- ii. *Whether the zoning proposal is compatible with the present zoning pattern and conforming uses of nearby property and the character of the surrounding area.*

MPC Comment: The proposed Master Plan amendment does not drastically alter the intent or style of development originally intended. While more mixed use is proposed, this does remain in line with the intent of the original Master Plan.

- iii. *Whether there are other existing or changing conditions affecting the use and development of the property which give supporting grounds for either approval or disapproval of the zoning proposal.*

MPC Comment: The existing development of Hutchison Island has largely sat unfinished. By amending the Master Plan and proposing standards for this specific area of the plan the development has a better chance of moving forward and not sitting partially complete. However, in the long run, this does mean that piecemealing out the original development may lead to conflicting intent and designs by separate parties.

c. Consistency

Whether the zoning proposal is in conformity with the policy and intent of the Comprehensive Plan and other adopted plans, such as a redevelopment plan or small area plan.

MPC Comment: The proposed PD aligns well with the directives of *Plan 2040*. The Comprehensive Plan officially adopts the "*Strong Corridors*" preferred growth strategy, shifting the region's focus toward efficient, mixed-use development clustered around major transportation corridors. Hutchison Island is identified as a potential growth area and an area of further study as a growth center.

d. Reasonable Use

Whether the property to be affected by the zoning proposal has a reasonable use as currently zoned.

MPC Comment: The properties do have reasonable use as presently zoned, but those uses and development have largely not occurred.

e. Adequate Public facilities

Whether adequate school, public safety and emergency facilities, road, ingress and egress, parks, wastewater treatment, water supply and stormwater drainage

facilities are available for the uses and densities that are permitted in the proposed zoning district.

MPC Comment: As already noted much of the infrastructure has been installed as part of the previously unfinished development, additional work will be designed and required as part of the site plan process. However, staff recommends the Board consider conditioning an agreement between the City and the Petitioner on addressing public safety, without necessarily giving specific form to that agreement to allow the City and Petitioner to determine what may be necessary.

f. Proximity to a Military Base, Installation or Airport

MPC Comment: The subject property is not within an airport or airfield overlay, or within proximity of a military installation.

B. Compatibility

The rezoning proposal will be constructed, arranged and operated so as to be compatible with the immediate vicinity and not to interfere with the development and use of adjacent property in accordance with the applicable district regulations.

MPC Comment: The PD text will establish standards to maintain compatibility between the mixed use and commercial pods with residential focused areas.

C. Resource Protection

The rezoning proposal will not result in the destruction, loss, or damage of any resource determined by the Mayor and Aldermen to be of significant natural, scenic or historic importance. Such historic resource shall be listed or eligible to be listed on the local or National Register of Historic Places.

MPC Comment: No, while the development is on a small island, much of the interior is upland and even not within a special flood hazard zone.

D. Design Review

The rezoning proposal will be compatible or complimentary with the adjacent properties. The architectural style, materials, other treatments, etc., to be utilized within a Planned Development shall be considered by the Planning Commission and Mayor and Aldermen as part of the overall review process.

MPC Comment: The subject properties are not within or in proximity of any nationally or locally designated historic district or identified assets of historic significance. The Savannah Downtown Historic District is the only within reasonable proximity, but is across

the river, and this development will be central and to the northern waterfront of Hutchison Island.

Policy Analysis

While the proposed PD zoning holds the potential to be beneficial for the site and to advance the policy goals of the joint Comprehensive Plan for the future development of Hutchison Island, this is a style of land use regulation where one previously larger and coherently designed development is being developed piecemeal by separate parties. While no issues are foreseen necessarily with this specific proposal, the opportunity may exist in the future with other developments and actors.

Largely the proposal continues much of the intent included with the original Savannah Harbor Master Plan with more current styles of development patterns and mixed use. This proposal may allow this section of the original development to occur and not continue to sit vacant. However, there are potential concerns with the lack of available Public Safety services.

Staff Recommendation

MPC Staff recommends **APPROVAL with CONDITIONS** of the request for Major Amendment to a Final Master Plan, subject to the following:

1. The applicant enters into an agreement with the City of Savannah regarding the review of the availability of Public Safety services.