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METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION

"Planning the Future - Respecting the Past"

M E M O R A N D U M

TO: The Planning Commission
THROUGH: Melanie Wilson, Executive Director and CEO
FROM: MPC Staff
DATE: January 06, 2026
SUBJECT: Text Amendment to the City of Savannah Zoning Ordinance
Re: Amendment to Article 7, Section 7.7, Historic Property
Overlay District and the Official Zoning Map
APPLICANT: Mayor and Aldermen of the City of Savannah
Bridget Lidy - Director of Planning and Urban Design, Agent
FILE NO: 25-005000-ZA (TEXT)

REQUEST:

The City proposes zoning text amendments to add clarifying standards to *Article 7, Section 7.7, Historic Property Overlay District*, establishing a formal framework for local historic property designation.

The proposal would also designate 4241 Ogeechee Road (PIN 20836 02002), known as the *Savannah Powder Magazine*, as the first Historic Property Overlay, to be identified as **H-P-O-1**. A corresponding zoning map amendment is requested concurrently.

The Historic Preservation Commission has reviewed and approved the designation in accordance with the requirements of *Section 3.17 – Local Historic Property Designation* at its meeting on [November 19, 2025](#).

The text is proposed to be amended as follows:

7.7.2 Reserved Relationship to Zoning Districts

For all properties within H-P-O, the regulations for both the base zoning district and this overlay district shall apply.

7.7.3 Applicability

a. A Historic Property Overlay District (H-P-O) is identified on the official zoning map as "H-P-O" followed by a designated number (e.g. H-P-O-1).

The numerical designation identifies the geographic location of the overlay district. H-P-O properties include:

1. H-P-O-1 District

This boundary includes the Savannah Powder Magazine
(20836 02002)

7.7.4 Classification of Resources

All buildings, structures sites and objects, collectively known as resources, within the H-P-O shall be identified as contributing and non-contributing. The Historic Preservation Officer shall determine if a building is eligible for contributing status.

7.7.5 Certificate of Appropriateness Required

Prior to the commencement of certain work, as identified in Sec. 3.18.2.Certificate of Appropriateness for Local Historic Districts and Properties with the exception of new construction

7.7.6 Criteria for a Certificate of Appropriateness

The Historic Preservation Commission shall review and take final action on a proposed Certificate of Appropriateness by applying the applicable standards and criteria below. Depending on the specific nature of the proposed material change, one or more of the standards and criteria may apply. The application for a Certificate of Appropriateness will indicate which standards and criteria apply based on the work proposed.

- a. Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Rehabilitation (Sec. 7.9.8)
- b. H-P-O Design Standards (Sec. 7.7.7)
- c. Relocation Standards (Sec. 3.18.8);
- d. Demolition Standards (Sec. 3.18.8); and
- e. Sign Standards (Sec. 9.9);

7.7.7. Design Standards for Local Historic Property Overlays

The intent of these standards is to ensure appropriate, new construction, additions and alterations within the H-P-O. They are also intended to protect the historic integrity of contributing resources.

The following design standards shall apply to contributing resources, unless

otherwise specified. Though certain building materials are prescribed below, the Historic Preservation Commission 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.

- a. The historic character of the contributing structures on the property will be retained and preserved.
- b. Each contributing resource will be recognized as a physical record of its time and place. Work needed to stabilize, consolidate and conserve existing historic materials and features will be physically and visually compatible, identifiable upon inspection and properly documented for future research.
- c. Changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right will be retained and preserved.
- d. Distinctive materials, features, finishes and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property shall be persevered.

- e. Chemical or physical treatments, if appropriate, will be undertaken using the gentlest means possible. Treatments that cause damage to historic materials will not be used.
- f. If the existing condition of historic features, finishes and construction of contributing resources, are degraded beyond repair, the degradation shall be documented and verified by the Historic Preservation Officer and replacement shall be of the same material and configuration as the original.

7.7.8 Maintenance of Contributing Resources

Resources shall be maintained in accordance with any property maintenance ordinances, nuisance abatement ordinances, this Ordinance (including Sec. 3.20 Proactive Preservation), and all other applicable ordinances and polices.

BACKGROUND:

A *local historic district* is established to provide a uniform procedure to protect broad areas or neighborhoods that possess significant historic, architectural, or cultural value. Its purpose is to conserve the historical integrity and character of neighborhoods as a collective entity. In contrast, the *historic property overlay* (H-P-O) is intended to promote the preservation of individual historic resources that are often located *outside of those established local historic districts*.

While a local historic district focuses on the visual compatibility of new development and maintenance of architecturally significant existing structures within the context of the entire surrounding neighborhood, the H-P-O's primary intent is to ensure that alterations, additions, and new construction remain visually compatible, specifically with the existing resources on that individual property. Essentially, the district designation serves to protect the collective heritage of an area, whereas the historic property overlay provides the critical design standards and legal protections necessary to safeguard the integrity of a single, distinct site, such as the Savannah Powder Magazine.

The Savannah Powder Magazine was constructed in 1898 as a municipally owned facility for the safe storage of dynamite and other explosive materials. Located on Ogeechee Road outside the city limits at the time, the site was intentionally chosen for its isolation to protect public safety. The Powder Magazine served as the City of Savannah's only non-military facility of its kind and operated continuously until its closure in 1971. In recent decades, the City has taken steps to preserve the structure, including commissioning a restoration plan and securing grant funding. In February 2025, the building was listed on the *National Register of Historic Places* for its association with Savannah's growth and its innovative design for explosive storage.

Architecturally, the Savannah Powder Magazine is a one-story Gothic Revival brick structure with a distinctive T-shaped plan and an octagonal primary chamber. It features original masonry detailing and specialized safety elements such as thick brick walls, iron vents, asphalt-coated interior surfaces, and vented light boxes designed to reduce explosion risk. The building retains a high level of historic integrity in location, design, materials, and workmanship, remaining largely unaltered despite the loss of its roof and some features. Set on approximately fifteen acres, the structure continues to convey its historic function and remains under City ownership.

FACTS AND FINDINGS:

1. *Sec 7.7 of Article 7 - Overlay Districts* currently establishes the intent to permit zoning overlay districts for the preservation of properties identified as possessing historical significance, but it contains no associated standards. The proposed text amendment extends and clarifies this provision, adding: *the relationship of the Overlay to base zoning districts, applicability, means of resource classification, clarification of COA requirements, design and maintenance requirements.*
2. A 2020 City study, *Savannah Surplus Property Land Use Preference Survey Report*, recommended retaining the property in public ownership and using it for a combination of passive recreation, civic purposes and potentially, housing.
3. *Section 3.17.4 Local Historic Property Designation* of the Zoning Ordinance provides specific criteria that must be met for a property to be considered eligible for historic designation.
 - a. Whether the historic property possesses integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association, and at least one (1) of the following:
 - i. Is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history;
 - ii. Is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past;
 - iii. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represents the work of a master, or that possesses high artistic values, or that represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
 - iv. Has yielded or may be likely to yield, information important in pre-history or history.

As noted in the application: “Based on the recent listing in the *National Register of Historic Places*, the Powder Magazine meets the criteria and is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of Savannah history in politics and government at the local level.”

4. The Petition for designation was reviewed by the Historic Preservation Commission and approved at its meeting on November 19, 2025 in accordance with the provisions of *Sec. 3.17.3.*

ORDINANCE ANALYSIS:

Per section 3.7.7 of Article 3, Savannah’s Zoning Ordinance offers four (4) review criteria for proposed text amendments:

- a. **Consistency** – The extent to which the proposed text amendment is consistent with the remainder of the Zoning Ordinance, including any purpose and intent statements.

MPC Staff Comment: *The amendment is consistent with the purpose of the Ordinance to conserve and protect the historical integrity of Savannah.*

- b. **New or Changing Circumstances** – The extent to which the proposed text amendment represents a new idea not considered in the existing Zoning Ordinance, or represents a revision necessitated by changing circumstances over time.

MPC Staff Comment: *The amendment extends the City's commitment to preserve its historical and architectural heritage. The 2025 National Register listing and the City's recent preservation-forward policy adoptions to protect municipal assets represent circumstances supporting the local designation.*

- c. **Error or Inappropriate Standard** – Whether or not the proposed text amendment corrects an error in the Zoning Ordinance, or otherwise improves upon existing requirements or standards.

MPC Staff Comment: *The amendment corrects the absence of evaluation criteria within the existing Section 7.7, ensuring the Historic Preservation Commission and Staff have clear standards for review.*

- d. **Compliance with Higher Law** – Whether or not the proposed text amendment revises the Zoning Ordinance to comply with state or federal statutes.

MPC Staff Comment: *The proposed language has been reviewed by the City Attorney's Office and aligns with the Georgia Historic Preservation Act.*

POLICY ANALYSIS:

The proposed text and map amendments support *Savannah GPS Goal 2*, Invest in Equitable Community Development and Resiliency, by identifying and protecting significant local historic and cultural resources outside the *Downtown National Historic Landmark District*. The text amendment would establish site-specific design standards through the Historic Property Overlay district, providing critical protections for the Savannah Powder Magazine and similar properties of historical significance, ensuring that any proposed work is reviewed by the Historic Preservation Commission for consistency with adopted standards.

Concurrently, the map amendment would designate the property as **H-P-O-1**, enabling formal preservation review and oversight. The proposed amendments are further supported by findings from the 2020 Savannah Surplus Property Land Use Preference Survey Report, which identified the Powder Magazine as a site suitable for continued City ownership with a mix of passive recreation and civic uses. Establishing local historic designation ensures long-term stewardship of one of the few known surviving municipal powder magazines in Georgia while aligning with broader City planning and preservation goals.

MPC STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

MPC Staff recommends **approval** of the request to amend Article 7, Section 7.7, Historic Property Overlay District, to establish a formal framework for local historic property designations *and* to designate 4241 Ogeechee Road (PIN 20836 02002), known as the Savannah Powder Magazine, as H-P-O-1.

Note: This recommendation could change subject to new information provided at the meeting. Final decisions will be made by the Commission at the public hearing based on information provided at the meeting, as well as information submitted for the staff recommendation.