



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"

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: June 23, 2026
SUBJECT: Text Amendment to the City of Savannah Zoning Ordinance
Re: Amendment to Articles 2 Review Bodies and
Administrators, 3 Application and Review Procedures, 6
Special Purpose Districts, 7 Overlay Districts, 8 Use
Standards, 9 General Site Standards, 13 Abbreviations and
Buffers
APPLICANT: Mayor and Aldermen of the City of Savannah
Bridget Lidy - Director of Planning and Urban Design, Agent
FILE NO: 26-002369-ZA (TEXT)

REQUEST:

The City proposes text amendments to the zoning ordinance to facilitate the transfer of authority of application intake from the City of Savannah (City) to the Chatham County-Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC) to facilitate a more concise process for the public in the processing of development applications. The MPC currently processes all applications for Historic district Certificates of Appropriateness.

The text is proposed to be amended as follows:

Proposed Revisions

Note:

*Text revisions to be enacted shown in blue, bold, and underlined.
Text revisions to be repealed shown in red, bold, and strikethrough.
MPC revisions to be shown in green*

ARTICLE 2.0 REVIEW BODIES AND ADMINISTRATORS

Sec. 2.7 ~~Planning~~ MPC Director

2.7.1 Defined

The Executive Director of the Metropolitan Planning Commission shall be the ~~Planning~~ MPC Director.

2.7.2 Delegation of Authority

The ~~Planning~~ MPC Director may designate any staff member to serve as his/her designee for those functions identified in this Ordinance. The ~~Planning~~ MPC Director shall remain responsible for any final action, as applicable.

2.7.3 Powers and Duties

a. General Authority

- i. The ~~Planning~~ MPC Director shall perform related duties as directed by the Planning Commission or any other applicable ordinances.
- ii. The ~~Planning~~ MPC Director shall have the powers and duties listed below, in addition to those provided elsewhere in this Ordinance and the City of Savannah Code of Ordinances, as applicable.

b. Review Authority

With respect to this Ordinance, the ~~Planning~~ MPC Director shall review and make recommendations regarding:

- i. Comprehensive plan amendments;
- ii. Zoning map amendments;
- iii. Planned development districts;
- iv. Zoning text amendments;
- v. Planning Commission Development Plans;
- vi. City of Savannah Development Plans, as required by this Ordinance;
- vii. Traffic impact analyses;
- viii. Special use permits;
- ix. Subdivisions;
- x. Local historic district designations, including amendments to height and contributing resource maps;
- xi. Local historic property designations;

- xii. Certificates of Appropriateness for local historic districts and historic properties;
- xiii. Certificates of Appropriateness for the Savannah Downtown Historic District with the exception of those listed below; and;
- xiv. Other duties as specified by this Ordinance.

c. Final Authority

With respect to this Ordinance and the Subdivision Ordinance, the ~~Planning~~ MPC Director shall be responsible for final action regarding:

- i. Certificates of Appropriateness for actions identified in Sec. 3.19.7; and
- ii. Other duties as specified by this Ordinance.

2.3.2 Powers and Duties

b. Review Authority

With respect to this Ordinance and specifically for the City of Savannah, the Planning Commission shall review and make recommendations unless otherwise specified in this ordinance to the Mayor and Aldermen regarding:

*****Within the Zoning Ordinance, all references to Planning Director shall be revised to MPC Director. *****

Article 2 – 13 total mentions

Article 3 – 84 total mentions

Article 6 – 7 mentions

Article 7 – 37 mentions

Article 8 – 27 mentions

Article 9 – 23 mentions

Article 13 – 1 mention

ARTICLE 3.0 APPLICATION AND REVIEW PROCEDURES

~~Section~~ Sec. 3.1 Purpose

Sec. 3.1 Purpose

3.1.2. Pre-application Conference.

Before submitting an application for development approval, an applicant shall ~~schedule~~ attend a pre-application conference with the ~~Planning~~ MPC Director to discuss procedures, standards and regulations required for approval in accordance with this Ordinance. The City Manager or his or her designee shall be invited to pre-application conferences applicable to all items listed in this section.

The pre-application meeting may be in person or via conference call. A mandatory pre-application meeting conference is required for the following applications and where specified elsewhere in this Ordinance:

- a. Development of Regional Impact;
- b. Comprehensive Plan Amendment;
- c. Rezoning (Map Amendment);
- d. Rezoning, Planned Development District;
- e. Zoning Text Amendment;
- f. Planning Commission Development Plan Review (Variance requested);
- g. Special Use Permit;
- h. Special Exceptions;
- i. Local Historic District Designation;
- j. Local Historic Property Designation;
- k. Amendment to Local Historic District Contributing Resources Map or Height Map; and
- l. Certificate of Appropriateness for Local Historic District;
- m. Variances, and
- n. Relief for uses and structures.

3.1.4 Determination of Completeness

a. Completeness Determination

Applications for items listed in 3.1.2 and Sec. 3.23 Appeals will be submitted to the MPC Director ~~City Manager or his or her designee~~ and checked for completeness within three (3) working days of submittal. An application is determined to be complete if all required information and documents have been prepared in accordance with the specific application requirements outlined in this Article.

b. Complete Application

Once an application has been deemed to be complete, MPC Director ~~City Manager or his or her designee~~ shall transmit the application to the appropriate reviewing authority for review and recommendation. The MPC Director ~~City Manager or his or her designee~~ shall notify the applicant and the City Manager or his or her designee that the application is complete.

If an application requires a public hearing, the application shall be placed on the next available agenda of the appropriate reviewing body.

Sec. 3.2 Public Notice

3.2.1 Applicability

All hearings of the Mayor and Aldermen and the Planning Commission which involve rezonings, zoning map amendments, zoning text amendments and special use permits are public and are subject to notification requirements under the State Zoning Procedures Law, O.C.G.A. Chapter §36-66-1, et seq., where applicable. All hearings of the Mayor and Aldermen, Historic

Preservation Commission and the Savannah Downtown Historic District Board of Review which involve historic designations and certificates of appropriateness are public and subject to notification requirements of the State Historic Preservation Act. The MPC Director shall provide public notice as required by this section unless otherwise specified by this Ordinance. Where a zoning action is initiated by or on behalf of the Mayor and Aldermen, and Planning Commission review is not requested, notice shall be provided by the City Manager or his or her designee.

3.2.5 Published Notice

a. Timing of Published Notice

i. Public Hearings

1. All applications that require published notice, except as hereinafter provided, the notice shall be published at least 15, but no more than 45 days prior to the public hearing.
2. For applications to designate a local historic district or to designate a local historic property, notice of the public hearing shall be published at least 10 but not more than 20 days prior to the public hearing as provided in O.C.G.A. §44-10-26 (“Georgia Historic Preservation Act”), or as amended. Notice of the public hearing shall be published on at least three (3) occasions prior to the public hearing.
3. ~~Except as provided hereinafter, all Zoning Board of Appeals, Savannah Downtown Historic District Board of Review, and Historic Preservation Commission applications for variances, special administrative permits, special exceptions, conditional use permits, other similar permits not enumerated in the Zoning Procedures Law, O.C.G.A. §36-66-1 et seq., applications for appeal of administrative decisions, and Planning Commission review of Development Plans provided in Sec. 3.8.3.b.ii. shall require at least 30 days published notice prior to the public hearing which shall include the time, place, and purpose of the public hearing. In addition, notice shall be mailed to the owner of the property that is the subject of the application.~~ Notwithstanding any provision to the contrary, where the grant or denial of a variance or condition concurrent is considered in conjunction with a decision to adopt or deny an amendment to the zoning ordinance to rezone property or in conjunction with the decision to grant or deny a special use permit, only one public hearing is required and notice of the public hearing shall be published at least 15 but not more than 45 days prior to the date of the hearing which shall state the time place and purpose of the hearing.

3.2.6 Posted Notice

a. Content of Notice

When required, as provided in Table 3.2-1, posted notice shall include the following information listed below on the sign:

- i. The type of application;
- ii. Description of the proposal or request;

- iii. The date, time and location of the scheduled public hearing;
- iv. The application file number; and
- v. A phone number to call for additional information.

b. Posting of Notice

Posting of property shall comply with the requirements listed below.

- i. Responsibility for Posting
Signs shall be posted by the applicant, except applications initiated by the Mayor and Aldermen shall be exempt from this requirement.
- ii. Form of Required Signs
Notice shall be posted on weather resistant signs in a form established by the City Manager or his or her designee.
- iii. Preparation of Signs
 - 1. Signs shall be prepared by the MPC Director or City Manager or his or her designee, as applicable.

Sec. 3.4 Comprehensive Plan Amendment

3.4.1 Purpose

An application for a Comprehensive Plan amendment, text or map, may be initiated by the Mayor and Aldermen or the Planning Commission. Any person owning property within the City, or agent for such property owner, may initiate an application for a Comprehensive map amendment to change the Future Land Use Map category for their own property only.

3.4.2 Pre-Application Conference Required

Prior to the submittal of an application for a comprehensive plan amendment, the applicant shall request and participate in a pre-application conference in accordance with Sec. 3.1.2, Pre-application Conference.

3.4.3 Comprehensive Plan Amendments Initiated by the Mayor and Aldermen

~~Notwithstanding any other provision in this ordinance to the contrary, any amendment initiated by or on behalf of the Mayor and Aldermen shall not be submitted to or considered by the Planning Commission unless specifically requested by the City Manager or his or her designee.~~

3.4.4 The MPC Director shall be notified of a City-initiated map or text amendment by postal or electronic mail at least 30 days prior to the scheduled public hearing.

Sec. 3.5 Rezoning (Map Amendment)

3.5.3 Application Procedures

- a. Prior to the submittal of an application for a rezoning, the applicant shall participate in a

pre-application conference ~~with the Planning Director~~ as described in Sec. 3.1.2.

3.5.6 Review by the Planning Commission

a. **Consideration by Planning Commission**

All rezoning applications shall be considered by the Planning Commission at a public hearing, prior to public hearing by the Mayor and Aldermen.

b. **Standards and Criteria**

The Planning Commission shall review and make a recommendation on the proposed rezoning based upon the standards in Sec. 3.5.8, Review Standards for Rezoning Applications.

c. **Planning Commission Recommendation**

A recommendation shall be prepared and forwarded to the Mayor and Aldermen. The recommendation shall indicate if the proposed rezoning should be:

- i. Approved;
- ii. Approved with conditions;
- iii. Approved with an alternative zoning district;
- iv. Continued to the next meeting or to a date certain; or
- v. Denied.

3.5.10 ~~Rez~~Zoning Applications Initiated by the Mayor and Aldermen

- a. One purpose of a ~~rez~~oning initiated by or on behalf of the Mayor and Aldermen may be to rezone areas in conformance with the principles of comprehensive land use planning and staged development as reflected by established plans and policies, as well as planned public facilities.
- b. Notwithstanding any other provision in this ordinance to the contrary, any ~~rez~~oning initiated by or on behalf of the Mayor and Aldermen shall not be submitted to or considered by the Planning Commission unless specifically requested by the City Manager or his or her designee ~~Mayor and Aldermen~~.
- c. The same review criteria shall apply to ~~rez~~onings initiated by or on behalf of the Mayor and Aldermen as to all other rezonings as set forth in Sec. 3.5.8 Review Standards for Rezoning Applications.
- d. The MPC Director shall be notified of a City-initiated map amendment by postal or electronic mail at least 30 days prior to the scheduled public hearing.

Sec. 3.6 Rezoning (Map Amendment), Planned Development District

Sec. 3.7 Zoning Text Amendment

3.7.3 Application Procedures

Prior to the submittal of an application for a text amendment, the applicant shall participate in a pre-application conference ~~with the Planning Director~~ as described in Sec. 3.1.2.

3.7.5 Review by the Planning Commission

a. **Consideration by Planning Commission**

All text amendment applications shall be considered by the Planning Commission at a public hearing, prior to public hearing by the Mayor and Aldermen. The Planning Commission public hearing shall be held no more than 120 days after the receipt of a completed application.

b. **Standards and Criteria**

The Planning Commission shall review and make a recommendation on the proposed text amendment based upon the standards in Sec. 3.7.7, Review Criteria for Text Amendment Applications. The Planning Commission shall make a recommendation no more than 120 days after the first meeting during which a public hearing is held for a rezoning.

c. **Planning Commission Recommendation**

~~After consideration of the review criteria in Sec. 3.7.7, the Planning Commission shall provide a recommendation which~~ A recommendation shall be prepared and forwarded to the Mayor and Aldermen. The recommendation shall indicate that the proposed text amendment should be:

- i. Approved as submitted by the applicant;
- ii. Approved as recommended by the ~~Planning~~ MPC Director;
- iii. Approved with modifications;
- iv. Continued to the next meeting or a date certain or
- v. Denied

3.7.6 Action by the Mayor and Aldermen

Within seven (7) days of the recommendation of the review authority, the ~~Planning~~ MPC Director shall forward the recommendation to the Mayor and Aldermen for final action.

a. **Public Hearing**

The Mayor and Aldermen shall hold a minimum of one (1) public hearing to consider the proposed text amendment after receiving a recommendation from the responsible review authority. Within seven (7) days of receiving the recommendation, the Mayor and Aldermen shall notify the applicant of the scheduled date for the public hearing. Notwithstanding any other provision in this ordinance to the contrary, any text amendment initiated by or on behalf of the Mayor and Aldermen shall not be submitted to or considered by the Planning Commission unless specifically requested by the ~~Mayor and Aldermen~~ City Manager or his or her designee.

Sec. 3.8 Development Plan Review

3.8.3 Review Authority for Development Plans

There are two review authorities for Development Plans with varying review and approval procedures. The authorities are provided below:

a. City of Savannah Development Plans (Minor)

Prior to the submittal of an application for a Development Plan listed in part i.3 below, the applicant shall participate in a pre-application conference as organized by the City Manager or his or her designee.

- i. **Final Authority:** Development Plans that are reviewed and approved by the City Manager or his or her designee include the following:
 1. Temporary use permits (see Sec. 3.11, Temporary Use Permits);
 2. Accessory structures or uses as provided in Sec. 8.7 Accessory Structures and Uses as determined by the City Manager or his or her designee; or
 3. Development Plans that do not require Planning Commission level review described below. The **Planning MPC** Director may participate in the City of Savannah Development Plan Review for such plans.

b. Planning Commission Development Plan Review (Major)

Development Plans that are reviewed and approved by the Planning Commission. Prior to the submittal of an application for any Development Plan listed in parts i and ii below, the applicant shall participate in a pre-application conference as described in Sec. 3.1.2. The MPC Director may waive the pre-application conference requirement for variances, special exceptions, and major subdivisions.

- i. **Review Authority:**

The Planning Commission shall review the following Development Plans and make recommendations to the Mayor and Aldermen:

 1. Rezoning for a Planned Development District (see Sec. 3.6 Planned Developments); and
 2. Special use permits (see Sec. 3.10, Special Use Permits).
- ii. **Final Authority**

The Planning Commission shall review and have the final authority to approve or deny the following Development Plans:

 1. Any special exception that requires a Development Plan (see Sec. 3.12, Special Exceptions);
 2. Any use that requires a Development Plan as provided in Article 8.0, Use Standards;
 3. Any variance requested for any Development Plan; or
 4. Major subdivisions in accordance with the requirements of the Subdivision Regulation Ordinance, Savannah City Code, Part 8, Chapter 2.

Sec. 3.9 Traffic Impact Analysis

Sec. 3.10 Special Use Permit

3.10.3 ~~Reserved~~ Pre-Application Conference Required

Prior to the submittal of an application for a special use permit, the applicant shall request and participate in a pre-application conference in accordance with Sec. 3.1.2, Pre-application Conference.

Sec. 3.11 Temporary Use Permit

Sec. 3.12 Special Exceptions

3.12.1 Purpose

This Section establishes procedures for providing relief from specified standards within this Ordinance. It is not the intent of the special exception to eliminate such standards, but rather to provide a process by which exceptions can be made for individual circumstances. **Prior to the submittal of an application for a special exception, the applicant shall request and participate in a pre-application conference in accordance with Sec. 3.1.2, Pre-application Conference.**

Sec. 3.13 Home Occupation Permit

Sec. 3.14 Wireless Communications Facilities

Sec. 3.15 Sign Permit

Sec. 3.16 Local Historic District Designation

Sec. 3.17 Local Historic Property Designation

Sec. 3.18 Certificate of Appropriateness for Local Historic Districts and Local Historic Properties

Sec. 3.19 Certificate of Appropriateness for the Savannah Downtown Historic District

Sec. 3.20 Proactive Preservation

Sec. 3.21 Variances

3.21.3 Application Process

As described below, an application for a variance shall be submitted to the applicable review authority.

a. Zoning Board of Appeals

Prior to the submittal of an application for a variance, the applicant shall participate in a pre-application conference **in accordance with Sec. 3.1.2, Pre-application Conference.**

b. Planning Commission

Prior to the submittal of an application for a variance, the applicant shall participate in a pre-application conference **in accordance with Sec. 3.1.2, Pre-application Conference.**

Sec. 3.22 Written Interpretations

Sec. 3.23 Appeals

Sec. 3.24 Relief for Nonconforming Uses and Structures

ARTICLE 6.0 SPECIAL PURPOSE DISTRICTS

6.1.3 Initiation of a Planned Development Rezoning

An application for a Planned Development rezoning may be initiated by any person, or agent for such person, who seeks to rezone his or her own property. **Prior to the submittal of an application for a Planned Development rezoning, the applicant shall participate in a pre-application conference as described in Sec. 3.1.2.**

BACKGROUND:

The proposal is to change the application and intake process for Zoning Board of Appeals and developments from starting with City of Savannah staff and then being transferred to MPC staff. Currently an application is started with the City, by submitting payments and applications. Once submitted, reviewed for completeness, and paid for with the City that application is then sent to the MPC for review and consideration. Several sections of the Zoning Ordinance specify intake and application authority. To facilitate the intake of applications by the MPC, these sections are being amended to provide clarity and transparency.

In addition to the changes made for Intake, changes are being made to clarify the title of the intake authority, changing the current designation of “Planning Director” to “MPC Director” along with modifying the definition to be clear. It should be noted within the enabling legislation of the MPC, the MPC is designated as the official planning body for both Chatham County and the City of Savannah.

FACTS AND FINDINGS:

1. In addition to the changes made for Intake, changes are being made to clarify the title of the intake authority, changing the current designation of “Planning Director” to “MPC Director” along with modifying the definition to be clear. The City has proposed numerous changes within the proposed amendment with regards to change this afore mentioned title, however the vast majority of changes are not specifically shown, with the titled “Planning Director” being mentioned nearly 200 times within various Articles.
2. It should be noted within the enabling legislation of the MPC, the MPC is designated as the official planning body for both Chatham County and the City of Savannah.
3. This amendment supports several goals of the City’s GPS Goal 6: Always Be a High-Performing Government.
4. The amendment streamlines the process for applicants for variances and developments.
5. MPC Staff has also added multiple points to this amendment shown in Green, bolded and underlined text.

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 clarify processes and authorities for the intake and consideration of applications.*

- 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 streamlines the applications process for items to the MPC.*

- 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 clarifies processes and authorities that exist.*

- 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 change is not a result of changes in state or federal statutes.*

POLICY ANALYSIS:

The City states that the proposed text amendments support *Savannah GPS Goal 6: Always Be A High-Performing Government*, by ensuring every dollar of public funds is spent wisely, transparently, and to the maximum benefit of our community, by saving money to the taxpayer by implementing operational efficiencies, eliminating redundancy and waste, and optimizing partnerships to leverage shared service.

MPC STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

If the Commission does see fit to approve this request to amend Articles 2 Review Bodies and Administrators, 3 Application and Review Procedures, 6 Special Purpose Districts, 7 Overlay Districts, 8 Use Standards, 9 General Site Standards, and 13 Abbreviations and Buffers, MPC staff suggest the changes also proposed by MPC staff.

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.