



CHATHAM COUNTY-SAVANNAH
METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION *"Planning the
Future, Respecting the Past"*

STAFF REPORT

To: The Planning Commission

From: Subhashi Karunarathne, Planner – Development Services

Date: March 10, 2026

Subject: Comprehensive Plan - Future Land Use Map Amendment

Applicant/Agent: Josh Yellin for Bernard Property Holdings LLC

Address: 8106 Waters Ave

PIN: 20494 07004

Site Area: 0.16 acres

Alderman District: 4 – Alderman Nick Palumbo

Chatham County Commission District: 1 – Commissioner Wayne Noha

File Number: 25-000785-ZA-FLUM

Request:

The Petitioner is requesting a Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Map (FLUM) amendment to change the designation of 8106 Waters Avenue from Commercial-Neighborhood to Civic/Institutional in support of rezoning the subject property to OI-T (Office-Institutional Transition). The application was filed concurrently with a petition to rezone the subject property and is requested strictly on the basis of zoning compliance.

Evaluation:

Within the City of Savannah, the Zoning Ordinance requires amendments to the zoning map to be consistent with the FLUM. In essence, amendment of the FLUM very technically signals appropriateness of only specifically identified zoning districts. *NewZO* requires a

Future Land Use designation of 'Civic/Institutional' for property to be rezoned to the OI-T (Office and Institutional – Transition) zoning district.

Consideration of the following points may serve to elucidate whether the proposed amendment meets the intent of published policy documents:

1. The relationship of the proposed amendment to the existing and future land uses depicted in the Future Land Use Map.

MPC Comment: The relationship of this proposed amendment to the depicted land uses is primarily driven by a technical zoning compliance issue rather than a fundamental shift in the area's planned future use. Under the current Savannah Zoning Ordinance (Sec. 5.15.2), the requested Office and Institutional-Transition (OI-T) zoning district is not a permitted classification within the Commercial-Neighborhood FLUM category. The applicant has requested the amendment to Civic/Institutional simply because it is one of the few categories that technically allows the OI-T rezoning to proceed.

'Commercial-Neighborhood' areas are described as "Nodal and multi-tenant retail areas that are within predominately residential areas and are developed at a scale and intensity compatible with adjacent residential uses. These neighborhoods are typically auto-dependent."

While the proposed low-intensity office use aligns well with the *Plan 2040* Urban Transitional Character Area's goal of integrating secondary commercial uses along evolving, high-traffic corridors like Waters Avenue, the "Civic/Institutional" FLUM category is generally intended for educational, religious, medical, or public uses such as schools, hospitals, and libraries, often in a campus setting.

5.15.2 Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Map Consistency

The OI districts are allowed only in the Future Land Use Map categories as shown below:

- a. **Office/Institutional:** Office and Institutional-Expanded (OI-E); Office and Institutional (OI); Office and Institutional-Transition (OI-T)
- b. **Office-Transition:** Office and Institutional-Transition (OI-T)
- c. **Commercial-Suburban:** Office and Institutional-Expanded (OI-E); Office and Institutional (OI); Office and Institutional-Transition (OI-T)

As an alternative, rezoning to the similar B-L (Limited Business) zoning district was discussed as it would not require amendment of the FLUM, however, the intent of the OI-T zoning district more closely aligns to the context and intent of the proposal as the business will be conducted within an existing single-family dwelling modified for commercial use.

2. The relationship of the proposed amendment to any applicable goals, objectives, policies, criteria, and standards adopted in the Comprehensive Plan.

MPC Comment: The subject property is located in the *Urban Transitional* character area, which explicitly encourages secondary commercial, civic, and institutional uses to serve as buffers along evolving, high-traffic corridors like Waters Avenue. The proposed low-intensity office perfectly matches this vision.

The Comprehensive Plan's long-term vision for residential areas adjacent to high-traffic arterial roads includes a "transition toward low density commercial, retail and office functions...that protect and insulate residential areas in a cohesive and symbiotic manner". The requested OI-T (Office and Institutional - Transition) district specifically fulfills this policy by acting as a transitional buffer between Waters Avenue and the interior residential neighborhood.

The applicant is only requesting the Civic/Institutional designation because of an oversight in the current Zoning Ordinance that prevents the OI-T zoning district from being placed in a Commercial-Neighborhood FLUM category. However, the "Civic/Institutional" FLUM category is intended for potentially larger-scale educational, religious, medical, or public uses, often in a campus setting. MPC Staff recommends denial of the specific request to amend the FLUM to Civic/Institutional as the current FLUM designation is more appropriate and consistent with the intent of Plan 2040 for the future growth of the corridor.

3. Other professional planning principles, standards, information and more detailed plans and studies considered relevant.

MPC Comment: When evaluated through the lens of the *Savannah GPS Strategic Plan* and the *Equity Implementation Framework*, the FLUM amendment request highlights a systemic regulatory barrier that the City should address to promote equitable economic growth.

- Expanding Economic Access: Goal 3 of the Savannah GPS Strategic Plan is to "*Expand Economic Access, Opportunity & Vitality for All*". It directs the City to support local, small businesses and entrepreneurs and to foster economic opportunity by streamlining permitting and licensing processes. The applicant's stated goal is to establish an office to assist in "*retaining small, locally owned businesses within the City*".
- Removing Unfair Regulatory Burdens: The *Equity Implementation Framework* explicitly defines equity as taking action to "*remove unfair burdens caused by history or current conditions*". It specifically monitors "Entrepreneurship and business ownership" as a key indicator of equitable economic vitality.

To best align with the *Comprehensive Plan*, *Savannah GPS*, and the *Equity Framework*, the City should decline the individual FLUM amendment, and instead initiate a text amendment to allow the OI-T zoning district within the existing Commercial-Neighborhood FLUM category as it is a more appropriate designation. This solution removes a systemic barrier to local entrepreneurship, streamlines the process for small businesses to revitalize legacy commercial properties, and achieves strict Comprehensive Plan consistency without distorting the Future Land Use Map.

4. Written comments, evidence, and testimony of the public.

MPC Comment: At the time this report was written, MPC staff had received no public comments on the proposal.

Staff Recommendation

MPC Staff recommends **denial** of the request to amend the FLUM from a designation of Commercial-Neighborhood to Civic/Institutional as the current FLUM designation is more appropriate than that requested to permit the proposed and future low-intensity commercial uses of the property.

