



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: MPC Staff – Development Services

Date: March 10, 2025

Subject: Zoning 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

Request: Rezone from RSF-6 (Residential Single-family 6) to OI-T (Office and Institutional - Transition)

File Number: 26-00785-ZA-MAP

Request

The Petitioner is requesting an amendment to the Zoning Map from RSF-6 (Residential Single Family – 6) to OI-T (Office and Institutional – Transition). The proposed use is for an office. The property was previously utilized as a hair salon. The proposed OI-T zoning district is not currently permitted under the Commercial-Neighborhood FLUM category.

Facts and Findings

Zoning History

The subject parcel, along with the majority of the surrounding area, was originally zoned R-1 (Single Family Residential) in 1962 by Chatham County. Upon annexation into the City of Savannah in 1979, it was classified as R-6. In 2000, following the Grove Park Zoning Study, the

City resolved to maintain the existing residential zoning pattern in the interior of the subdivision while considering petitions for non-residential zoning along Waters Avenue on a case-by-case basis. In August 2010, the previous owner petitioned to rezone the subject property from R-6 to PRT (Planned Residential Transition) to establish an office (File No. Z-100810-29434-2). While MPC staff acknowledged that the request was consistent with the Future Land Use Map at the time, they recommended **denial** because a mid-block change was considered "spot zoning" that lacked cohesion and would place undue pressure on adjacent residential properties.

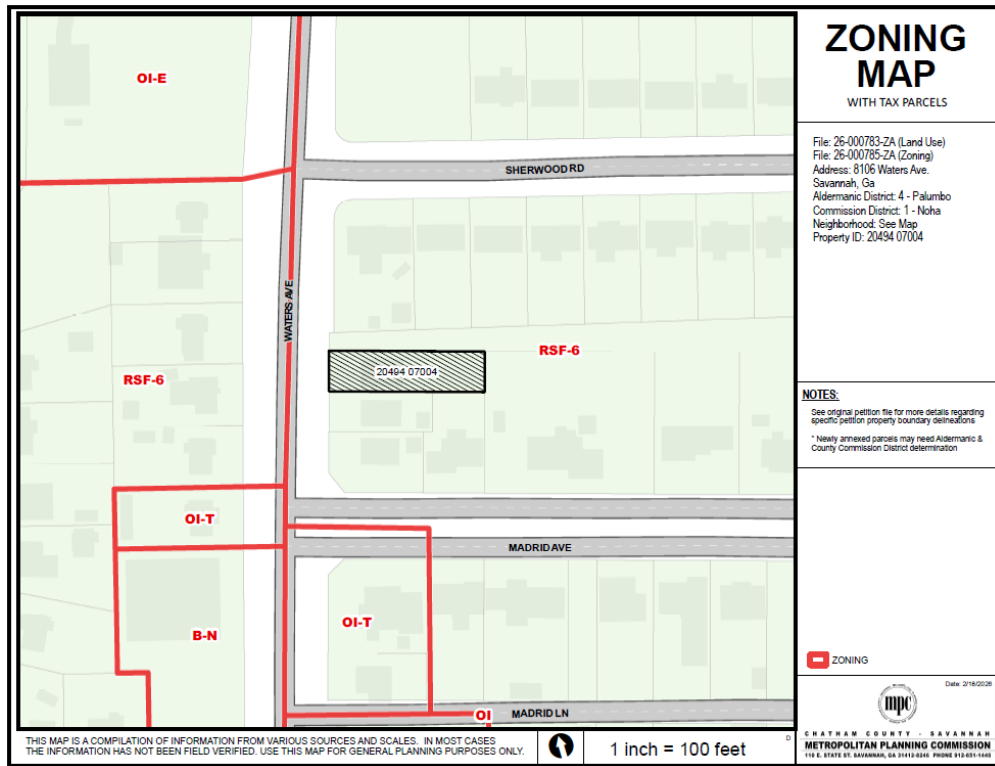
Site

The subject property is located at 8106 Waters Avenue, mid-block between Sherwood Avenue and Madrid Avenue. The parcel is 0.16 acres in size and rectangular in shape with 43 feet of frontage along Waters Avenue and a depth of 165 feet. The property contains a single-family residence built in 1978 with heated and cooled living area of 1,040 square feet. The structure was previously internally adapted to host a commercial use.

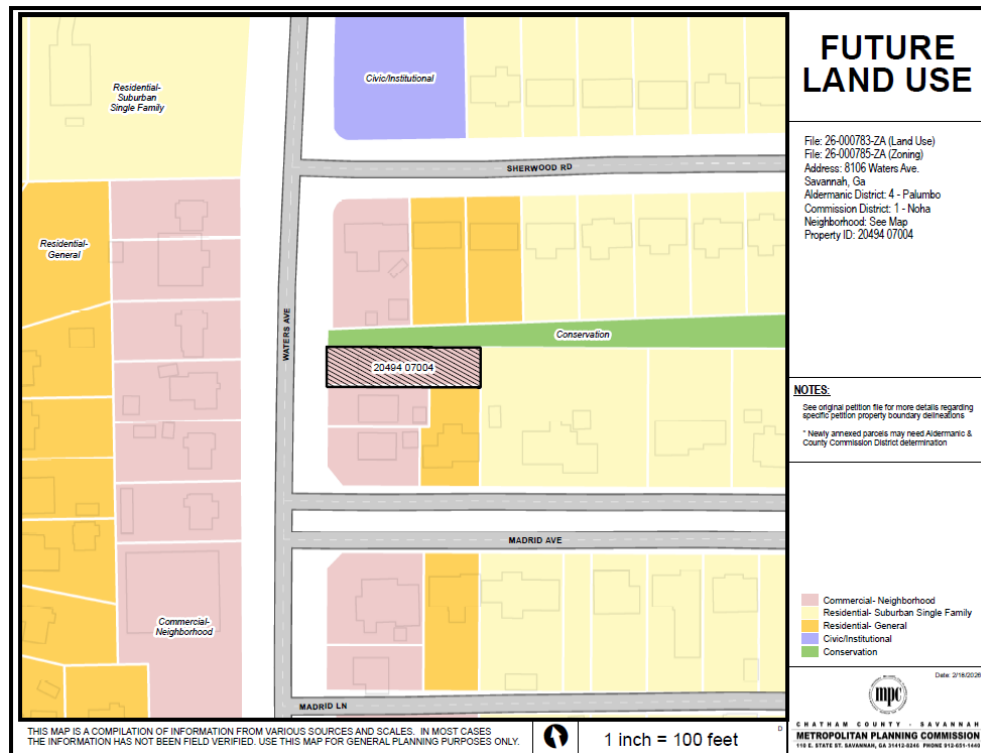
Existing Zoning and Development Pattern

The subject parcel is currently zoned RSF-6 (Residential Single-family 6). Unlike the conditions present during the 2010 rezoning denial, the Waters Avenue corridor has increasingly become commercial in nature. Today, adjacent and nearby properties are zoned a mix of RSF-6, OI-T, B-N, OI, and OI-E.

Location	Land Use	Existing Zoning
North	Conservation, Single-family Residences	RSF-6
South	Single-family Residences; Interior Design Studio	RSF-6, OI-T
East	Single-family Residences	RSF-6
West	Single-family Residences; Offices; Place of Worship	OI-E, RSF-6, OI-T, B-N



Current Zoning Map



Current FLUM Map

Public Notice

Mailed notice of the Planning Commission meeting was sent to all property owners within 300-feet of the subject property, signs were posted on site and required newspaper advertisements were run at least 15 days prior to the meeting. The mailed notice included instructions on how to access the public meeting via the internet.

Neighborhood Meetings

While a neighborhood meeting is required for rezoning, there is no active neighborhood association or point of contact for the Skyland Terrace, Greenway Park, Grove Park and Oglethorpe neighborhoods.

Impact and Suitability

Public Services and Facilities

The site is served by City water, sewer and stormwater systems. Modifications requiring the issuance of a site development permit will go through the site plan review process which includes approval of all applicable departments.

Comprehensive Land Use Plan Element

The Urban Transitional character area, often described as an "urban edge" or "urban expansion" zone, is defined by automobile-oriented, suburban-style residential areas that still retain access to urban amenities and public transit. It is characterized by medium-to-high density attached and detached housing as its primary uses, alongside secondary commercial, civic, and institutional uses. These neighborhoods are typically pedestrian-oriented with well-utilized sidewalks, open spaces, and parks, and they offer prevalent opportunities for infill and redevelopment, especially along corridors suited for transit-oriented development.

The proposed zoning change to Office and Institutional - Transition (OI-T) to accommodate an office use is highly appropriate for this specific character area. The OI-T district is explicitly intended to support the transition of originally residential properties into limited nonresidential uses, acting as a vital buffer between heavier traffic corridors and interior residential neighborhoods. Because the property's current Commercial-Neighborhood Future Land Use Map (FLUM) designation does not technically permit the OI-T district under current ordinances, the property needs a FLUM amendment to Civic/Institutional to achieve strict consistency. Introducing a low-intensity office use here perfectly aligns with the Urban Transitional area's goal of integrating secondary commercial and institutional redevelopment along evolving, high-traffic corridors.

Existing Zoning District

- Intent of the RSF-6 Zoning District:

The RSF- districts are established to preserve and create areas of single-family detached development. The five districts (RSF-30, RSF-20, RSF-10, RSF-6, RSF-5, and RSF-4) within the RSF- designation provide for varying development standards but generally permit the same uses. A limited number of nonresidential uses are allowed that are compatible with single-family residential uses.

- Allowed Uses: The uses allowed in the RSF-6 zoning district appear in a chart appended to the end of this report.
- Development Standards: The development standards of the RSF-6 zoning district appear in a chart appended to the end of this report.

Proposed Zoning District

- Intent of the OI-T Zoning District:

The Office and Institutional-Transition (“OI-T”) district is established to facilitate the orderly transition of properties originally developed for residential use to limited nonresidential uses. These properties are located in areas where increased automobile traffic, road widening or other factors have diminished residential viability, resulting in the need for a transitional area to buffer surrounding residential properties.

- Allowed Uses: The uses allowed in the OI-T zoning districts appear in a chart appended to the end of this report.
- Development Standards: The development standards of the OI-T zoning districts appear in charts appended to the end of this report.

Zoning Ordinance Review

The following review criteria for rezoning are prescribed in the Savannah Zoning Ordinance Sec. 3.5.8:

Suitability and Community Need

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

MPC Comment: *Yes. The range of uses permitted under the proposed OI-T zoning is more suitable than those allowed under the current RSF-6 designation. The 2010 staff report noted that increased traffic impacts and business activities along Waters Avenue had diminished the residential character of the frontage properties, making them prime candidates for transitional zoning. As nearby properties have since transitioned to commercial and institutional zoning, rezoning this parcel to OI-T is no longer considered spot zoning and addresses the corridor's evolution.*

- Whether the proposed zoning district addresses a specific need in the county or city.

MPC Comment: *The proposed rezoning addresses several specific needs within the community. Previous City zoning studies have explicitly recognized that increased traffic impacts and business activities along Waters Avenue have diminished the viability of single-family residential uses for properties directly fronting the corridor. The proposed OI-T district addresses the specific need for a transitional buffer that shields the interior residential neighborhood from heavy traffic while allowing limited, low-intensity nonresidential uses.*

Like similar transitional corridors in the City, the Waters Avenue frontage has experienced a gradual character shift toward business and institutional uses. Rezoning this parcel to OI-T addresses the need for zoning consistency, matching the property's classification with the present character and evolving land-use pattern of the area.

Compatibility

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

MPC Comment: *No. The requested zoning district is not expected to adversely affect the use or usability of adjacent or nearby properties. The subject property was previously utilized as a commercial hair salon; the proposed use is a low-intensity office. Further, there are established development standards and requirements for buffers and landscaping that will protect adjacent residential properties from the new commercial uses.*

- 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: *Yes. The requested zoning is compatible and consistent with the adjacent zoning, the evolving land-use pattern, and the character of the surrounding area. While the immediate block was historically residential, neighboring properties along the corridor have already been rezoned to a mix of OI-T, B-N, OI, and OI-E. The intent of the OI-T district is specifically to provide limited, low-intensity nonresidential uses along corridors like Waters Avenue to act as a transitional buffer for the existing residential communities behind them.*

- 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: *Yes. The requested zoning aligns with the changing conditions along the Waters Avenue corridor. Previous city studies have recognized that increased traffic impacts and business activities have diminished the viability of single-family residential uses for properties directly fronting Waters Avenue. The corridor is experiencing a gradual character shift toward business uses. Rezoning the property to OI-T formalizes this evolution and provides the additional benefit of retaining small, locally owned businesses within the City.*

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 subject property is currently designated as Commercial-Neighborhood on the FLUM. Under current regulations, OI-T is only permitted in Office/Institutional, Office-Transition, and Commercial-Suburban FLUM categories.*

Reasonable Use

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

MPC Comment: *While the subject parcel has reasonable use as presently zoned, the proposed zoning change is more consistent with recent development patterns along the corridor, adjacent zoning, and the intent of the Comprehensive Plan.*

Adequate Public Services

- 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: *Adequate City services will be available to serve the proposed use. Modifications requiring the issuance of a site development permit will go through the site plan review process which includes approval of all applicable departments.*

Proximity to a Military Base, Installation or Airport

MPC Comment: *The subject parcel is not within an installation AICUZ or APZ, nor is it in proximity to an airport.*

Recommendation

MPC Staff recommends **approval** of the request to rezone the subject property to *Office & Institutional - Transition* based upon the evolution of adjacent land use patterns, compatibility with the surrounding commercial and transitional area, and its suitability as a buffer along the Waters Avenue corridor.

Additional Comments:

Section 5.15.2 should be revised to allow OI-T in the Commercial-Neighborhood districts, as it is a less intense classification. This amendment would better reflect surrounding conditions and the intent of the Comp Plan:

5.15.2 Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Map Consistency

The OI districts are permitted only in the following FLUM categories:

- Office/Institutional: OI-E, OI, OI-T
- Office-Transition: OI-T
- Commercial-Suburban: OI-E, OI, OI-T
- ***Commercial-Neighborhood: OI-T (ADD)***

Office and Institutional-Transition (OI-T)

The OI-T district supports the transition of properties originally developed for residential use into limited nonresidential uses. It is intended for areas where traffic increases, roadway modifications, or similar factors have reduced residential viability, creating a need for a transitional buffer between residential and nonresidential uses.