



METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION

"Planning the Future - Respecting the Past"

STAFF REPORT

To: The Planning Commission

Through: Melanie Wilson, Executive Director and CEO

From: Ely Zarka, Senior Planner - Development Services

Date: May 12th, 2026

Subject: Variance for Development Plan

Petitioner: Alec Gregg

Owner: Highlands Commercial Park LLC

Address: 143, 149, 155 Shellbark

PIN(s): 21016 02118, 21016 02119, 21016 02120

Site Area: 9.8 acres total

Alderman District: 1– Bernetta B. Lanier

Chatham County Commission District: 8 – Marsha Buford

File Number: 26-001813-ZA

Request

The Petitioner is requesting MPC approval for variances to the maximum building height permitted in the Highlands Business Park Master Plan

The request is as follows:

1. Increase the maximum building height from 50 feet to 58 feet.

The request is specifically for the design of two of the proposed eight structures.

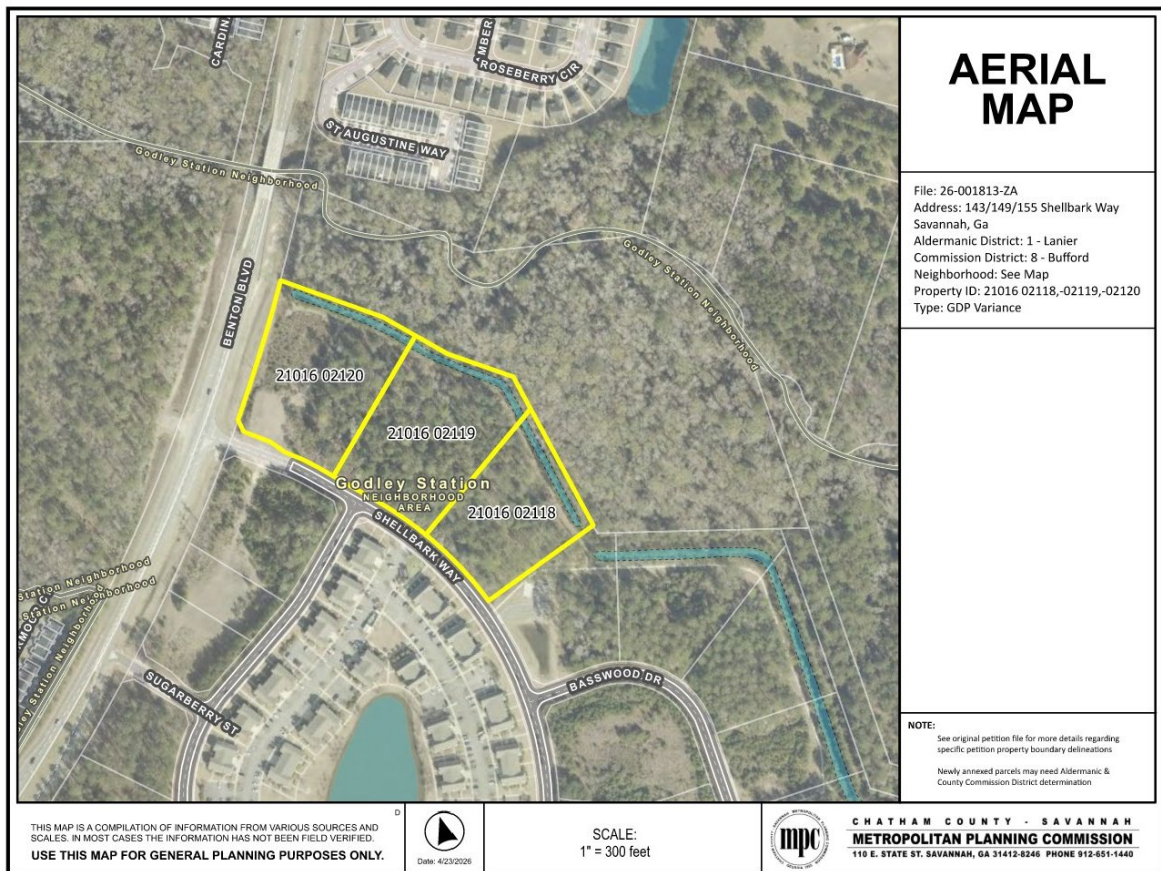
Facts and Findings

- 1) The master plan has been amended several times, the most recent of which was in April 2026. The previous amendment #4 was approved to permit this multifamily development.
- 2) As part of the previous amendment the multifamily units are permitted at a density of 23 dwelling units per acre.
- 3) The subject multifamily buildings are part of a larger proposed development and are proposed to be four stories, while the other six multifamily buildings are all three stories
- 4) The total development is for 224 units, out of the 225 permitted by the master plan.

- 5) The petitioner has submitted several examples of similar rooflines, at existing development, as submitted however all of these examples are of three-story structures.
- 6) The applicant has specifically requested 58 feet in height and not the 57 feet four inches as shown in the height exhibit to allow for slight deviations if the design is modified.

Existing Zoning and Development Pattern

The Highlands Business Park will be home to a mix of uses, however the outer ring of the development has not yet been built out. The inner ring of the development is multi-family of a much lesser density and design. The outer ring is designated as a mixture of office and institutional uses. The subject parcels will be bounded by wetlands to the north, commercial and other multifamily directly west and south, and office and institutional to the east.



Aerial Map for Shellbark Way

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 30 days prior to the meeting. The mailed notice included instructions on how to access the public meeting via the internet.

Standards at Issue

1. Per the Highlands Park Master Plan, this multifamily development shall comply with the RMF-2-23 of the City of Savannah's Zoning Ordinance.

***MASTER PLAN AMENDMENT #4 NOTES:**

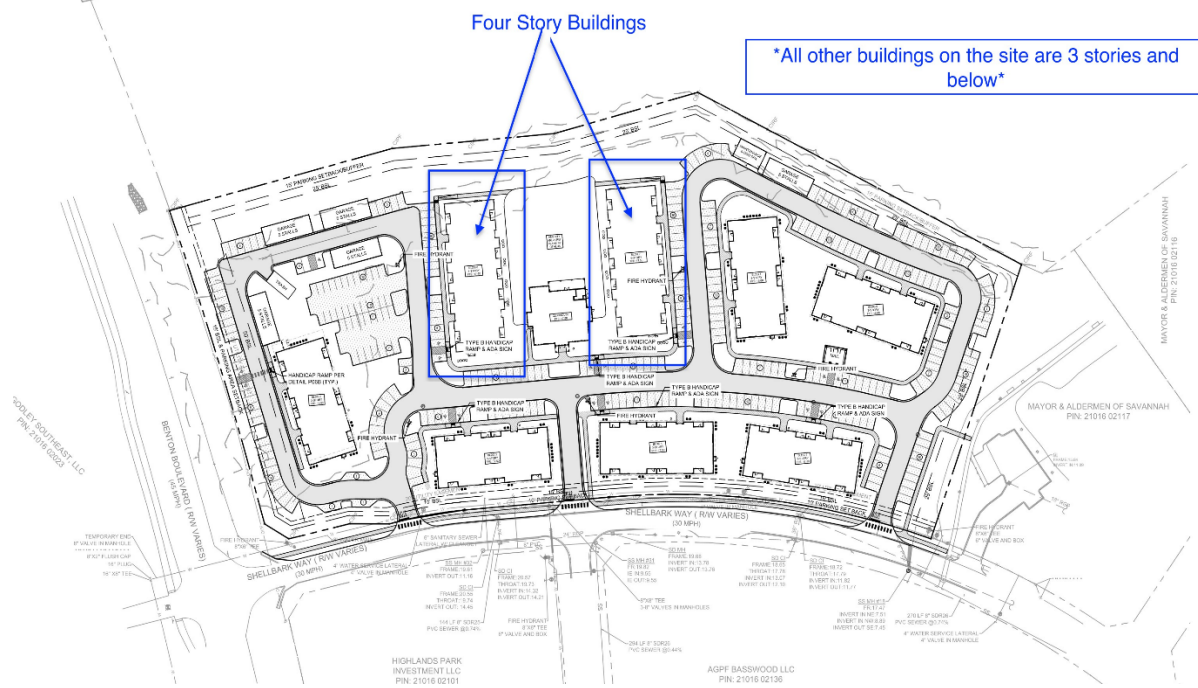
1. MASTER PLAN AMENDMENT #4 PROPOSES NO CHANGES TO THE MULTIFAMILY RESIDENTIAL (14 DU/AC) USE.
2. THE NEIGHBORHOOD CENTER USE ACREAGE WAS REDUCED BY 9.8 ACRES, WHICH IS CONVERTED TO THE NEW MULTIFAMILY RESIDENTIAL (23 DU/AC) USE.
3. ESTABLISH A MULTIFAMILY RESIDENTIAL (23 DU/AC) USE TO INCLUDE ± 9.8 AC.
4. DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE MULTIFAMILY RESIDENTIAL (23 DU/AC) LAND USE SHALL COMPLY WITH THE CITY OF SAVANNAH RMF 2-23 DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS AS ESTABLISHED BY THE CITY OF SAVANNAH ZONING ORDINANCE.

5.10.5 Development Standards for Permitted Housing Types			
Standards	RMF-1	RMF-2	RMF-3
Street Access			
Single-family detached	40%	40%	--
All other housing types	50%	50%	50%
Lane Access			
Single-family detached	40%	45%	--
All other housing types	50%	50%	50%
Height (max ft) [4]	50	50	50
Accessory Structure Setback	See Sec. 8.7	See Sec. 8.7	See Sec. 8.7

2. Per Section 5.10.5 of the Zoning Ordinance, maximum building height is 50 feet. There is a note that further restrictions apply within a 50-foot proximity to other specific districts. This does not apply in this case.



Height exhibit denoting height limit relative to submitted elevations



Site Plan denoting subject structures

Zoning Ordinance Review

The Planning Commission is authorized to grant variances to the standards of *Article 5, Base Zoning Districts*, upon the basis of the criteria established in Sec. 3.21.10.

The following review criteria for Variances are prescribed in the Savannah Zoning Ordinance Sec. 3.21.10:

A. General Consistency

The variance shall be consistent with the intent of this Ordinance and the Comprehensive Plan and shall not be injurious to the neighborhood or otherwise detrimental to the public health, safety, or welfare.

MPC Comment: The ordinance sets a height limit that anticipates a certain building style and a number of stories that would be feasible with some variation based on design. This request is not consistent with the intent of the ordinance.

B. Special Conditions

i. Special conditions and/or circumstances exist which are peculiar to the land, buildings or structures involved and which are not applicable to other lands, buildings or structures in the same zoning district.

MPC Comment: There are no special circumstances or conditions that are peculiar to the subject lots.

ii. The special conditions and/or circumstances do not result from the actions of the applicant.

MPC Comment: The petitioner has the ability to meet the requirement with other roof designs or with less stories for the subject structures. The other structures in the development are meeting this height requirement, and the cause of seeking relief ultimately is a design/aesthetic choice. The applicant has pointed out the design proposed is more beneficial for maintenance and is in keeping with the surrounding development styles.

iii. The special conditions and/or circumstances are not purely financial in nature so as to allow the applicant to use the land, buildings or structures involved more profitably or to save money.

MPC Comment: The request while for development is not purely financial in nature. A similar structure in number of stories and units could be developed within the height limit with other roof designs.

C. Literal Interpretation

Literal interpretation of the provisions of the regulations would deprive the applicant of rights commonly enjoyed by other properties in the same zoning district under the terms of the Ordinance and would result in unnecessary and undue hardship on the applicant.

MPC Comment: The literal interpretation of the regulations would not deprive the applicant of rights commonly enjoyed by other properties in the same zoning district.

D. Minimum Variance

The variance, if granted, is the minimum variance necessary to make possible the reasonable use of land, buildings, or structures.

MPC Comment: Variances are not necessary for reasonable use of the land.

E. Special Privilege Not Granted

The variance would not confer on the applicant any special privilege that is denied by this Ordinance to other lands, buildings, or structures in the same zoning district.

MPC Comment: The variances will confer special privilege on the Petitioner, though variance relief is a remedy afforded to all similarly situated property owners. While the petitioner has pointed out similar roof styles in the surrounding area, all of these structures are three stories in height and ultimately would not necessarily require the same relief.

MPC Staff Recommendation

MPC Staff recommends **denial** of the requested variance:

1. Increase the maximum building height from 50 feet to 58 feet.