CHATHAM COUNTY - SAVANNAH

METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION

"Planning the Future - Respecting the Past"

MEMORANDUM

File No.	26-003992-ZA (TEXT)
Date:	October 27, 2026
To:	The Planning Commission
Through:	Melanie Wilson, Executive Director/CEO
From:	Ely Zarka, Senior Planner – Development Services
Subject:	Text Amendment to the City of Savannah Zoning Ordinance Re: Amendment to Articles 5 Base Zoning Districts, 8 Use Standards, and 13 Abbreviations and Buffers
Applicant/Agent:	Bridget Lidy for The Mayor and Aldermen of the City of Savannah

REQUEST:

The City of Savannah (City) proposes zoning text amendments to add permitted use and associated development standards to *Articles 5 Base Zoning Districts, 8 Use Standards, and 13 Abbreviations and Buffers*, to permit

The text is proposed to be amended as follows:

ARTICLE 5.0 BASE ZONING DISTRICTS

Sec. 5.4 Principal Use Table

RINCIPAL USES	C	C-M	C-P	A-1	RSF-E	RSF-30	RSF-20	RSF-10	RSF-6	RSF-5	RSF-4	RTF	TR-1	TR-2	TR-3	RMF-1	RMF-2	RMF-3	RMHP	TN-1	TN-2 Int. Lot	TN-2 Cor. Lot	TN-3	TC-1	TC-2	D-R	D-N	D-C	D-CBD	D-X	D-W	OI-T	OI	OI-E	BL-N	BL-C	BL-M	IL-R	IL-T	I-L	I-H	Use Standards
Day Care Services:																																										
Child/adult day care home				L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	~~L~~ L	L	~~S~~L	~~S~~L	~~S~~L		L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L		L			L							Sec. 8.3.9 or Sec. 8.7.11
Child/adult day care center				L	S	S	S	S	S	S						L	~~S~~L	~~S~~L		~~S~~L	~~S~~L	~~S~~L	~~S~~L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L		L	L	L	L	L	L		L	L	S		Sec. 8.3.10 or Sec. 8.7.1
Child/adult care home, 24 hour				S	S	S	S	S	S	S														S	L		L	L	L	L				S								

Sec. 5.12 Traditional Neighborhood Districts

5.12.8 Additional Requirements Applicable to the Traditional Neighborhood Districts

a. **All TN- Districts**

i. Deliveries shall be restricted to the hours of 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., any day of the week.

ii. Hours of operation for commercial uses shall be limited to:

1. 6:00 a.m. until 10:00 p.m., Sunday through Thursday; and
2. 6:00 a.m. until 11:00 p.m., Friday and Saturday.

iii. Drive-thru service is not permitted.

iv. Accessory structures with a roof must be located in the rear yard.

v. Principal use dwellings shall be a minimum of 450 square feet.

vi. On interior lots, permitted nonresidential uses are allowed only on the ground floor **with the exception that Child/adult day care center uses may occupy all floors of a building**.

vii. When a lot does not have vehicular access from a lane or side street and the lot width is 30 feet or less, the maximum front yard setback may be increased to 22 feet to allow for vehicle parking or the minimum building frontage may be reduced to 50% to allow for vehicle parking. The standard shall not be applicable to nonresidential uses.

b. **TN-1 District**

i. Nonresidential uses shall be located on a corner lot and abut a street that is classified as a collector or greater. **Child/adult day care center uses shall not be subject to this standard.**

ii. Lots of record existing as of the Effective Date of this Ordinance, shall be utilized to determine the extent to which the corner lot provision of this Section shall be allowed. The recombination of parcels is permitted but shall not be used as the basis for the expansion of non-residential usage beyond a distance of 60 feet as measured from the property line beginning at the corner.

iii. Alternate standards may be applied in accordance with Sec. 7.6 Affordable Housing Overlay District.

c. **TN-3 District**

Buildings originally constructed for a residential use shall not be converted into a nonresidential use **with the exception of Child/adult day care center**. **Such buildings shall be converted back to residential if vacated by the Child/adult day care center.**

ARTICLE 8.0 USE STANDARDS

Sec. 8.3 Civic Use Standards for Limited and Special Uses

8.3.9 Child/Adult Day Care Home

a. In any Residential zoning district and any TN- zoning district, ~~the use shall be~~ **such uses** located on a street **not** classified as a collector or arterial as identified in Appendix A-1 **shall be limited to six (6) children on premises at one time, not including the family of the operator. With the exception of RMHP districts, the number of children may be increased to twelve (12) when the subject property meets the standards listed in Sec. 8.7.11.c.i.3. When such use is located on a collector or arterial street, the number of children on premises shall be limited to twelve (12), subject to Sec. 8.7.11.c.i.3. The maximum number of enrollees on premises may be varied, with the exception of RMHP districts.**

b. The hours of operation shall be limited to between ~~6:30~~ **5:00** a.m. and ~~7:00~~ **9:00** p.m. **This standard does not exempt such uses from State of Georgia licensing requirements related to hours of operation.**

c. Signage for such use shall be in accordance with Sec. 8.7.11.b. xi.

d. Additional child day care home standards:
   i. The outdoor play area for a child day care home shall be screened by an opaque fence that is at least six (6) feet in height.
   ii. A license for the operation such use shall be obtained pursuant to ARTICLE M of the City of Savannah Code of Ordinances, as amended. The home shall also comply with all the regulations established by and be licensed by the State of Georgia.

e. Such uses shall comply with all the regulations established of and be licensed by the State of Georgia.

f. Such uses shall comply with Sec. 8.7.11 "Home Occupations".

~~e.~~ **g. Additional adult day care home standards:**
An adult day care home shall comply with the Georgia Department of Human Resources "Standards for Adult Day Care", as amended.

8.3.10 Child/Adult Day Care Center

a. **Child day care center standards:**
   i. The outdoor play area for a child day care center shall be screened by an opaque fence that is at least six (6) feet in height.
   ii. A license for the operation of such use shall be obtained pursuant to ARTICLE M of the City of Savannah Code of Ordinances. The center shall also comply with all the regulations established by and be licensed by the State of Georgia.

b. **Adult day care center standards:**
An adult day care center shall comply with the Department of Human Resources "Standards for Adult Day Care", as amended.

c. Within any district requiring special use approval, the following standards shall apply:
   i. **The subject property shall be conforming with the minimum lot width and lot area for the zoning district** ~~**Such use shall be located on a street classified as a collector or arterial as identified in Appendix A-1**~~.
   ii. The ~~**number of enrollees**~~ **following standards** shall be determined by the Mayor and ~~**Alderman**~~ **Aldermen**.
      1. **Number of enrollees**
      2. **Hours of operation**
      3. **Parking requirements**
      4. **Buffer requirements**
   iii. The hours of operation shall be limited to between ~~**6:30 a.m. and 7:00 p.m**~~. **5:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.**

Sec. 8.7 Accessory Structures and Uses

8.7.11 Home Occupations
The intent of a home occupation use is to permit very limited nonresidential activity within a residential dwelling or any building accessory to the dwelling, provided that such activity does not detract from nor is incompatible with the surrounding residential uses. The following standards shall apply:

8.7.11.c Specific Standards
The uses listed below shall comply with the following specific use standards in addition to the standards provided in Sec. 8.7.11.b. above.

i.Child/Adult Day Care Home

1. Such use shall not provide care for more than six (6) individuals, not including the caregiver's own family **except in accordance with Sec. 8.3.9.a and Sec. 8.7.11.c.i.3. Where the number of enrollees exceeds six (6), the number of employees permitted on-site may be increased in accordance with State of Georgia licensing requirements**.
2. Such use shall be operated only between the hours of ~~**6:30**~~ **5:00** a.m. and ~~**7:00**~~ **9:00** p.m. **This standard does not exempt such uses from State of Georgia licensing requirements related to hours of operation.**

3. In any Residential zoning district, if the use is located on a street **not classified as a collector or arterial** ~~**classified as Residential or greater**~~ as identified in Appendix A-1 **and the number of enrollees is proposed to exceed six (6)**, the applicant must provide a site ~~**plan**~~ **drawing** for approval and include:
    a. Off-street stacking shall be required per Table 9.3-9 Vehicle Staking Requirements. **This standard may be varied.**
    b. Adequate vehicle queuing shall be provided on site to prevent the obstruction of travel lanes that are adjacent City streets.
    c. The site shall be evaluated for feasibility to incorporate a circular driveway with two curb cuts if permitted by the City's Traffic Engineering Manual; and
    d. The City of Savannah Traffic Engineer shall review the site for adequate traffic circulation and traffic safety **and provide comment.**

Commentary: Traffic Engineering review of the site plan is advisory. Acceptance of the site drawing is the purview of the applicable zoning authority for any associated permit, variance, and/or zoning action.

4. Such use shall not be permitted within **250** ~~**500**~~ feet **of the same use, as measured along street centerlines. Such use shall not be permitted within 100 feet,** as measured in any direction from property line to property line, of the same use.
5. The applicant shall provide a letter from the homeowner's association, where applicable, stating that the use is not prohibited by a Declaration of Covenants.

ii. **Child/Adult Care, 24-hour Care** ~~**Center**~~ **Home**

1. Such use shall not provide care for more than six (6) individuals, not including the caregiver's own family.
2. Such use shall not be permitted in Residential districts **except by approval of a Special Use Permit**.

8.7.13 Accessory Uses for Places of Worship

The following uses and activities are considered accessory to a place of worship. Additional buffering may be required where the proposed accessory use requires a greater use buffer than the principal use. The uses listed below shall comply with the following specific use standards in addition to the standards provided in Sec. 8.7.2 above.

a. Office for the place of worship;

b. Rooms for religious instruction or counseling;
c. Temporary child and adult care during religious services and events;
d. Fellowship hall;
e. Kitchen facilities (not to include restaurants);
f. Outdoor play area (including ball fields);
g. Community food programs using the kitchen facilities but delivering food elsewhere;
h. Accessory dwelling unit (no more than one unit);
i. Caretaker's dwelling unit (no more than one unit); and
j. Gymnasium/multi-purpose building.
k. Child/adult day care center that operates seven (7) days a week subject to the following:
i. Such use shall be licensed by the State of Georgia.
ii. In districts other than D- districts, such use may have up to eighteen (18) individuals under care at one time subject to item iii below. In D- districts, such use may have up to twenty-four individuals under care at one time, subject to item iii below. This standard may be varied.
iii. Shall be subject to Sec. 8.7.11.c.i.2 and Sec. 8.7.11.c.i.3.

Sec. 8.7.25 Day Care Centers at Places of Employment

A day care center offered by an employer to its employees shall be considered an accessory use to the principal use of the employer subject to the following:

a. Such facilities shall be licensed by the State of Georgia.
b. Day care services shall be offered only to employees of the principal use.
c. When proposed in an existing building, the parking requirement for the day care center shall be determined based on the parking requirement of the principal use or the parking requirement for Child/adult day care center as listed in Sec. 9.3.4, whichever is less. When proposed in a new building, the parking requirement shall be the parking requirement for Child/adult day care center.
d. Hours of operation may be set by the principal use employer.
e. Accessory day care centers shall not be permitted in I-H districts.

Article 13.0 Abbreviations and Definitions

Sec. 13.2 Defined Terms, General

Child/adult care center, 24 hour: A facility that provides care and supervision for ~~**more than six (6)**~~ children or adults **as a principal use** and which is licensed by the State of Georgia. **A day care center may be licensed by the State of Georgia as a Group Day Care based on the number of enrollees.** Such facility may operate 24 hours per day.

Child/adult day care center: A facility that provides care and supervision for ~~more than six (6)~~ children or adults **as a principal use** and which is licensed by the State of Georgia. **A day care center may be licensed by the State of Georgia as a Group Day Care based on the number of enrollees. This use shall not be allowed in a residence. Hours of operation shall be determined by use standards in Sec. 8.3.**

Child/adult care home, 24 hour: A facility that provides care and supervision for ~~more than six (6) but no more than 12~~ children or adults as an accessory use of an operator-occupied residence and which is licensed by the State of Georgia. **A home day care may be licensed by the State of Georgia as a Group Day Care or a Child Care Learning Center based on the number of enrollees. The maximum number of children or adults under care at one time shall be determined by the use standards in Sec. 8.3 and Sec. 8.7.** This number shall not include children or adults who reside in the home. Such facility may operate 24 hours per day.

Child/adult day care home: A facility that provides care and supervision for ~~more than six (6) but no more than 12~~ children or adults as an accessory use of an operator-occupied residence and which is licensed by the State of Georgia. **A home day care may be licensed by the State of Georgia as a Group Day Care based on the number of enrollees. The hours of operation and maximum number of children or adults under care at one time shall be determined by the use standards in Sec. 8.3 and Sec. 8.7.** This number shall not include children or adults who reside in the home.

BACKGROUND:

Per several reporting agencies and organizations, the Savannah area does not provide enough childcare for the number of individuals, mainly children. These reports advise that removing some of the barriers to entry for new operators may help close the shortfall on available day care services

Currently within the City of Savannah, daycares can fall under one of three different uses: child/adult day care home, child/adult day care home 24 hours, and child/adult day care center. Both child/adult day care home uses are operated out of residences, with the difference being the operation time potentially allowed. A child/adult day care center is operated more as commercial use being the primary use of the structure. Day care centers are permitted in several residential districts currently, but the structure and primary use are for the day care center use, not as a residence.

FACTS AND FINDINGS:

1. All three uses are either Limited or Special Use as currently allowed, and as proposed.

2. As proposed, child/adult day care home would be permitted as a limited (administrative) use in all districts where it is permitted. Child/adult day care center is being introduced to additional districts as a special use in more residential districts, and as a limited use in the mixed use districts where it previously required a special use. Child/adult day care home 24 hour is being added to several single-family residential districts as a special use.

3. Currently for child/adult day care homes, a buffer of 500 feet is enforced, preventing the same use within the buffer area. This is proposed as being changed to a combined buffer of 100 feet from the property line and 250 feet down the centerline of the road. This greatly reduces the required separation between day care from a 5-7 block area to 1.5-2 blocks depending on the layout of the neighborhood.

4. Adult/Child day care homes are only being added to a single district, Residential Mobile Home Park, with other changes only to the level of application required.

5. The use for all three is for Adult/Child but does not speak to changes regarding adults.

6. Day care by definition is not a place where “clientele” can reside, other uses in the use table would govern uses that would act as the residence for the clientele on either a permanent or temporary basis.

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 portions of the purpose of the Ordinance to permit a growing need in certain areas. However, it is also clear that many areas already allow the use and may not be currently utilized to their fullest extent.*

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 removes barriers to introducing day care services in several areas, with different categories based around the intensity of the operation.*

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 adds existing uses to more districts, with some changes to the manner in which it is permitted and is not necessarily a correction of the ordinance. Specific distance requirements are being added to clarify how the buffers to similar uses should be measured.*

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: *Several studies regarding the potential need, specifically childcare services, in the area based on the population within those age ranges. However, that is not necessarily a result of higher mandates. Changes and clarifications to definitions are connected to changes made at the state level.*

POLICY ANLYSIS:

The proposed amendment is supported by several goals *Savannah GPS*, 1, 2 and 3 by reducing barriers to local businesses. If a certain number of daycares were available or cheaper to operate then the cost burden could be reduced leading to benefits in other sectors of life.

The proposed text amendments proposed several changes that could allow a service that is currently deficient in terms of demand by removing administrative and process barriers. This is done by making the least intensive version of the use limited (administrative) vs a special use in all of the districts it is permitted in, while adding it as a use to one district. The existing buffering is also being drastically reduced. While introducing the use in more areas of the City may help provide a needed service, this is still a use that could be detrimental to surrounding properties.

The buffer that exists in the ordinance could be argued as being overly restrictive, however the proposed reduced buffering combined with the changes to use requirements has the potential to introduce this use into many neighborhoods that currently to not allow it or do not expect such a potential density. A buffer less than 500 feet may be worthwhile; however the combination of more permissive processes as well as a much smaller buffer may have unanticipated impacts on neighborhoods. Perhaps a buffer that is less than 500 feet but greater than the proposed buffer would

achieve an appropriate middle ground.

In the proposed changes only lots that meet their minimum required size are permitted to operate a day care home, which is the same requirement that properties must meet to have an ADU. This raises the question, is an ADU also permitted on the same lot that operates a daycare? This may be the appropriate opportunity to clarify that they are or deny that possibility.

The window for which a day car home may operate is being extended from 6:30 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. While this does potentially line up with the starting work times for some parents who are dropping kids off before a morning work shift, this does create a situation where several day cares could be present in close proximity with vehicles arriving dropping off or picking at the day care at a very early or very late into the day. This could have a negative impact on several areas, most likely residential neighborhoods.

For those day cares which require a special use permit, either as a 24-hour day-care home, or day care center. What are the guidelines to which these shall be evaluated to? This proposed ordinance stipulates that the following standards shall be determined by the Mayor and Aldermen: number of enrollees, hours of operation, parking requirements, buffer requirements.

MPC STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

MPC Staff recommends **APPROVAL with CONDITIONS** of the request to amend Articles 5 Base Zoning Districts, 8 Use Standards, and 13 Abbreviations and Buffers to permit child/adult day cares in several districts with the following conditions:

1. The proposed buffer shall be reduced to a 400' radius from the subject parcel.
2. The hours of operation for a day care home shall remain with the window from 6:30 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.
3. A parcel shall not be permitted to have both a child/adult day care home as well as an Accessory Dwelling Unit.
4. A child/adult day care home, 24 hour shall not permitted in the RSF-5, RSF-6, or RSF-10 districts.

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.