

PLANNING COMMISSION

STAFF REPORT

Department of Growth Management



MEETING DATE:	September 24, 2025
PROJECT:	Consideration and Direction on Potential Amendments to the Town of Bluffton Code of Ordinances, Chapter 23, Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), Article 5 – Design Standards - Accessory Buildings
PROJECT MANAGER:	Angie Castrillon Planner Department of Growth Management

REQUEST: The Department of Growth Management seeks input and direction from the Planning Commission (PC) regarding the use of unenclosed carports within Old Town.

PREVIOUS WORKSHOPS: On August 12, 2025, Town Council held a workshop to consider potential amendments to the Town of Bluffton Code of Ordinances, Chapter 23, Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), Article 5 – Design Standards: Accessory Buildings. Council requested additional opportunities for the Planning Commission (PC) to review and provide feedback on the potential amendments prior to further action.

Workshops on this topic were previously held with both the Planning Commission (PC) and the Historic Preservation Commission. However, no clear consensus or direction emerged due to varied perspectives. In April 2025, staff facilitated a workshop with Town Council, during which Council provided general direction to guide future standards.

Overall Intent

- Regulations should be guided by common sense and practicality, without creating undue burdens for residents, particularly long-term homeowners.
- Carports should be classified separately from carriage houses or sheds.
- Any new standards must be sensitive to and supportive of Historic District designation and character of Old Town.

Design and Compatibility

- Design guidelines should address scale, size, and height (measured in feet), ensuring carports do not overwhelm principal structures or disrupt the district's character.
- Visual diversity is encouraged; uniformity should be avoided.
- Screening measures, such as louvers or landscaping, may be appropriate to reduce impacts on adjacent properties.

Functionality and Use

- Carports should be restricted to residential use only, with no commercial activity permitted.
- Structures should be functional enough to accommodate typical resident needs, e.g., space for two vehicles, a boat, and/or a golf cart.

- Limited utilities, such as lighting and exterior water spigots, may be permitted.
- Access and orientation should be thoughtfully planned; for example, designs that require “sideways” parking may not be practical.

Lot and Zoning Considerations

- Standards should be flexible to address varying lot sizes and configurations, with potential to
- Placement near property lines may be considered where appropriate.
- Setbacks and existing non-conforming conditions should be carefully evaluated, with possible tailored approaches for unique or constrained sites.
- Regulations should be flexible enough to accommodate various lot sizes and configurations, with potential allowances for carports near property lines in cases where space is limited.

Construction Standards

- Consider whether carports should be required to meet hurricane resistance standards.
- Allow continued use of pre-fabricated structures where already in place, but establish minimum design standards for new installations.
- Tree preservation and landscaping impacts should be addressed during planning and review.
- All proposed structures must comply with relevant building codes, particularly regarding proximity to adjacent structures or property boundaries.

Community Engagement and Next Steps

- Additional public input is needed to ensure that regulations reflect community values and practical realities.
- Council encourages Staff to develop regulatory options and design concepts for future review and discussion

ITEMS FOR PC CONSIDERATION:

Maximum Lot Coverage

- Should carports be subject to maximum lot coverage requirements based on zoning district and building type?
- Lot coverage would include all impervious structures or surfaces, ensuring sufficient open space, stormwater management, and preservation of neighborhood character.

New Building Type – Carport

- Staff seeks PC input on the following draft standards:
- Allowed only on residential lots with an existing principal structure.
- Maximum footprint of 600 sq. ft., subject to district-specific lot coverage limits.
- Height not to exceed the height of the principal structure or 18 feet, whichever is less.
- No solid walls permitted; a maximum of two sides may be enclosed with louvers or horizontal panels.
- Limited electrical service permitted; no internal plumbing.
- Placement at the rear of the lot, or at least 20 feet behind the front plane of the

- principal structure.
- Limited to one carport per lot.

NEXT STEPS: Feedback from the Planning Commission will be incorporated into a draft amendment, in addition to the feedback from Historic Preservation Commission. Staff anticipates returning to Town Council with a formal draft for first and second reading. Public engagement opportunities will be integrated throughout this process. Staff will also make every effort to receive public input during these workshops.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Proposed UDO Edits
2. August 2025 Town Council Workshop Packet