

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION



STAFF REPORT

Department of Growth Management

MEETING DATE:	August 6, 2025
PROJECT:	COFA-05-25-019766 36 Bruin Road – New Construction
APPLICANT:	James Atkins (Court Atkins Group)
PROPERTY OWNER:	ABPAL, LLC
PROJECT MANAGER:	Charlotte Moore, AICP, Principal Planner

APPLICATION REQUEST: The Applicant, James Atkins (Court Atkins Group), on behalf of the owner, ABPAL LLC, requests that the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) approve the following application:

A Certificate of Appropriateness to construct a 2-story commercial building of approximately 3,130 SF at 36 Bruin Road in Old Town Bluffton Historic District, and within the Neighborhood General-HD (NG-HD) zoning district.

INTRODUCTION: The Applicant proposes the construction of a 2-story commercial structure (ABPAL Shell Building) with yet to be determined businesses. The proposed structure, approximately 3,130 SF, has characteristics of both a Main Street Building Type and a Live-Work Sideyard Building Type but is reviewed as an Additional Building Type as the NG-HD zoning district does not allow Main Street Buildings and an upper-story residence is not provided as is typical of a Live-Work Sideyard Building.

As stated in the UDO Sec. 5.15.5 C., “[w]ithin the NG-HD district, building form and scale shall be primarily residential to maintain the predominantly residential character component of this district. The UDO Administrator may waive the mandatory residential component for properties with frontage on SC Highway 46 and Bruin Road; buildings on these properties may be constructed with retail shopfronts, awnings, marquees, colonnades, or arcades in accordance with this UDO but must be residential in form and scale.” The residential component has been waived. The building complies with the form and scale requirement; its site placement complies with the front build-to zone (10’-20’ feet), side and rear yard setbacks, and is a half-story below the maximum permitted height of 2.5 stories.

The structure will be constructed on a slab with tabby stucco finish and the main mass of the structure will be underneath front-facing overlapping gables and will include projections on both the left and right elevations underneath shed roofs. The Bruin Road elevation includes three full-lite fixed frame windows with individual awnings for a shopfront appearance, with a side yard door main entrance into a partially screened

patio/vestibule. The screens are covered by operable Bahama shutters. The Rear Elevation includes a projection underneath a rear-facing gable that will include a ground floor screened porch, stairs, and a second-floor porch that will house HVAC equipment.

The building will feature Hardie horizontal lap siding, roof sections that include asphalt shingles (gables) or 5-V crimp (shed), and fiberglass windows.

The Development Plan for the subject property was approved by the Planning Commission on March 26, 2025 (DP-12-24-019469). The proposal included the subdivision of a 1.22 acre-lot into two lots, Lot 1 (the existing office building and parking lot for Court Atkins Group) and Lot 2 (a portion of the existing parking area for the subject structure). The Development Plan shows that American with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance will be via the Bruin Road entry. This must be shown on the Landscape Plan.

This project was presented to the Historic Preservation Review Committee for conceptual review at the June 30, 2025 meeting and comments were provided to the Applicant (See Attachment 7).

REVIEW CRITERIA & ANALYSIS: In its review of this COFA-HD application, Town Staff and the Historic Preservation Commission are required to consider the criteria set forth in Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) Section 3.18.3 (COFA-HD, Application Review Criteria), applying the standards and guidelines of UDO Sec. 5.15, Old Town Bluffton Historic District. The intent of the standards and guidelines is, in part, to provide guidance and ensure consistent development without discouraging creativity or forcing the replication of historic models.

The applicable criteria of UDO Sec.3.18.3 are provided below followed by a Staff Finding based upon review of the application submittals to date.

1. Section 3.18.3.B. Consistency with the principles set forth in the Old Town Master Plan.

- a. *Finding.* The application is consistent with the principles set forth in the Old Town Master Plan. The Old Town Master Plan states that “The built environment, in particular the historic structures scattered throughout Old Town, should be protected and enhanced. While it is of great importance to save and restore historic structures, it is just as important to add to the built environment in a way that makes Old Town more complete.”

Old Town Bluffton Historic District is a locally designated historic district. The proposed structure has been designed to be sympathetic to the architectural character of neighboring structures and will enhance the neighborhood by adding architectural variety.

- b. *Finding.* The Old Town Master Plan initiatives also include the adoption of a form-based code that included architectural standards for structures located within the Old Town Bluffton Historic District. These standards are included in Article 5 of the UDO. The new construction will be in conformance with those standards if the conditions noted in #2 of this Section are met.
- c. *Finding.* The Old Town Master Plan initiatives also promote preservation and protection of the legacy of the Old Town Bluffton Historic District through additions to the built environment which make Old Town more complete. The addition of the new building contributes to the district as well as helps to provide completeness to the neighborhood and overall district.

2. Section 3.18.3.C. The application must be in conformance with applicable provisions provided in Article 5, Design Standards.

- a. *Finding.* Town Staff finds that if the conditions noted below are met and/or approved by the HPC, the proposed structure will be in conformance with applicable provisions provided in Article 5:

(1) Service Yards (UDO Sec. 5.15.5.F.9.): An exterior service yard is proposed in the rear yard that complies with the screening requirements of the UDO. HVAC equipment, however, is proposed to be located on the second-story rear patio. Per UDO Sec. 5.15.9., service yards must be located “away from public vantages and screened from view. The HPC may approve alternate locations and screening for utilities if they are unable to be located within the service yard.”

The HVAC equipment is located behind a standard porch railing with wood and appears to be screened with horizontal louvers of unknown material. Screening details must be provided to show the proposed material and dimensions, including height. HPC must determine if the HVAC location is appropriate and screened appropriately. If the ground floor rear patio is to be used as a service area in the future, it must also be screened in compliance with the UDO to hide equipment. Service yard screening can be enclosed with louvers, lattice, vertical board, board on board panels, or other styles that would be typical of earlier styling. Sheet A4.1 of Attachment 5 suggests a chain-linked fence is proposed; the material is not identified.

(2) Walls (UDO Sec. 5.15.6.G.): Wall cladding is predominately Hardie lap siding with 5” and 7” exposure and smooth Hardie panels. Brick cladding is proposed for Right side yard ground floor elevation. Brick has been used elsewhere in Old Town for chimneys, foundation walls, columns, and as secondary wall material for some buildings. The UDO permits “[w]herever possible, green building materials...including recycled content sheathing, siding composed of reclaimed or recycled material, salvaged masonry brick

or block, and locally produced stone or brick.” The Applicant seeks to use Mosstown by Cherokee, a tumbled greyish brown brick, and will provide a sample for the HPC meeting. This is not recycled, salvaged or locally produced brick. The HPC must determine if brick is an appropriate material; if so, the source and type must also be approved.

- (3) Columns (UDO Sec. 5.15.6.H.2.):** Wood columns are proposed with cementitious trim, which is not a material permitted by the UDO (only termite resistant wood painted or natural, cast iron, concrete with smooth finish, brick, stone, steel or tabby). Columns must comply with the permitted materials unless otherwise approved by the HPC.
- (4) Windows - Material (UDO Sec. 5.15.6.I.2.):** The window material is identified in the narrative (Attachment 7) as Marvin Elevate, which is a fiberglass exterior, wood interior window. The material must be identified on the plan.
- (5) Windows – Configuration (UDO Sec. 5.15.6.3):** Two windows (labeled “B”), approximately 24 SF each on the front elevation are fixed, which is not a permitted window configuration for non-storefront windows. Given the large size of the windows, the commercial nature of the building and the Bruin Road frontage, this configuration appears appropriate for the context but must be approved by the HPC.
- (6) Windows – Size (UDO Sec. 5.15.5.F.3.& 4.):** Window size is not dictated by the UDO; however, individual building features, such as windows, “must be proportional to other features of the building as well as the overall building form.” Further, “interruptions and variety into the wall plane to create interest and variety” must be incorporated. The Left Elevation at the ground level adjacent to the stairs is a blank wall and the two windows at the second story labeled “D” are short (2’-10”x4’-0”) in comparison to other windows (“C”) on the same elevation that are 2’-10”x6’-0”. Consider making the “D” windows taller to match the height of the “C” windows.
- (7) Doors (UDO Sec. 5.15.6.I.2.a.):** The rear ground level patio door on the Left Elevation has not been identified in the door schedule. It must be wood, metal or metal-clad.
- (8) Shutters (UDO Sec. 5.15.6.M.1.e.):** Shutters shall be constructed of durable wood. Except in the case of a Contributing Structure, the use of Wood Composite material for shutters may be allowed provided a determination is made that the shutters will be consistent with the character of the Historic District and the materials used are of equal or better quality than traditional building materials. The Applicant has proposed that all shutters, including

ground floor Bahama shutters, be composite wood material (Attachment 7). Composite materials have been approved on a limited basis depending on context. Further, the “arm’s length” rule has been applied. As noted in “Traditional Construction Patterns” (McGraw Hill, 2004), referenced in UDO Sec. 5.15.6.A., “[s]ubstitute materials may be used for materials...but their appearance must be indistinguishable from the original at arm’s length or less, and their performance must exceed that of the original if they are to be used below the second floor.”

(9) Lighting (UDO Sec. 5.12): Manufacturer cut sheets must be provided to ensure compliance with the UDO.

(10) Landscaping (UDO Sec. 5.3.7.E.1.): The UDO requires that “...a foundation planting area at least 8 feet wide [to] be maintained around all structures. The foundation planting [must] incorporate a mixture of trees, shrubs, and ground covers in order to soften the building façade.” Foundation plantings have been provided, but do not comply with this requirement at the building front as there is approximately 8’-0” foot width of unplanted area extending from the building wall. Further, the use of podocarpus and camelias suggests the possibility that the building and space in between the landscaping is intended to be screened from Bruin Road, as the mature height of both plants is 5’-0” and 10’-0”, respectively. The front yard landscaping must be revised to meet the intent of the UDO. Also, access to the stairs on the Left elevation appears to be through a landscaped area. Landscaping in this area must be revised to show the path to the stairs. The ADA accessible route and details must also be shown on the Landscape Plan.

3. Section 3.18.3.D. Consistency with the nature and character of the surrounding area and consistency of the structure with the scale, form and building proportions of the surrounding neighborhood.

Finding. Town Staff finds the nature and character of the new construction to be consistent and harmonious with that of the surrounding neighborhood. The mass and scale of the structure is appropriate for its location and the architectural detailing, with revisions to address the items in #2 above, will be sensitive to the neighboring properties.

4. Section 3.18.3.F. The historic, architectural, and aesthetic features of the structure, including the extent to which its alteration or removal would be detrimental to the public interest.

Finding. If the conditions #2 of this report are met, the proposed plans are sympathetic in design to the neighboring historic and non-historic resources;

therefore, the structure, with the recommended revisions, will have no adverse effect on the public interest.

5. Section 3.18.3.H. The application must comply with applicable requirements in the Applications Manual.

Finding. The Certificate of Appropriateness Application has been reviewed by Town Staff and has been determined to be complete except for the applicable items in #2. A separate Site Feature-HD application will be required for future signage.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: It is the charge of the HPC to assess and interpret the standards and guidelines set forth in the UDO as they pertain to applications using the review criteria established in the UDO and to take appropriate action as granted by the powers and duties set forth in Section 2.2.6.E.2. Town Staff finds that with the conditions noted below, the requirements of Section 3.18.3 of the Unified Development Ordinance have been met and recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission approve the application subject to the following conditions and determinations:

Conditions:

1. If the ground floor rear patio is to be used as a service area, it must be screened to comply with UDO Sec. 5.15.5.F.9.
2. Provide a screening detail for the HVAC equipment on the second-story rear patio. *(Note: A determination must be made by the HPC as to the appropriateness of the HVAC location.)*
3. Identify the fiberglass window material in the window schedule.
4. Consider making the windows labeled “D” on the Left elevation taller to match the windows labeled “C” on the same elevation.
5. Identify the material to be used for rear ground level patio door on the Left elevation in the door schedule, which must wood, metal or metal-clad per UDO Sec. 5.15.6.I.2.a.
6. Submit the manufacturer’s cut sheets for all proposed exterior lighting to confirm compliance with UDO Sec.5.12.
7. Show compliance with the 8’-0” foundation planting requirement along the front building elevation per UDO Sec. 5.3.7.E.1.
8. Revise the landscaped area at the stairs on the Left elevation to show the pathway to the stairs.
9. Show the ADA accessible route into the building and provide details to show compliance.
10. Per Section 3.19 of the UDO, a Site Feature-HD is required for any signs proposed on the site.

Determinations:

Determinations from the HPC are needed regarding:

1. The proposed location of HVAC equipment on the second story rear patio.
2. The proposed use of brick for partial wall cladding, as well as the source and type.
3. The use of cementitious trim to wrap wood columns.
4. The use of two non-storefront fixed windows (labeled “B”) on the front elevation.
5. The use of wood composite shutters on the first and second stories.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION ACTIONS: As granted by the powers and duties set forth in Section 2.2.6.E.2, the Historic Preservation Commission has the authority to take the following actions with respect to this application:

1. Approve the application as submitted by the Applicant;
2. Approve the application with conditions; or
3. Deny the application as submitted by the Applicant.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Location & Zoning Map
2. Application
3. Plat
4. Survey & Photos
5. Plans
6. Landscape Plan
7. Narrative & Responses to HPRC Comments – 06.30.2025