

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION



STAFF REPORT

Department of Growth Management

MEETING DATE:	September 2, 2026
PROJECT:	COFA-05-25-019766 36 Bruin Road – Second Amendment to an Approved COFA
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:

An amendment to an approved Certificate of Appropriateness to add an elevator shaft and make related alterations for 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.

BACKGROUND: On August 6, 2025, HPC approved a COFA to allow the construction of a new commercial building (ABPAL Shell Building) with yet to be determined businesses at that time. The first amendment to the approved COFA was granted at the January 7, 2026 meeting of the HPC.

The structure, of approximately 3,130 SF, is under construction and has characteristics of both a Main Street Building Type and a Live-Work Sideyard Building Type but was reviewed as an Additional Building Type as the NG-HD zoning district does not allow Main Street Buildings and an upper-story residence will not be provided as is typical of a Live-Work Sideyard Building.

The Development Plan for the subject property was approved by the Planning Commission on March 26, 2025 (DP-12-24-019469). The approval 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). A 22-foot-wide vehicular access easement will be shared between the two lots, and an existing dumpster on Lot 1 will be shared with Lot 2.

INTRODUCTION: The narrative (Attachment 2) states that this second amendment is requested to provide improved accessibility for one of the second-floor office tenants via an elevator. As the building is already under construction, the elevator shaft is proposed

within a chimney structure attached to the rear porch. This addition requires other alterations, including:

- The relocation of the rear service yard to the building's left elevation;
- The reorientation of the rear porch staircase;
- The addition of screening to the first-floor rear porch to conceal restaurant equipment. Proposed screening is to match previously approved slat details on the rear porch elevations;
- An increased rear porch depth of 4'-6", not including the chimney structure. This will result in an additional porch column on the left and right porch elevations.

Apart from the chimney structure on the rear elevation, the proposed alterations are minor and consistent with applicable UDO requirements.

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.A.1 Consistency with the principles set forth in the Old Town Master Plan and Town of Bluffton Comprehensive Plan.

- a. *Finding.* The Old Town Master Plan initiative included the adoption of a form-based code that includes architectural standards for structures located within the Old Town Bluffton Historic District. These standards are included in Article 5 of the UDO. The amendments will be in conformance with those standards if the conditions noted in #3 of this Section are met.
- b. *Finding.* The application complies with the Town's Comprehensive Plan.

2. Section 3.18.3.A.2 Conformance with the approved Final Development Plan, Subdivision Plan, and any other agreements or plans that are applicable.

- a. *Finding.* The application is consistent with the approved Final Development Plan.

3. Section 3.18.3.A.3 Conformance with applicable provisions provided in Article 5, Design Standards.

a. Findings.

(1) Addition of a Chimney Structure: The proposed elevator shaft is to be disguised as a chimney with a tabby stucco finish. At the top of the chimney, a double bishop cap is proposed. The addition is proposed on the rear elevation and will not be visible from Bruin Road.

As the chimney structure is designed to conceal an elevator shaft, it is not an authentic element; authenticity is the “primary goal” of the architectural standards for Old Town Bluffton Historic District (UDO Sec. 5.15.6.A.). Therefore, the HPC must determine if the proposed chimney structure, including its design, supports this goal.

(2) Relocation of Service Yard: The previously approved rear elevation service yard has been relocated to the left elevation by the stairwell. Per the Fire Marshal and Fire Code, nothing may be stored or erected in the service yard under the stairs unless the space is sprinkled.

4. Section 3.18.3.A.4 Demonstration of a compatible visual relationship between new construction or alterations and existing buildings, streetscapes, and open spaces. A compatible visual relationship must be generally of a similar structural mass, scale, height, proportion, directional expression of the principal elevation and rhythm of spacing, as applicable.

Finding. The alteration appears appropriate for its location and the architectural detailing sensitive to and compatible with neighboring properties.

5. Section 3.18.3.A.5 Conformance 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 #3.

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 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 determination:

1. The appropriateness of the chimney structure, including its design, to conceal the proposed elevator shaft.

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. Narrative
4. Amended Architectural Drawings (08.11.2026)
5. Amended Landscape Plan (08.05.2026)
6. HPRC Comments (08.03.2026)