

TOWN COUNCIL



STAFF REPORT

Growth Management Department

MEETING DATE:	September 8, 2026
PROJECT:	Discussion of Potential Amendments to the Town of Bluffton's Municipal Code of Ordinances, Chapter 23, Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), Article 5 (Old Town Bluffton Historic District), Certain Regulations
PROJECT MANAGER:	Kevin Icard, AICP Director of Growth Management

REQUEST: To seek direction from Town Council on potential updates to the UDO related to Old Town Bluffton Historic District.

BACKGROUND: The Historic Preservation Commission, Planning Commission and Town Staff have a list of potential amendments related to the Old Town Bluffton Historic District regulations (UDO Sec. 5.15) and the Table of Uses by Districts (UDO Sec. 4.3). While some amendments are not urgent and will be best addressed following the update of the Old Town Master Plan, others require more immediate attention in anticipation of continued development prior to its completion.

Historic District Related Amendments - These amendments relate to items that have been identified as being of increasing concern, including:

- 1) *Windows* - require rather than encourage true and simulated divided lites, as appropriate.
- 2) *Fences and Walls* - clarify the minimum transparency requirement.
- 3) *Attached Carriage Houses* - provide additional requirements to ensure that attached carriage houses are more distinct from the main structure to avoid the appearance of a suburban bonus room over a garage.
- 4) *Additional Building Types* - this building type has become the default for most applicants but lacks sufficient standards to prevent building styles and sizes that are out of context.

The Old Town UDO requirements were developed based on "...simple principles in order to maintain the quality of environment that has made Bluffton so desirable and to encourage infill to follow this desired pattern." As the current regulations related to these items are inadequate, some newer buildings have windows, for example, that are typical in suburban residential

developments and attached “carriage houses” that lack sufficient distinction from the main house. Minor amendments can ensure that Old Town’s architectural character remains intact with new development.

Multifamily in Light Industrial District – A recent request from Planning Commission is to review and consider amending the Light Industrial zoning district to remove or restrict multifamily uses. Below is a list of key reasons for restricting multifamily uses.

- *Economic & Land Preservation:* Light industrial acreage is a limited resource vital for commercial activity and local employment. Because residential developments yield higher land values, allowing multi-family uses drives up property prices, prices out industrial tenants, and permanently eliminates critical industrial land.
- *Land Use Conflicts & Environmental Compatibility:* Mixing residential and light industrial uses leads to operational friction. Typical industrial impacts—heavy truck traffic, loading dock operations, high-intensity lighting, hours of operation, odors, and minor hazardous material storage—generate frequent nuisance and safety complaints from residents, compromising both public health and ongoing business operations.
- *Infrastructure & Service Demands:* Industrial zones are built for heavy freight logistics and wide turning radii rather than pedestrian safety or residential traffic. Introducing multi-family developments strains local road networks and creates inefficient municipal demands for residential amenities like walkable sidewalks, parks, and tailored utility standards within an industrial corridor.

CONSIDERATION: Does Town Council want Town Staff to move forward with UDO amendments? If yes, Town Staff will work the Historic Preservation Commission and Planning Commission to develop the amendments to present for a recommendation to Town Council. The tentative timeline for these amendments appears on the next page.

TIMELINE:

Amendment Process	Date	Complete
Town Council Workshop	September 8, 2026	✓
Historic Preservation Workshop	October 7, 2026*	
Planning Commission Recommendation & Public Hearing	October 28, 2026*	
Town Council First Reading	November 10, 2026*	
Town Council Final Reading & Public Hearing	December 8, 2026*	

*Tentative Dates