

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION



STAFF REPORT

Department of Growth Management

MEETING DATE:	January 7, 2026
PROJECT:	COFA-05-25-019766 36 Bruin Road – 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 allow certain changes for 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: 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. The proposed structure, approximately 3,130 SF, 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.

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 use component was waived. The building complied with the form and scale requirement; its site placement complied with the front build-to zone (10’-20’ feet), side and rear yard setbacks, and will be a half-story below the maximum permitted height of 2.5 stories.

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).

Depending on the overall use of the building, parking may require reevaluation of the development plan.

The amendment is requested, based on the narrative (Attachment 2), to make changes due to “potential tenant requirements, additional mechanical needs,” as well as other minor changes. The proposed changes include:

- The addition of a rooftop well for mechanical equipment that will be screened with a parapet wall (left elevation);
- The removal of second story windows between brackets on the left elevation, and a respacing of brackets;
- The removal of the ground level rear porch screen;
- The addition of brick pavers to the front porch (right elevation);
- The revision of the second story rear porch railing from pickets to louvers for improved screening;
- The relocation of a second story rear door to be centered in the porch; and,
- The change of a single door to a double door at the porch on the right elevation (not visible from the exterior).

With the exception of the roof well addition and removal of the windows, the proposed alterations are minor and consistent with applicable UDO requirements. The roof well and windows are specifically addressed in #2 of this report.

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 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 amendments will be in conformance with those standards if the conditions noted in #2 of this Section are met. Determinations of appropriateness for the window removal and roof well are required.

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

a. Findings.

- (1) Removal of Windows:** The removal of two second-story windows at the left elevation will create more blank space in the left elevation. Their removal is proposed as the area behind the wall is a storage area.

UDO Sec. 5.15.5.F.3.a. states that “[b]uildings shall incorporate interruptions and variety into the wall plane to create interest and variety in the streetscape while still maintaining a consistent architectural style and connection to its surroundings.” This requirement is further reinforced by UDO Sec. 5.15.5.F.1.2.d. which states that “[l]ong unarticulated masses shall be avoided.” With the addition of the roof well in the shed roof just above the second story, the blankness of the left elevation is further emphasized and should be reconsidered unless deemed appropriate by the HPC.

- (2) Addition of a Roof Well:** The roof well on the left shed roof would include the addition of a gutter with an awkward configuration. Screening material would be Hardie horizontal lap siding to match the main structure and would include boral trim material (which is not a permitted UDO material and would require HPC approval).

While the UDO does not specifically address roof wells, it functions as a service area. UDO Sec. 5.15.5.F.9. requires service yards to be located in rear or side yards not facing a street, away from all 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. Roof mounted equipment must be “low-profile and located at the side or rear elevations to not be visible from the street.” The height of the roof well is approximately 5’-3”.

As the approved speculative structure was not designed for the more intensive use of the building now desired, a roof well suggests that the overall design may need reconsideration. This is not a retrofit of an existing building. A determination of appropriateness by HPC is necessary.

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. The mass and scale of the structure was deemed appropriate for its location and the architectural detailing sensitive to the neighboring properties. The

proposed window removal and roof well addition, however, do require a determination of appropriateness by HPC to ensure the building remains consistent with the nature and character of the surrounding area.

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. Whether the removal of two windows and addition of a roof well will meet the spirit of the UDO, as noted in #2, and not be a detriment to the public interest is to be determined by HPC

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.

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 conditions and determinations:

Conditions:

1. Approval of the proposed changes requested as part of this application (removal of ground level rear porch screen, addition of brick pavers to the front porch, revision of the second story rear porch railing from pickets to louvers; relocation a second story rear door to be centered in the porch; and, change of a single door to a double door at the porch).

Determinations: The determinations below must be considered for their appropriateness. If not acceptable, the HPC must provide an alternative or deny the request.

1. The removal to two windows in the second-story left elevation.
2. The addition of a roof well at the left shed roof and the proposed gutter configuration. If approved a gutter detail will be required to show compliance with UDO Sec. 5.15.6.J.

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. Application
2. Narrative
3. Location & Zoning Map
4. Plat
5. Survey & Photos
6. Amended Architectural Plans
7. Approved Final COFA (08.06.2025)