



MEMORANDUM

TO: Historic Preservation Commission

FROM: Charlotte Moore, AICP, Principal Planner

RE: Historic Preservation Commission Workshop Regarding Carriage Houses (Metal Canopies/Carports)

DATE: November 6, 2024

CC: Kevin Icard, AICP, Director of Growth Management

INTRODUCTION: The property owner of 41 Thomas Heyward Street, located in Old Town Bluffton Historic District, was cited by the Town of Bluffton for erecting a stand-alone metal canopy/carport without an approved Certificate of Appropriateness-Historic District (COFA-HD) as required by the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), and without an approved building permit. The owner, Keith Fisher, seeks to correct the UDO violation through a separate zoning text amendment (ZONE-09-24-019360) as further explained in the Background section of this memo.

COMMISSION WORKSHOPS: The Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) workshop will be the second workshop held on this matter; the first workshop was held by the Planning Commission on October 23rd.

Per UDO Section 3.2.2.F. "Planning Commission Workshops are intended to be the first official presentation of a proposed project to provide the public with information and a forum to initially review the application and identify applicable application review criteria. Meetings are encouraged as opportunities for informal, non-binding communication between the Applicant and neighboring property owners who may be affected by the application." It is a standing practice to hold workshops with the HPC for proposed text amendments that will affect Old Town Bluffton Historic District.

While a text amendment is not a development project, discussion of the amendment in a workshop setting is an opportunity to have an informal discussion regarding its purpose, necessity and implications. Town Staff may also receive guidance from Town Commissions in preparation of a formal recommendation per the process indicated in UDO Sec. 3.5. No votes will be taken at the workshop.

BACKGROUND: The property at 41 Heyward Street includes an existing two-story single-family residence and an existing detached two-story Carriage House in the rear of the property. Over the years, as shown on Google Street View, the area adjacent to the south side of Carriage House and the property line has been used for unenclosed and uncovered storage of vehicles and watercraft. It is within this area where a metal canopy/carport was installed without Town approval, which requires an approved COFA-HD and an approved building permit. A Notice of Violation by the Town

of Bluffton was the impetus for a text amendment application by the property owner (Attachment 1). While specific text language has not been proposed, the owner would like for Town Council to "...include regulations and guidelines..." to allow carports. The owner has provided additional information in a written narrative to support the amendment (Attachment 2).

The property owner provided photos of some existing metal canopies/carports located in Old Town (Attachment 3). The first photo is the subject property and was provided by Town Staff. Without research on each canopy/carport, it is not possible to know their legal status, including those that are legally non-conforming (i.e., grandfathered). Grandfathered metal carports are those that existed before the UDO was adopted on August 10, 2011.

HOW THE UDO REGULATES "CARPORTS": In Old Town Historic District, carports *are* regulated as a Carriage House building type. Within Old Town, a form-based code approach is used to regulate buildings by specified types that vary by zoning district (UDO Sec. 5.15.8). When located in an accessory structure that is 121 to 1,200 square feet, uses such as garages, carports, workshops, and accessory dwelling units (or some combination thereof) are classified as a Carriage House building type. Unenclosed carports with metal roofs would also be classified as a Carriage House and must comply with the design standards in UDO Sec. 5.15. Additionally, only one Carriage House is permitted on a lot that is not within the Riverfront Edge-Historic District zone. The RV-HD zoning district includes most of the large, long, narrow properties on the May River.

Because the subject property has an existing Carriage House, a second Carriage House (i.e., the metal carport) is not permitted even if it complies with the applicable design standards of UDO Sec. 5.15.

It should be noted that the adjacent property, 43 Heyward Street, has an existing metal carport that was also cited for non-compliance with the UDO, and which was constructed without an approved building permit. The owner of the property applied for a COFA-HD, which will be reviewed by the Historic Preservation Commission on November 6. If the HPC approves the design, the carport (i.e., Carriage House) would be allowed (following receipt of a building permit) and would be the only Carriage House on the property.

The Old Town Bluffton Historic District was adopted, in part, to prevent building types that are damaging to its unique character. UDO Sec. 5.15.1.D states that "[t]hrough history, patterns of building placement, street elevation, compositional principles, materials, and applications have established a broad but clear set of collective responses. This Section [Old Town Bluffton Historic District] identifies a set of relatively simple principles in order to maintain this quality of environment that has made Bluffton so desirable and to encourage infill to follow this desired pattern." For more than 13 years, there have been established standards for Carriage Houses and compliance by other property owners who have completed the application process.

FOR DISCUSSION: For the metal canopy/carport to remain as illegally erected on the subject property, two UDO amendments would be necessary to: 1) allow more than one Carriage House per lot; and 2) exempt the metal carport (and, by extension, similar buildings, from design review). Compliance with established rear and side yard setbacks would also be necessary.

Consideration of the above two questions will serve as the basis for determining the appropriateness of the UDO amendment. Again, this is an informal discussion, no votes will be taken.

NEXT STEPS (TENATIVE): The proposed text amendment will be reviewed as follows:

- Historic Preservation Commission Workshop (advisory only): November 6, 2024
- Planning Commission (recommendation): December 18, 2024
- Town Council First Reading: January 14, 2025
- Town Council Public Hearing/ Second Reading: February 11, 2025

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Application
2. Narrative
3. Photos of Canopies/Carports