

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION



STAFF REPORT

Department of Growth Management

MEETING DATE:	November 6, 2024
PROJECT:	COFA-02-24-019013 43 Thomas Heyward Street Carriage House (Existing Pre-fabricated Metal Canopy / Carport)
APPLICANT:	Raymond Beach
PROPERTY OWNER:	Megan C. Beach
PROJECT MANAGER:	Charlotte Moore, AICP, Principal Planner

APPLICATION REQUEST: The Applicant requests that the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) approve the following:

A Certificate of Appropriateness-HD (COFA-HD) to allow an existing one-story Carriage House of approximately 756 unenclosed square feet erected without an approved COFA-HD and without an approved building permit. The property is zoned Neighborhood General-HD (NG-HD).

INTRODUCTION: The Town of Bluffton issued a Notice of Violation for the unapproved installation of a prefabricated metal canopy/carport of approximately 756 unenclosed square feet without an approved COFA-HD and without an approved building permit. In response, the property owner seeks approval of a COFA-HD to allow the structure to remain with some alteration to its existing appearance.

In Old Town Bluffton, principal and accessory buildings are classified as “types” based on their building form. The types of permitted buildings vary by zoning district. Form-based zoning emphasizes, in part, architecture that is human-scale as well as the use of high-quality building materials that are characteristic of the area. This focus is intended to ensure a built environment where building form and scale are of greater importance than how buildings are used, unlike conventional zoning. This approach protects Old Town Bluffton’s cherished physical character. Based on the vision established in the Old Town Master Plan (adopted by Town Council in 2006), the UDO serves as the main implementation tool for the Master Plan and was adopted on August 10, 2011.

Accessory buildings that are at least 121 square feet are classified as a “Carriage House” building type regardless of use. One (1) Carriage House is permitted per lot for properties in Old Town except for those within the Riverfront Edge-Historic District (RV-HD). The RV-HD district includes most of the large, long, narrow properties with May River frontage. The UDO further limits Carriage Houses to a maximum footprint of 800 square feet, a total of

1,200 square feet, and two stories in height. As presently exists, the canopy/carport meets these Carriage House criteria provided in UDO Sec. 5.15.8.F. While Carriage Houses may be used for utility purposes, the UDO does not intend for the architecture to be utilitarian, thus requiring Carriage Houses be of the same general character as the primary structure.

The application states that the total footprint is 738 square feet, and that the width is 18 feet and the length 41 feet (Attachment 2). These measurements do not match those provided in Attachment 4, and it is unclear if the height shown on the attachment—15 feet, nine (9) inches is the actual height of the existing structure to the roof ridge.

This project was presented to the Historic Preservation Review Committee (HPRC) for conceptual review at the April 8, 2024 meeting. HPRC comments are provided as Attachment 5.

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, New Construction and Alterations), 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 predictable and compatible development and architecture 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. 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 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 and new construction, regardless of building type and size, must comply with the architectural standards within the UDO. For more than 13 years, new Carriage Houses and alterations to existing Carriage Houses, whether conforming or non-conforming (i.e, those legally existing before the adoption of the UDO) have been and will continue to be reviewed against these standards. Alterations to nonconforming structures must comply with the UDO. (UDO Sec. 5.15.2.D) This process ensures that new development complements the existing built environment.

2. **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 or otherwise approved by the HPC, the proposed Carriage House may possibly be in conformance with applicable provisions provided in Article 5:

1) **Side Yard Setback:** Within the NG-HD District, a five (5) foot side yard setback is required. The structure was placed two (2) feet within this setback. To remain in this location, application for and approval of a variance by the Town of Bluffton Board of Zoning Appeals would be required. Alternatively, the structure could be moved out of the setback to comply with the requirement. (UDO Sec. 5.15.5.C.)

2) **Roofs:**

a) Permitted roof types are gabled, hip and shed. The roof form is gabled but with a low pitch (2.5:12) that causes a somewhat flat appearance that is atypical of Carriage Houses in Old Town, and that is inconsistent with the primary structure, which has a hip roof. Because the structure is prefabricated, the pitch cannot be changed. Further, as the carport is unenclosed, the metal bracing to support the roof at each column is visible.

The HPC should determine if the pitch is acceptable and is of the same general character as the primary structure. Additionally, the HPC should determine if the exposed metal roof bracing is acceptable (UDO Sec. 5.15.6.J.1.a. and Sec. 5.15.8.F.)

b) The application states that the proposed roofing material will be Galvalume. Allowable metal roofs are galvanized, copper, aluminum, and zinc-alum. (UDO Sec. 5.15.6.J.2.a.). The HPC must determine the appropriateness of the alternate Galvalume material.

c) The application states that roof configuration will be 5-V crimp. Spacing between ribs cannot exceed 24 inches on-center, and panel ends must be exposed. The drawings do not show exposed panel ends at the eave overhangs. The HPC must determine the appropriateness of the roof configuration without the exposed panel ends. (UDO Sec. 5.15.6.J.3.a.)

3) **Same General Character as the Primary Structure** A Carriage House must be of the same general character as the primary structure (a single-family residence). While the two structures visually differ, the Carriage House is proposed to have a 5-V crimp metal (Galvalume) roof and wood box columns, both of which are used on the primary structure.

(UDO Sec. 5.15.8.F.). The primary structure has a hip roof and the Carriage House has a front-facing gable roof with a small pitch.

3. **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. While this criterion is more applicable to primary structures, Town Staff finds that the prefabricated metal canopy/carport structure or Carriage House does not present a compatible visual relationship with surrounding buildings as it was not originally designed to comply with the UDO. Effectively altering its appearance to achieve the intent of the UDO may be unlikely without structural changes that may not be feasible.

4. **Compliance 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 with the exception of 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.

Based on the application of the UDO review criteria, Staff finds that the Historic Preservation Commission must make a determination regarding the below items, and that additional information may be necessary to render a final decision given the unusual circumstances of this structure.

1. A determination by the Historic Preservation Commission regarding:
 - a. Determine that the roof pitch is acceptable and is of the same general character as the primary structure on the lot. (UDO Sec. 5.15.6.J.1.a.)
 - b. Determine that exposed metal roof bracing is acceptable. (UDO Sec. 5.15.8.F.)
 - c. Determine that Galvalume is an acceptable alternative roof material. (UDO Sec. 5.15.6.J.2.a.).
 - d. Determine that the absence of exposed roof panel ends at the eaves is acceptable. (UDO Sec. 5.15.6.J.3.a.)
 - e. Determine that the Carriage house is of the same general character as the primary structure. (UDO Sec. 5.15.8.F.)

2. Further, the following shall be provided:
 - a. Correct dimensions and height of the structure.
 - b. If the design is approved, the structure must be removed from the side yard setback or a variance obtained to allow the structural encroachment.

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 and Zoning Map
2. Application and Narrative
3. Site Survey
4. Carport Drawing
5. HPRC Report