

TOWN COUNCIL

STAFF REPORT

Growth Management



MEETING DATE:	August 12, 2025
PROJECT:	Consideration and Direction on Potential Amendments to the Town of Bluffton Code of Ordinances, Chapter 23, Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), Article 5 – Design Standards - Accessory Buildings
PROJECT MANAGER:	Kevin Icard, AICP Director of Growth Management

REQUEST: The Department of Growth Management seeks input and direction from Town Council regarding the use of unenclosed carports within Old Town.

PREVIOUS WORKSHOPS: Workshops have been held by both the Planning Commission (PC) and the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) to discuss potential amendments. No clear direction was provided from either commission. Opinions varied, as well.

In April 2025, Staff facilitated a workshop with Town Council to discuss and request direction on how to move forward. Council provided valuable insight and gave general directions for staff to move forward. A summary of the comments is listed below.

Overall Intent

- Regulations should be guided by common sense and practicality, ensuring they do not create unnecessary burdens for residents, particularly long-term homeowners.
- There is broad agreement that carports should be treated as a separate building classification, distinct from Carriage Houses or sheds.
- Any regulatory changes must be sensitive to and supportive of the Historic District designation and the character of Old Town.

Design and Compatibility

- Design guidelines should focus on appropriate scale, size, and height (measured in feet rather than stories), ensuring that carports do not overwhelm primary structures or disrupt the neighborhood aesthetic.
- Council expressed a desire to maintain visual diversity and avoid uniformity by allowing carports that reflect the eclectic nature of the district.
- Visual screening, such as louvers or buffer plantings, should be considered to reduce the visual impact on adjacent properties.

Functionality and Use

- Carports must be restricted to residential use only, with no commercial activity permitted.
- Structures should be functional enough to accommodate typical resident needs—e.g., space

for two vehicles, a boat, and/or a golf cart.

- The inclusion of utilities such as electrical outlets for golf carts and water spigots was generally supported.
- Access and orientation should be thoughtfully planned; for example, designs that require “sideways” parking may not be practical.

Lot and Zoning Considerations

- Regulations should be flexible enough to accommodate various lot sizes and configurations, with potential allowances for carports near property lines in cases where space is limited.
- Setbacks and existing non-conforming conditions should be carefully evaluated, with possible tailored approaches for unique or constrained sites.

Construction Standards

- Consider whether carports should be required to meet hurricane resistance standards.
- Allow continued use of pre-fabricated structures where already in place, but establish minimum design standards for new installations.
- Tree preservation and landscaping impacts should be addressed during planning and review.
- All proposed structures must comply with relevant building codes, particularly regarding proximity to adjacent structures or property boundaries.

Community Engagement and Next Steps

- Additional public input is needed to ensure that regulations reflect community values and practical realities.
- Council encourages Staff to develop regulatory options and design concepts for future review and discussion

Based on the direction provided, staff is proposing the following amendments to the UDO to regulate these structures.

- Does Town Council want to implement a “Maximum Lot Coverage” based in the Building Type and Zoning District that a property is located in?
 - **Lot coverage.** The portion of the lot covered by any structure or constructed element that impedes infiltration of stormwater into the ground or disrupts vegetated surfaces. For purposes of lot coverage standards, structures or constructed elements that allow some infiltration, such as decks, patios and driveways, porous pavers or concrete, or other elements that disturb ground cover shall be counted towards the total surface coverage unless they demonstrate they are a functional and integral part of a stormwater system and best management practice in Article 5, Design Standards.
 - Maximum lot coverage regulations are crucial for maintaining a balance between built and open spaces, promoting environmental sustainability, and preserving neighborhood character. They limit the percentage of a lot that can be covered by buildings and other impervious surfaces, thus ensuring adequate green space, managing stormwater runoff, and preventing overcrowding.

- Does Town Council want to create a new Building Type titled Carport? If so, below is a breakdown of the proposed regulations.
 - Regulated to Residential properties only and must have an existing principal structure on the lot.
 - Have a maximum 600 square foot footprint, however, it cannot exceed the maximum lot coverage based on the principal building type.
 - Carports can be no taller than the principal structure or 18' whichever is less.
 - No solid walls would be allowed.
 - No more than 2 sides may be enclosed with louvered or horizontal panels or siding.
 - Limited power and no internal plumbing (external hose bib/spigot are acceptable).
 - Carport placement is at the rear of the lot or at a minimum 20' behind the front plane of the principal structure.
 - No more than one carport allowed on a lot.

NEXT STEPS: If Town Council agrees with the suggested changes, staff will present the proposed amendments to both the HPC and PC at workshops before returning to Town Council for a first reading and public hearing/second reading. While the HPC does not have the authority to make a formal recommendation on edits to the UDO, Town Staff finds it beneficial to received feedback from them. Staff will also make every effort to receive public input during these workshops.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Proposed UDO Edits
2. April 2025 Town Council Workshop Packet