

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION



STAFF REPORT

Department of Growth Management

MEETING DATE:	October 7, 2026
PROJECT:	COFA-10-25-019985 36 Tabby Shell, Lot 19 New Construction: Single-Family Residence and Carriage House
APPLICANT:	Steven G. Stowers, AIA (Architecture 101)
PROPERTY OWNERS:	Ashley and John Gering
PROJECT MANAGER:	Charlotte Moore, AICP, Principal Planner

APPLICATION REQUEST: The Applicant, Steven Stowers, on behalf of owners, Ashley and John Gering, requests Historic Preservation Commission approval of the following application:

A Certificate of Appropriateness to allow the construction of a 2.5-story main residence of approximately 4,391 heated square feet (SF) and an attached 2-story Carriage House of approximately 938 SF located at 36 Tabby Shell Road, Lot 19, in the Tabby Roads development in Old Town Bluffton Historic District and zoned Neighborhood General-Historic District (NG-HD).

INTRODUCTION: The Applicant proposes construction of a 2.5-story single-family structure with an attached 2-story carriage house on an irregularly shaped 0.10-acre lot (4,516 SF) in the Tabby Roads development.

The proposed primary structure/house will have a 1,618 SF footprint, not including porches, and an overall 4,391 heated square feet. The carriage house, with a footprint of 469 SF, is connected to the main house with a 2-story partially enclosed breezeway that is located almost entirely under the same roof mass as the carriage house. Vehicular access to the property and carriage house will be via Pluff Mud Lane, an unpaved private alley at the rear of the property.

As the subject property is in the Tabby Roads development, building setbacks (except for accessory structures), the main structure footprint size, and required parking must comply with the Covenants, Conditions and Restrictions (CCRs) for Tabby Roads.

The approved Tabby Roads development plan identifies the following standards for Lot 19: a front minimum setback of six (6) feet, a left side yard minimum setback of five (5) feet, a right minimum side yard setback of 7.5 feet, and a rear yard minimum setback for the

primary structure of 10.5 feet. Compliance with these standards, as well as the off-street parking requirement, is shown.

As indicated in the letter from the Tabby Roads Architectural Review Board (ARB), a variance was granted by the ARB to allow the first-floor footprint (i.e., the heated square footage) to be increased from 28% to no more than 40% of the total lot square footage (Attachment 8).

Per the UDO, the house is architecturally characteristic of a Center Hall House but is classified as an Additional Building Type as the main house footprint exceeds the front build-to zone (15-25 feet), side yard (15 feet) and rear yard (30 feet) setback requirements of the NG-HD District. The carriage house encroaches four feet-six inches (4'-6") into the five-foot (5'-0") setback required by UDO Sec. 5.15.5.C.; a variance for the encroachment was approved by the Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) on September 1, 2026.

The main structure will be constructed on a raised slab clad with brick veneer and will include a full-façade front porch underneath a hip roof. The main mass of the house will be under a side-facing gable roof that includes a central dormer with a row of five windows underneath a shed roof. In the rear, three individual shed dormers with two windows each will be provided. A brick chimney is proposed on the left elevation. In the southwest corner of the rear elevation, a 2.5-story building recess is proposed to avoid encroachment into the side yard setback; the recess will provide an area for a service yard.

The attached carriage house will be constructed on a slab with the main mass underneath a rear-facing gable. An exterior staircase on the left elevation will provide access to the second-floor residence. Unless the area underneath the staircase is sprinkled, a service yard cannot be in this location as a fire would cut off the only access to/from the second story.

Materials for both buildings will include standing seam metal roofs, fiber cementitious lap/board and batten siding, columns, wood doors and shutters, fiberglass windows, and a Savannah Grey brick foundation and chimney.

This project was presented to the Historic Preservation Review Committee for Concept Plan review on June 22, 2026. The HPRC comments are provided in Attachment 9.

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 applicable principles set forth in the Old Town Bluffton Master Plan and Town of Bluffton Comprehensive Plan;

- a. *Finding.* The Old Town Master Plan initiatives also include the adoption of a form-based code that includes architectural standards for structures located within the Old Town Bluffton Historic District. These standards are included in Article 5 of the UDO. The new construction proposed as part of this request will be in conformance with those standards if the conditions noted in #2 of this Section are met.

2. Conformance with the approved Final Development Plan, Subdivision Plan, and any other agreements or plans that are applicable.

Compliance with the Tabby Roads development plan/plat and the Tabby Roads CCRs is demonstrated.

3. Conformance with applicable provisions in Article 5, Design Standards.

- a. *Findings.* Town Staff finds that if the following conditions are met, the proposed construction will be in conformance with applicable architectural design provisions provided in Article 5. The conditions follow the format of UDO Sec. 5.15 (Old Town Bluffton Historic District).
- 1) **First Floor Height:** Sheet A501 in Attachment 6 shows a 36-inch minimum porch and first floor height. Sheet A201 shows a 2'-2" first floor height. The first finished floor height must be a minimum of three (3) feet above the average adjacent sidewalk grade per UDO Sec. 5.15.6.F.1.c. and the porch height must be a minimum of 30-inches from grade to top of stairs (UDO Sec. 5.15.6.E.5.c.).
 - 2) **Service Yard:** A service yard for HVAC equipment is provided in the rear of the main structure; the service area for waste receptacles for the main structure and carriage house, as well as the HVAC area for the carriage house, is not shown. These areas must be shown on the plan and comply with Sec. 5.15.5.F.9. The area underneath the carriage house stairs cannot be used for equipment or storage unless sprinkled, per the Bluffton Township Fire District. Meters must also be screened and be located in the rear yard or side yard not facing a street (UDO Sec. 5.15.6.F.2.). The screening detail, including screening material proposed, must be shown on Sheet A201.
 - 3) **Porch Screening:** It is unclear if the breezeway screen will have all "architectural expression" on the outside of the screen as required by UDO Sec. 5.15.6.E.5.f. The screen detail on Sheet A002 is unclear.

- 4) **Columns.** Front porch columns are proposed to be fiber cement, which is not a column material permitted by the UDO (Sec. 5.15.6.H.2.a.). The HPC can determine if fiber cement is an appropriate alternate material.
- 5) **Railings:** A custom wrought iron rail system is proposed at the front porch stairs that includes curved balusters that are not traditional balusters in Old Town. The UDO does not specify baluster shape. The UDO is intended to provide a set of “relatively simple principles” to ensure that Old Town’s architectural character is continued and is “not...intended to discourage creativity” (UDO Sec. 5.15.1.C.and D.). The HPC must determine if the proposed balusters are an appropriate design. Show the dimension of the top rail, which must be a minimum of 2 ¾” per UDO Sec. 5.15.6.H. 3.d.
- 6) **Windows:** The project analysis sheet states that all windows will be fiberglass double-hung and casement in the front dormer, but the window grid system has not been identified. Simulated divided lites are most appropriate for new construction and are encouraged. Additionally, the carriage house windows on the right and left elevations have a square orientation, which differs from the vertical orientation used elsewhere on the carriage and main house. UDO Sec. 5.15.6.I.1.a. requires opens to be vertical, which would match the other windows.
- 7) **Doors:** Sliding doors are proposed for the back porch and would not be visible from the exterior. The door material has not been identified (wood is shown on the project analysis sheet but this may not be correct). Per UDO Sec. 5.15.6.I.3.c., doors are required to have a French or casement operation. The HPC must determine if a sliding door system is appropriate.
- 8) **Roofs:** A standing seam metal roof is proposed but the type of metal has not been identified. Acceptable materials include galvanized, copper, aluminum and zinc-alum and must be identified. (UDO 5.15.6.J.).
- 9) **Gutters:** Half-round gutters are proposed but the material has not been identified. UDO Sec. 5.15.6.J.2.c. requires copper, galvanized steel, or aluminum, 14-18 gauge.
- 10) **Trim:** All trim work must be shown in compliance with the UDO unless otherwise approved by the HPC. Not all trim materials and configurations have been identified, including cornerboards (see UDO Sec. 5.15.6.N.) and soffits (UDO Sec. 5.15.6.P.). PVC material, which is not permitted by the UDO, is proposed for the water table and drip cap. The HPC may consider alternative materials but has not approved PVC in the past. Soffits should be

beaded, v-groove or tongue and groove; rough sawn wood, plywood and aluminum are not permitted per UDO Sec. 5.15.6.P.10.

4. **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. If the conditions noted in #2 of this report are met, a compatible visual relationship will be demonstrated with surrounding properties, streetscapes and open spaces.

5. **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 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 Section 2.2.6.E.2. Town Staff finds that with the conditions noted below, 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 with the following conditions:

1. The first finished floor height must be a minimum of three (3) feet above the average adjacent sidewalk grade per UDO Sec. 5.15.6.F.1.c. and the porch height must be a minimum of 30-inches from grade to top of stairs per UDO Sec. 5.15.6.E.5.c.
2. Show the service yard for the carriage house HVAC and waste receptacles. Service yards must be screened in compliance with UDO Sec. 5.15.5.F. and a complete screening detail provided.
3. Provide a detail to clearly show the architectural expression (columns, railings, etc.), on the outside of the screen.
4. Provide windows that are simulated divided lites and revise carriage house windows on the right and left elevations to have a vertical orientation.
5. Provide gutter material that complies with the UDO Sec. 5.15.6.J.2.c.

6. Show all trim, including dimensions and configurations, to be in compliance with the UDO unless otherwise approved by the HPC.
7. For the railings at the main house front porch and carriage house, show the top rail dimension.

Further, Town Staff requests a determination by the Historic Preservation Commission regarding the following:

1. The use of fiber cementitious material for the front porch columns.
2. The baluster design for the railing proposed at the front porch steps.
3. The use of a sliding door system at the back porch. (*Note: Door material must be identified.*)
4. The use of PVC material for the water table and drip cap trim.

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 Map & Aerial View
2. Application
3. Narrative
4. Photos
5. Survey
6. Site Plan & Architectural Plan
7. Landscape Plan
8. Tabby Roads ARB Approval Letter
9. HPRC Comments 06.22.2026