

PLANNING COMMISSION

STAFF REPORT

Department of Growth Management



MEETING DATE:	June 25, 2025
PROJECT:	The Bluffton Bookshop Preliminary Development Plan
APPLICANT:	Jonathan Marsh, Witmer Jones Keefer, Ltd.
PROJECT NUMBER:	DP-04-25-019712
PROJECT MANAGER:	Dan Frazier Planning Manager Department of Growth Management

REQUEST: The Applicant, Jonathan March of Witmer Jones Keefer, on behalf of property owners Jamie and Allyn Oliver is requesting approval of a Preliminary Development Plan application. The project consists of the renovation of the existing 1,769 SF residential structure into a bookstore and icery with associated parking and infrastructure (Attachment 1).

INTRODUCTION: The property is within the Neighborhood Conservation – Historic District (NC-HD) and consists of approximately 0.3 acres identified by tax map number R610 039 00A 0324 0000 and located southeast of the Wharf Street and Bridge Street intersection at 89 Bridge Street in the Old Town Bluffton Historic District (Attachment 2).

BACKGROUND: This application is for a preliminary development plan located within the Old Town Bluffton Historic District and as such is subject to the standards set forth in the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO).

The Applicant proposes to renovate the existing residential structure and demolish the carport. No changes are proposed to the garage at the rear of the property. The Applicant proposes a bookshop with an icery located on the western side of the main building with associated driveways, access, parking, utilities and stormwater infrastructure (Attachment 3).

As reflected in the revised site plan, the proposed development includes widening of the existing access to the site at Bridge Street. A twenty-two (22) foot wide drive apron is to be installed per the Town of Bluffton Bridge Street Streetscape Public Project. It is the responsibility of the property owner to obtain the required encroachment permit from SCDOT. The Applicant will coordinate with the Town and SCDOT prior to Final Development Plan approval.

In addition to the bookstore, the Applicant proposes an icery in the western side of the building, which currently serves as a 109 SF laundry room. Per UDO Section 9.4.3.M, an icery is:

"A Retail Business that is primarily engaged in the sale of non-food or beverage related goods or merchandise but that sells coffee, tea, non-alcoholic beverages, pastries, confections, ice cream, gelato, shaved ice and/or frozen refreshments intended for direct consumption by the purchaser that are served, but not cooked or substantially prepared, on the premises of the establishment. An icery is only permitted as a Conditional Accessory Use to a Retail Business."

The proposed icery would be less than 25% of the main retail business's heated square footage as required by UDO Section 4.4.2.G, which states:

"A Retail Business principally engaged in the sale of goods or merchandise may have an Icery as a Conditional Accessory Use provided the following conditions are met: (i) No more than twenty-five (25%) percent of the Retail Business' heated square footage is allocated for use as an Icery; and, (ii) No outdoor dining areas with seating and tables for customers may be provided."

In support of the proposed development, 4 onsite parking spaces are required and 6 are proposed. The existing car port will be removed and replaced with five gravel spaces.

There is an existing gravel connection between the subject property and the Beaufort County owned Oyster Factory Park parking lot to the west. The proposed development plan shows existing parking access, however, it should be noted that the access point cannot currently be used by this development. The site plan as proposed can function without this connection.

Staff comments on the Preliminary Development Plan were reviewed at the May 21, 2025, Development Review Committee meeting (Attachment 4). The Applicant provided a response to comments and revised site plans on May 28, 2025 (Attachment 5 and 3).

The subject parcel is within the Old Town Bluffton Historic District (HD) and will require a Certificate of Appropriateness – Historic District (COFA-HD) at time of final development plan approval.

REVIEW CRITERIA & ANALYSIS: The Planning Commission shall consider the criteria set forth in Section 3.10.3.A of the Unified Development Ordinance in assessing an application for a Preliminary Development Plan. The applicable criteria are provided below followed by Staff Finding(s) based upon review of the application submittals to date.

1. Section 3.10.3.A.1. Conformance with the applicable provisions provided in Article 5, Design Standards.

Finding. The proposed site improvements conform with the applicable provisions provided in Article 5, Design Standards.

2. Section 3.10.3.A.2. The proposed development shall be in conformance with any approved Development Agreement, PUD Concept Plan, PUD Master Plan, Subdivision Plan, or any other agreements or plans that are applicable.

Finding. The proposed development is not within any PUD, Development

Agreement, or Subdivision Plan.

3. **Section 3.10.3.A.3.** If the proposed development is associated with a previously approved Master Plan, then the traffic and access plans shall adhere to the previously approved traffic impact analysis or assessment, where applicable. If an application is not associated with a previously approved PUD Master Plan, then a traffic impact analysis shall be required at final development plan submittal.

Finding. The proposed development is not within any approved Master Plan or PUD.

4. **Section 3.10.3.A.4.** The proposed development must be able to be served by adequate public services, including, but not limited to, water, sanitary sewer, roads, police, fire, and school services. For developments that have the potential for significant impact on infrastructure and services, the applicant shall be required to provide an analysis and mitigation of the impact on transportation, utilities, and community services.

Finding. Letters from the agencies providing public services will be required at time of Final Development Plan submittal per the Applications Manual.

5. **Section 3.10.3.A.5.** The phasing plan, if applicable, is logical and is designed in a manner that allows each phase to fully function independently regarding services, utilities, circulation, facilities, and open space, irrespective of the completion of other proposed phases.

Finding. The project is proposed to be completed in a single phase.

6. **Section 3.10.3.A.6.** The application must comply with applicable requirements in the Applications Manual.

Finding. The application has been reviewed by Town Staff and has been determined to be complete.

PLANNING COMMISSION ACTIONS: The Planning Commission has the authority to take the following actions with respect to the application as authorized by Section 2.2.6.C.5 of the UDO:

1. Approve the application as submitted;
2. Approve the application with conditions; or
3. Deny the application as submitted.

RECOMMENDATION: Town Staff finds that the requirements of Section 3.10.3.A of the Unified Development Ordinance are met and recommends that the Planning Commission approve the application as submitted.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Application and Project Narrative
2. Vicinity Map

3. Survey, Site Development and Landscape Plan Set
4. DRC Comments and Original Site Plans 05 21 25
5. DRC Comments Response 05 28 25