

PLANNING COMMISSION

STAFF REPORT

Growth Management Department



MEETING DATE:	June 24, 2026
PROJECT:	Amendments to the Town of Bluffton Code of Ordinances Chapter 23 – Unified Development Ordinance, Article 3 (Application Process) – Sec. 3.18 (Certificate of Appropriateness-Historic District) and Sec. 3.19 (Site Feature-Historic District Permit) as it Relates to Demolition of Non-Contributing Structures in Old Town Bluffton Historic District
PROJECT MANAGER:	Charlotte L. Moore, AICP Principal Planner

INTRODUCTION: As set forth in Section 3.5.2 of the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), “an application for a UDO Text Amendment may be initiated by a Town of Bluffton property owner, Town Council, Planning Commission, or the UDO Administrator when public necessity, convenience, State or Federal law, general welfare, new research, or published recommendations on zoning and land development justifies such action.”

REQUEST: The UDO Administrator requests that the Planning Commission recommend approval to Town Council of a Text Amendment to the following UDO sections:

Article 3 (Application Process) – Sec. 3.18 (Certificate of Appropriateness-Historic District) and Sec. 3.19 (Site Feature-Historic District Permit) as it Relates to Demolition of Non-Contributing Structures in Old Town Bluffton Historic District

BACKGROUND: In 2024, the Town amended the UDO to add or refine processes and review criteria for the relocation and demolition of structures within Old Town Bluffton Historic District. This amendment distinguished contributing and non-contributing structures. Those that are contributing add to the “historic associations [and] architectural qualities...that relate to the documented significance of Old Town Bluffton Historic District” and have a higher standard of review.

The 2024 amendment changed the demolition review criteria to be less stringent for non-contributing structures than the criteria for contributing structures, but it maintained the Certificate of Appropriateness (COFA) application requirement, which is reviewed by the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC). The intent was to provide an opportunity to possibly preserve structures that may qualify for contributing status that had not previously been identified. However, with the recent 2025 historic resources survey update, Town Staff is confident all structures that contribute to Old Town Historic District have been identified. Therefore, the process to demolish a non-contributing structure should not require a more lengthy and rigorous review by the HPC.

The proposed amendments would allow demolition of non-contributing structures to be reviewed by the UDO Administrator (or designee) through the Site Feature Permit application process. Town Staff can request information about the structure to document its history to have a more complete record of Old Town's development history. The review would be conducted within five business days as opposed the COFA process which requires a pre-application meeting, concept plan review by Historic Preservation Review Committee, and final plan review at a public Historic Preservation Committee meeting. The process for the relocation of non-contributing structures would not change as it is reviewed as new construction through the COFA process.

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS: See Attachment 1 for proposed amendments.

REVIEW CRITERIA & ANALYSIS: When assessing an application for UDO Text Amendments, Town Council is required to consider the criteria set forth in UDO Section 3.5.3, Application Review Criteria. These criteria are provided below, followed by a Finding.

1. **Section 3.5.3.A.** Consistency with the Comprehensive Plan or, if conditions have changed since the Comprehensive Plan was adopted, consistency with the overall intent of the Plan, recent development trends and the general character of the area.

Finding. The proposed amendment has no relationship to this criterion.

2. **Section 3.5.3.B.** Consistency with demographic changes, prevailing economic trends, and/or newly recognized best planning practices.

Finding. While not newly recognized, it is always a best practice to streamline the Town's review processes.

3. **Section 3.5.3.C.** Enhancement of the health, safety, and welfare of the Town of Bluffton.

Finding. The proposed amendment has no relationship to this criterion.

4. **Section 3.5.3.D.** Impact of the proposed amendment on the provision of public services.

Finding. The proposed amendment has no relationship to this criterion.

5. **Section 3.5.3.E.** The application must comply with applicable requirements in the Applications Manual.

Finding. The application complies with all applicable requirements of the Applications Manual.

PLANNING COMMISSION ACTIONS: As granted by the powers and duties set forth in Section 2.2.6.C.4 of the UDO, the Planning Commission has the authority to take the following actions with respect to this application:

1. Approval of the application as submitted;

2. Approval of the application with amendments; or
3. Denial of the application as submitted by the Applicant.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: As submitted, Growth Management staff recommends that the Planning Commission recommend approval of the proposed Text Amendments to Town Council.

NEXT STEPS

UDO Text Amendment Procedure	Date	Complete
Step 1. Planning Commission Public Hearing and Recommendation	June 24, 2026	✓
Step 2. Town Council – 1st Reading	July 14, 2026	✓
Step 3. Town Council Meeting – Second/Final Reading and Public Hearing	August 11, 2026	✓

ATTACHMENTS:

Attch1: Proposed Text Amendments