



HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION MINUTES

300 Martin Luther King Blvd.

September 11, 2025

TIME: 4:30 PM

1. A CALL TO ORDER

Rush Denson called the meeting to order at 4:30 p.m.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. Approve August 14, 2025 minutes

A motion was made by Mike Buckalew to accept the minutes as written. The motion was seconded by Aaron Bushey. All approved.

3. PUBLIC HEARINGS

(Limit comments to 3 minutes or less)

Rush Denson opened the floor for public comments. There were none.

4. OLD BUSINESS

There was no old business to discuss.

5. NEW BUSINESS

2. 815 6th Ave: Northside Historic District

COA: Replace Windows

Applicant: Patricia Quinn

Agenda Item #: 1

Meeting Date: 9/11/2025

Action Requested: COA: Install Windows

Location of Property: 815 6th Ave; Northside Historic District

Petitioner: Patricia Quinn

Resources:

Circa 1980. Ranch residence. Non-contributing structure.

Proposal: The petitioner requests a COA for the following:

1. Replace all windows with same style; Beveled triple slider, white metal frames.

Guidelines:

Windows:

- a. Retain and repair existing windows including window sash, glass, lintels, sills, architraves, shutters, pediments, hoods and hardware. If new sashes are used, duplicate the original material, design, size and hardware of the original window. Do not change window size, sash size or windowpane size.
- b. Do not introduce or create new window openings into the front principal elevation of the structure and do not enlarge or reduce original window openings to fit new stock window sizes.
- c. The original number and arrangement of panes should be maintained.
- d. Storm windows should be visually unobtrusive and should not damage existing window frames. Storm windows should be designed so that they can be removed in the future without damage to the original fabric of the structure. Storm windows should be compatible in color and design with the original windows. For example, mill finished aluminum storm windows should not be used with painted window sash.
- e. Plastic, canvas or metal strip awnings or fake shutters that are not compatible with the architectural style of the structure should not be used.
- f. Where existing shutters are replaced or reinstalled when missing, the new shutters shall be sized to fit the window opening, in height and width, whether the shutters are fixed or operable. Composite materials are allowable for shutters so long as they duplicate the original in shape and texture.
- g. New window openings should not be introduced unless they match the existing window configuration and their placement harmonized with the existing rhythm of openings.
- h. Original windows should not be filled in.

Staff recommendation:

1. Staff recommends approval of installation of new metal framed triple slide windows to match existing windows on this non-contributing structure.

Discussion:

Staff provided a description of the proposed window replacement and specs on this noncontributing residence.

There was no discussion.

A motion was made by Aaron Bushey to approve. The motion was seconded by Mike Buckelew. All approved.

3. 704 Ave D: Geneva Historic District
COA: Install Concrete Ramp and Drive
Applicant: CJCF, LLC
This item was tabled at the request of the applicant.
4. 500 Geneva St: Geneva Historic District
COA: Concrete Ramp and Parking Area
Applicant: CJCF, LLC
This item was tabled at the request of the applicant.

5. 121 S. 9th St: Downtown Historic District
COA: Enclose Display Area & Remove Door
Applicant: Randy Brown

Agenda Item #: 4
Meeting Date: 09/11/2025
Action Requested: COA: Enclose Display Area & Remove Door
Location of Property: 121 S. 9th St; Downtown Historic District
Petitioner: Randy Brown

Resources:

Museum of East Alabama: Circa 1970; one-story concrete block building with brick veneer façade; aluminum and glass storefront. Conditionally Contributing.

Proposal: The petitioner requests a COA for the following:

1. Enclose the display area (vacant lot) with wood-framed storefront windows and a single wood door. Install a ribbed steel garage door in the rear to allow for displays to be moved in/out.
2. Remove an unused single door in the middle of the building; pull the storefront forward to align with other windows.

Proposed Guidelines:

STOREFRONT - #2.

Preserve existing historic storefronts. Retain characteristic storefront features.

DISPLAY WINDOW: Maintain the original dimensions and transparent nature of the display window. Do not add small paned windows or reflective glass.

COLUMNS: Maintain cast iron columns and brick and stone piers which frame the storefront.

TRANSOM: Retain the original shape and transparency of the transom. Do not place a sign over the transom. If an interior ceiling has been lowered below the transom, it should be recessed from the storefront. Do not place air conditioning units in the transom.

RECONSTRUCTED STOREFRONT - #3

Reconstruction of a historic storefront should be based on physical evidence and historical documentation such as photographs.

RE-CONSTRUCTION: Obtain historic photographs, postcards of downtown, and historical background about the building by contacting the historical society, library, and/or state archives.

NEW STOREFRONT-#4

If documentation of the original storefront does not exist, design a new storefront that is compatible with the materials, size, scale, and character -defining features of nearby buildings.

NEW DESIGN: Respect the original design of the building and visual character of the district. Do not add early colonial features, attempt to create a theme, or make a building more ornamental than it originally was. The new design should incorporate characteristic elements of a traditional storefront, including the display window, transom, recessed entrance, and bulkhead using compatible materials. (see Preservation Brief #11)

REPLACEMENT: Replacement windows are only recommended when historic windows cannot be rehabilitated. When replacement windows are installed, they should match the historic window in size, style, and materials and have the same number of panes. Interior storm windows are preferable to exterior ones. Wood windows are recommended, but painted metal windows may be acceptable. (see Preservation Brief #3)

DOORS - #9.

Preserve the original front doors and opening.

PRESERVATION: The original size and shape of door openings should be maintained, not in-filled. Original doors and door hardware should be repaired and maintained. Replacement doors, when necessary, should be compatible with the original doors in terms of style, size, material, and glass panel configuration.

NEW OPENINGS: When the creation of new openings is necessary in order to meet fire codes, they should be located on sides or to the rear of buildings, rather than on the front. New openings, when permitted, should be compatible in scale, size, proportion, and placement to historic openings.

CLOSING AN OPENING: If the blocking of an opening is allowed, infill materials should be compatible with the building and should be placed 2" to 6" back from the building face. Use of fixed reflective glass is not recommended.

Staff recommendation:

1. Staff recommend approval of a new wood-framed storefront with transom, full glass windows, and steel garage door in the rear.
2. Staff recommend approval of a single wood door.
3. Staff recommend approval of removing the center building door and pulling the storefront forward for continuity.

Discussion:

Staff provided an overview of the proposed changes to the open display area and storefront. The museum desires to have a controlled environment for displays. There was no further discussion.

A motion was made by Linda Lanz to approve. The motion was seconded by Aaron Bushey. All approved.

6. 913 S. Railroad Ave: Downtown Historic District
COA: Rehabilitation of Storefront
Applicant: Paul Gibson-Studio BGP Architects

Agenda Item #: 5
Meeting Date: 09/11/2025
Action Requested: COA: Façade Renovation
Location of Property: 913 S. Railroad Ave; Downtown Historic District
Petitioner: Paul Gibson-Studio BGP Architects

Resources:

913 (915) Venable's Find Foods: after 1924; one story brick load bearing wall construction; pilaster and corbelled parapet has recessed panels; some original woodwork. Glass and metal frames at pedestrian level date from a later period. Contributing Resource.

913 ½ Carol's Attic: after 1924; one story brick load bearing wall construction; pilaster and corbelled parapet has recessed panels; some original woodwork. Glass and metal frames at pedestrian level date from a later period. Contributing Resource.

Proposal: The petitioner requests a COA for the following:

1. Exterior brick repairs, grout re-pointing and masonry cleaning. Buildings have been painted in the past and will be repainted to a similar hue.
2. Replace existing storefront with historically appropriate wood trim, paneling and entrance doors. New window framing to be aluminum storefront with SDL transoms.
3. New canvas awnings on 1" tubular aluminum frames are to be installed.
4. Interior repairs will include gutting of existing partitions and ceilings, repair of compromised floor and roof structures, and new plumbing, electrical, and mechanical systems, resulting in a vanilla box ready for office, mercantile or restaurant use.

Proposed Guidelines:

STOREFRONT - #2.

Preserve existing historic storefronts. Retain characteristic storefront features.

DISPLAY WINDOW: Maintain the original dimensions and transparent nature of the display window.

Do not add small paned windows or reflective glass.

COLUMNS: Maintain cast iron columns and brick and stone piers which frame the storefront.

TRANSOM: Retain the original shape and transparency of the transom. Do not place a sign over the transom. If an interior ceiling has been lowered below the transom, it should be recessed from the storefront. Do not place air conditioning units in the transom.

RECONSTRUCTED STOREFRONT-#3

Reconstruction of a historic storefront should be based on physical evidence and historical documentation such as photographs.

RE-CONSTRUCTION: Obtain historic photographs, postcards of the downtown, and historical background about the building by contacting the historical society, library, and/or state archives.

NEW STOREFRONT-#4

If documentation of the original storefront does not exist, design a new storefront that is compatible with the materials, size, scale, and character -defining features of nearby buildings.

NEW DESIGN: Respect the original design of the building and visual character of the district. Do not add early colonial features, attempt to create a theme, or make a building more ornamental than it originally was. The new design should incorporate characteristic elements of a traditional storefront, including the display window, transom, recessed entrance, and bulkhead using compatible materials. (see Preservation Brief #11)

UPPER STORY WINDOWS- #7.

Preserve the size, shape, details, and transparency of upper story windows.

PRESERVATION: The glass, sash, hardware, and window surrounds, including the lintel or decorative window hoods, should be preserved and maintained. Add shutters to the exterior only if they originally existed. Shutters should be operable or should at least appear to be operable; when closed over an opening, they should fit the size of the opening. (see Preservation Brief #9, 10)

RE-ESTABLISHMENT: Consider reopening closed or blocked windows. In some cases, closed exterior shutters may be used to define the original window dimensions. Instead of boarding up windows when the second story is not in use, hang curtains or interior shutters to give the building an occupied appearance. Reflective and dark, tinted glass is not appropriate.

REPLACEMENT: Replacement windows are only recommended when historic windows cannot be rehabilitated. When replacement windows are installed, they should match the historic window in size, style, and materials and have the same

number of panes. Interior storm windows are preferable to exterior ones. Wood windows are recommended but painted metal windows may be acceptable. (see Preservation Brief #3)

DOORS - #9.

Preserve the original front doors and opening.

PRESERVATION: The original size and shape of door openings should be maintained, not in-filled. Original doors and door hardware should be repaired and maintained. Replacement doors, when necessary, should be compatible with the original doors in terms of style, size, material, and glass panel configuration.

NEW OPENINGS: When the creation of new openings is necessary in order to meet fire codes, they should be located on the sides or to the rear of buildings, rather than on the front. New openings, when permitted, should be compatible in scale, size, proportion, and placement to historic openings.

CLOSING AN OPENING: If the blocking of an opening is allowed, infill materials should be compatible with the building and should be placed 2" to 6" back from the building face. Use of fixed reflective glass is not recommended.

CANOPIES - #17.

Maintain original canopies and balconies.

PRESERVATION: Although canopies, porches, and balconies are not commonly found on commercial buildings, when they exist, they are distinctive features. Original materials, details, shape, outline, and roof height should be retained. Enclosing canopies and balconies is not appropriate if it destroys the visual openness of the porch appearance. Concrete canopies or covered walkways are not appropriate.

CANOPIES AND COLOR

In the 1970s a continuous wood shingled canopy was attached to Opelika's downtown buildings. This inappropriate canopy, which visually bisected the buildings and altered the character of downtown, was recently removed. Color is an inexpensive practical way to breathe new life into downtown buildings. Do not paint a brick building which is unpainted because it turns a low-maintenance material into a high-maintenance one. Although design review boards generally do not dictate color, the use of color can have a dramatic positive or negative impact on the district. Therefore, a few guidelines have been included. Merchants can receive color specifics through the Alabama Main Street office at the Alabama Historical Commission.

Staff recommendation:

1. According to Preservation Brief #11, new storefront designs should not draw attention away from the historic building with its detailing but should respect the existing historic character of the overall building. Where an architecturally or historically significant storefront no longer exists or is too deteriorated to save, a new front should be designed which is compatible with the size, scale, color, material, and character of the building.
2. Replacing historic wood-framed storefronts with metal framing is generally not recommended. The original wood framing is integral to the historic character of the storefront and the overall building. Metal framing can alter the architectural features that make a building historic, potentially destroying its distinguishing characteristics. Instead, it is advisable to repair and retain the historic features using recommended treatments. This approach respects the building's historical significance and preserves its unique character.
3. Staff does not recommend pulling the recessed entry forward flush with adjacent buildings because this is a distinguishing characteristic of this building.
4. Applicant shall return with detailed specs for all doors, windows, lighting, materials, and signage for approval prior to installation.

Discussion:

This item was for preliminary review only and discussion included buildings 913, 917, 921, and 923.

Rush Denson recused himself from discussion on the renovation and new build for agenda items 5-8.

Staff explained that the next four items is one project to renovate the Searcy properties. Due to the size and scope of the project, staff has separated it into four projects for each ground level building. The last agenda item addresses the second and third floors of new construction.

Paul Gibson with Studio BGP Architects and owner, Carson Cummings, provided a 3-D model of the project and gave a detailed description of renovations and additions. Building A is a contributing structure on the NR. Building B and C show brick work that does not align with the work on surrounding buildings. They propose demolishing these two buildings and coming back with a brick and cast stone façade that would align with existing parapets. The first floors would be retail and the second and third floors, which is set back from the parapet about 10ft to maintain the scale of the street, would be loft apartments. There will be about 20 small studio and two bedroom apartments. Thirty parking spaces are planned in the back with security fencing. From the rear you can see ground level and the next two levels residential units. Building D on the corner will remain with possibly a second floor restaurant and terrace type bar. The restaurant space is conceptual, no tenant has been secured. The desire is to revitalize and energize that corner intersection. The small brick noncontributing addition on the rear of Building D, would be demolished and a small courtyard installed.

Aaron Kovak asked what basis the developer is asking to demo the two buildings. Mr. Gibson explained it is due to the condition and the punched openings don't align with rest of the streetscape. Also, it is not conducive when trying to get a multi-level in the way it's currently proportioned. A steel structure will probably be needed with a brick veneer façade on the front going up the first two levels. The third level would be stepped back with a metal panel glass system. The street level will have a more continuous parapet line.

Aaron Kovak asked if the brick for the new construction would be historic/reclaimed brick or new brick. Mr. Gibson said it would be a modular brick, it would not be a utility brick, which is a 12"x 4" size. The main purpose today was to get an opinion of the demolition of the two structures. A lot of the details are still being worked through.

Carson Cummings stated that as they visited other property and business owners, there was a need for loft apartments. Long term, residential units are a good fit for this property. Construction could start within the next six months and be completed within eighteen months.

Staff explained the current plans show both metal and canvas awnings, possibly painted brick on the second level, and repainting of currently painted buildings. Wood bulkheads and aluminum framed windows will be used on storefronts. Cast stone will also be used. The rendering shows metal panels on the second level bar area.

Linda Lanz stated that she likes the concept. However, care needs to be taken that the renovations and new construction have the character and feel of what is valued in our historic town.

Matt Mosley said what is important to the developer and the Planning Commission is how the Historic Preservation Commission feels about the demolition of the two buildings and the proposed height for residential. The Planning Commission will review request for approval of the apartment use in the downtown zone. The number of units is tied to the height that is being proposed. You have the 10th Street bridge adjacent and an elevation change going up to the museum property and courthouse. Where the museum is now, it used to be the Clemment Hotel, which was one of the taller buildings in town. Further conversation will be needed regarding the proposed metal. It is being used in some other downtown but is potentially a new material being introduced into the South side of downtown.

Aaron Bushy asked if an adjoining building can only be one story taller than the building next to it. Mr. Mosley explained that scale relative to what is next door is important. A four-five story building next to a one-story building would be out of scale. The same thing with having a building set 20ft back from other properties. How the project is

compatible to the downtown, what is around it, the change in scale, and how it fits proportionally into the area. The developer is setting back the third story of the primary building so when standing as a pedestrian on the ground floor, when you look up you are not likely to see the third story.

Mike Buckalew expressed that the third story is very modern. He would like to see something with a little older look. Maybe a more ornate metal or railing. The top has a more industrial look. Mr. Gibson said they could look at options.

Staff explained that the two buildings requested to be demolished are conditionally contributing in our survey. However, the National Park Service no longer used this category on new surveys. A building is either contributing or noncontributing. Alterations were made at the time of our survey and the buildings did not qualify as contributing. Mr. Mosley stated one of the two buildings to be demolished has a more modern style and proportion. The Niffer's building has the height of other buildings and windows are a bit more proportionally correct compared to others, it does not have the transoms of building further down the street. There is evidence that the front façade has been rebuilt.

Staff again reviewed a general scope of work to be done. Attention was brought to the metal/aluminum storefront framing. The Commission has generally required wood framed windows on the south side. New materials will be introduced in the new guidelines. A site plan has been provided for parking and courtyard. A plan to screen parking will be required.

Mr. Cummings explained that they are now in the position that in order to move forward a decision needs to be made on the request to demo Building B and C and the materials that can be used so that the architect can finalize renderings and plans.

Aaron Kovak stated that he understands for the project to move forward the two buildings will need to be removed. They are making the effort to keep what is historic. The set back (third floor) architecturally helps. The project is a win for the city. It is important to sit down with the commission and carefully go over materials.

Aaron Bushey said the commission needs to recognize the unique example of someone who has four buildings in a row and the commission is giving them a dispensation to take these down (a building) where we might not do that the next time. If there is a contributing (or noncontributing) structure that is approved to be taken down that doesn't bleed into permission given across the board.

Mr. Mosley recognized that the demolition request is on buildings that are conditionally contributing. You would want to give much more review on these than you would a noncontributing structure. At the time of the survey, the surveyor felt that they were not fully contributing structures.

You have a little bit more flexibility in this case because of that than you would if someone requested demolition of a listed contributing structure. This would require a much more thorough review of the structure.

The applicant will return with final renderings, materials, specs, parking and landscaping for approval. Any approval for demolition would be contingent on Planning Department approval of residential units, with the basic size, scope, and scale of the buildings to be placed back.

7. 917 S. Railroad Ave: Downtown Historic District
COA: Demolition and New Construction
Applicant: Paul Gibson-Studio BGP Architects
Agenda Item #: 6
Meeting Date: 09/11/2025
Action Requested: COA: Demolition and New Construction
Location of Property: 917 S. Railroad Ave; Downtown Historic District
Petitioner: Paul Gibson-Studio BGP Architects

Resources:

Salvation Army: circa 1880's; one story brick load bearing wall construction; new brick façade; most of pedestrian level woodwork is original. Brand new store sign, awnings, and pendent lights. Conditionally Contributing.

Proposal: The petitioner requests a COA for the following:

1. Demolition of the existing building and construction of a two-story brick masonry façade in keeping with eight, proportions and masonry detailing of the adjoining (913) building. Construction of a permanent metal canopy to extend 5ft over the right of way.
2. Construction of a 3rd story set back ~10ft from the façade to maintain the street-level massing of the adjoining (913) building. The 3rd floor will be primarily metal panel and glass construction.
3. The first floor will consist of three (3) retail spaces fronting S. Railroad Ave, a street entrance to the apartment units, and five (5) ground floor apartments facing the rear, southeast, and courtyard, southwest.
4. The southwest elevation is to be a combination of brick and metal panels to match the façade. The southwest elevation will be primarily metal panel.

Proposed Guidelines:

DEMOLITION - #32.

Historic buildings should not be demolished.

NEGLECT: Property owners should not allow their buildings to deteriorate by failing to provide ordinary maintenance. This is considered to be demolition by neglect. When failure to maintain a property creates a public safety hazard, the city may condemn the property. Depending on local law, the city may stabilize the building at the owner's expense.

ECONOMIC HARDSHIP: If a request for demolition based on economic hardship is documented in a financial report detailing the costs of rehabilitation and evidencing that the existing building is incapable of producing a reasonable economic return on the investment, then the demolition may be approved.

STRUCTURAL INSTABILITY: If a request for demolition is based on structural instability or deterioration, a technical report, prepared by an architect or professional engineer, should be submitted. This should detail the nature and extent of the specific problems and provide cost estimates for their correction.

CONSTRUCTION PLANS: An application for demolition should be accompanied by a complete plan for the new development proposed for the site, a timetable, a budget for both the demolition and new construction, and evidence that adequate financing is available.

DOCUMENTATION: Prior to demolition, the building should be documented by measured drawings and photographs of the building's elevation and architectural features. Parts and materials should be salvaged and recycled if possible.

PUBLIC SAFETY: When in the interest of public safety, the removal of part of a building or complex may be required.

NON-CONTRIBUTING BUILDINGS: Demolition may be appropriate when a building has lost its integrity of design or is not a contributing building within the historic district, and its removal would result in a more positive effect on the district. In such cases, new construction should relate better to the historic district than the existing building. The requirements listed above should be satisfied, if applicable.

NEW CONSTRUCTION - #29.

New construction should be compatible with neighboring buildings.

COMPOSITION: New buildings should define the three basic divisions of a commercial facade: a top which is typically a flat roof with a parapet and decorative cornice; a middle area defined by the upper story windows which are vertical and regularly placed; and a bottom which is transparent and has the elements of a storefront, including a bulkhead, a display window, and a transom.

MATERIALS: New materials should relate to historic materials in terms of texture, scale, color, and composition. New buildings should utilize the same materials as those on existing historic structures. Masonry, particularly brick, is an appropriate material. Inappropriate materials are plywood, composition panel, plastic, imitation brick or stone, vinyl or synthetic siding, sheet metal, and stone veneer. Neither stucco nor concrete block impart the same scale or texture as brick.

SIZE / SCALE: New buildings should be in scale with existing buildings. This means that they should not be appreciably taller, shorter, wider, or narrower than the buildings adjacent to them. Multi-story buildings should have a vertical emphasis, meaning that they should be taller than they are wide. The scale of key elements and details should refer to nearby buildings.

RHYTHM OF OPENINGS: The design, scale, and placement of openings in buildings, which provide a visual rhythm along the street, should be continued. Walls should be divided into bays by windows. New construction should avoid creating long unrelieved expanses of wall along the street. Window openings should be vertically proportioned and placed symmetrically on the facade. They should be slightly recessed back from the surface. Windows should be defined by sills, lintels, or decorative surrounds.

ORIENTATION / ALIGNMENT: Orientation of new construction should match that of existing adjacent buildings. Facades should face the same direction as those of neighboring buildings. The similar heights of buildings are emphasized by the alignment of cornices and/or horizontal bands of second story windows. New construction should continue the visual continuity of horizontal elements.

SETBACK / SPACING: New buildings should conform with adjacent or surrounding buildings in terms of their setback and the spacing between buildings. Historically, blocks of commercial buildings directly fronting the sidewalk are attached to each other, sharing a party wall. New buildings should create a continuously walled complex that holds the lines of the streets. Generally, avoid buildings designed as free-standing objects.

STYLE: The design of new buildings should complement existing historical architecture rather than attempt to imitate it. The new construction should be distinguishable from the old so that the evolution of the Main Street district can be visually read. New designs should creatively draw on the important characteristics of existing buildings.

LANDSCAPE: Site planning should respect the precedents set by other buildings in the block. In areas where many trees form a bower across the streets, new plantings should be planned to achieve a similar effect. For walls, fences, and paving, use materials consistently found in the district. (refer to Design Guideline #22)

Staff recommendation:

1. This Conditionally Contributing building appears to have been updated and possibly refaced with brick at some point. According to the State Historic Preservation office, the category of Conditionally Contributing no longer exists. Structures are now designated as either Contributing or Non-Contributing.
2. The Commission should consider the following guidelines during preliminary review:
 - New materials should relate to historic materials in terms of texture, scale, composition and utilize the same materials as those on existing historic structures.
 - New buildings should define the three basic divisions of a commercial façade: a top which is typically a flat roof with a parapet and decorative cornice; a middle area defined by the upper story windows which are vertical and regularly placed;

and a bottom which is transparent and has the elements of a storefront, including bulkhead, a display window, and a transom.

- New designs should creatively draw on the important characteristics of existing buildings.
- New buildings should be in scale with existing buildings. They should not be appreciably taller, shorter, wider, or narrower than the buildings adjacent to them. The scale of key elements and details should refer to nearby buildings.
- The design, scale, and placement of openings, which provide a visual rhythm along the street, should be continued. Walls should be divided into bays by windows. New construction should avoid creating long unrelieved expanses of wall along the street. Window openings should be vertically proportioned and placed symmetrically on the façade. Windows should be defined by sills, lintels, or decorative surrounds.

3. Applicant shall return with detailed specs for all doors, windows, lighting, materials, and signage for approval prior to installation.

Discussion:

See discussion for agenda item #5

A motion was made by Aaron Kovak to approve the demolition request with staff recommendation on this conditionally contributing structure with plans for new retail and residential construction.

8. 921 S. Railroad Ave: Downtown Historic District
COA: Demolition and New Construction
Applicant: Paul Gibson-Studio BGP Architects

Agenda Item #: 7

Meeting Date: 09/11/2025

Action Requested: COA: Demolition and New Construction

Location of Property: 921 S. Railroad Ave; Downtown Historic District

Petitioner: Paul Gibson-Studio BGP Architects

Resources:

Circa 1950's; one story building with brick load bearing wall construction with solid brick parapet; pedestrian level glass and metal storefront. Conditionally Contributing.

Proposal: The petitioner requests a COA for the following:

1. Demolition of the existing building and construction of a two-story brick masonry façade in keeping with eight, proportions and masonry

detailing of the adjoining (913) building. Construction of a permanent metal canopy to extend 5ft over the right of way.

2. Construction of a 3rd story set back ~10ft from the façade to maintain the street-level massing of the adjoining (913) building. The 3rd floor will be primarily metal panel and glass construction.
3. The first floor will consist of three (3) retail spaces fronting S. Railroad Ave, a street entrance to the apartment units, and five (5) ground floor apartments facing the rear, southeast, and courtyard, southwest.
4. The southwest elevation is to be a combination of brick and metal panels to match façade. The southwest elevation will be primarily metal panel.

Proposed Guidelines:

DEMOLITION - #32.

Historic buildings should not be demolished.

NEGLECT: Property owners should not allow their buildings to deteriorate by failing to provide ordinary maintenance. This is considered to be demolition by neglect. When failure to maintain a property creates a public safety hazard, the city may condemn the property. Depending on local law, the city may stabilize the building at the owner's expense.

ECONOMIC HARDSHIP: If a request for demolition based on economic hardship is documented in a financial report detailing the costs of rehabilitation and evidencing that the existing building is incapable of producing a reasonable economic return on the investment, then the demolition may be approved.

STRUCTURAL INSTABILITY: If a request for demolition is based on structural instability or deterioration, a technical report, prepared by an architect or professional engineer, should be submitted. This should detail the nature and extent of the specific problems and provide cost estimates for their correction.

CONSTRUCTION PLANS: An application for demolition should be accompanied by a complete plan for the new development proposed for the site, a timetable, a budget for both the demolition and new construction, and evidence that adequate financing is available.

DOCUMENTATION: Prior to demolition, the building should be documented by measured drawings and photographs of the building's elevation and architectural features. Parts and materials should be salvaged and recycled if possible.

PUBLIC SAFETY: When in the interest of public safety, the removal of part of a building or complex may be required.

NON-CONTRIBUTING BUILDINGS: Demolition may be appropriate when a building has lost its integrity of design or is not a contributing building within the historic district, and its removal would result in a more positive effect on the district. In such cases, new construction should relate better to the historic district than the existing building. The requirements listed above should be satisfied, if applicable.

NEW CONSTRUCTION - #29.

New construction should be compatible with neighboring buildings.

COMPOSITION: New buildings should define the three basic divisions of a commercial facade: a top which is typically a flat roof with a parapet and decorative cornice; a middle area defined by the upper story windows which are vertical and regularly placed; and a bottom which is transparent and has the elements of a storefront, including a bulkhead, a display window, and a transom.

MATERIALS: New materials should relate to historic materials in terms of texture, scale, color, and composition. New buildings should utilize the same materials as those on existing historic structures. Masonry, particularly brick, is an appropriate material. Inappropriate materials are plywood, composition panel, plastic, imitation brick or stone, vinyl or synthetic siding, sheet metal, and stone veneer. Neither stucco nor concrete block impart the same scale or texture as brick.

SIZE / SCALE: New buildings should be in scale with existing buildings. This means that they should not be appreciably taller, shorter, wider, or narrower than the buildings adjacent to them. Multi—story buildings should have a vertical emphasis, meaning that they should be taller than they are wide. The scale of key elements and details should refer to nearby buildings.

RHYTHM OF OPENINGS: The design, scale, and placement of openings in buildings, which provide a visual rhythm along the street, should be continued. Walls should be divided into bays by windows. New construction should avoid creating long unrelieved expanses of wall along the street. Window openings should be vertically proportioned and placed symmetrically on the facade. They should be slightly recessed back from the surface. Windows should be defined by sills, lintels, or decorative surrounds.

ORIENTATION / ALIGNMENT: Orientation of new construction should match that of existing adjacent buildings. Facades should face the same direction as those of neighboring buildings. The similar heights of buildings are emphasized by the alignment of cornices and/or horizontal bands of second story windows. New construction should continue the visual continuity of horizontal elements.

SETBACK / SPACING: New buildings should conform with adjacent or surrounding buildings in terms of their setback and the spacing between buildings. Historically, blocks of commercial buildings directly fronting the sidewalk are attached to each other, sharing a party wall. New buildings should create a continuously walled complex that holds the lines of the streets. Generally, avoid buildings designed as free-standing objects.

STYLE: The design of new buildings should complement existing historical architecture rather than attempt to imitate it. The new construction should be distinguishable from the old so that the evolution of the Main Street district can be visually read. New designs should creatively draw on the important characteristics of existing buildings.

LANDSCAPE: Site planning should respect the precedents set by other buildings in the block. In areas where many trees form a bower across the streets, new plantings should be planned to achieve a similar effect. For walls, fences, and paving, use materials consistently found in the district. (refer to Design Guideline #22)

Staff recommendation:

1. According to the State Historic Preservation office, the category of Conditionally Contributing no longer exists. Structures are now designated as either Contributing or Non-Contributing.
2. The Commission should consider the following guidelines during preliminary review:
 - New materials should relate to historic materials in terms of texture, scale, composition and utilize the same materials as those on existing historic structures.
 - New buildings should define the three basic divisions of a commercial façade: a top which is typically a flat roof with a parapet and decorative cornice; a middle area defined by the upper story windows which are vertical and regularly placed; and a bottom which is transparent and has the elements of a storefront, including bulkhead, a display window, and a transom.
 - New designs should creatively draw on the important characteristics of existing buildings.
 - New buildings should be in scale with existing buildings. They should not be appreciably taller, shorter, wider, or narrower than the buildings adjacent to them. The scale of key elements and details should refer to nearby buildings.
 - The design, scale, and placement of openings, which provide a visual rhythm along the street, should be continued. Walls should be divided into bays by windows. New construction should avoid creating long unrelieved expanses of walls along the street. Window openings should be vertically proportioned and placed symmetrically on the façade. Windows should be defined by sills, lintels, or decorative surrounds.
3. Applicant shall return with detailed specs for all doors, windows, lighting, materials, and signage for approval prior to installation.

Discussion:

See discussion for agenda item #5

A motion was made by Aaron Kovak to approve the demolition request with staff recommendation on this conditionally contributing structure with plans for new retail and residential construction.

9. 923 S. Railroad Ave: Downtown Historic District
COA: Facade Renovation, Demolition, and New Construction
Applicant: Paul Gibson-Studio BGP Architects

Resources:

Ronald Bagen's Studio: circa 1885; one story brick load bearing wall construction with solid brick parapet; new brick façade; glass and metal frame store front. Conditionally Contributing.

Proposal: The petitioner requests a COA for the following:

1. Exterior brick repairs, grout re-pointing and masonry cleaning. Building has been painted in the past and will be repainted.
2. Replacement of existing storefront with historically appropriate wood trim, paneling and entrance doors. New window framing to be aluminum storefront with SDL transoms.
3. New canvas awnings on 1" tubular aluminum frames to be installed.
4. Addition of a second story to include dining/bar facilities and a large, partially covered rooftop terrace. As with 917 & 921, the additional story will be set back from S. Railroad Avenue to maintain the historic street level parapet relationship.
5. Interior repairs will include gutting of existing partitions and ceilings, and replacement of the existing wood floor and root structure with concrete slab on grade and steel roof framing.
6. Addition of two stairs and an elevator.
7. Installation of three (3) new openings on the southwest elevation facing S. 10th Street.
8. Demolition of 1,042 SF brick addition on the southeast corner that is facing S. 10th Street.

Proposed Guidelines:***STOREFRONT - #2.***

Preserve existing historic storefronts. Retain characteristic storefront features.

DISPLAY WINDOW: Maintain the original dimensions and transparent nature of the display window.

Do not add small paned windows or reflective glass.

COLUMNS: Maintain cast iron columns and brick and stone piers which frame the storefront.

TRANSOM: Retain the original shape and transparency of the transom. Do not place a sign over the transom. If an interior ceiling has been lowered below the transom, it should be recessed from the storefront. Do not place air conditioning units in the transom.

RECONSTRUCTED STOREFRONT-#3

Reconstruction of a historic storefront should be based on physical evidence and historical documentation such as photographs.

RE-CONSTRUCTION: Obtain historic photographs, postcards of the downtown, and historical background about the building by contacting the historical society, library, and/or state archives.

NEW STOREFRONT-#4

If documentation of the original storefront does not exist, design a new storefront that is compatible with the materials, size, scale, and character -defining features of nearby buildings.

NEW DESIGN: Respect the original design of the building and visual character of the district. Do not add early colonial features, attempt to create a theme, or make a building more ornamental than it originally was. The new design should incorporate characteristic elements of a traditional storefront, including the display window, transom, recessed entrance, and bulkhead using compatible materials. (see Preservation Brief #11)

UPPER STORY WINDOWS- #7.

Preserve the size, shape, details, and transparency of upper story windows.

PRESERVATION: The glass, sash, hardware, and window surrounds, including the lintel or decorative window hoods, should be preserved and maintained. Add shutters to the exterior only if they originally existed. Shutters should be operable or should at least appear to be operable; when closed over an opening, they should fit the size of the opening. (see Preservation Brief #9, 10)

RE-ESTABLISHMENT: Consider reopening closed or blocked windows. In some cases, closed exterior shutters may be used to define the original window dimensions. Instead of boarding up windows when the second story is not in use, hang curtains or interior shutters to give the building an occupied appearance. Reflective and dark, tinted glass is not appropriate.

REPLACEMENT: Replacement windows are only recommended when historic windows cannot be rehabilitated. When replacement windows are installed, they should match the historic window in size, style, and materials and have the same number of panes. Interior storm windows are preferable to exterior ones. Wood windows are recommended but painted metal windows may be acceptable. (see Preservation Brief #3)

DOORS - #9.

Preserve the original front doors and opening.

PRESERVATION: The original size and shape of door openings should be maintained, not in-filled. Original doors and door hardware should be repaired and maintained. Replacement doors, when necessary, should be compatible with the original doors in terms of style, size, material, and glass panel configuration.

NEW OPENINGS: When the creation of new openings is necessary in order to meet fire codes, they should be located on the sides or to the rear of buildings, rather than on the front. New openings, when permitted, should be compatible in scale, size, proportion, and placement to historic openings.

CLOSING AN OPENING: If the blocking of an opening is allowed, infill materials should be compatible with the building and should be placed 2” to 6” back from the building face. Use of fixed reflective glass is not recommended.

CANOPIES - #17.

Maintain original canopies and balconies.

PRESERVATION: Although canopies, porches, and balconies are not commonly found on commercial buildings, when they exist, they are distinctive features. Original materials, details, shape, outline, and roof height should be retained. Enclosing canopies and balconies is not appropriate if it destroys the visual openness of the porch appearance. Concrete canopies or covered walkways are not appropriate.

CANOPIES AND COLOR

In the 1970s a continuous wood shingled canopy was attached to Opelika’s downtown buildings. This inappropriate canopy, which visually bisected the buildings and altered the character of downtown, was recently removed. Color is an inexpensive practical way to breathe new life into downtown buildings. Do not paint a brick building which is unpainted because it turns a low-maintenance material into a high-maintenance one. Although design review boards generally do not dictate color, the use of color can have a dramatic positive or negative impact on the district. Therefore, a few guidelines have been included. Merchants can receive color specifics through the Alabama Main Street office at the Alabama Historical Commission.

Staff recommendation:

1. According to Preservation Brief #11, New storefront designs should not draw attention away from the historic building with its detailing but should respect the existing historic character of the overall building. Where an architecturally or historically significant storefront no longer exists or is too deteriorated to save, a new front should be designed which is compatible with the size, scale, color, material, and character of the building.
2. Replacing historic wood-framed storefronts with metal framing is generally not recommended. The original wood framing is integral

to the historic character of the storefront and the overall building. Metal framing can alter the architectural features that make a building historic, potentially destroying its distinguishing characteristics. Instead, it is advisable to repair and retain the historic features using recommended treatments. This approach respects the building's historical significance and preserves its unique character.

3. Staff recommends approval of canvas awnings.
4. Staff recommends approval of demolition of the rear addition which is not original to the building and has no significance.
5. Staff recommends approval of new storefront windows facing S. 10th Street.
6. The applicant shall return with a landscape plan to block the view of rear parking.
7. Applicant shall return with detailed specs for all doors, windows, lighting, materials, and signage for approval prior to installation.
8. All approvals are contingent on Planning Department review.

Discussion:

This item was for preliminary review only and discussion included buildings 913, 917, 921, and 923. The applicant will return with revised renderings and plans based on discussion.
See item #5 discussion.

6. OTHER BUSINESS

10. Enforcement Report

11. Staff Report

12. Next meeting DATE

1. Next meeting October 9, 2025

7. ADJOURN