

Statement of Andrew Jones, Chair of the Oglethorpe Plan Coalition

October 10, 2023

Re: 503 East Bay St.

Please reject this proposal because it fundamentally alters the design of our historic Factor's Walk.

This proposal is for the insertion of a metal deck along the side of one of the area's historic bridges. This alters the historic character of the bridge, in violation of the Department of Interior Standards.

It is very different from the so-called precedents at Vic's and Cottonsail because it completely covers the lower level roadway. From the lower level, the view of sky will be completely blocked. Further, the other examples had a history of covering part of the lower level, and this project does not. Here are the findings of MPC staff:

FINDINGS:

The applicant provided an extensive history of the building and bridges that connect the building back to the top of the bluff. The bridges have, generally, always been in the same configuration that they are now; the area proposed to be covered has never been covered historically. This is unlike the area outside Vic's on the River which was covered historically and a portion of which is now covered again per a COA issued in 2011 [File No. H-110623-4463-2] which is attached to the agenda.

Thus, the proposal before you is precedent setting.

It seems that the current generation is intent on degrading the historic integrity our waterfront, which prior generations worked so hard to save. On the west end, the Plant Riverside project inserted new buildings between the west end of Factors Walk and the river, creating a false history and placing some of the earliest buildings into a non-historic alley. On the east side, where the 1858 Old Harbor Light used to guide ships from the harbor, one can no longer even see the harbor because brand new no-style hotels block the view. With this new proposal, we are witnessing the potential degradation of everything in between.

The spidery iron bridges that connect Emmet Park to Factor's Walk are a quintessential element of Factor's Walk. To fill the space in between them with metal decks fundamentally changes the spatial relationships that define this area.

Factor's Walk is recognized as a Character Area under section 7.7.11 of the Ordinance, which specifically mentions the bridges.

7.8.11 Character Areas

A Character Area is a predefined area within the Savannah Downtown Historic District that has special character-defining features that are unique to that area.

a. Factors Walk

- i. A unique historic area within the Savannah National Historic Landmark District distinguished by its access to the Savannah River, parks and green space, proximity to commercial and shipping industry structures, historical structures, and sloping cobblestone rights-of-way, and pedestrian bridges.

Here is a typical view.



You must deny this proposal because it is not visually compatible with the rhythms and building masses of the adjacent visually related contributing structures.

Section 7.8.9, the visual compatibility test, includes a consideration of

e. Rhythm of structures on streets

The relationship of a building or structure to the open space between it and adjacent buildings or structures shall be visually compatible with the open spaces between contributing buildings and structures to which it is visually related.

f. Rhythm of entrance and/or porch projection

The relationship of entrances, porch projections, and walkways to buildings or structures shall be visually compatible with the contributing buildings and structures to which they are visually related.

This proposal violates the historic rhythms of the contributing buildings to which it relates visually.

Your role is to enforce the Protections of the Ordinance. Please apply the criteria and deny this project.