

SAVANNAH - CHATHAM COUNTY HISTORIC SITE AND MONUMENT COMMISSION

**REGULAR MEETING
112 EAST STATE STREET**

ARTHUR A. MENDONSA HEARING ROOM

May 3, 2007

4:00 P.M.

MINUTES

HSMC Members Present:

**Gordon Smith, Vice-Chairman
LaVerne Ricks-Brown, Secretary
Phillip Williams, Commission Member
Frank Lang, Ex-Officio**

HSMC Members Not Present:

Walter Wright, Chairman

HSMC/MPC Staff Present:

**Ellen Harris, Preservation Planner
Janine N. Person, Administrative Assistant**

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 4:20 p.m.

Mr. Gordon Smith stated he will be acting as Chairman on behalf of Walter Wright who was unable to attend the meeting.

Present for the petition was Mr. Ted Haviland.

Ms. Harris gave the Staff report.

**II. Petition of Theodore Haviland and Julian McKenzie
File No.: C-070404-33992-2
Site Evaluation - Washington Square
Washington Fire Company Monument**

NATURE OF REQUEST: The petitioner is requesting that Washington Square be evaluated and determined as an "Available Site" for a minor monument. This is the first step in the application process for a monument on public property, as outlined in the Master Plan and Guidelines. The theme, design, and funding will all be reviewed later.

FINDINGS:

Washington Square is not currently listed in as an Available Site in the Master Plan and Guidelines. The square, located in Washington Ward, is the northernmost square on Houston Street and is a relatively quiet and residential section of the Landmark District.

While there are no other monuments in the square, there is one marker to The Georgia Medical Society in the northeast section of the square. Adjacent to the square, on the southwest trust lot,

there are two minor monuments: the Umbreit Memorial Bell and the Hohenstein Memorial Flagpole. The Umbreit Bell commemorates the Port of Savannah and Maritime Day and is dedicated to Reverend A. Dale Umbreit. The flagpole is dedicated to John B. Hohenstein, Sr., also involved with Savannah's maritime industry. These two monuments are adjacent to the International Seamen's House.

There are 17 criteria used to evaluate sites (see page 24 of the Master Plan). The following criteria were used in the original assessment of the site to eliminate Washington Square as an Available Site:

- The proposed site should be large enough to accommodate an object, and should not encroach on... designated green space.
- The proposed site should not be utilized for special events...
- The installation of the object should not cause detriment to the character of the surrounding neighborhood.

The center of Washington Square is an open grass area, while all other areas are grass and other landscaping. The southern center area has some shrubbery but is dominated by a slate patio with two benches. The petitioner is proposing locating a monument on the slate area adjacent to the existing boxwood hedge. By locating the monument on the slate area, it does not encroach on green space.

Washington Square is frequently the site of weddings and other celebratory events, though much of this activity takes place in the center of the square with the slate area used as a staging area. Based on the conceptual size and scale of the proposed monument, the proposed location would not interfere with events.

While theme and design are not a part of this submittal, the applicant has provided some information on both and is useful in evaluating whether or not it may be detrimental to the character of the neighborhood.

The applicant wishes to build a monument to house the original cornerstone from the No. 1 Fire Station located at Broughton and Houston Streets from 1878 until 1959. The building was demolished in 1962. The cornerstone, which is inscribed "Washington Fire Co. 1847-1875", references the private Washington Fire Company located on Washington Square until 1875, when it was replaced by No. 1 Fire Station, on Broughton Street, the first city-owned fire station. There is also a cistern underneath the square, which purportedly stored water for the Washington Fire Company.

The applicant has proposed a monument approximately two feet wide by two feet deep by three feet high of Savannah gray brick and a granite or cast stone top. Discussions with the petitioner indicate a plaque with the history of the cornerstone will also be part of the monument. An initial impression of the monument size and design, indicates the monument will be unobtrusive and not attract large numbers of visitors (which would be inappropriate for the peaceful, quiet character of this neighborhood).

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends considering the site available with the following stipulations:

- The petitioner understands that approval of the site does not mitigate the requirement of the petitioner to submit an application and all required supplementary information for the theme, location, design and funding (Parts 1 and 2 of the Monument Application).
- The monument must comply with the criteria addressing theme, location, design, and funding as set forth in the Master Plan and Guidelines.
- The site approval is only for the limited two-foot-by-two-foot area of the slate patio in the south central section of the square, adjacent to the boxwood hedge, along the north side of the slate, in the center.
- The size of the monument does not exceed by more than 10 percent the proposed dimensions submitted by the petitioner (two feet wide by two feet deep by three feet high).
- The site will be “reserved” for the petitioner for a period of one year, or until the petitioner withdraws the petition in writing. After the period of one year, if Part 1 of the Monument Application has not been received for the monument, the site will revert to its previous “unavailable” status.

Ms. Harris said the reason for the stipulations in the recommendation is that the square has been determined unavailable for other monuments and has been a source of contention in the past. She said they want to be very careful not to set a precedent for establishing the square as a square for monuments. In this particular case, Staff feels that it is appropriate. The Technical Advisory Committee reviewed the application this morning and they concurred with Staff's recommendation and voted to recommend it to the Commission.

PETITIONER'S COMMENTS:

Mr. Ted Haviland showed a sketch drawing of the proposed monument. He stated that the cornerstone will be located in the center and have a metal plaque explaining the significance of the monument. It will also reference the cistern as a water reservoir for the fire company that serviced Washington Ward and the adjacent areas. He said in addition to marking the historic site of the Washington Fire Company, it would also recognize the dedicated firemen that served at the Number One Fire Station, who also served as mentors and role models for the youth of the old fort section of Savannah.

Mr. Lang asked how many firemen were in the company.

Mr. Haviland stated there were two platoons that worked 24 hours on and 24 hours off and that each platoon had four men.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Mr. Bill Durrance (Washington Square Resident) stated there have been issues in the past with monuments being proposed for Washington Square. He said he spoke with the neighbors and

everyone was supportive of this monument. Their only concern was that it would set a precedent for something in the future, but that it was appropriate for the square.

Mr. Williams asked about the materials for the monument.

Mr. Haviland stated they have some circa 1860 Savannah gray brick that may have been the same vintage used for the Number One Fire Station.

HSMC ACTION: Mr. Williams made a motion that the Savannah – Chatham County Historic Site and Monument Commission does hereby approve Washington Square as an Available Site for the Washington Fire Company Monument. Ms. Ricks-Brown seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

III. Proposal for Public Art Park - Ryan Madson and Matt Toole

Ms. Harris introduced Mr. Ryan Madson and Mr. Matt Toole. She said this is not a formal application and that she had met with Mr. Madson who wanted to present the idea of a possible art park with revolving exhibits. She felt it was interesting and a good idea and invited him to come to the Commission to present it to receive feedback.

Mr. Matt Toole thanked the Commission and said he grew up in Savannah on Wilmington Island, attended Savannah Christian Preparatory School and Georgia Southern University, moved away for several years, and came back to teach at Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) where he is a sculptor and a professor. He said he would like to propose a public art park to be located on the outskirts of the historic area, but accessible to foot traffic and tourists.

Mr. Ryan Madson stated he is from Statesboro, Georgia, and attended Georgia Southern University, moved to Virginia to study city planning at the University of Virginia, came back home to the Coastal Empire, and is employed at Lott + Barber Architects. He said they have been working on the idea for a year or more and that it is a common interest of theirs because they are passionate about great art.

Mr. Toole displayed a slideshow presentation of various images of other art parks around the country. There will be a space for local schools, colleges, and universities to exhibit alongside regional and national artists. He said Savannah has a tradition of sculptures that are of historical context, and this sculpture garden on the outskirts will deal more with contemporary designs. It will provide opportunities for local schools to collaborate with up and coming artists and well-known, established artists. He has experience in creating works for parks around the country.

Mr. Madson stated that Savannah has great statues and historical monuments that relate to local history. These will be more contemporary installations of a fine arts nature. He said they envision collaborating with the Jepson Arts Center, SCAD, and other local artists that may have contacts with national and regional artists. Mr. Jerome Meadows who did the work at Yamacraw Village and works with Gadsden Elementary agreed to be an advisor. They are looking at a site on West Boundary and Jones Streets that is owned by the Board of Education, right across from the redevelopment at the Roundhouse. They are working toward obtaining a temporary use of the space, and are present for two purposes: presenting the concept and hoping to get some support to approach to the Board of Education regarding the land acquisition.

Mr. Toole stated there is currently a garden space with relief sculptures in clay that the students made at Garrison Elementary, and that site already had an art garden appeal.

Mr. Smith asked who would own the park.

Mr. Toole stated that no one would own it. He said the Board of Education owns the property and they want to build a committee to deal with accepting works of art, and they are looking at individuals in the community. He has spoken to Mr. Meadows and Judge Robert Cook about being on the committee.

Mr. Williams stated it is a good site and another possible site would be the new River Street Extension area.

Mr. Toole stated that it is a great idea and they are looking to propose an idea that could happen in several places. He said there could be pockets around the city.

Mr. Lang suggested the Nathaniel Greene Park as a good site.

Ms. Ricks-Brown stated she was under the impression that the Commission approves the historical significance of monuments in the city, and that there are certain guidelines that must be met from a historical perspective. She understands and supports what they want to do, but doesn't know if it is within the Commission's purview.

Ms. Harris stated the Commission reviews markers, monuments, and public art. She said typically, the Commission reviews markers and monuments, but there are a few public works of art in the city, for example the two sculptures in front of the Federal Building on Telfair Square. It is within the Commission's purview to review design, location and funding, but the theme of the art is art and, therefore, the theme is not evaluated in the same way as markers and monuments. The Commission evaluates the design, location and funding just as they would with a monument. In this particular case because these will be revolving, temporary exhibits, it would not be appropriate, nor would the Commission want to review every single work in every exhibit. Permanent works would be reviewed with the same care and detail they would afford any monument. She suggested for temporary art that the artist and piece selection be submitted in a package to the Commission.

Ms. Ricks-Brown asked what is in the Master Plan regarding evaluating art.

Ms. Harris stated the guidelines in the Master Plan address the site, theme, design, and funding, three of which could be applied to public art: site, design, and funding.

Mr. Smith stated he was not sure if there was any action to be taken.

Ms. Harris stated a letter of support for the concept of a public art park would help when they approach the Board of Education about the site.

The Commission agreed.

Mr. Toole stated he would keep them informed through Staff and make sure that the community is involved in the decision-making.

IV. OTHER BUSINESS

A. Update on Julie Backus Smith Statue

Mr. Smith stated the County Commission approved the erection of a bronze statue at Lake Mayer. He said the Chairman wrote a letter at the Commission's request to Mr. Russ Abolt, the County Manager. He said each member had received a letter and asked for comments.

Ms. Harris stated she had discussed the letter with Mr. Wright and he felt it should not be pursued.

Mr. Williams stated he would like to see another letter formed to say thank you and let them know that the Commission is available.

Mr. Smith stated the County feels independent and may not feel it is necessary to notify the Commission regarding proposed monuments. He said he felt the letter was inappropriate, and as a matter of courtesy they should inform the Commission of their concepts. He suggested the Commission leave matters as they are.

Ms. Ricks-Brown suggested that a letter could be sent explaining that they wanted to open a door of communication as a professional courtesy, stating that they hope it was not taken the wrong way.

Mr. Lang stated that the park is in the City of Savannah and since the Commission represents the City, he did not feel that the County could approve items without contacting the Commission.

Mr. Smith stated the Commission could write a letter stating the previous letter was an attempt to communicate but he did not think it was appropriate for him as the Vice-Chairman to write it. He said the Chairman should be involved.

Ms. Ricks-Brown stated since Mr. Wright's signature is on the original letter she would like to have his approval.

Mr. Smith suggested the decision to send the letter should be deferred until the next meeting.

B. Update on Haitian Monument

Ms. Harris gave an update on the status of the Haitian monument at Franklin Square and the recent press conference. She said the Haitian Minister of Culture and Communications was in Savannah and wanted to see the site and get an update on the monument. Ms. Melissa Jest, Ms. Beth Reiter, and other officials gave a tour and an overview of historic preservation. The city has completed the engineering drawings, the project has been bid, and they are waiting for the Haitians to purchase the granite slabs for the base.

C. Update on WWII Monument

Ms. Harris stated she spoke with Mr. Eric Meyerhoff the architect for the monument, and they are working with Water and Sewer Departments to come up with a solution that takes into account the underground elements of the square so that the monument can be located in the center. She did not know if the design is being scaled-down, but thinks they are working on a model of the existing design to show it is compatible. They will be resubmitting a proposal for the square.

Mr. Smith stated the Commission needs to hear from all of the proprietors who have utilities in the square that may be impacted by the monument.

Ms. Harris stated she would ask the relevant entities to attend the meetings or provide a written statement stating they agree with the plans.

Mr. Williams asked if they were required to provide a model.

Ms. Harris stated there was no requirement for a model as a part of the motion. It was discussed and is stated in the minutes and the petitioner is aware of the discussion.

Mr. Smith asked if they would be out of line to write a letter stating if there is another submission it should be with a model.

Ms. Harris suggested because it was not a part of the motion at the meeting they cannot require it but when they submit the drawings to her, if it is not included she could make a strong case for providing one.

Ms. Harris stated there would be a Board retreat on June 15, 2007, with all of the historic preservation-related Boards. She said there will be more information forthcoming regarding the itinerary and that it will be an all day event. Part of the retreat will be a training session, part of it will have speakers, and there will be time set aside for discussing problems or issues. She said the Commission training on June 8, 2007, with the Carl Vinson Institute of Government will be rescheduled.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Savannah - Chatham County Historic Site and Monument Commission, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 5:25 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ellen Harris
Preservation Planner

EH/jnp