

SAVANNAH - CHATHAM COUNTY HISTORIC SITE AND MONUMENT COMMISSION

**REGULAR MEETING
112 EAST STATE STREET**

ARTHUR A. MENDONSA HEARING ROOM

February 5, 2009

4:00 P.M.

MINUTES

HSMC Members Present:

**Walter Wright, Chairman
Gordon Smith, Vice-Chairman
Walt Harper
Joshua L. Ward
Phillip Williams**

HSMC/MPC Staff Present:

**Ellen Harris, Preservation Planner
Janine N. Person, Administrative Assistant
Sarah Sisser, Historic Preservation Intern**

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 4:00 p.m.

II. Update: Terracotta Winged Lion Statue, David White, Park and Tree Department

Mr. White stated that they went through a Request for Proposal process looking for a qualified conservator to reconstruct the lion and that they selected Nelson Architectural Conservation based in Connecticut. He said they have experience, have done work for the Newport County Preservation Society in Newport, Rhode Island, and they have done repair and reconstruction work in Savannah on terracotta building ornaments. They will come to Savannah in approximately two weeks to pick up the pieces and take them to the studio. It should take approximately three months to reconstruct it, make a mold, and cast a new lion to put back in place. A fence is also being cast by a local artisan.

Mr. Wright asked if it could be pieced back together.

Mr. White stated that they will put as much as they can back together with epoxy adhesives, use a terracotta repair material to fill in what is missing, and then smooth it out. A mold will be made to cast a concrete replica that will have the same color and texture as the original. The reconstructed statue will be stored as an indoor exhibit.

Mr. Williams asked if the concrete will be the dark red terracotta or if it is a mixture.

Mr. White stated that it will be a mixture.

Mr. Wright asked if the City is paying for it and if the person who hit the statue had insurance.

Mr. White stated that they did not have auto insurance and that the City is working on a process where payments can be made. He said that the community is interested in helping and that there is also some private fundraising.

Mr. Wright asked if it would have a fountain in it.

Mr. White said yes; that it has a copper tube where the water will come out.

Mr. Harper stated that at a Park and Tree Commission meeting he mentioned placing barriers around it to prevent it from happening again. He asked if City Council had mentioned anything about the barriers.

Mr. White stated that it has not gone to City Council because there would have to be recommendations first and an investigation. He said there are utilities under the sidewalk and that they cannot just bore down but that a site study will have to be done.

**III. Petition of the City of Savannah
File No.: C-090128-58141-2
Request for Site Evaluation
Multiple Locations on Ellis Square**

Present for the petition was. Mr. Chris Morrill.

Ms. Harris gave the Staff report.

NATURE OF REQUEST:

The petitioner is requesting that a Site Evaluation be completed on Ellis Square and the adoption of the Ellis Square Monument and Public Art Master Plan.

FINDINGS:

Historical Background: Ellis was one of the four original squares laid out by Oglethorpe in 1733. The Ellis Square Market was built 1763 and operated until 1954. Ellis Square functioned as a site of commerce for almost a century. The City signed a 50-year lease to use Ellis Square as a parking garage. On December 31, 2004, this lease expired. Preparations for reclaiming Ellis Square began in 1999 when the City commissioned two studies for feasibility and a cost estimate of to build a 700 space underground garage to replace the 507 space City Market garage. In 2002 the City hosted a design charette to engage the community in design process. By 2004 a master plan and financial models for public-private partnership had been developed. In January 2006, the City began disassembly of the old Ellis Square parking deck and subsequent construction of the underground parking garage to be located at this site. During late fall 2008, the completed underground parking garage was opened to the public.

Currently the City is moving towards completion and finalization of plans for the redevelopment of Ellis Square. In doing such, a need to identify potential locations for displays of monuments and public art became apparent to the process. The City hopes to utilize this site evaluation as a way to help ensure

that redevelopment plans for Ellis Square and future monument and public art proposals maintain the overall vision and design for Ellis Square.

Identified Locations: Four locations within Ellis Square have been identified as appropriate for monuments or public art. (1) The northeast quadrant and (2) southeast quadrant have been identified as appropriate for temporary art exhibits or installations. The far west middle quadrant has been identified as appropriate for two monuments. (3) One monument would be located on the eastern edge of the sidewalk ringing the exterior of the square. The theme of this monument should be artistic or cultural in nature. (4) The other monument would be located in this same quadrant but within the elliptical sidewalk. It has been proposed that a flat commemoration (such as a mosaic) would be appropriate at this location. It was also been proposed that the theme be related to commerce to recognize the commercial significance of Ellis Square.

The Master Plans and Guidelines criteria for evaluating sites were intended to apply to existing sites. Because Ellis Square has been designed with appropriate locations for monuments and public art already identified and incorporated into the overall design, the proposed locations meet all the guidelines.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends considering the four sites within Ellis Square (northeast quadrant, southeast quadrant, far west middle quadrant along the eastern edge of the sidewalk, the far west middle quadrant within the ellipse) as available. Staff further recommends adopting the Ellis Square Master Plan for monuments and public art to include the following suggested themes for each identified site:

- (1) Northeast quadrant: temporary art exhibits or installations**
- (2) Southeast quadrant: temporary art exhibits or installations**
- (3) Far west middle quadrant on the eastern edge of the sidewalk ringing the exterior of the square: theme should be artistic or cultural in nature.**
- (4) Far west middle quadrant within the elliptical sidewalk: theme should be related to commerce and the design should be relatively flat (such as a mosaic).**

The Technical Advisory Committee reviewed the petition that morning at 11:00 a.m. and unanimously recommended approval.

Mr. Williams asked if the southwest corner has tables and if a monument has been recommended for that corner.

Ms. Harris stated that it is a space where tables and chairs will be provided for the public. It was suggested that a portion be a flat monument to encourage a plaza feel to remain open and unobstructed.

Mr. Williams asked about the green squares inside and outside of the lifts and the concrete in the bottom left corner.

Ms. Harris stated that the green squares will be greenspace and that there would be concrete or some type of pervious gravel or crushed aggregate.

Mr. Wright asked about the structures in the lower left and right corners and being the stairways to the garage.

Ms. Harris stated that she believed they are the air intake handlers for the garage below.

Mr. Williams asked if there would be access below in the square.

Ms. Harris pointed out the staircase.

Mr. Harper asked if there are provisions for trees in the square, what size, and what type.

Ms. Harris stated that would be a question for Mr. White from Park and Tree.

PETITIONER'S COMMENTS:

Mr. Chris Morrill (Assistant City Manager) stated that he has been working on Ellis Square and the parking garage and that they will have seven mature live oaks with 8 to 12-inch calipers, that they have been identified and prepared, and will be taken off Truman Parkway and moved. He said that six of them should be moved within the next two weeks. They saved the historic dirt and it will be put back in, the trees will go in, and they will complete the sidewalk on Congress Street for pedestrian safety. The rest of the project will be out to bid and will take approximately four weeks, go to City Council for approval, and then it will be a 210-day completion.

Mr. Harper asked if the elevator and stairwell will have any external bricks placed on it.

Mr. Morrill stated that they will be planting fig vine on the outside to soften it and apply a stucco coating to soften the color. He said the goal is to downplay the buildings because they did not want them too ornate and become the center of the square, but that they are utilitarian. He said the convenience center will be all glass with a v-shape metal roof.

HSMC ACTION: **Mr. Smith made a motion that the Savannah – Chatham County Historic Site and Monument Commission approve the petition as submitted. Mr. Harper seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.**

Mr. Williams asked if there would another step involving the lighting.

Ms. Harris stated that all that what is being looked at today is identifying potential sites for monuments and not the overall square design or lighting. She said that as individual monuments come forward, the Commission would look at the lighting for that particular monument.

IV. Petition of the Friends of Johnny Mercer, Inc.
File No.: C-090120-60621-2
Part I: Theme and Location
Johnny Mercer Statue, Ellis Square

Present for the petition was Ms. Dianne Thurman.

Ms. Harris gave the Staff report.

NATURE OF REQUEST:

The petitioner is requesting approval of the Theme and Location of a monument to Johnny Mercer to be located on the western edge of Ellis Square. It is anticipated that Part II: Design and Funding will be reviewed at the March 5, 2009, meeting.

While design is not technically a part of this review, it may be helpful to know that the initial concept is a life size bronze statue of Johnny Mercer reading a newspaper while leaning against a fire hydrant. This design is based on a photograph of him in this pose.

FINDINGS:

THEME: The theme of the monument is a commemoration of Johnny Mercer, a world-renowned songwriter who was born in Savannah and whose childhood home is located at 226 East Gwinnett Street.

The following guidelines from the Master Plan are relevant to this theme:

- **Proposed themes should fall into one more of the following categories...**

The proposed theme falls into the Arts and Humanities category.

- **The proposed theme should have direct local relevance to the history and development of Chatham County.**

The proposed theme commemorates an important an important local figure.

- **The level of significance should be high enough to warrant a public presence.**

Johnny Mercer's significant contributions to the music industry warrant a public presence.

- **The person, place, or event commemorated should not have been sufficiently commemorated elsewhere in the County.**

There is a Georgia Historical Society (GHS) marker in front of Johnny Mercer's childhood home on Gwinnett Street, a marble bench in Johnson Square dedicated to Johnny Mercer, a matching bench in Bonaventure Cemetery, and a tree to the north of the Civic Center dedicated to Johnny Mercer. While there are certainly a number of commemorations, none sufficiently commemorate Johnny Mercer's significance and contributions.

- **The theme should reflect a larger connection to the community as a whole, and not only to one distinct group.**

Johnny Mercer's lyrics are relevant to the community as a whole.

- **Commemorated persons should have enduring historical significance and have been dead at least twenty-five years....**

Johnny Mercer has enduring significance and passed away in 1976, 33 years ago.

- **There should be significant documented evidence... of the ... person.**

As an international figure, there is an abundance of documented evidence.

LOCATION:

The proposed location is at the western edge of Ellis Square, on the ring of sidewalk along the exterior of the square.

Most of the guidelines for evaluating a site were developed for existing sites, rather than new sites (like Ellis), however, the following guidelines from the Master Plan are relevant to this location:

- **The proposed site should be easily accessible to pedestrians and the physically challenged.**

Ellis Square will be fully ADA accessible and the monument's location on the sidewalk will make it fully pedestrian accessible.

- **The proposed site should be visible and accessible from a public right-of-way.**

The location is on a public right-of-way and will be highly visible from Barnard Street as well as the City Market area.

- **The proposed site should have adequate parking nearby.**

The location is above an underground parking garage and there is also street parking available.

- **The installation of the object should not detract from the design of the overall site.**

The architect/designer of the square was very involved in locating the most appropriate site on Ellis Square to place the monument. The monument fits into the overall Master Plan for Ellis Square.

The following guideline evaluating the relationship between site and theme is also relevant:

- **If the proposed theme falls into an existing theme pattern, the proposed site should also follow the corresponding site pattern.**

The Master Plan for Ellis Square establishes Ellis Square an interactive cultural center. A monument to Johnny Mercer at this location fits with this theme pattern.

RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends approval of Part I: Theme and Location with the stipulation that the location of the statue be moved several feet to the east so that the statue does not block the sidewalk, causing a potential hazard to pedestrian and bicyclists and, also so that the fire hydrant is in a more natural location Details involving the pavers and their interconnectivity with the bricks may be provided at the Part II: Design and Funding review.

The Technical Advisory Committee reviewed the petition that morning at 11:00 a.m. and unanimously recommended approval.

Mr. Williams asked if the base would be marble.

Ms. Harris stated that the photograph showed Mr. Mercer standing on hexagonal pavers and so that is what is proposed. It will contrast with the brick so that it stands out to form its own space.

Mr. Smith stated that he is concerned about protection from the automobiles. He said he hopes that there is some consideration to protect it.

Ms. Harris stated that this was one of the considerations for picking this site within the square. She said that with City Market on the side, there would be less of a potential danger of cars. The cars will come around but they would be slowed from the corner. It is better protected here than at the bottom of the square.

Mr. Williams asked about the height of the fire hydrant being as tall as it appeared.

PETITIONER'S COMMENTS:

Ms. Dianne Thurman (Co-Chair for the Johnny Mercer Statue Committee and Vice-President of the Friends of Johnny Mercer) stated that the sculptor, Ms. Susie Chisholm, was sent an actual fire hydrant that is historically correct to ensure the statue would be molded around it. She said that Mr. Stratton Leopold contacted his costumers and that the clothing is authentic. They have an authentic model, Mr. Mercer's great nephew Mr. Steve Gerard, Jr.

Mr. Wright asked if it is modeled from a photograph.

Ms. Thurman said yes but that they changed it because the photograph had Mr. Mercer looking down reading the newspaper and they wanted interaction with the public. She said as you approach it and look close up you would see a great smile as if he is recognizing a friend in Savannah and is thrilled to see you.

HSMC ACTION: Mr. Harper made a motion that the Savannah – Chatham County Historic Site and Monument Commission recommend approval of the petition to the City Council with the stipulation that the statue be moved back per Staff's recommendation. Mr. Williams seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

V. MEETING MINUTES - October 2, 2008

HSMC ACTION: Mr. Harper made a motion that the Savannah – Chatham County Historic Site and Monument Commission approve the minutes as submitted. Mr. Smith seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

VI. ELECTIONS

- a. Chair
- b. Vice-Chair
- c. Secretary

Mr. Wright said that the Bylaws state that the Chairman must be rotated, that they need to elect a new set of officers, that it is a one-year duty, and that they can be renominated up to three consecutive terms or three years. He said that he will retire out of the Commission after 11 years of service. Ms. LaVerne Ricks-Brown has resigned, he will be retiring, and that will leave four current members for the three officers.

Ms. Harris stated the duties and responsibilities of the Board members for their benefit.

Mr. Wright asked for nominations.

HSMC ACTION: Mr. Williams made a motion that the Savannah – Chatham County Historic Site and Monument Commission recommend Mr. Gordon Smith as Chairman. Mr. Harper seconded the nomination and it passed unanimously.

HSMC ACTION: Mr. Wright made a motion that the Savannah – Chatham County Historic Site and Monument Commission recommend Mr. Phillip Williams as Vice-Chairman. Mr. Smith seconded the nomination and it passed unanimously.

HSMC ACTION: Mr. Wright made a motion that the Savannah – Chatham County Historic Site and Monument Commission recommend Mr. Walt Harper as Secretary. Mr. Smith seconded the nomination and it passed unanimously.

Mr. Wright welcomed Mr. Joshua L. Ward as a new Commission member.

Mr. Harper asked about Mr. Ward's background.

Mr. Ward stated that he is an architect with Buckley and Associates, has lived in Savannah for approximately four years. His first time in Savannah was as a student at the Savannah College of Art and Design where he obtained his Architecture and Historic Preservation degrees.

Mr. Williams stated that Mr. Ward is also on the Young Architects Forum and a Savannah Green Building Council member.

Mr. Smith thanked Mr. Wright for his service and for nominating him as new Chair and expressed his dismay for losing Ms. LaVerne Ricks-Brown who was a valuable asset. He said that he hoped the City would appoint someone of her caliber and that the Commission will miss her.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Savannah - Chatham County Historic Site and Monument Commission, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 4:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ellen Harris
Preservation Planner

EH/jnp