

SAVANNAH - CHATHAM COUNTY HISTORIC SITE AND MONUMENT COMMISSION

**REGULAR MEETING
112 EAST STATE STREET**

ARTHUR A. MENDONSA HEARING ROOM

March 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. Petition of the Friends of Johnny Mercer, Inc.
File No.: C-090120-60621-2
Part II: Design and Funding
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 Part II: Design and Funding of a monument to Johnny Mercer to be located on the western edge of Ellis Square.

Part I: Theme and Location was approved by the Historic Site and Monument Commission on February 5, 2009.

FINDINGS:

DESIGN: The design of the monument is a life-size bronze statue of Johnny Mercer leaning against a fire hydrant and reading a newspaper. The design is based on a photograph of Johnny Mercer (see

attached). The petitioner anticipates that the statue will be unveiled on his 100th birthday, November 18, 2009.

The statue will be located on the western edge of Ellis Square, encroaching approximately one-foot onto the interior edge of the perimeter sidewalk. It will be 13'-9" from the southern east-west interior sidewalk.

The statue will be secured to a concrete base beneath the ground by several rods imbedded in the statue extending into the concrete. The concrete base will be topped with the hexagonal pavers, which will be flush with the brick sidewalk and crushed aggregate. The City Engineering Department is preparing the structural drawings which are not a part of the design review process.

The following guidelines from the Master Plan are relevant to the design:

- **Monuments should be considered permanent and designed accordingly.**

The proposed design and materials are considered permanent.

- **Monuments should be designed and constructed of materials suitable for outdoor display. Future maintenance and conservation requirements should be considered.**

The proposed monument is bronze which has a proven record of performing satisfactorily in the local climate. The artist has provided maintenance instructions (see attached).

- **Monuments should be designed so as to be reasonably resistant to vandalism.**

There are no small parts that might be broken off.

- **Monuments should be designed so as not to pose a danger to the curious public...**

The location of the monument has been moved to encroach minimally on the sidewalk so as not to pose a danger to bicyclists or pedestrians.

- **Monument design should include landscaping, paving, seating, drainage, lighting, fencing, or other protective measures which may be considered necessary.**

The monument has been incorporated into the overall design of Ellis Square. There will be hexagonal pavers surrounding the statue, to accurately depict the photograph, and also differentiate the space around the statue from the sidewalk. No seating will be provided as a part of the monument.

- **Monuments should be superior quality and craftsmanship.**

The petitioner has provided a maquette to illustrate the superior quality and craftsmanship.

- **A monument should be of original design...**

The monument is a custom made one-of-a-kind piece.

- **Monuments should be designed to complement and enhance the site in which it is located. It should not compete with or encroach upon existing monuments, public art, or buildings.**

The monument has been carefully sited and designed to fit into the Ellis Square Master Plan for Monuments and Public Art, adopted at the February 5, 2009, meeting.

- **Donor names may be incorporated into the design... but should be discreet and not detract from or dominate the monument.**

The statue will be on 8” hexagonal pavers up to seven of which will be engraved with the names of major sponsors in a font recommended by the manufacturer for the clearest legibility. One of the pavers will be at the feet of the statue with the text: Johnny Mercer 1909-1976. If feasible, the text for this paver will be Johnny Mercer’s signature.

- **The designer and/or fabricator should have completed projects of similar size and scale in the public arena...have an excellent reputation...provide images of existing similar monument... demonstrate the ability to meet the proposed timeframe.**

The sculptor for the statue is Susan Chisholm. Samples of similar work and resume are attached.

FUNDING:

Statue: \$90,000.00

Engraved hexagonal pavers: \$700.00

Foundation and the installation: \$5,000.

Total Cost: \$95,700.00

The Friends of Johnny Mercer Statue Committee has raised \$90,404.50. Of that amount a minimum of \$1,505.00 will be match dollar for dollar by Johnny’s daughter and grandson (up to another \$5,000.00). That will make a total of \$91,909.50. The remaining \$3,790.50 will be secured through additional donations and fundraising efforts.

RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends approval of Part II: Design and Funding. The Technical Advisory Committee reviewed the petition at 11:00 that morning and unanimously recommended approval.

Mr. Harper asked how the monument will be anchored into the ground.

Ms. Harris stated that the City has established a policy of having their Engineering Department do the drawings for anchoring monuments into the ground. She said there would be rods embedded into the statue at various points and the rods will be embedded into a concrete base.

Mr. Harper asked if the statue and the fire hydrant will be life-sized.

PETITIONER’S COMMENTS:

Ms. Dianne Thurman (Vice President of the Friends of Johnny Mercer and Co-Chair of the Johnny Mercer Statue Committee) stated that the Mueller Company in New York produces fire hydrants and that they shipped a 300-pound fire hydrant to Ms. Susie Chisholm. She is molding around the fire hydrant so that it will be accurate.

Mr. Smith stated he understood that the clothes being used were Mr. Mercer’s clothes.

Ms. Thurman stated that Mr. Stratton Leopold, who is on the statue committee, contacted a costumer who had the clothes flown in to Ms. Chisholm. She said that the clothes are era appropriate and that Mr. Mercer's great nephew had modeled for Ms. Chisholm. They tried to keep everything historically accurate with one change being made to the position of Johnny's head. They wanted the statue to interact with the community and the head has been raised.

BOARD DISCUSSION:

Mr. Williams stated that the hat in the maquette looks different than in the photograph. He said that the hat on the statue is sitting down further on the head than the hat in the photograph.

Mr. Wright stated that the hat in the photograph is a classic 1940's Fedora. He said that it is different and more broad-banded.

Ms. Chisholm stated that the costume department from Paramount Pictures looked at the outfit and sent an authentic 1930's, 1940's outfit to match the model. She said she took the hat, measured the dimensions, and that she is working with what was given to her.

Mr. Smith stated that he has hats that are lower in the back and eased upward toward the front and this hat did not appear to do that.

Ms. Chisholm stated that she is working with the hat that was given to her. She said that they put the outfit on the model and adjusted the tie so that it would be at the right angle. She assumes that the life-size hat she is working with is correct.

Mr. Williams stated that you see more of the forehead in the photograph than you do in the maquette. He said that it translates as a more happy-go-lucky feeling and the sculpture did not portray the same feeling when looking at the photograph.

Ms. Chisholm stated that the maquette is a quarter-life with an inch tall head. A maquette is meant to work from and a lot less detailed than a life-size.

Mr. Williams asked if Ms. Chisholm has started on it.

Ms. Chisholm answered yes she has because it takes six months to cast it. She said that she has to work on it in order for it to be ready by November. Everything is not written in stone but the Commission should come and see it. Her brother photographed everything and she measured the sleeve, the cuffs, how big the buttons were, and how far apart they were on the coat. She would like to think that what she is doing is accurate to what it would be life-size, some of the wrinkles might not be the same on the maquette, the newspaper would be smaller, and there will be differences. The newspaper will be smaller in the life-size piece and it should be arriving any day from New York.

Mr. Williams asked if it will be the actual newspaper.

Ms. Chisholm answered no; it is not the actual one but a variety newspaper that is smaller. She said that the larger model could afford to have more accuracies than the smaller one.

Mr. Williams stated that they could probably zoom in and read it.

Ms. Chisholm stated that it has been tried and the determination is that it is just a variety newspaper because of the size, and that he was probably reading a review of something that he had done.

Ms. Nancy Mercer Guerard (Johnny Mercer's Niece) stated that Mr. Mercer wore hats all of the time and if the Commission goes to the studio they will see that more of the forehead is showing. She said that she is happy with it and it felt like her Uncle Bubba.

HSMC ACTION: Mr. Harper made a motion that the Savannah – Chatham County Historic Site and Monument Commission recommend approval of the Part II: Design and Funding as submitted. Mr. Williams seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

III. Request for Special Called Meeting on March 23, 2009, Concept Design Approval of the WWII Monument

Ms. Harris stated that there has been a request for a Special-Called meeting to review the concept design of the proposed World War II monument. She said that she is recommending March 23rd at 11:00 a.m. There is a chance the meeting may be cancelled.

HSMC ACTION: Mr. Wright made a motion that the Savannah – Chatham County Historic Site and Monument Commission approve of the Special-Called meeting on March 23, 2009, at 9:00 a.m. to review the design concept of the proposed World War II monument. Mr. Ward seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Mr. Wright asked what would be brought to the Commission.

Ms. Harris stated that they have been working closely with City staff but she was unaware.

Mr. Wright asked if it would be the same concept with the sphere and some statuary.

Ms. Harris stated that she did not know.

Mr. Ward asked where the Commission is in the process.

Ms. Harris stated that City Council has approved the River Street site just to the west of the Hyatt. She said that the African-American monument is on one side of the Hyatt and this would be on the other side. The next step in the process is design and funding and the Veterans Council has asked for a concept approval as an the interim step because they are concerned and don't want to pay a lot of professional fees to develop a full-blown design of architectural and engineering drawings. Because of the scale of the project, she thought it is a good idea and a recommended step. It is not a formal part of the review process as concept approval, but an opportunity for the Commission to give feedback before the design is fully developed.

Mr. Williams asked if they would be using the same manufacturer.

Ms. Harris stated that she believed that it is all still under discussion.

Mr. Wright stated that the Commission's objection was to the location in Oglethorpe Square and that this was a good solution.

IV. MEETING MINUTES - February 5, 2009

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

Mr. Wright asked if there is any information on Commission member replacements and if applications have been turned in.

Ms. Harris stated that she did not believe that City Council has made appointments yet and that applications have been made.

V. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Savannah - Chatham County Historic Site and Monument Commission, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 4:20 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ellen Harris
Preservation Planner

EH/jnp