

SAVANNAH - CHATHAM COUNTY HISTORIC SITE AND MONUMENT COMMISSION

**REGULAR MEETING
112 EAST STATE STREET**

ARTHUR A. MENDONSA HEARING ROOM

August 6, 2009

4:00 P.M.

MINUTES

HSMC Members Present:

**Gordon Smith, Chairman
Phillip Williams, Vice-Chairman
Walt Harper
Eli Karatassos
Adrienn Mendonca**

HSMC/MPC Staff Present:

**Thomas L. Thomson, P.E./AICP, Executive Director
Ellen Harris, Preservation Planner
Sabrina Finau, Administrative Assistant**

I. CALL TO ORDER

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

Mr. Smith introduced new Commission member Mr. Eli Karatassos and said that Ms. Mary Soule will also serve on the Commission, though she could not be here today. He said that Mr. Walter Wright and Mr. Josh Ward will be leaving the Commission. He thanked him for their service and said that he hopes they will work with the Commission in the future.

II. DISCUSSION: Revisions to the “Markers, Monuments, and Public Art Master Plan and Guidelines for the City of Savannah”

Ms. Harris presented an overview of the background of the Commission and Master Plan and Guidelines. She said that this was the first of at least two public meetings on the revisions and that there wouldn't be a vote today. This is not a formal recommendation from Staff regarding the revisions, but more of a workshop or brainstorming session of thoughts, ideas, and the overall picture.

Mr. Karatassos asked what the method of the public notice was.

Ms. Harris stated that the media notified included the Savannah Morning News, Savannah Business of Report and Journal, WTOC, WSAV, WJCL, the City Public Information Office (PIO), the County PIO, and the notice is posted a week in advance at the door for the members of the public. It is also on the front page of the MPC website and on the Historic Site and Monument Commission (HSMC) page. TAC members were also notified which includes GHS, HSF, SCAD, Telfair, Beach Institute, SSU,

Armstrong Atlantic, etc. Individual notices to the public aren't mailed because it would have to be a city-wide notification.

She provided an overview of the evolution of the HSMC and the Master Plan. The Master Plan and Guidelines have been in effect for over two and one-half years. It was the first document that comprehensively looked at the criteria for evaluation, and it has been a very effective process. All plans should be updated on a regular basis because it keeps them current.

She broke down the elements of the Master Plan into three separate topics. She talked about a comprehensive inventory of existing markers and monuments that identifies available sites, the TAC structure and composition, and the process for reviewing the monuments.

The inventory of existing markers and monuments will be updated, as will the list of "Available Sites." She noted that there were some problems with the current application process. Currently, applications are reviewed in two parts: Part 1 - Theme and Location and Part 2 - Design and Funding. The problem with this process is that the applicant has to invest a lot of expense in the final design and there are no opportunities for the HSMC to provide feedback on the design. Therefore, it is being proposed to make the application Part 1 - Theme, Location, and Preliminary Design and Part 2 - Final Design and Funding.

The current composition of the TAC includes ten representatives from ten institutions in the City. Because the representatives are chosen by the institution, we haven't always had the technical expertise needed by the HSMC. For example, we might have three appointments with a history background and no appointments with sculptural expertise. Therefore, it is proposed to allow the HSMC to make appointments to the TAC based on areas of expertise. Appointments could include an architect, landscape architect, historian, sculptor, urban designer, etc. This list is not exhaustive and could be added to as needed by the HSMC. The City appointments from the Park and Tree Department and Cultural Affairs Department would be maintained as they need to be involved from the beginning of each monument.

It is also proposed that the applicant meet with the TAC earlier in the process and that it not be a formal recommendatory body. The TAC would meet with the applicant in a round-table discussion format and provide comments to the HSMC, rather than a formal recommendation.

There is no formal process currently to involve relevant City departments (other than Park and Tree and Cultural Affairs) so they don't get involved until very late or even after approval, and it has caused a lot of problems. Currently, all new construction projects in the Historic District must apply for and participate in a Site Plan Review (SPR). This review notifies all City departments of the proposal and they have the opportunity to comment. It is proposed to institute this process for all monuments, before going to the HSMC.

This would be an extra initial step for the applicant but would avoid problems and delays further into the process.

Mr. Harper asked if the TAC is currently appointed by the city.

Ms. Harris answered no. She said they are appointed by the institutions that they represent.

Mr. Harper asked if in the proposed process the HSMC picks the individuals.

Ms. Harris stated that the city representatives would remain the same and the HSMC would make appointments based on a professional level of expertise.

Mr. Harper asked if the World War II monument committee contacted the city and the electric company or if Staff did it for them.

Ms. Harris stated that she didn't contact the electric company but that she notified the city departments, they had a meeting, and one of the city department heads suggested who should be called.

Mr. Harper said it should be the responsibility of the petitioner to go out and get the permits and make the appropriate contacts.

Ms. Harris stated Mr. Harper was identifying the key issues and red flags are in the current process.

Mr. Smith stated that this is a response to a number of problems from the past. He said that everyone is interested in doing a professional job smoothly without any rancor, and because of the process in the past, it is cumbersome and often times the petitioner does not know what their responsibilities are about due diligence. He does not feel that it is people or petitioner-friendly unless they can smooth the process. He is interested in hearing Staff's solutions.

Ms. Harris stated that the proposed revisions were developed in consultation with other relevant city departments. She is working with the City Engineering Department to develop an appropriate application form for the monument SPR process.

Mr. Karatassos asked if the SPR application to the City is in addition to the HSMC.

Ms. Harris answered yes.

Mr. Harper suggested that instead of having two separate applications that the applications be combined. The applicant can turn it into Staff and Staff decides what goes to the City and the other part can go to the HSMC.

Ms. Harris stated that they will work with the City on the process. Regarding the guidelines, it is proposed to strengthen the language to make it clearer to the applicant and the HSMC what the intent is. She proposed that the theme have documented, significant, clear, and direct relevance to the history and development of Chatham County. The local focus should be the predominate theme of the monument.

A new guideline being proposed is that monuments and markers located on public property shouldn't promote a particular religion or political ideology.

Mr. Williams stated that the name of a Walmart for-profit corporation on a historic monument in a public place seemed like something that should be addressed in the guidelines. He said that it didn't have precedent.

Ms. Harris stated that it did have precedence. The Georgia Historical Society (GHS) marker program partners with different organizations to erect markers. The organization pays 50 percent and GHS pays 50 percent. Approximately 99 percent of the time the partnering organization is a non-profit or a local community organization, and about one percent of the time it happens to be a for-profit. There are several other GHS markers with private corporations listed at the bottom of the marker saying, “Erected by the Walmart Corporation and the GHS,” their standard format.

Mr. Williams stated that he has a problem with it because it is free advertising on public property. He said he appreciates the fact that they donated, but donations coming from a public corporation implies that they’re doing it for other reasons rather than a strict donation and then they get free publicity on public property.

Mr. Harper Wal-Mart is just trying to be a good corporate neighbor and citizen. He said that he did not see it as advertising.

Mr. Smith stated that he disagreed because there had to be an element of motivation to say that my company name is there and it’s permanent. He said that he agreed with Mr. Williams.

Ms. Mendonca stated that she wondered about the context.

Ms. Harris stated that it was related to Sandfly and the Walmart that was built next to the community. Because of the anger over the issue, one of the things Walmart said they would do to mitigate was to provide funding for five markers relating to the African-American history and culture throughout Chatham County. She said this is the Sandfly marker just off Montgomery Crossroads.

Mr. Karatassos asked where the reference to the company is on the marker.

Ms. Harris stated that it is located at the bottom in a standard place that is on every GHS marker in small letters with either the Sam’s Club Foundation or Walmart and the GHS.

Mr. Smith stated that as a lawyer he didn’t believe in advertising. He said all sorts of people would want to advertise and it needs to be seriously addressed.

Mr. Harper stated that unfortunately GHS doesn’t get the funds they deserve to erect the markers so they have to go outside and solicit funds. He said Sam’s Club or Walmart wants to donate \$100,000 to the project then they deserve to have their name on it.

Ms. Harris displayed a slide of a marker and the text in its standard format.

Mr. Harper expressed concern about not allowing religious or political monuments because they wouldn’t have half of the monuments they have now. He said that the Moravian monument is both religious and political. The World War II monument would never be done because of the political ideology behind it.

Ms. Harris stated that she was not trying to prevent the political ideology behind the commemorations of a person, movement, or event. She said that everybody has a political or religious ideology. Maybe it is something they need to look closer at, remove altogether, or refine the language to specifically address the concern. If someone wanted to erect the Ten Commandments, a copy of the Koran, or other religious books they may get into legal trouble over whether they can be displayed in public spaces. If one is allowed, they will allow all; in a public space perhaps they should allow none. They haven't had any problems with it but it was just a thought that occurred.

She continued with her briefing and mentioned the guideline that stated that the installation of an object should not cause overcrowding of the site if there are existing objects. A sentence was added that read, "objects should be sighted far enough away from other objects as to allow the visitor proper appreciation of each individually."

Ms. Harris stated that an existing guideline says that an object should not cause detriment to the character of the surrounding neighborhood. She said she received comments from Dr. Blood, Chairman of the TAC who suggested that the language in place say that it shouldn't just not cause detriment but also enhance the space or surrounding neighborhood and be a positive addition.

Mr. Smith asked if there is a definition to explain what a temporary marker is.

Ms. Harris stated that it would need to be added.

Mr. Karatassos asked why they specify that the markers have to have black backgrounds.

Ms. Harris stated that it is for consistency in the Landmark District because there are so many of them.

Mr. Karatassos stated that he disagreed with it because if you walk down the street there are different styles and colors of houses.

Ms. Mendonca stated that it made them easy to identify as a tourist. She said that if they are consistent then you know what it is.

Ms. Harris continued discussing how temporary markers being considered on an individual bases.

Mr. Williams asked what the reason would be for a temporary marker and why would they allow it.

Ms. Harris stated that at Battlefield Park they have a series of temporary markers and they intend to update and change them as new information and archaeological evidence comes available.

Mr. Smith stated that a good example of that is the GHS marker placed in Forsyth Park. He said that every sentence in it is incorrect but yet it is too expensive to take it down, recast it, and correct the information.

Ms. Mendonca asked if there is any need for a later process to go back and identify the ones that need to be taken out if they are temporary.

Ms. Harris answered that is why a plan is requested from the applicant. She said if they don't get taken out and they look bad, then they can go back and say that this was erected by GHS, they are responsible for it, and they said they would take it down in 2015.

Ms. Mendonca asked if that would rely on the community calling Staff to tell them it looks bad.

Mr. Williams asked that when monuments come in that are designed by sign makers rather than reputable monument companies, would there be a way to address it.

Ms. Harris stated that Guidelines 19 through 22 of the existing guideline deal with the qualifications of the manufacturer. She said they could strengthen it with additional standards but this is what is currently in place.

Mr. Williams stated that some sign makers consider their work art.

Ms. Harris stated that it is a subjective line but this is where the Commission comes in to make the determination. She said if there is a suggestion for a standard to help that she would be glad to put it in. The concern with sponsorship could come in the Text section. She didn't have any proposed changes to the existing text but this might be the appropriate location regarding sponsorship names.

Mr. Williams stated that he thinks it should be only non-profit individuals.

Ms. Harris asked as applied to markers and monuments.

Mr. Williams answered yes.

Ms. Harris stated that at least 50 percent of the monuments in this city have the major donors names on them which are for-profit companies. She said that she believed with Walmart's situation on the GHS marker, that it was The Walmart Foundation, which is a non-profit foundation that contributed the money. If that was the standard it wouldn't have ruled out what the Commission is concerned about. She needs more guidance from the Commission to develop a standard to address the issue.

Ms. Mendonca stated that based on the last design they looked at, perhaps there should be a recommendation to limit the names included on a monument.

Ms. Harris stated that in the current standards donor names may be incorporated in ways such as being inscribed on bricks. They have to be discreet and not detract from the monument. She said that the artist name and the fabricator may be incorporated but should also be discreet and not detract. They could set additional standards and it would vary depending on the size of the monument regarding what is appropriate for the size of the text.

Ms. Mendonca stated that they might have to reference something like the scale and mass. She said the context is relevant. Money is money and people are giving money for these monuments and deserve to be recognized because of that if they want to. It is tradition that goes way back.

Mr. Williams stated that the KKK recognizes themselves as a religion. He said if they wanted to donate and have their name on a marker and the Commission said no, would they have legal precedence to come back and ask why. The HSMC could be sued.

Mr. Pete Liakakis (County Commission Chairman) stated that there are a number of monuments around the city that have bricks and that bricks are being sold for the World War II monument. He said if you look at the Vietnam and other memorials that companies bought bricks to help sponsor them. It might not be that much of a display but it is there.

Mr. Smith stated that this item is addressed in the Guidelines and Design referencing bricks. He said that the Commission is brutally aware of the clashing and conflicting interest. Because of the size they try to limit it and make them discreet.

Ms. Harris stated that the example of the KKK wanting to have a monument is a good one, however, in the text section it is stated that the text should avoid offensive, obscene, or inflammatory language. She said that she thinks a case could be made and that having the KKK listed as a sponsor on a monument would be inflammatory. It wouldn't be allowed just based on the language as a policy.

Mr. Smith stated that the county towns in Ireland have a monument with one side written in Gaelic and the others in English. The English translation says that this is a monument in honor of the great Daniel O'Connor, murdered in cold blood by the bloody British. That marker would not pass with the Commission. They would have the statue but not the comments of that type in the narrative and this is one of the Commission's safeguards.

Mr. Williams said that when you start putting names on a marker and in obvious places for people to read, he feels that for-profit names aren't appropriate. Maybe on brick it is fine, but bricks could be seen more as a landscape improvement rather than a monument, even though it is part of a monument. When it's on the actual monument it becomes a part of the monument where more people see it and look at it.

Ms. Harris stated that with a lot of the monuments there is not one central element but one of many elements and it's hard to say that you can't put it on the monument. At Battlefield Park there is not one monument and there are several dedication plaques on pedestals. If there are more ideas or solutions she needs more input on how to enforce it. She continued with the issue of funding.

Mr. Smith thanked Ms. Harris for the presentation and asked for any questions, comments, or suggestions on the proposed revisions. He asked if Ms. Harris wanted the comments emailed and how she would like the format to be.

Ms. Harris stated that if there are comments regarding Markers and Monuments that were left off she asked that she be emailed. She said if there are comments regarding the proposed changes, that a consensus at the meeting be made if it is something to pursue.

Mr. Liakakis stated that the TAC has people from organizations who have the background. He thinks that Staff needs to consider that when they are talking about changing the makeup from the way it is now. On the MPC when an individual represents a group, everybody would agree on something and this individual would come up with an obscure requirement or regulation and cause absolute confusion,

especially for those coming to the MPC for a specific matter. The HSMC has done a good job of working, giving their comments, and presenting it to City Council. Some of the things can go beyond in a not so good manner.

Mr. Smith stated that what Mr. Liakakis said is a valid point and that everyone on the Commission and Staff is trying to get to that point. He said that they are trying to clarify, explain, and make it easier for people to use. What they are trying to avoid is needless obstruction and pedantry. He agrees with what Mr. Liakakis is saying but said that they need to look at it in a way to avoid needless bureaucracy for people. He has sometimes felt that there is a lack of coordination with the County but we all need to know what the other is thinking in order to work together as a team.

Mr. Liakakis stated that some of the items were very good suggestions but some parts need to be reconsidered.

Mr. Wright stated that all of the proposed changes have merit and show a lot of thought. He said that the World War II monument process provided a lot of lessons learned that are incorporated in the proposed changes.

Mr. Smith stated that he is offering an open invitation to Mr. Wright to stay with the Commission and that they looked forward to working with him in the future.

Mr. Thomson stated that he has a wonderful staff. He said that they have worked together to collaborate and have laid down ideas to improve on the process.

Mr. Harper stated that it goes back to streamlining it. He said that the Commission and the petitioner learned a lot in the process as to what to do and what not to do, and what they needed and what they didn't need. This is a very good move with the Master Plan so that the Commission can move forward and make it easier for both the petitioner and the Commission.

Ms. Mendonca asked what the current and proposed terms on the TAC are.

Ms. Harris stated that there are currently no terms. She said that they serve until the institution appoints someone else. As far as proposed terms it can be left up to the Commission and you might want to consider not having imposed terms for the simple reason that expertise doesn't expire. If you find someone who is really good and is knowledgeable about stonework and provides excellent information for example, you might not want to have them rotate off after two years.

Mr. Harper asked what if you find someone that is not conducive.

Ms. Harris stated that if you didn't have any terms that someone could be replaced after six months.

Ms. Mendonca asked about changing the process to have SPR with the City and if there would be any resistance with a larger workload.

Ms. Harris stated that the City is totally in favor and this is what they want. They are frustrated with the current process because they don't receive notification until the end and they have to pick up the pieces. They are often responsible for the implementation and actual construction of the monument as tasked by the City Manager, and they want to be involved at the beginning.

Ms. Mendonca stated that it is an excellent idea and was wondering with the environment and the cutbacks going on if Staff anticipated it being a problem. She said that it appears that it is not.

Mr. Thomson stated that for many years for downtown development there was no prior advance SPR by the appropriate staff before something went to the Historic Review Board (HRB). Ms. Charlotte Moore led the effort to get with the City review staff who brought in all the appropriate people including Beth Reiter, and they developed a process that Ellen Harris is suggesting be used with the HSMC. It is two applications, but they have to do it anyway for all other development in downtown. It is part of the process and gives the HSMC information about what physical things they would encounter from the City review of underground, above ground, and next to type of situations. The process for the HRB has worked well and if you talk to them they like it too because they receive information they haven't had before. It also stopped the conversation about whether the building had enough parking to meet code and other things the HRB didn't have authority over.

Mr. Smith stated that a perfect example was the Lafayette Square where the Colonial Dames wanted to put up a fountain, got an approval, put the beautiful fountain up, and it collapsed into the water cistern that was underneath because no one knew that it was there. It cost a lot of money to get it repaired and the petitioner didn't have the information available to them. The Commission needs to save effort and money by directing it.

Mr. Williams asked if the process of research that happened with the World War II monument and the City a standard thing or something that was implemented for the World War II monument.

Ms. Harris stated that it is something that the applicant is typically responsible for. She said that the application process is that the applicant has to do the research and provide footnotes and bibliography. She said because it is an important monument for the City that the Veterans might not have had the necessary resources to do the research, the City Manager offered the City Library and Archives staff to help with the research. It was an unusual situation that had to do with the importance of the monument to the City and with relevance to everyone.

Mr. Williams stated that the outcome was beautiful and he wondered if in the future it would be available.

Mr. Smith stated typically not.

III. MEETING MINUTES: May 6, 2009

HSMC ACTION: Mr. Williams made a motion that the Savannah – Chatham County Historic Site and Monument Commission approve the minutes with the correction regarding Ms. Mendonca's reference to the raising of the monument to help prevent trip hazards. Mr. Harper seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

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 5:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ellen Harris
Preservation Planner

EH/jnp