



S A V A N N A H - C H A T H A M C O U N T Y
HISTORIC SITE & MONUMENT COMMISSION

Arthur A. Mendonsa Hearing Room
June 2, 2016 4:00 P.M.
Meeting Minutes

JUNE 2, 2016 HISTORIC SITE AND MONUMENT COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING

HDRB Members Present: Eli Karatassos, Chair
Dolores Engle
Thomas Gensheimer
Dr. Nicholas Henry
Ryan Madson
Kristopher Monroe

MPC Staff Present: Tom Thomson, Executive Director
Ellen Harris, Director of Urban Planning and Historic Preservation
Sara Farr, Historic Preservation Planner
Mary E. Mitchell, Administrative Assistant

I. Call to Order and Welcome

1. [Order and Welcome](#)

Mr. Karatassos called the Historic Site and Monument Commission meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. He welcomed the new Commission members, Ms. Dolores Engle and Dr. Nicholas Henry, and everyone in attendance to the meeting. Mr. Karatassos outlined the role of the Historic Site and Monument Commission.

Mr. Karatassos explained that Mr. Walt Harper was on the Historic Site and Monument Commission many years as a representative of the Park & Tree Commission. But, due to the Commission getting a new chair person, Mr. Harper will no longer be on the Commission. He is being replaced by Ms. Engle. Mr. Karatassos and the Commission asked staff to get a certificate of appreciation to be presented to Mr. Harper for his years of dedicated services to the Commission to be given to him at the next Commission meeting.

II. Approval of Meeting Minutes

2. [Approval of April 7, 2016 Meeting Minutes](#)

Attachment: [04-07-2016 Minutes.pdf](#)

Board Action:

The Savannah Historic Site and Monument Commission does hereby approve the minutes of - PASS April 7, 2016.

Vote Results

Motion: Thomas Gensheimer

Second: Kristopher Monroe

Dolores Engle - Aye

Thomas Gensheimer - Aye

Dr. Nicholas Henry - Aye

Eli Karatassos - Aye

Ryan Madson - Not Present

Kristopher Monroe - Aye

III. Regular Agenda

3. [Petition of Gordon Denney for the Park and Tree Department | 16-002857-MON | Chippewa Square | Fence](#)

Attachment: [Staff Recommendation.pdf](#)

Attachment: [AERIAL MAP.pdf](#)

Attachment: [Submittal Package.pdf](#)

Mr. Gordon Denney of the Park & Tree Department was present on behalf of the petitioner.

Ms. Sara Farr gave the staff report. The petitioner is requesting approval to install an ornamental iron fence around the monument in Chippewa Square, located at Bull and McDonough Streets. Lighting will also be installed. The fence will be similar to those around the monuments in Johnson Square and Wright Square. The height will be approximately 3 feet tall. The new lighting will include landscape flood lights and two spotlights to highlight the monument at night. The fence and the lighting will be contained to the brick area around the monument.

Ms. Farr reported that staff recommends approval of the request for the installation of a fence and lighting in Chippewa Square.

PETITIONER COMMENTS

Mr. Denney explained that when the lighting was revised at the Gordon monument when Mr. Christian Sottile was doing the lighting study, they came up with a better lighting source. This led them to the fact that a fence is needed here, not only for protection, but to better light the monument. This will give the opportunity to protect the monument,

while also providing public safety. He sees children climbing on the monument often and is fearful that not only will they damage the monument, but also hurt themselves.

Mr. Gensheimer asked if the intent of this request is really for the lighting and not for the security of the monument.

Mr. Denney said first and foremost it is for the security of monument, but this will also provide the opportunity to have lighting for the monument. People constantly rub the stone. Over the years, the lion shields have been rubbed too often; this destroys the sandstone. Last year a corner stone was chipped. This led to their inquiring about putting a fence around the monument. The monument inscription will still be readable.

Mr. Gensheimer asked how many more monuments are enclosed in a fence.

Mr. Denney answered that all the squares on Bull Street are fenced.

Mr. Gensheimer asked if the fence will be cast iron.

Mr. Denny answered yes, the fence here will match the existing two north fences.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Ms. Melissa Sanders came forward and thanked the staff for the public notices that were mailed. She appreciates being notified as a resident requiring notice, but she does not support this petition. A cage and excessive lighting is not needed; but, restoring the law is needed. In 2011 she purchased her home at 22 West Hull Street overlooking Chippewa Square because of the strict zoning laws and ordinances. Her investment was thoughtful and significant so that she could legally and lawfully operate appropriately for the neighborhood, medium density business at her residence just as her neighbors who live in Brown Ward could do so legally.

Mr. Karatassos informed Ms. Sanders that while he understood what she was saying about the zoning and ordinances, this Commission has no jurisdiction in this matter. He informed Ms. Melissa that she needs to address these concerns to the City of Savannah. Mr. Karatassos said if Ms. Melissa does not like the fence, that's fine, but this Commission will not get into a discussion regarding private use of public property.

Ms. Sanders asked the Commission to deny the petition as it is inappropriate.

Mr. Karatassos explained to Ms. Sanders that the HSMC is not the Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC). In fact, they have no relationship with MPC other than using their Mendonsa Hearing Room to hold their meetings. The MPC staff (Preservation) serves as staff to them. They are an agency of the State of Georgia, created by the State of Georgia, and serves under the purview of the City of Savannah. Therefore, they do not have anything to do with conversion of property. The HSMC is strictly involved with the approval of monuments, murals, etc. Mr. Karatassos informed Ms. Sanders that their recommendation will go the City Council. This will give her an opportunity to voice her concerns to them.

Board Action:

The Historic Site and Monument Commission does hereby recommend approval to City Council to install an ornamental iron fence around the monument in Chippewa Square and lighting. - PASS

Vote Results

Motion: Kristopher Monroe

Second: Ryan Madson

Dolores Engle - Aye

Thomas Gensheimer - Aye

Dr. Nicholas Henry - Aye

Eli Karatassos - Aye

Ryan Madson - Aye

Kristopher Monroe - Aye

IV. Other Business

4. [Introduction and Overview of Proposed Public Art Project- 347 Abercorn Street- Erin Wessling](#)

Attachment: [HSMC Proposal 347Abercorn.pdf](#)

Attachment: [Concept PPAS 347Abercorn.pdf](#)

Attachment: [ConceptPPAS 347Abercorn PP.pdf](#)

Mr. Karatassos explained that the request from Ms. Erin Wessling is for the HSMC to receive information on requesting general approval of a proposed public art concept that they are want to have at 347 Abercorn Street.

Ms. Wessling came forward and stated that last year she received approval from the HSMC for their public art project entitled "Savannah's Masterpiece." This was the first sustainable public art project that Savannah had on the façade of Judge Realty Building. She explained that it is their plan to produce public art projects on an increasingly larger scale. Therefore, today they want to present the concept to the HSMC of having 347 Abercorn Street become a permanent site for public art on a rotating and temporary basis.

Ms. Wessling said this was the meeting to come to due to the Mural Ordinance will be discussed after their presentation. However, they really want to get feedback from the HSMC on how they might process 347 Abercorn Street to be a continual ongoing site for various public art projects, not necessarily just murals or smaller versions of art on the façade of the building.

Mr. Karatassos reminded Ms. Wessling that whatever the HSMC does, comes under the purview of the Mayor and Aldermen. He explained that as this is in the Historic District, whatever the petitioner wants to do has to go to the City for approval. Mr. Karatassos stated that the initial mural that Ms. Wessling placed on the site was great. Therefore, he believes that whatever Ms. Wessling presents to the HSMC would be innovative in this regard. However, the HSMC has a procedure in place for submitting murals. He asked Ms. Wessling what was she presenting to the HSMC today.

Ms. Wessling believed that presently the mural ordinance allows a site to be approved as a permanent place for rotating murals. They are attempting to advance this and expand the definition of public art as far as how murals are defined and have something as an abstract artistic piece. Obviously, they want more to be one of them. They are looking at more three-dimensional works of art to be developed. They do not want to be necessarily restricted to murals. They want to have a continual permanent site for whatever they apply for. Hopefully, they may not have to go through all the processes that come with applying for such public art. They will be adhering to the regulations that the HSMC requires.

Mr. Karatassos said he believes that the HSMC is being asked to advance its discussion regarding the petitions that Ms. Wessling will submit to them. He does not know if there is anything in particular that the HSMC can do for Ms. Wessling regarding her presentation. However, at this time they will open the meeting for public discussion of the HSMC's master plan relating to murals.

Ms. Wessling said they are currently working on a public art project that she will present to the HSMC in August, 2016. She stated that she does not mind coming to the HSMC to get everything evaluated, but the consistency in which they do apply, the grandeur and increasing technicality that they are asking for will become more frequent. Therefore, they want to create the idea of basically adding on to the definition of a permanent space for public art; particularly, on a private building in the Historic Downtown District.

Mr. Karatassos said realizing that the building is on a public right-of-way, it is probably viewed by the public; but not everybody likes the murals that are put there. If someone does not like a particular mural, they will call the Mayor and Aldermen. City Council has the say so on every mural issue that comes before them. Consequently, it is the HSMC's responsibility to watch what is approved so that it is representative of the public to ensure that it is what they want to express; but, the HSMC has to ensure that the public art does not create something negative or irate. Therefore, the HSMC has to be careful in its considerations. Whatever the HSMC does, goes to the Mayor and Aldermen. The HSMC likes the mural ordinance and does not want anything to happen to it and, therefore, must be cautious in dealing with the ordinance. The final authority lies with the Mayor and Aldermen.

Mr. Gensheimer asked Ms. Wessling if she was saying that they want to expand their art boundary. But, today, she can not tell the HSMC what the art will look like. He saw the pictures that were presented and it looks fine, but to give carte blanche to do almost anything that could be considered as art without the HSMC approving it, is something that he cannot support.

Ms. Wessling explained that what they are trying to create is protocol. Every time they do a project, obviously they are going through the process of answering questions, telling the HSMC the engineering behind it, and the idea of the bidding process that they conducted with the artist. She said as it has been stated, the HSMC is nurturing the public art and mural ordinances for the Mayor and Aldermen. They are just attempting to expand upon this. The HSMC has to approve the projects they do. But, they are just trying to put in place an easier avenue of putting the art on the site.

Mr. Karatassos stated he believes Ms. Wessling is basically saying they are creating a

means of displaying temporary art on the structure. This has to go to the City for a permit. He does not believe that the City will let them just alter the building by putting something there, be it stainless steel or whatever. There is a process for getting this approved. If the owner wants to put up the stainless sleeves for an art project, it is up to him. But, this does not mean that the HSMC should be taken out of the process. As Mr. Gensheimer has stated, he, too, does not like the idea of signing an open request to put up whatever they want. They know where it is going and they trust them to do so. They cannot tell the individual to put up whatever they want, when they want to.

Mr. Karatassos said the first time someone put something on the site, whether it is appropriate or not, the process will be seriously questioned as to why the art did not have a public view.

Mr. Madson said his interpretation of this item for discussion which will become a petition for this site is that the HSMC consider them as two new ideas. One is protocol and the process and whether or not it is staff level approval or community approval and at what levels those approvals are happening. This is a cross spectrum of approvals that they might have. If they look back at the mural wall that Matt Hebermehl and See-Saw implemented with an on-going mural every few months, they would present a concept drawing, a sketch and get approval from the HSMC for that. However, he believes Ms. Wessling wants to build on that kind of legacy, those kind of protocols, and make it work for something that it not necessarily a mural every time. Therefore, there is the other idea that it is not two dimensional paint as something that is public art or is interpreted differently. He believes this is the bigger discussion that the HSMC can have following this discussion. What is appropriate to address in the mural ordinance? What part of it is public art that falls under the HSMC purview and whether or not they move some of those around and reconsider what is public art?

Mr. Karatassos thanked Ms. Wessling and others for coming and asked them to remain so they could participate in the next agenda item which is the Mural Policy discussion. He explained, however, that nothing will be changed today.

5. [Mural Policy Discussion](#)

Attachment: [Mural policy discussion.pdf](#)

Mr. Karatassos explained the process for the Mural Policy discussion. Ms. Farr will give a presentation on the mural process and then the public will have a chance to make public comments.

Ms. Farr gave the presentation. She said the HSMC received the following number of mural applications: 2013 - five; 2014 - four; 2015 - four; and 2016 - one. All applications were approved with the exception of one, which was later approved in a different location. The murals represent a wide variety of subject matter and artistic styles. They include both temporary and permanent installations.

Ms. Farr stated that the mural policy contains the following:

Theme - Should be respectful of the greater context of the community. The content permitted under free speech and Georgia laws.

Location - Incorporated into its location; complement the neighborhood and not distract drivers; usually should be located in a mixed use or commercial area; take support and opposition into consideration (support required for residential areas); consider site in relation to other murals; and rules regulating placement on historic material.

Design - Scale and context must be considered and appropriate; must be an original design; appropriate materials and finishes used; follow artist qualification and guidelines.

Ms. Farr explained that upon approval of the HSMC of the location and process for rotating murals, (in which the petitioner plans to apply more than one mural to the same wall within a year), staff may review the individual submissions. A posting 15 days in advance is required, and a public hearing shall be held if requested within the 15 days. She stated that the petitioner has to maintain the mural or payment into a fund to maintain the mural. The petitioner has to meet funding standards and the approved mural is to display the approval information in the bottom right-hand corner of the mural.

Ms. Farr said in terms of some questions to think about for the process are: what changes might be made to the rotating mural process? how to make the process more user friendly, efficient, and available? Is the process too confusing or difficult? Examples of other processes that may work better?

Ms. Farr said in terms of future goals, staff is working on updating the plan, layout, and content. They are giving thought to how more public art can be integrated into the city.

Dr. Henry asked Ms. Farr to explain the cost and expenses process.

Ms. Farr stated that basically it is the responsibility of whoever installs the mural to maintain it.

Ms. Harris explained that murals on private property have to be fully funded and maintained by the property owner.

Mr. Monroe said there is language in the Historic Site and Monument Commission's by-laws that applies to only certain historic districts. Was there ever a consideration that this may apply only to the Landmark District or Designated National Landmark Districts or local historic districts?

Ms. Harris explained that when the guidelines were created in 2009, they did not have a mural policy. This meant that murals were not allowed anywhere within the entire city. They were considered either signage or graffiti and enforced accordingly. The petitioner either had to go through the process and get a building permit and meet the signage

requirements or they were considered a property maintenance issue which was graffiti and was removed. This was the initial reason why staff got involved. They were asked to come up with a policy as the city needed a mural policy so that the items would not be considered graffiti or signage.

Ms. Harris said when they looked at the purview of where it should apply, the City Council and the HSMC believed that murals should be allowed city-wide. Therefore, the mural policy [chapter 6] contains the guidelines and is applied city-wide so that murals can be permitted city-wide. Otherwise, they either fall under the signage policy or under the Graffiti and Property Maintenance Policy. This policy was adopted in 2013.

Mr. Karatassos stated the HSMC would now have the Board discussion. Then the Public will make comments. He wanted everyone to understand that the procedure is if the Board votes to make a change in the guidelines [Master Plan] the staff will send this to City Council and they can approve, disapprove or send the guidelines back to the HSMC.

BOARD DISCUSSION

The HSMC discussed the guidelines. Ms. Engle asked how does the HSMC judge the art and murals. Mr. Karatassos read the master plan guidelines. Mr. Gensheimer answered that the HSMC does not look at a piece of art or a mural and say this is what I would like to see. The Board looks to see whether the art or mural fit the guidelines. Mr. Madson said his comments apply to the mural ordinance as well as public art. He believes that they should not have a one size fits all approach. They should have rigor and oversight when it comes to the Landmark Historic District whether it's at the Commission level or staff level. Do they treat every art petition the same way outside of the Landmark Historic District? He stated that he does not believe they do. Therefore, a cross concern of spectrum of attitudes about public art, they might say that on the far conservative end, they have oversight over every step, but on the other end, they have by-right public art where people can do what they want to. Mr. Madson said the one-size fits all does not work for him; and the fact that there is not an outlet for by-right public art in this city is problematic. He would like to hear from the public about why certain alternative approaches rather than oversight and regulations every step, may be viable for some parts of Savannah, for certain communities, for certain neighborhoods, or certain corridors.

Mr. Gensheimer asked Mr. Madson why he felt it was problematic.

Mr. Madson answered he believes it is government over-reach.

Mr. Karatassos said the HSMC has come a long way without causing the people who oversee them from stepping in and asserting their will instead of what the HSMC was trying to do.

Mr. Monroe said he understood what Mr. Madson was saying, but as much as he is not for over-regulation, this is a forum for the public to come and voice what they like or do not like about something. The HSMC is the body that takes that into consideration.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Ms. Katherine Sandoz stated she has lived in this city for 20 years; she taught at SCAD 10

years; and she and her husband own several buildings and businesses within the city. Ms. Sandoz said she is an artist and has had several public art projects approved by the HSMC. She said in terms of being an artist and a community member, they do want the HSMC to weigh-in; they want feedback on public art. Therefore, she believes that what some of them would love to see is a streamlined protocol. A building such as Judge Realty could be a preapproved site for a number of types of works. Ms. Wessling has been preapproved as having the hardware, the engineering, and the maintenance program. But, due to what Mr. Madson has introduced, their question is what do community members want for and from their public art in the city.

Ms. Sandoz said as a business owner, a parent, and an educator she would like for her city to have a public art program that is more robust; more plentiful; is supported by a commission made up of peers such as architects, educators, artisans, and craft persons. She stated that she would also like for the policy to include things such as light, sound, 3D, and multimedia projects. Additionally, she would like a plan to come from the Mayor's office saying they would like to have 20 permanent rotating sites that presents temporary art, and that they would like to partner with the schools, senior citizens, transportation, tourism, etc.

Mr. Gensheimer explained that it would be great to have 20 places for art to be placed, but this is not determined by the HSMC. Isn't this determined individually? If someone wants to put the art on their building, that's great. Therefore, the person would need to get the community to support it and then propose 20 different places.

Mr. Monroe said what Ms. Sando is asking is not in the HSMC's purview.

Mr. Katatassos explained that Ms. Sandoz stated that they want a more robust public art program; a community to be boastful of it; be supported by a group of peers; and want a major public initiative. He said all these things are a great idea, but they do not have anything to do with the HSMC's approval process, except that in the final end of being robust depends on the art community to bring it to them. The HSMC does not have a marketing arm. He said everything that Ms. Sandoz has stated is a good idea, but it does not speak to the HSMC's issue which is how do they procedurally deal with applications of public art and murals. The Downtown Neighborhood Association could be a venue. Probably, there are venues that exist, but the HSMC is not one of those venues.

Ms. Sandoz said she believes that the HSMC can provide the feedback. For example, can Judge Realty be a preapproved space?

Mr. Gensheimer asked Ms. Sandoz if she believes that all these things would happen if there was no regulation.

Ms. Sandoz said she would never suggest that there not be regulations; she believes that the HSMC should review each project, but she also believes that if they had 10 spaces that were preapproved with hardware, programs in place - such as a school, business, or an institution that they would have more petitioners and more presentations. This would be the thing to do.

Mr. Madson said there is a map and an approved list of existing monuments and at least

two or three pieces of public art in the Landmark District. They could proactively expand this and the definition of what public art is beyond a monument and the few pieces of public art that are there. He said the map is in place and this is one of the possible future goals that is listed. They can update the map and the list.

Mr. Karatassos said a lot more places are getting cleaned up that could be used for locations to place monuments, etc. He believes that updating the list is a staff issue. Ms. Harris and he have talked about some locations for a statute on the west side of River Street. There will be some updates to the list.

Mr. Tom Thomson, MPC Executive Director, stated he has talked with Ms. Harris about this, but the concept is how do you streamline getting public art approved in some way. He strongly believes that the HSMC should review all the public art designs. If they have a location, such as Judge Realty, where the art work will be done over and over, maybe some of the business end of it such that guarantees the maintenance and other business components, could be an approved location on file. But, based on their experience, he personally believes that there should be a public process for people to look at the design. Mr. Thomas said he does not believe that it is onerous if it is going to be done quarterly, every six months or whatever to rotate through the designs. Schedule it, present it and give the public an opportunity to comment.

Ms. Harris said they only evaluated public sites. She is saying public right-of-way, the land that is owned by the City. With the new developments that are coming online that have some private areas that may be visible to the public, they are so numerous within the city that it would be difficult to do an evaluation of all of them; every single building would be potentially a site for public art. She said, therefore, the map is really looking at public right-of-way that is available. Basically, square, medians, etc. that are owned by the City of Savannah. Ms. Harris said she only wanted to make that clarification. Now, this does not say that they couldn't look at every single façade in the entire city, but City Council would need to be convinced to authorize more funding in order for them to have the resources to do so.

Mr. Madson asked if they could have a task force to address the map and list.

Mr. Karatassos said as Ms. Harris stated, they can not designate every possible location for public art in Savannah. He said, theoretically, every building could come in for something. They can only designate public art on public buildings, on public property.

Mr. Clinton Edminster thanked the HSMC for having the meeting today. He is the owner and founder of Starlandia Creative supplies on 41st and Bull Street. He is also the cofounder and executive director of Art Rise Savannah. He is also the president of Star Council which is the Starland Community Council which is a coalition of businesses in the Starland district between Henry Street and Victory Drive, East Broad and MLK. He encouraged the HSMC to create a task force including artists, property developers, and city leadership that would analyze the existing mural policy, its process and identify the strengths and weaknesses that they are currently seeing with the mural ordinance. Mr. Edminster said he was talking about the entire concept of public art in Savannah.

Mr. Karatassos said the HSMC does not deal with enterprise zones. These are the people that need to push for public art in the areas that Mr. Edminster mentioned.

Mr. Monroe said he does not disagree with what has been said, but the HSMC does not have a budget. He is personally for enterprise zones, but they do not do this. He explained that what would be helpful for him in this process is for the persons who have gone through the process to let them know what they disliked.

Mr. Gensheimer stated that he does not know if the HSMC can create a task force. It is a good idea, but he believes it is off point.

Mr. Karatassos said what stands out to him is that they do not have a lot of public meetings where people can come and talk about public art. He said there is probably a lot of good ideas within the public about how they address art in a public way. Mr. Karatassos believes somehow they need to get all the people with their ideas in front of the right people. He was not saying get a task force, but get the Mayor and Aldermen and the City's Administration involved in the discussion. He does not want to get 10 or so persons together because they do not have the power to do anything about it. He would rather see people who have the authority to do something about it come together and be exposed to the discussion. Maybe at one of City Council's workshop they may be able to get them to have such a discussion. He asked that staff send a letter to the City Manager asking her to encourage City Council to put them on the agenda to meet with them in one of their workshops and talk with them about public art in Savannah.

Mr. Karatassos asked Mr. Edminster to send the information he spoke about to the staff.

Mr. Thomson stated that if it is going to be a public policy, City Council has to be engaged. He said they do not have the resources to help support the separate efforts until some time into the future. There is a lot more that the public art community needs to do among themselves and others. Mr. Thomson suggested that they approach the Emergent Savannah folks and start a dialogue.

Mr. Bobby Familiant stated that he has lived downtown since 2012. He owns property in the Historic District. He works downtown and lives near the Judge building. He was fortunate enough to watch the public art going up on that building. He wanted to show support for public art. He commended Mr. Madison for his grasp for what is going on. Public art and murals are different.

6. [Commissioner Items](#)

7. [Next Meeting - Thursday, July 7, 2016 at 4:00 p.m. in the Arthur A. Mendonsa Hearing Room, MPC, 112 E. State Street](#)

V. Adjournment

8. [Adjourned](#)

There being no further business to come before the HSMC, Mr. Karatassos adjourned the meeting at 5:38 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ellen Harris
Director of Urban Planning and Historic Preservation

EIH:mem

The Chatham County - Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission provides meeting summary minutes which are adopted by the respective Board. Verbatim transcripts of minutes are the responsibility of the interested party.