



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
March 2, 2017 4:00 P.M.
Meeting Minutes

MARCH 2, 2017 HISTORIC SITE AND MONUMENT COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING

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

HSMC Member Not Present: Dolores Engle

MPC Staff Present: 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 meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. and welcomed everyone in attendance. He outlined the role of the Historic Site and Monument Commission.

II. Approval of Meeting Minutes

2. [Approval of February 2, 2017 Meeting Minutes](#)

Attachment: [February 2, 2017 Minutes.pdf](#)

Board Action:

The Savannah Chatham County Historic Site and Monument Commission does hereby approve the February 2, 2017 Meeting Minutes.

- PASS

Vote Results

Motion: Ryan Madson
Second: Thomas Gensheimer
Thomas Gensheimer - Aye
Dr. Nicholas Henry - Aye
Eli Karatassos - Aye
Ryan Madson - Aye
Kristopher Monroe - Aye

III. Regular Agenda

3. [Petition of Georgia Historical Society | 17-000693-HM | 23 Montgomery Street | Marker](#)

Attachment: [Staff Recommendation.pdf](#)

Attachment: [Application and Submittal Packet.pdf](#)

Ms. Elyse Butler, Rev. Thurmond Tillman and others were present on behalf of the petition.

Ms. Sara Farr gave the staff report. The applicant is requesting approval to install a historical marker to recognize the history of the First African Baptist Church. This church is one of the nation's oldest continuous African-American churches. Two possible locations are proposed: a freestanding marker near the church front entryway (on Montgomery Street between West Bryan Street and West St. Julian Street) or in the adjacent Franklin Square. The applicant agreed to pay for the repair and replacement of the historical marker as needed and is requesting the escrow payment be waived.

Ms. Farr stated that as required in the Master Plan and Guidelines, written notice was sent to all property owners and neighborhood associations within 200 feet of the subject property. A sign was posted on the property fifteen days prior to the meeting.

Ms. Farr stated that the marker will read as follows:

First African Baptist Church

First African Baptist Church traces its roots to 1773 and the organization of a congregation at nearby Brampton Plantation by Rev. George Leile. Under the leadership of Rev. Andrew C. Marshall (3rd pastor), the congregation obtained this property. Constructed of Savannah Grey brick by congregants, both free and enslaved, the current building was completed in 1859. Rev. Emanuel K. Love (6th pastor), an advocate for African-American education and civil rights, was instrumental in establishing today's Savannah State University. Rev. Dr. Ralph Mark Gilbert (13th pastor) was a prominent leader of the NAACP and the revival of the Savannah chapter in the 1940s. U.S. Representative Adam Clayton Powell of Harlem and Dr. Martin

Luther King, Jr. are among the noteworthy speakers hosted here. FABC is one of the oldest continuously operating African-American churches in North America.

Erected by the Georgia Historical Society and First African Baptist Church.

Ms. Farr reported that staff recommends approval to City Council of the marker with the condition that the selected site does not involve disturbing existing vegetation or sidewalks, because otherwise the marker meets the standards in the Master Plan and guidelines. Staff recommends the Montgomery Street site adjacent to the church due to its proximity to the building.

PETITIONER COMMENTS

Ms. Butler explained that they do not like to give just one location option. Therefore, this is the reason two locations were given for placement of the marker. They understand the sidewalk is narrow. However, two sided markers have been placed close to buildings. Nevertheless, the marker placed in the park would easily be accessible.

Ms. Butler stated that the marker is the joint effort of the Georgia Historical Society and the First African Baptist Church. She explained that the Georgia Historical Society Committee is comprised of independent scholars across the state. Therefore, anything that they propose, every line has been researched.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Ms. Farr stated that the Historic Savannah Foundation (HSF) is unable to attend today's meeting, but sent their written comments. The HSF maintains its opposition to placing such markers on buildings. They prefer that the marker be freestanding and not attached to the building.

COMMISSION DISCUSSION

The Commission discussed the placement of the marker. The sidewalk appears to be problematic as it is narrow. They discussed if the marker would obstruct the path. Regarding the wording on the marker, what is *establishing today's Savannah State University* referencing?

Ms. Butler explained that in reference to the wording *establishing today's Savannah State University*, she recommended that the word *today's* be stricken.

Rev. Tillman stated that the church does not object to the wording as is on the marker. He explained that the date the marker is erected will be shown thereon. Consequently, when an individual is reading the marker, all they have to do is look at the date and know that the wording *establishing today's Savannah State University* is referencing the date shown on the marker.

Rev. Tillman said the church has no objections to whether the marker is placed near the church or in Franklin Square.

Ms. Harris explained that if the staff believes that there will be a problem with the

placement, they will get the City staff involved. The minimum ADA requirement for a sidewalk is four feet. Therefore, the sidewalk has to have four feet of unobstructed right-of-way. This sidewalk meets the minimum standard.

Mr. Karatassos said the marker will be placed near the church on the sidewalk or in Franklin Square. He called for a motion. At either location it will be a freestanding marker.

Board Action:

The Historic Site and Monument Commission does hereby recommend approval to City Council of the marker at 23 Montgomery Street with the condition that the selected site, Montgomery Street adjacent to the church, does not require disturbing existing vegetation or sidewalks. - PASS

Vote Results

Motion: Ryan Madson
Second: Thomas Gensheimer
Thomas Gensheimer - Aye
Dr. Nicholas Henry - Aye
Eli Karatassos - Aye
Ryan Madson - Aye
Kristopher Monroe - Aye

IV. Other Business

- 4. [Commissioner Items](#)
- 5. [Next Meeting - Thursday, April 6, 2017 at 4:00 p.m. in the Arthur A. Mendonsa Hearing Room, MPC, 112 E. State Street](#)

V. Adjournment

- 6. [Adjourned](#)

There being no further business to come before the Commission, Mr. Karatassos adjourned the meeting at 4:45 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ellen Harris, Director
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.