



Savannah - Chatham County Historic Site & Monument Commission

Arthur A. Mendonsa Hearing Room
April 4, 2019 4:00 P.M.
Meeting Minutes

APRIL 4, 2019 SAVANNAH-CHATHAM COUNTY SITE & MONUMENT COMMISSION

Members Present: Dr. Nicholas Henry, Chair
Kristopher Monroe, Vice-Chair
Alicia Blakely
Eli Karatassos
Sean Mannion

Member Absent: Thomas Gensheimer

MPC Staff Present: Leah Michalak, Director of Historic Preservation
Ryan Jarles, Cultural Affairs Planner
Kait Morano, Comprehensive Planner
Alyson Smith, Historic Preservation Planner
Mary E. Mitchell, Administrative Assistant

I. Call to Order and Welcome

[1. Call to Order and Welcome](#)

Dr. Henry 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. He announced that **Ms. Leah Michalak** was promoted to serve as the Historic Preservation Director replacing Ms. Ellen Harris, who resigned from the MPC staff effective March 14, 2019.

Ms. Michalak introduced staff members, Alyson Smith, Historic Preservation Planner, who has been employed for several years at MPC, but will now work closely with the HSMC, Ryan Jarles, Cultural Resources Planner, new employee, and Kait Morano, Comprehensive Planner, new employee.

The HSMC congratulated Ms. Michalak on her promotion and welcomed Alyson, Ryan, and Kait.

II. Approval of Meeting Minutes

[2. March 7, 2019 Historic Site and Monument Commission Meeting Minutes](#)

📎 [March 7, 2019 Minutes.pdf](#)

Motion

The Savannah-Chatham County Historic Site and Monument Commission does hereby approve March 7, 2019 Meeting Minutes with an amendment that Sean Mannion was absent when this vote taken.

Vote Results (Approved)

Motion: Eli Karatassos

Second: Kristopher Monroe

Thomas Gensheimer	- Not Present
Dr. Nicholas Henry	- Abstain
Eli Karatassos	- Aye
Kristopher Monroe	- Aye
Alicia Blakely	- Aye
Sean Mannion	- Aye

III. Regular Agenda

[3. Petition of Jerelene P. Williams | 19-001433-HM | 77 East River Street | Historical Marker Replacement](#)

📎 [Application - 77 E. River Street 19-001433-HM.pdf](#)

📎 [Submittal Packet.pdf](#)

📎 [19-001433-HM Staff Recommendation.pdf](#)

Ms. Jerelene P. Williams was present on behalf of the petition.

Ms. Leah Michalak gave the staff report. The petitioner is requesting approval to replace an existing marker with a new marker on the base of the African American Monument located on public property at 77 East River Street. The existing marker was approved and installed on the base of the monument in 2003 [File No. C-030703-35815-2] as a “temporary plaque” to raise funds to pay for the previously installed monument. The new marker will serve as the platform for the monument title as well as information regarding a previous sponsor/donor. The existing marker is 9” x 9” and the new marker is proposed to be 10” x 12” and 1/8” thick (.125”). The monument is a statue of an African American family with a quote from Maya Angelou engraved on the base that reflects the slave ship experience. The proposed marker features the name of the monument, its original dedication date, and the sculptress’s name. It also contains the name, life dates, and life summary of Dr. Abbie H. Jordan who was a driving force behind locating this monument (sponsor/donor) in 2003.

Ms. Michalak stated that the cost of the marker is \$530 (including freight) but it is unclear who will fund the marker. The applicant indicates that she has spoken to the City of Savannah’s Monument Upkeep Team who has agreed to install the marker. As required in the Master Plan and Guidelines, written notice was sent to all property owners, and the neighborhood association, within 200 feet of the subject property. A sign was posted on the property fifteen days prior to the meeting. No comments were received from the public.

Ms. Michalak reported that staff recommends approval to replace an existing marker with a new marker on the base of The African American Monument located on public property at 77 East River Street with the following conditions to be provided for staff review and approval because otherwise the marker meets the standards:

1. Increase the font height of the monument title to a minimum of 1” and ensure that all other text is not less than ½” in height. Ensure that the sponsor/donor’s name font height is smaller than the monument title.
2. Provide a final design drawing of the marker.
3. Provide an escrow payment.

Mr. Karatassos said it would be helpful if the HSMC received the font changes upfront showing them how the new font size would look.

Mr. Monroe asked, for clarification, if the \$530 has been allocated.

Ms. Michalak said a receipt was included showing \$530 which included the freight. The City has agreed to install the marker at no cost.

Ms. Blakely asked if the unveiling is scheduled for July 26, 2019.

Ms. Michalak answered yes, the scheduled unveiling date is set for July 26, 2019.

Ms. Blakely said Dr. Abbie Jordan fought hard to get the monument. She is happy that now they are going to give recognition to Dr. Jordan. Ms. Blakely asked staff to please let the Commission know when the unveiling will be held.

PETITIONER COMMENTS

Ms. Williams thanked the staff and Commission for hearing their petition. She said some misleading information is shown on the monument that they are asking for donations. She explained that a bank account number is stated on the monument also that shows where to send the donation. They checked the account and found out that it was closed, probably due to inactivity.

Ms. Williams said Dr. Jordan did not want to be recognized for certain things. She worked very hard to get the African Family monument erected. Dr. Jordan passed in January 2019. Now, they want to honor her for all the work she did to get the monument erected on River Street. Dr. Jordan contributed more than \$100,000 of her personal money to this monument. Ms. Williams asked the Commission to please approve the changes they have submitted for the plaque. They are not doing anything to the monument, but just putting a plaque at the base of the monument in recognition of all the work Dr. Jordan did to get the monument erected.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Ms. Edna Jackson, former Mayor of Savannah, said in 2000 when she was initially elected as an alderman on City Council, she had a conversation with Dr. Jordan about the African American monument. Dr. Jordan was determined to get the monument erected as Savannah never had an African American monument. This monument was the first and now there is one more. Ms. Jackson said if you go to southern towns, particularly those cities in the deep south where civil rights were fought, you will see many monuments commemorating the past. Ms. Jackson said this is a tribute to a lady that stood up and stood out and made us aware that it was necessary to have a monument in Savannah in recognition of the African American families. Ms. Jackson invited and welcomed the Commission to come to the unveiling on July 26, 2019.

Dr. Henry explained that the Commission is undertaking a new venture. He asked Mr. Monroe to please explain what they are doing.

Mr. Monroe explained that they have had an on-going conversation with the Monuments for Peace and Justice in Alabama. As a part of their project, each county is represented. They have a monument that each county can claim. But at this point, they are just gathering information from the Monuments for Peace and Justice and the Telfair Academy about this program. As they gather more information, it will be shared.

Ms. Jackson explained that she recently took the freedom tour in Alabama. Therefore, she is familiar with what Mr. Monroe was saying. Ms. Jackson said people may not realize it, but Savannah was desegregated before any of the other cities in the state of Georgia before the Civil Rights Act was passed. She would be happy to work with Mr. Monroe. She has many books on this subject.

Mr. Mark Armstrong came forward and said when Ms. Williams was talking about the donations, maybe they might want to start a foundation and attach it to the First African Baptist Church on Montgomery Street.

Ms. Pat Gunn, CEO of Underground Tours, said she was happy to be present at this meeting today. The monument has become a hangout for her, seven days a week. She believes it would be beneficial if a counter was placed at the monument as there are many people who visit this monument daily. The visitors are saying that the language of Maya Angelou is deteriorating and, therefore, cannot be read. They talked with some students at SCAD about darkening the language so it can be read. As she has said, she is at this monument everyday. During Easter and Christmas seasons people bring flowers and place them at this monument. They are not only bringing flowers, but letters, too. The letters are just sitting there. It would be good if a

mailbox could be put there to put the letters in.

Ms. Gunn said she just wanted to come to today's meeting also to let the Commission know that the public loves the monument. It would be great if landscaping could be placed here. She said some florists have contacted them about donating floral to the City. Maybe some plants from West Africa could be placed here such as Indigo. Years ago, lots of debris was here and they talked with the City Manager and asked that the African American monument be washed just as they do the other monuments in the city. She paid special homage to Dr. Jordan.

Dr. Henry asked staff what is the City's responsibility to the upkeep of this monument.

Ms. Michalak said she would look into this further, but she believed it was the same as the others where you pay into an escrow to maintain it.

Mr. Monroe said he believed the African American monument was erected prior to putting the escrow account in place. He does not believe that an escrow account has been setup to maintain this monument.

Ms. Williams explained that she was informed that the City is responsible for maintaining the monument. She was further informed that after getting approval from the Historic Site and Monument Commission, that City Council has to approve their petition also. The monument is on City's property, therefore, they are responsible for the upkeep.

Ms. Michalak read that the Master Plan and Guidelines says that all markers, monuments, and public art erected on public property becomes the property of the Mayor and Aldermen. They assume the responsibility for future maintenance and upkeep for the markers and monuments. Therefore, an initial escrow payment is required. The applicant subsequently approved the application, the Mayor and Aldermen designee will determine the escrow payment and will notify the applicant. It must be paid prior to construction or installation on the monument or public art. Any marker or monument erected on private property is the responsibility of the property owner.

Mr. Karatassos asked Ms. Williams if they have contacted the sculptress about the deteriorating wording.

Ms. Jackson answered no. This has to be taken up with the City. The granite that is at the base is the responsibility of the City. The monument [the family] was created by the sculptress listed on the monument. The City was responsibility for building the area and base. The sculptress did not do the inscription.

COMMISSION DISCUSSION

During the meeting, the public and the Board expressed their concern about several items regarding this monument:

- Deterioration of the Maya Angelou quote on the granite base;
- Conservation of the letters left at the monument by the public [mailbox? City archivist?]
- Adding landscaping around the barren monument [appropriate plants such as Indigo?]

The Commission directed staff to followup on these items with the appropriate City departments.

Motion

The Savannah - Chatham County Historic Site & Monument Commission does hereby recommend approval to City Council to replace an existing marker with a new marker on the base of The African American Monument located on public property at 77 East River Street with the following conditions to be provided for staff review and approval because otherwise the marker meets the standards:

1. Increase the font height of the monument title to a minimum of 1" and ensure that all other text is not less than ½" in height. Ensure that the sponsor/donor's name font height is smaller than the monument title.
2. Provide a final design drawing of the marker.
3. Provide an escrow payment.

Vote Results (Approved)

Motion: Eli Karatassos

Second: Sean Mannion

Thomas Gensheimer	- Not Present
Dr. Nicholas Henry	- Abstain
Eli Karatassos	- Aye
Kristopher Monroe	- Aye
Alicia Blakely	- Aye
Sean Mannion	- Aye

4. PETITION OF CARMELA ALIFFI | 19-001467-PA | 2417-2421 WATERS AVENUE | MURAL

- 📎 [Application - 2417-2421 Waters Avenue 19-001467-COA.pdf](#)
- 📎 [support email 19-001467-COA.pdf](#)
- 📎 [Submittal Packet - 2417-2421 Waters Avenue 19-001467-PA.pdf](#)
- 📎 [19-001467-PA Recommendation.pdf](#)
- 📎 [opposition email waters ave 3.pdf](#)

Ms. Carmela Aliffi, property owner, was present on behalf of the petition.

Mr. Ryan Jarles gave the staff report. The applicant is requesting approval for an after-the-fact mural at 2417-2421 Waters Ave. The mural is painted directly onto the wooden siding of the southern facing façade. The mural which is 15' X 20', and is designed by the artist Panhandle Slim, depicts the famous artist "Frida Kalho" with a quote by the artist, "You deserve a lover who takes away the lies and brings you hope, coffee and poetry." This mural is located outside of the Downtown Historic District and does not require review by the HDBR. Several of the artist's murals were approved after-the-fact by the HSMC on October 6, 2016 (16-003895-PA) as well as August 3, 2017 (17-003005-PA)

Mr. Jarles stated that the Sanborn maps prior to 1970 show an additional brick structure attached to the portion of the wall that the mural is painted on. This structure was removed from the property exposing that the wall that the mural is painted on. Furthermore, the maps indicate that historically the wall that the mural is painted on was a brick wall, and therefore the current material used for the wall is an alteration and is non-historic.

Mr. Jarles stated that as required, written notice was sent to all property owners and the neighborhood association, within 200 feet of the subject property. A sign was posted on the property fifteen days prior to the meeting. Comments were received for and against the mural.

Mr. Jarles reported that staff recommends approval of the after-the-fact mural with the conditions that:

1. Petitioner provides staff with paint type used.
2. If intended to be permanent, petitioner provides staff with the weatherproofing and vandalism-resistant coating used.

Because otherwise it meets the standards in the Master Plan and Guidelines for Markers, Monuments, and Public Art.

Mr. Monroe asked that since this is an after-the-fact request, did the petitioner approach the MPC regarding the request or vice-versa?

Ms. Michalak explained that a complaint was received through the City of Savannah's Code Compliance Department.

Mr. Karatassos stated that this is an issue where the artist knows the procedure, but does not follow it. He is aware that there are many citizens who believe that the Panhandle Slim [the artist] is wonderful, but he breaks the law every time. Mr. Karatassos said if the Commission is going to approve his art and he does not get it approved prior to erection, a fine should be imposed on him.

Ms. Blakely asked who owns the building? She wanted to hear what the owner has to say about the mural being painted on her building.

Ms. Aliffi answered that she owns the building.

Mr. Monroe said he just wanted the records to show that there are five other members on this Commission and that Mr. Karatassos was only speaking for himself.

Mr. Karatassos explained that he was only speaking for himself and not the entire Commission.

Mr. Mannion said, also, that each Commission member speaks for themselves and he has not voiced approval or disapproval of this after-the-fact request.

Ms. Blakely, too, said that Mr. Karatassos spoke only for himself and not the entire Commission.

Mr. Karatassos explained that if any of the Commission members wanted to go back and check the history of Panhandle Slim, they will find that this Commission has approved multiple murals painted by him and they were already done with reasons given that everybody liked the message. But the fact is, the murals were done without getting prior approval from the Historic Site and Monument Commission. Now, this continues to happen. It is nice that they like the message, but suppose someone does this over and over and it is not something that the public likes. The HSMC has standards that they expect the people to abide by. If someone wants to paint a mural on their wall, all they have to do is get an application online or from the MPC office, complete it and submit it to the Historic Preservation staff. This artist knows the rules, but continues to put the burden on the property owner. Their standards must be followed.

Dr. Henry asked if the HSMC's rules are not followed, does the mural come down.

Ms. Michalak answered that technically if the standards are not met, this is in violation of the Certificate of Appropriateness [COA] and, therefore, would be treated as graffiti. The City would remove it.

Mr. Mannion asked that beyond just removing the graffiti, are there any actions the City can take against the artist whether it be in terms of criminal actions such as a fine, imprisonment, etc.

Ms. Michalak answered she did not know, but would check on this.

Mr. Monroe asked if this is a law or a requirement for the Commission to approve this.

Ms. Michalak explained the specific standards in the HSMC's ordinance is law. The staff has worked closely with the Code Compliance Department to put together the distinctions between what is graffiti, what is art, etc. regarding when something can be removed. The City is asking to get a list of the murals that have been approved by the HSMC so they will know which ones are graffiti and which ones are murals.

PETITIONER COMMENTS

Ms. Aliffi came forward and thanked the staff and Commission for reviewing their petition. She apologized about the after-the-fact request. She thought that because she was not in the Historic District, she was not held to the same criteria. Her father owned the building and turned it into a supply store. At the death of her father, she became the owner.

Ms. Aliffi said she has been an art teacher for 42 years and 28 of those years have been at a local high school in Savannah. She explained that a garden is next door to her building. They plant flowers in the garden. A library is here and the mural. Chairs are here, too, and anyone can come and sit here. Ms. Aliffi said she keeps hearing about Waters Avenue being revitalized. One of her neighbors has an art store and change paper displays often with many different designs. Children and adults visit the neighbor's establishment and do art projects. They believe this is something good for their community. A little wedding chapel is here also.

Ms. Aliffi said she spoke to Panhandle Slim about the mural. Some teachers talked to her about an art project

as they all want to make the area more inviting. The teachers at SCAD believed it was a good idea, but they did not have the time to devote to the project. Panhandle Slim told her he would love to paint a mural here. She explained that she is responsible for the mural. If there is a penalty that needs to be paid, it is on her as she approached Panhandle Slim about the project. She gave him \$100 to purchase the exterior house paint for the mural. They got together and looked on the internet for quotes. They wanted something that would be artistic to go along with the tenants, the art store and say something about love.

Ms. Aliffi said when someone sees something they can choose to see it as love or hate. They may see it in a positive or negative way. The day she found out that an application needed to be submitted for approval of the mural, she was at work, but the next day she submitted the application. They are just trying to spread love. The mural has been here since March, 2018. She entertained questions from the Commission.

Ms. Blakely said she loves the mural that is painted on the building. She rides down Waters Avenue quite often and sees the people coming in and out. She was not aware that you could go there, sit, and review the mural. She thanked Ms. Aliffi for putting the mural on her building; Waters Avenue needs to be revitalized.

Mr. Monroe said he passes by this way everyday. He concurs that Waters Avenue does need to be revitalized. The artist is well aware that he needs to get approval prior to painting a mural. He asked Ms. Aliffi if a protective coating is on the mural.

Ms. Aliffi answered that the mural is painted on wood. If a protective coating is not on the mural, she will ensure that it will be done.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Mr. Mark Armstrong said the people who live in this area do not like the mural. The mural goes too far with the content of the quote. He finds this mural disgusting. He said that Frida Kahlo was not a good person. She was a member of the Mexican Communist Party.

Dr. Henry informed Mr. Armstrong that the Commission reviews a mural with their standards. The mural meets the standards in the Master Plan and Guidelines for Markers, Monuments, and Public Art.

Ms. Jackson said "read the words" painted on this mural. The mural is talking about a lover who takes away lies and bring you hope, coffee, and poetry. She said that Panhandle Slim has done many great things in this community. Yes, Panhandle Slim might have made some mistakes, but when he is asked to do something, he does it with love and care. Everyone is aware of Waters Avenue and anything that is done to improve this street such as brightening it up and give people hope is good.

Mr. Mannion said he understands that as soon as Ms. Aliffi found out that she was in violation, she immediately submitted an after-the-fact application. He applauds that, but, this is not an excuse for disobeying the law. It is good that this was done, but the mural has been up more than a year. The statement made about the Communist Party cannot be used as a reason for the Commission not to approve the mural.

COMMISSION DISCUSSION

During the meeting, the petitioner agreed to all conditions.

Mr. Karatassos said the owner did not know that an application must be submitted prior to painting the mural, but the artist, Panhandle Slim, knows this.

Ms. Aliffi asked if a person needs to get permission prior to putting up a mural not just in the Historic District, but in Savannah.

Ms. Michalak answered yes; this covers the entire city.

Ms. Aliffi asked who is responsible for checking on the murals?

Ms. Michalak explained that the Historic Preservation staff is not responsible for going around the city and county checking and identifying every mural or marker that was put up without approval. The HSMC has approved about 30 murals. The Compliance Department has asked the Historic Preservation staff to give them a list of the murals that have been approved so that they can address the others as graffiti or make them come into compliance.

Motion

The Savannah - Chatham County Historic Site & Monument Commission does hereby approve the after-the-fact mural with the conditions that:

1. Petitioner provides staff with paint type used
2. If intended to be permanent, petitioner provides staff with the weatherproofing and vandalism-resistant coating used.

because otherwise it meets the standards in the Master Plan and Guidelines for Markers, Monuments, and Public Art.

Vote Results (Approved)

Motion: Alicia Blakely

Second: Kristopher Monroe

Thomas Gensheimer	- Not Present
Dr. Nicholas Henry	- Abstain
Eli Karatassos	- Nay
Kristopher Monroe	- Aye
Alicia Blakely	- Aye
Sean Mannion	- Aye

IV. Other Business

[5. Commissioner's Items](#)

[6. Staff Items](#)

[7. Next Regular Meeting - Thursday, May 2, 2019 at 4:00 p.m. in the Chatham County Commission Hearing Room \(2nd Floor\), 124 Bull Street](#)

[8. Alternate Meeting Location Beginning in May - County Commission Chambers, 124 Bull Street, 2nd Floor](#)

📎 [ALTERNATIVE SITE MEETING SCHEDULE 030719.pdf](#)

Ms. Michalak explained that MPC's entire office will be renovated. It will be done in phases. Next month [May] the HSMC will meet at 124 Bull Street in the Commission Chambers on the second floor.

NOTE: After this meeting, staff learned that the alternate site meeting schedule will begin in June. Therefore, May meeting will be held at the MPC office as usual.

V. Adjournment

[9. Adjourned](#)

A question was raised about the Commission having pre-meetings prior to their regular meetings.

Ms. Michalak explained that as stated in the HSMC's meeting minutes of March 7, 2019, the Commission agreed not to schedule a pre-meeting for every meeting, but if staff feels that a pre-meeting would be helpful, they can advise the Commission of same. Ms. Harris previously suggested that the Chair make the decision whether or not to have a pre-meeting and the staff will coordinate with him. This was agreeable with

the Commission.

Dr. Henry stated that on behalf of the Historic Site and Monument Commission, he has written a letter of appreciation to Ms. Ellen Harris for the outstanding contributions she gave to the Commission.

Mr. Monroe reported that the Savannah Cultural Arts Center at 201 Montgomery Street will hold its grand opening celebration on Saturday, April 13, 2019 from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Mr. Mannion asked if a date could be set with the Code Compliance Department to meet with the HSMC to explain when they will have their city-wide discrepancy matter concerning the murals.

Ms. Michalak said this request was made to Ms. Harris and she will contact her regarding who made the request and get back with the HSMC.

There being no further business to come before the HSMC, Dr. Henry adjourned the meeting at 5:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Leah G. Michalak
Director of Historic Preservation

LGM:mem

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