


MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Aldermen

FROM: Michael Brown, City Manager 

CC: Bret Bell, COO
Luciana Spracher, Municipal Archives Director

RE: Civil War Memorial Recommended Next Steps

DATE: May 24, 2021

For several years the City of Savannah has done in-depth research and made thoughtful recommendations to address the Civil War Memorial, also referred to as the Confederate Monument, in Forsyth Park. While we wish to take specific actions that tell the fuller story of the Civil War, and reduce the Memorial's focus on the Confederacy, we have been constrained by State law, which prevents such modifications.

Following input from the Civil War Memorial Task Force and the Historic Site and Monument Commission, I now recommend City Council take the following actions:

1. City staff and leadership begin referring to the memorial as the "Civil War Memorial" in all City communications, including the City website and official City documents, as opposed to the Confederate Monument.
2. City Council adopt a Resolution officially calling on the Georgia General Assembly to amend the State laws that prevent local governments from altering and/or removing monuments and memorials that no longer serve the needs of their constituents.
3. Installation of one new interpretive sign mounted in the ground outside the memorial fence line with a panel that incorporates a pictorial timeline of the memorial site and the text:
"In 2018, the City of Savannah approved the relocation of the two busts (moved here from Chippewa Square in 1910) from the memorial's grounds and the placement of a new plaque on the memorial that states: This memorial was originally erected in 1875 to the Confederate dead, redesigned in 1879, and rededicated in 2018 to all the dead of the American Civil War. A Georgia State law, strengthened in 2019, currently

- prevents the City from taking these actions.” (Task Force Recommendation #11)
4. As soon as advised by the City Attorney that staff can legally move forward with their relocation, remove the McLaws and Bartow monuments and place them in storage until a proper location for them is identified. (Task Force Recommendation #5)

Recommendations from Civil War Memorial Task Force

In 2017 the City created the Civil War Memorial Task Force, composed of preservationists, historians, and administrators of local monument/marker programs. The Task Force presented eight recommendations to City Council, which were unanimously approved on February 14, 2018. Those recommendations were:

1. Rename from “Confederate Monument” to “Civil War Memorial”
2. Preserve all historical material on the memorial
3. Install a new bronze plaque on the blank horizontal panel on the south side of the memorial with this text:
“This memorial was originally erected in 1875 to the Confederate dead, redesigned in 1879, and rededicated in 2018 to all the dead of the American Civil War.”
4. Do not alter the blank vertical panel on the south side of the memorial
5. Relocate the McLaws and Bartow monuments to Laurel Grove North Cemetery
6. Do not replace the Bartow and McLaws monuments at the memorial site
7. Preserve the fence around the memorial in the current elliptical shape
8. The community expands the story of the Civil War, its causes, and its effects throughout Savannah, other than at the Forsyth Park Confederate Memorial site

At the guidance of the City Attorney’s Office, staff did not move forward on the implementation of the above recommendations based on current State laws. In light of this, the Task Force was reconvened in 2020 to consider supplementary signage for the Memorial’s site. As part of their process, the Task Force:

- reviewed the original recommendations approved by City Council in 2018;
- considered Savannah’s memorial in context of current State laws and the broader national discussion of monuments, but with an eye towards this memorial’s specific history and narrative;
- explored a range of options, weighing the pros and cons of each.

In October 2020, the Task Force submitted one revised and three new recommendations for City Council’s consideration:

Revised Recommendation #5: Remove the McLaws and Bartow monuments and place in storage until such time as the City of Savannah can identify a proper location for them

Additional Recommendation #9: The City of Savannah consistently refer to the memorial as the “Civil War Memorial” in all City communications, including the City website and official City documents.

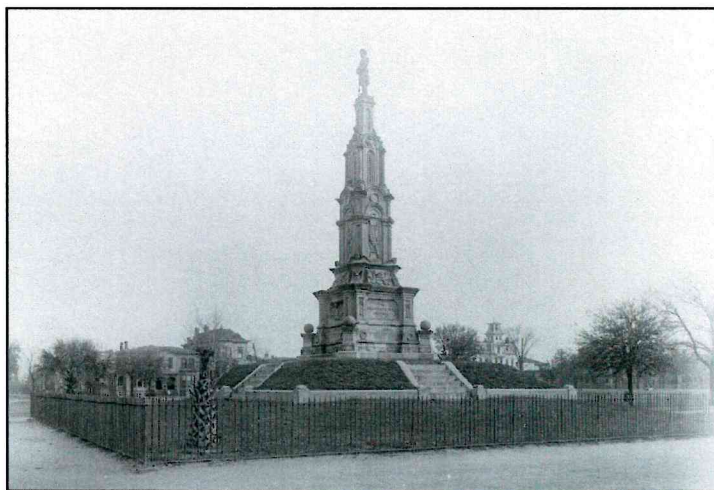
Additional Recommendation #10: Include the amendment of Georgia State laws preventing local governments from altering and/or removing monuments and memorials that no longer serve the needs of their constituents to the City of Savannah Legislative Agenda.

Additional Recommendation #11: Install one new interpretive sign mounted in the ground outside the memorial fence line with a panel that incorporates a pictorial timeline of the memorial site and the text:

“In 2018, the City of Savannah approved the relocation of the two busts (moved here from Chippewa Square in 1910) from the memorial’s grounds and the placement of a new plaque on the memorial that states: *This memorial was originally erected in 1875 to the Confederate dead, redesigned in 1879, and rededicated in 2018 to all the dead of the American Civil War.* A Georgia State law, strengthened in 2019, currently prevents the City from taking these actions.”



Memorial before 1879 alterations



Memorial with original fencing line before 1910 relocation of busts



McLaws and Bartow monuments' original location in Chippewa square

Additional Recommendation #12: The Savannah City Council should establish a permanent Culture, History & Education Committee. It would have a rotating membership comprised of citizens representing Savannah's six districts, in addition to experts in the fields of education, tourism and history. The Committee would advise City leadership and staff on ways to expand Savannah's understanding and interpretation of all the city's history, especially related to the experiences of American Blacks, Native Americans, and women. This would be done through new static and living memorials, as well as public engagement, outreach, education and discussion of that history in new dynamic and meaningful ways.

At the October 8, 2020 Council Work Session, City staff briefed Council on the Task Force's recommendations. City Council requested Historic Site and Monument Commission (HSMC) review the recommendations and provide their feedback. On December 11, 2020, HSMC submitted the following feedback to the City:

- HSMC unanimously approved of the Task Force's recommendations, except for number 12, regarding the proposed establishment of a permanent Culture, History and Education Committee.
- HSMC encouraged that the Bartow and McLaws monuments "be removed, with all deliberate speed, and placed in storage to preserve and protect the monuments until such time as the City of Savannah can identify a proper location for them."