



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

Petitioner: Kelly Brooks
File No.: 26-000111-HM
Address: 502 East Harris Street
PIN: 20014 13010
Staff Reviewer: Alexander Merced
Date: March 5, 2026

NATURE OF REQUEST:

The applicant is requesting the installation of two (2) informational historic signs, one to explain the founding and one to explain the preservation of the Beach Institute. They are to be mounted on a recessed brick wall that encloses the back courtyard of the property.

The building that once housed the Beach Institute school is a contributing structure located at the Northeast corner of Harris and Price Street and is now home to the Beach Institute African American Cultural Center. The two proposed signs would front Harris Street and will be added in addition to two way-finding signs that are also being added to the property, both of which are similar in size and design and have already been approved by the MPC.

This case was first heard at the February 5th, 2026 HSMC meeting, and was continued to allow the applicant to adjust the content of the “Preservation” sign in order to display information more than 50 years old.

FINDINGS:

The following standards from the Historic Site and Monument Commission Guidelines for Markers, Monuments and Public Art apply:

Evaluating Themes for Markers and Monuments. New markers and monuments commemorate and honor people, places, and/or events.

Proposed themes should fall into one or more of the following categories.

Arts and Humanities. Includes art, architecture, music, theater, literature, education, etc.

Civil and Institutional.

Social and Humanitarian.

Local History. Includes folklore and/or local heroes.

Cultural and Ethnic History.

Education.

The “Founding” sign notes the original building design, initial class enrollment, and curriculum for the attending young African American scholars. The “Preservation” sign acknowledges the importance of Westley Wallace Law in preserving African American history and landmarks through the Civil Rights era, specifically Beach Institute, with the assistance of SCAD president and founder, Paula Wallace. The standard is met.

The proposed theme should have documented significant, clear, and direct local relevance to the history and development of Chatham County. The local focus should be the predominant theme of the monument.

The standard is met.

The person, place or event commemorated should not have been sufficiently commemorated elsewhere in the County. The theme should be distinct and original, and not be duplicated in other existing markers or monuments.

Both signs impart original information that enriches the site and has not been already referenced in any other marker or monument. The standard is met.

Commemorated events should have enduring historical significance and have occurred over fifty years ago.

The “Founding” sign addresses the founding of the Beach Institute in 1867. The “Preservation” sign addresses the importance of Westley Wallace Law in preserving African American history and landmarks through the Civil Rights era, mainly from the 1950’s through the 1970’s. The standard is met.

There should be significant documented evidence (written or oral) of the commemorated event, person, or place.

The standard is met.

Evaluating Sites for Markers, Monuments, or Public Art. Certain factors should be taken into consideration when evaluating whether a site is the appropriate location for a marker, monument or public art [hereto referred to as “object” to indicate the inclusion of all three types]. These factors include:

The installation of an object should not cause overcrowding of the site, if there are existing objects. Objects should be sited far enough away from other objects as to allow the visitor proper appreciation of each individually.

The proposed object should not damage or disturb existing established vegetation on the site including low tree limbs, or significant tree roots.

The proposed site should be visible and accessible from a public right of way.

The proposed site should be easy to maintain.

The installation of the object should enhance the space and character of the surrounding neighborhood.

The installation of the object should not require the alteration or removal of existing signage (traffic, street, etc).

The installation of the object should enhance the design of the overall site.

If periodic memorial services are likely, the site should be able to accommodate them without causing undue disruption to the neighborhood, plantings, etc.
All above standards are met.

Site in Relation to Theme for Markers or Monuments. *The relationship between site and theme for a marker or monument is critical in determining the appropriate site for a particular theme.*

Marker. *A marker should be erected in as close proximity to the site to which it is related as possible and be clearly visible from a public right-of-way.*

Markers commemorating an event should be sited within 100 feet of the event site or adjacent to the nearest public right-of-way.

A marker commemorating a place, such as a significant piece of architecture, should be located within 100 feet of the place or adjacent to the nearest public right-of-way.

All above standards are met.

Design. *The design of a marker, monument, or public work of art should be of the highest quality and caliber and enhance public space. In order to promote the high standards the City of Savannah has historically enjoyed in its markers, monuments, and public art, the following guidelines should be observed.*

Markers. *Markers may be mounted on a freestanding pole, wall-mounted, or embedded in the ground. As the primary purpose is to inform the public about an event, place or person, the aesthetic significance of a marker is generally minimal.*

Markers not erected through the GHS's marker program shall not bear the GHS or state seal.

Except the marker title, the marker text should be not more than 1" in height, and not less than 1/2".

Marker text should be created in a manner that, to the extent possible, prevents fading and erosion.

Markers should be made of an enduring, non-corroding material.

Markers should be considered permanent and designed accordingly.

The installation of a marker on building should not damage the historic fabric of the building.

All above standards are met.

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STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Approve the proposal as requested because the work meets the standards within the Master Plan and Guidelines for Markers, Monuments, and Public Art.

MW: CC: APM

Note: This recommendation could change subject to new information provided at the Historic Site and Monument Commission meetings. Decisions or recommendations will be made by the Historic Site and Monument Commission at the public hearing based on information provided at the meeting, as well as information submitted for the staff recommendation.