



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: Joyce Piersanti
File No.: 26-000916-HM
Address: Monterey Square
PIN: 20032 25001
Staff Reviewer: Alexander Merced
Date: May 7, 2026

NATURE OF REQUEST:

The applicant would like to install a commemorative bench on the Southeast corner of Monterey Square, fronting the path at the intersection of Bull Street and West Wayne Street.

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.

Social and Humanitarian.

Religious History. Includes people, places, or events.

The proposed bench is somewhere between a monument and a piece of public art that references the social and humanitarian significance of interfaith dialogue and collaboration among the various religions that populate Savannah, and a quote from Rabbi Arnold Mark Belzer, former Rabbi of Congregation Mickve Israel Synagogue across the square. 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.

Although it is not specifically mentioned, the bench and location have been proposed due to its proximity to Congregation Mickve Israel Synagogue. Additionally, the intent of the bench is to celebrate the many different belief systems that have each played a role in the development of this area. Therefore, staff feels that local history is being honored by this monument. The standard is met.

The level of significance should be high enough to warrant a public presence.

In service of representing the ideals noted above, staff feels that a bench is an ideal form to do so and, given the stated significance, that the significance does warrant a public presence in the manner presented. 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.

The standard is met.

The theme should reflect a larger connection to the community as a whole, and not only to one distinct group.

The bench references most major religions, all of which have representation in Savannah. The standard is met.

Commemorated persons should have enduring historical significance and have been dead at least twenty-five years. Living persons should not be commemorated.

Rabbi Arnold Mark Belzer died in 2025, although the bench does not specifically commemorate him, but instead quotes him.

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 object should not require the removal or alteration of existing above or below ground utilities.

The proposed site should be large enough to accommodate an object, and should not encroach on other existing object sites, buildings, or designated green space.

The proposed site should not be utilized for special events (such as sports, festivals, ceremonies, etc) on a regular basis which an object would disrupt.

The proposed site should not be prone to frequent automobile accidents which could damage the proposed object.

The proposed site should be easily accessible to pedestrians and the physically challenged (excluding marker sites).

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

The proposed site should have adequate parking nearby (excluding marker sites).

The proposed site should not have a high probability of significant archaeology unless an archaeological study is part of the proposal.

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 not significantly affect automobile traffic sight lines.

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

The installation of the object should not require the removal or alteration of existing sidewalks, unless it is part of a comprehensive redesign for the entire site (which is generally discouraged).

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

All of the 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.*

Monument. *Monuments should be erected on sites to which the theme has relevance.*

The proposed site should not disrupt an established theme pattern.

If the proposed theme falls into an existing theme pattern, the proposed site should also follow the corresponding site pattern.

The bench would be placed on a square within the Bull Street Military Theme Pattern, however it is in no way disrupting the theme pattern and there are other non-military monuments within the area.

The proposed site should be the most relevant location available to the monument theme, as demonstrated through the documentation regarding the direct local relevance of the proposed theme.

The applicant states that this is the most relevant location for this bench because it sits across the square from Congregation Mickve Israel, however the bench does not actually reference the synagogue in any way. It contains a quote from Rabbi Arnold Mark Belzer, the former Rabbi of the synagogue, but does not mention this fact either. This is where it does hit elements of public art, which would tie it less to the specific area.

The context of the proposed site should be a major consideration in the mass and scale of the proposed object.

The standard is met.

The location of monuments in the Landmark District should respect the Oglethorpe Plan, particularly in terms of historic viewsheds and sight lines.

The standard is met.

Public Art. *While public art by definition does not commemorate historical people, places, or events, its location is therefore less limited by relevance to the site. The theme of public art is considered Arts and Humanities and therefore the site should be appropriate for that theme.*

The location of public art in the Landmark District should respect the Oglethorpe Plan, particularly in terms of historic viewsheds and sight lines.

The standard is 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.*

Monuments and Public Art. *Monuments may take on many forms including works of art, benches, statues, sculptures, obelisks, sundials, etc. Monuments are typically commissioned, site-specific pieces.*

Public art may consist of a variety of media including, but not limited to, sculpture, mosaic, fountains or other water elements, or murals. Public art may be existing artwork or commissioned artwork.

The applicant may choose to commission a work of art or monument. The artwork or monument must be of the highest quality and should adhere to the guidelines.

Monuments should not be fabricated prior to approval.

Monuments should be considered permanent and designed accordingly.

Public art should generally be considered permanent and be designed accordingly, except in special situations which will be evaluated on an individual basis.

Monuments and public art should be designed and constructed of materials suitable for outdoor display. All proposed materials should have performed satisfactorily in the local climate for a period of time long enough to assure permanence. Future maintenance and conservation requirements should be considered.

Monuments and public art should be designed to be reasonably resistant to vandalism.

Monuments and public art should be designed so as not to pose a danger to the curious public, such as the use of sharp objects or loose parts.

Monument and public art design should include landscaping, paving, seating, drainage, lighting, fencing, or other protective measures which may be considered necessary.

Monuments and public art should be of superior quality and craftsmanship.

Monuments should not resemble gravestones.

A monument should be of original design, and public art should be an original work of art (one of a kind) or reproduced in editions of less than 200.

Monuments and public art should not replicate an original monument or work of art.

Monuments and public art should be designed to complement and enhance the site in which it is located. It should not compete with, dominate or encroach upon existing monuments, public art, or buildings.

Monuments and public art should be respectful of the architectural, historical, geographical, and social/cultural context of the site.

Monuments and public art should be compatible in scale, materials, and form with its context. Context includes the buildings, monuments, public art, landscaping and open space to which the monument or public art is visually related.

The bench will be commissioned and fabricated according to the guidelines. All of the above standards are met.

The format of the monument should effectively convey the message of the monument to the public.

This is up for interpretation, but staff finds that a bench is reasonable in this context. The standard is met.

The designer and/or fabricator (for a monument) and the artist (for public art) should have completed projects of similar size and scale in the public arena and be able to provide appropriate documentation.

The designer and/or fabricator (for a monument) and the artist (for public art) should have an excellent reputation and be able to provide verifiable references attesting to the quality of work.

The designer and/or fabricator (for a monument) and the artist (for public art) should be able to provide images or samples of existing similar monuments or works of art.

The designer and/or fabricator (for a monument) and the artist (for public art) should be able to demonstrate the ability to meet the proposed timeframe.

The applicant says that she has spoken with a company and received design specifications and cost details but has yet to share these with staff. The project still cannot move forward until these details are shared with staff and the commissioners.

Text. *The text for a marker, monument or work of art is considered part of the overall design concept. Placement of the text, font type and size, etc. should be included with the final design drawings.*

Text should be well-researched and based on historically accurate, documented facts.

The text is not historic, but the bench is focused more on visual symbolism rather than text aside from the quote.

The text should accurately and effectively convey to the reader the desired message.

Quotations should be noted accordingly and permission from the appropriate authority received.

The quote is the only text, and it clearly conveys the message. The above standards are met.

Text should avoid offensive, obscene, or inflammatory language.

The standard is met.

Funding.

Budget. *The Mayor and Aldermen do not fund new markers, monuments, or works of art. The applicant is fully responsible for funding the design, construction, installation, and any necessary landscaping, paving, or lighting involved with a new marker, monument, or work of art.*

The applicant must provide a realistic budget in Part II Final Design and Funding. The budget should be based on cost estimates provided by the manufacturer, artist, installer and/or contractor, as appropriate. The budget should include funding goals and deadlines. Should funding goals and deadlines fail to be met, the HSMC may, at its sole discretion, reconsider the application. The applicant must be capable of raising the necessary funding. Construction of the monument or installation of the work of art will not begin until all of the funding has been secured.

The project is being fully funded by the applicant. The standard is met.

Escrow Payment. *All markers, monuments and public art erected on public property become the property of the Mayor and Aldermen. The Mayor and Aldermen assume responsibility for the future maintenance and upkeep of the marker, monument or artwork. Therefore, an initial Escrow Payment is required of the applicant*

subsequent to approval of the application. The Mayor and Aldermen, or their designee, will determine the appropriate Escrow Payment and will notify the applicant. The Escrow Payment must be paid prior to construction/installation of the monument or public art. Any marker, monument or artwork erected on private property is the responsibility of the property owner.

The Escrow payment is noted, as is the fact that after installation, the marker will become the property of the Mayor and Aldermen.

Public Notice. *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. No public comment was received at the time of writing this report.*

Staff Report – Historical Marker
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STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Continue the request until the June 4, 2026, Historic Sites & Monuments Commission meeting in order to allow the applicant time to hire a designer/fabricator to complete the design and create the bench, and for staff to subsequently review the finished design to ensure that it meets the standards.

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.