

SAVANNAH - CHATHAM COUNTY HISTORIC SITE AND MONUMENT COMMISSION

REGULAR MEETING
112 EAST STATE STREET

ARTHUR A. MENDONSA HEARING ROOM

October 1, 2009

4:00 P.M.

MINUTES

HSMC Members Present:

Gordon Smith, Chairman
Walt Harper, Secretary
Eli Karatassos
Adrienn Mendonca
Mary Soule

HSMC Members Not Present:

Phillip Williams, Vice-Chairman

HSMC/MPC Staff Present:

Ellen Harris, Preservation Planner
Julie Yawn, Systems Analyst
Janine N. Person, Administrative Assistant

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 4:10 p.m.

Mr. Smith introduced Ms. Mary Soule, a newly appointed Commission member.

II. Julie Yawn, Systems Analyst: E-Agenda Introduction

Ms. Yawn gave an introduction of the e-agenda system, an electronic agenda that the Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC) has begun. She said it is the implementation of a web-based comprehensive meeting management system for the 13 Boards that the MPC supports. It manages the whole meeting from the agenda creation to the approval and distribution process, as well as Board management of meetings with voting and generation of the minutes. It allows online access to agenda information with supporting documentation, streamlines meeting and post-meeting documentation activities, and reduces inquiries. The HSMC is the next Board slated for the implementation of the e-agenda systems. She stated that the members will receive an email notice with a link to the meeting package on the www.thempc.org website for the next meeting. She said that documentation could be accessed on the laptops at the dais during a meeting. She gave a brief demonstration on the monitor.

Mr. Smith asked if there would be technical assistance from Staff.

Ms. Yawn answered yes.

Ms. Mendonca asked if the attachments would remain on the agenda in perpetuity.

Ms. Yawn stated that the archives go back for several years and will be available for a while.

III. Continued Discussion: Revisions to the “Markers, Monuments, and Public Art Master Plan and Guidelines for the City of Savannah”

Mr. Smith stated that the Commission will continue with the discussion of the revisions to the Master Plan and Guidelines for Markers, Monuments, and Public Art with Ms. Harris giving the overview.

Ms. Harris stated that it is a continued discussion regarding the feedback from the last meeting and that she had included some new standards. She said that she kept items from the previous discussion in, even if there was a consensus, to make sure that everyone was in agreement and as information for the new Commission member.

She gave a brief review of the establishment of the Commission, the current make-up of the TAC (10 representatives from various institutions), and proposed that the TAC consist of a mix of City representatives and professionals appointed by the HSMC based on expertise. Additional experts could be added on an as-needed basis.

Mr. Daniel Carey (Historic Savannah Foundation) asked if Ms. Harris is suggesting one representative per category or if it would be flexible.

Ms. Harris stated that it would be flexible. She said that there would be members with core expertise such as a monument conservator, a historic preservationist, or an architectural historian. Additional expertise could always be added as needed.

Mr. Karatassos stated that if there is a need for an expert in a particular area then they could get the person and ask for their input, but that they didn't have to be on the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) to provide input in making a recommendation. There are so many different landscape architects, historians, architects, etc., and he didn't understand the purpose and the idea of the Commission appointing their own technical people.

Ms. Mendonca stated her understanding is that the committee would be ad hoc and would change according to the needs of what is being reviewed at the time and not be permanent, with the exception of the City representatives like Park and Tree and Cultural Affairs.

Ms. Harris stated that this would be a flexible group of people that would have core representatives like the two City departments for example. She said they would need to be involved with every monument project that goes forward and that there would probably be a group of core people involved with every project like a historian.

Mr. Karatassos asked if they would be members of the TAC.

Ms. Harris answered yes.

Mr. Smith stated that currently the TAC has 10 members from different organizations. He said that some have been indifferent in sending the qualified personnel that is needed. He gave an example of certain institutions that ask if there is someone in their group who would serve on the TAC. They might not want to serve but it might look good on their cv, they don't show up, don't have qualifications, or their history expertise might be in oral history. The proposal is to name the people that the Commission feels is qualified to help as a core group so that it can be expanded when needed.

Mr. Harper stated that he understood what Mr. Karatassos was saying about the TAC and didn't think the Commission needed to appoint members. He said it could end up being members that would make it conducive to the results being sought. The organizations that are listed need better members on the TAC and if they are not, then take them off. He asked if there is a need for three professors from three different colleges.

Mr. Smith stated that he looked at the statistics from the existing TAC members and there was one who attended 50 percent of the meetings, one who has just gone off the Board and attended one-third of the meetings, one that attended 38 percent of the meetings, one with 30 percent, and one who didn't attend a single meeting. There are a number of duplications from the universities and some members have no expertise.

Mr. Harper asked if the ten representatives are picked by the organizations themselves.

Ms. Harris stated that is correct.

Mr. Harper stated that there has to be a better way to do it rather than the Commission appointing the people.

Mr. Smith stated that it is embarrassing for him to have to call a school and tell them that their appointee is not showing up, not taking part, or not helping the Commission and that they need to be replaced.

Mr. Karatassos stated that he is on the Savannah Economic Development Authority Board and the Board members appoint the advisory board members. He said that every advisory board is pretty much the same where most don't come unless their engaged. He asked how many times is the TAC people called and asked for technical help or something specific to the area they represent. The Commission should do away with it completely and stop the façade of having one or leave it alone. He asked why the Commission would have to wait for another meeting when they don't meet every month to approve a historian for a specific matter. Just pick up the phone and call them.

Ms. Mendonca stated that the TAC is there to provide the insight of the community and give the community a voice outside of people that are coming in from single entities, and it doesn't speak as much as it does when speaking for a group for an organization. She thought that it had relevance.

Ms. Harris stated that the TAC was created in 1993 because the Chairman of the Historic Site and Monument Commission (HSMC) noticed that they were struggling. They felt that they didn't have the necessary expertise to review the proposed monuments on a technical level. They got together and said

that they needed a TAC to assist and wrote a memo to City Council asking permission to form the TAC. They received the go ahead and came up with a list of ten different institutions because they felt that representatives from these institutions could provide the technical help. Originally, it worked quite well but over the years it was found to be broken and the TAC is not providing the expertise to help make the decisions. Maybe the TAC can be done away with altogether as Mr. Karatassos suggested and the experts can be pulled in on an as-needed basis. The point is, if there is a need for the expertise there has to be a way to get it. Maybe this isn't it, but it is important to have a process and have a way to do it.

Mr. Carey stated that there is a value contingent on participation. He said that he has been present nine months and has attended virtually all of the TAC meetings. The more you attend the better you are as a member which is the point being made and he agrees with it. Why it works with or without perfect attendance is still the continuity of whether it is the Commission or the Board, but understanding the larger context of the responsibility and the relationship with Staff, but part of getting a firm grasp of the charge and responsibility that comes about through familiarity and participation. He said that they learn from each other and develop expertise so that if someone isn't present, the information is shared from meeting to meeting and used as needed. There is still an opportunity for the experts to speak as a member of the public and they should always be invited to speak. In this capacity it puts them in a higher level, asks more of them, and he would hope that they would respond.

Mr. Karatassos stated that he thinks the Committee has the wrong name. He said there is the CUTS Policy Committee which theoretically could be them, the CUTS Technical Committee which is all of the engineers in the world, and the Citizens Advisory Committee. He said a name is needed and maybe it should be the Community Advisory Committee and not the Technical Advisory Committee because the Commission won't get a lot of technical help, but it needs the community's input on how they feel about things.

Ms. Soule stated that it sounds as though there is a need for technical advisors and that the ten representatives are not filling the need. She said they need a pool of people that are not present all of the time but have an expertise in the different areas that are needed. She didn't see that it precludes the institutions providing someone if they know what is needed. The Commission can solicit to the general public through advertising and then they would get people to come, serve, and be an advisor to the Commission.

Mr. Smith stated what they have now is indeed broken. He said they need to have someone who has some understanding about the purpose of the TAC and that if anyone has a better suggestion, they would love to hear it.

Mr. Karatassos stated he is opposed to the change as presented. He said there is a better way of doing it but he would not propose the change and did not agree with it.

Mr. Harper stated that they could clean up the ten groups by keeping Park and Tree, Cultural Affairs, an architect, a landscape person, and a historian. He said whether there is representation for the Georgia Historical Society, SCAD, or whatever group, the Commission needs to specifically ask for that particular expertise.

Ms. Harris stated that they do ask for the particular area of expertise.

Mr. Smith stated that they don't really get it.

Mr. Harper stated that it is broken but it could be fixed with this concept.

Mr. Smith asked if there are any other questions, comments, or suggestions on the proposed revisions or if anyone from the public wanted to comment.

Ms. Harris stated that it didn't appear that the Commission has reached a consensus on revising the structure of the TAC composition. She asked if it should be left as is or to continue the discussion because she is hearing a lot of different opinions and not a consensus on how to go forward with the revisions.

Ms. Mendonca asked if the Commission has polled any of the organizations that are currently on the list.

Mr. Carey stated that he wondered if the TAC was confronted and shown the attendance figures and the needs to let them know that they are not there just to fill a seat but to serve a purpose, laying out the responsibilities to say why they are needed. He said that they might not have the technical expertise and it is likely that someone in that position might know who the expert is. The need should be conveyed to the TAC.

Mr. Karatassos stated that this issue took up a lot of discussion at the last meeting and not a whole lot of the other issues took up that much time. He suggests that the Commission separate this, not propose any changes right now, and get to the other issues to get them done. He said that whatever the Commission comes up with has to go to a publically elected body for them to adopt, and he didn't want to have to tell them that he's taking any of the organizations off the list.

Ms. Soule asked why the institutions were placed on the list.

Ms. Harris stated that it was felt that they would provide the needed technical expertise.

Ms. Soule stated that they are not providing the technical expertise and asked why they keep the TAC if they are not filling the needs.

Mr. Smith stated he suspected that the Commission kept them even though they don't necessary function because of the political aspect; which is what they need to get away from. He said the Commission doesn't need political experts but people who can tell the Commission about urban planning, sculpting, etc.

Mr. Karatassos asked if he could get with Staff to come up with something better that will accomplish what everyone is trying to do, along with anyone else who wants to participate.

Mr. Smith invited everyone on the Commission that had any input or a better idea to let staff know.

Ms. Mendonca asked if the Commission could ask for data. She said that she is curious about how many other Commissions with the MPC have a TAC and asked how they are appointed.

Ms. Harris discussed the two part application with Part One being the Theme and Location and Part Two being Design and Funding. She said that the proposal is to keep it two parts but have the parts be Theme, Location, and Preliminary Design, and then Final Design and Funding. That way the applicant doesn't have to invest a lot of money in coming up with a final design if there is no chance it would be approved or if a lot of revisions have to be made.

Mr. Karatassos asked if the suggestion is to take a one-part application and make it a two-part application.

Ms. Harris stated that there is currently a two-part application process. She said that Part I is Theme and Location and Part II is Design and Funding. She is proposing to keep it two parts but have Preliminary Design and a Final Design and Funding.

Mr. Karatassos stated that he is all for making it easier for the applicant and not easier for the Commission. He said that if it's easier for the Commission that doesn't mean that it is easier for the person trying to do something. If it is going to be easier for the applicant, than that's great.

Ms. Harris stated that the applicant is going to benefit.

Mr. Karatassos asked if the applications come into one place.

Ms. Harris answered and said that they come here to the MPC.

Mr. Carey stated that ultimately it is better and will save time because the design is related to the location. He said that you can't divorce it from the location and vice versa. If it were in place then it would have saved months with respect to World War II monument.

Ms. Harris stated that she believed there is a consensus to move forward with this revision. She said the current process is that an applicant submits an application that goes to the TAC, the TAC has a formal meeting and makes a formal recommendation to the HSMC, the HSMC makes a formal recommendation to City Council, and City Council approves it. At that point other City departments, aside from Park and Tree and Cultural Affairs who are on the TAC, get pulled in like Engineering, Water and Sewer, etc. In the past, when they were pulled in there were lots of issues raised about the location with water lines and unknown things under the soil which affects the design and site. The applicant has to go back, redesign it, or move it to another site. Proposed monuments have to go through a Site Plan Review (SPR) process, the same process that is done in the Historic District for new construction. She said that the suggestion was taken to the City Engineer and they worked on it to streamline the process. The City departments will get together first to make sure that there are not any physical issues that can become a major problem. If necessary, the petitioner can revise it and if not, then it would move forward. The TAC reviews the proposal and provides comments in a round table discussion with the applicant and the HSMC, rather than having a formal meeting at the dais which changes the dynamics of the applicant/board relationship. It would then come to the HSMC to make the final determination but things have already been worked out with the City and the TAC so that when it

comes to the HSMC, all of the issues would have been resolved so that it can go forward to City Council. City Council always makes the final decision on public property.

Ms. Harris stated that regarding the guidelines she didn't think there would be anything too contentious because they were reviewed at the last meeting. She said that she wanted to go over them again in case there are any issues. The existing item on the left and the proposed on the right are mostly strengthening the language and that the additional language is in italics.

Mr. Smith stated that the Commission has been through the guidelines and asked for any comments.

Ms. Harris stated regarding the proposed location that it is just strengthening the language. She said that one of the suggestions she received was to add something in a location section about the mass and size because if it is a particularly large monument, the location will be key. The middle guideline is new and was not on the last presentation. She read, "The context of the proposed site should be a major factor in the mass and scale of the proposed object." There is additional information in the design section, but to reemphasize it, it is also included in the location section.

Mr. Smith stated that it was an issue with the gazebo in Crawford Square where if you drew an outside line around the silhouette, the mass of it would be greater than some of the proposed monuments. However, you could still see right through it and so it's a different kind of mass and this is trying to bring some rationality to it.

Mr. Carey stated that the proposed site should be the most relevant location available to the monument theme. He asked if that meant that the location should be relevant to the theme. Using the World War II monument for an example he asked what was the most relevant location.

Mr. Smith stated that the river front was decided because of the ship building and the port facilities. He said that if someone came in with a War of 1812 monument, that they didn't need to put it where there is no context with the War of 1812.

Ms. Harris stated that the City did an extensive research project on the river front and tied in all of the links to World War II. She said it is a great example and would be the most relevant.

Mr. Karatassos asked if there was any talk of a public relevance.

Ms. Harris stated that there is something in the guidelines that says it has to have relevance to the wider community and not be isolated.

Mr. Carey stated that the context of the proposed site should be a major factor in the mass and scale of the proposed object, and asked if factor meant consideration.

Ms. Harris answered yes. She said that if he thought consideration is a better term then she could change it.

For design she separated the text into a different section because a lot of the discussion last time was regarding the text. The design of markers had an addition about temporary markers that should be

allowed in a specific context, provided that there is a plan for the removal and/or replacement in the future that temporary markers can be allowed.

Mr. Harper asked Ms. Harris to refresh his memory about what a temporary marker would be.

Ms. Harris stated that there are a series of markers that were placed on River Street that don't follow the Georgia Historical Society (GHS) design, and they aren't meant to last forever but serve a different purpose. She said that at Battlefield Park there are similar markers and that the material can be changed out as it gets updated with new archaeological evidence.

Mr. Harper stated that if it wasn't ironed in stone but would, over time, need to be replaced. He said the Commission approved the plaques on River Street but he didn't recall it a stipulation for their future removal or replacement in the discussion.

Ms. Harris stated that it wasn't a standard and is one reason it is being added because the Commission would want them to submit a plan.

Mr. Smith stated that questions were raised asking what happens when the sun bakes it, the chemicals from the water, etc., and that at some point it could become illegible and look bad. He said that there were no provisions for them to be required to have a plan on how to renew it or take it down.

Ms. Harris stated that the City would step in and said if that happens that they would take them down.

She said there was discussion at the last meeting about whether or not for-profit names should be allowed on markers. She included the existing standards and proposed one standard that donor names may be included on the marker provided that the names are in a smaller font than the rest of the text, and that no slogans or corporate logos are included. The concern was about whether or not it was advertising for for-profit companies. In the past, approximately 99 percent of the markers have been erected by non-profits, but some for-profit companies like the Savannah Morning News and the Marshall House have sponsored markers. There was no discussion at that time about free advertising except for when Wal-Mart, as a mitigation measure for the new site near Sandfly, raised an issue of whether or not corporate sponsorship should be allowed on markers. This is her proposal on how to address it to ensure that it is not advertising, but they have a right to have their name there.

Mr. Karatassos stated that where it says a smaller font that it should say a smaller, similar font.

Ms. Harris stated that was a great suggestion.

Mr. Smith stated that it could say in an identical but smaller font.

Ms. Christy Crisp (Georgia Historical Society - GHS) stated that she and Mr. Will Handley, the Historical Marker Coordinator, are present to answer questions for the GHS process for marker approval.

Ms. Harris stated that in the design of monuments that the proposed changes are in italics and that it essentially strengthens the language. She said that the text on monuments had discussion about

corporate sponsorship and where the appropriate text would be, and that it is a new standard. Currently, it says that donor names may be incorporated into the design on the bricks but should be discreet. There is no language about sponsor names which is a little bit different, or who the organization is that is paying for the monument. She proposed that monument sponsors be incorporated into the design as a separate plaque but should be discreet and not detract or dominate from the monument or art work.

She said that there was discussion last time about the funding. The current guideline says that they have to have a realistic budget and it was proposed that a sentence be added stating that the budget should be based on cost estimates provided by the manufacturer, artist, installer, and/or contractor. This is in the final approval stages and after they have already received preliminary approval. It was suggested that the language be strengthened to state that the budget should include funding goals and deadlines. Should funding goals and deadlines fail to be met, the HSMC may recommend that the application be reconsidered. She tried to come up with some way to strengthen the requirements to have funding in place but it is out of the Commission's hands.

Ms. Mendonca stated that her concern is what happens when an applicant breaks ground, starts a project, and leaves it unfinished. She asked how long and at what point would the City step in, would they do it, and does it become a public tax burden. There wasn't anything in the guidelines to help the applicants understand that part of the process.

Ms. Harris stated that the City made it an informal policy to help with the engineering to make sure the support underground was accurate, and they also helped the Haitian monument with the base and the foundation.

Mr. Karatassos asked once they are approved did the petitioner have to get a building permit from the City.

Ms. Harris answered yes.

Mr. Karatassos stated that he wondered if the Commission is stepping into an area where the City is going to be. He said that once the Commission turns it over to the City that he didn't know if the Commission could have anything to do with the building permit once it is issued.

Ms. Harris stated that was why she struggled to come up with anything. She said that there is a provision in the Master Plan that says they have to come up with the funding before breaking ground. It is not the Commission's decision to make. If the City says that they can break ground, and it has happened before funding was secured, it's out of the Commission's purview at that point. If it ends up with a half built monument she didn't know if the Commission could assume responsibility for it.

Mr. Smith stated that the problem is that the Commission has already resumed responsibility for it by approving it based on the funding. He said if it's unrealistic and the Commission doesn't make a note of it, then the City could say that the Commission recommended it to them based on the funding that was presented. He thinks that the Commission should be able to go to the City and say that the Commission recommends that the City reconsider it.

Mr. Karatassos asked if they had talked with the appropriate department within the City to ask if this is something that they handle.

Ms. Harris stated that she has talked to City staff but they feel like their hands are tied because it is a political decision that isn't being made at staff level and is out of their hands too.

Mr. Carey stated that his question is when the Board asks for a realistic budget if it is a budget based on phases of the project, and if it's a three-phase project would they have funding that matches the phases or is it just a general realistic budget. He said that if there were required benchmarks that it might make it more comfortable with moving forward.

Ms. Harris stated that it has been left open and has not been prescribed because every monument is different and it is hard to have a catch all scenario. She said that sometimes the applicant comes in with a budget that might be for two million dollars and she encourages them to break it down further to see how they came up with the number.

Mr. Carey stated that the Commission could make a recommendation that it be opined to place a condition upon the permit.

Mr. Smith stated that the Commission might want to wordsmith it that if there are suggestions, that the Commission may recommend the application be reconsidered before the ground is broken, before the project gets underway, or add a caveat once the political decision has been made.

Mr. Harper asked if the Commission had the authority to legally do that.

Ms. Harris stated that the wording says recommend an application to be reconsidered. She said that the Commission could make a recommendation.

Mr. Smith stated that the Commission could make any recommendation as long as it is reasonable.

Ms. Mendonca agreed and stated that at least there is something that is published as part of the process. She asked that when it does go through the process and the Commission makes an approval if there is a timeframe where the approval is no longer valid and expires after so long.

Ms. Harris stated that she believed the applicant has one year and that it's in the standards already. She said that the Commission's approval is valid for one year and that if they wait 364 days and go get a building permit, then the building permit phase starts. They have a year to do something but they don't have to break ground.

Ms. Harris asked if the Commission wanted to continue the conversation about the TAC at the next meeting, or how they would like to proceed.

Mr. Smith stated that he is open to suggestions and personally felt that each Commission member should submit suggestions on how to fix something that is broken. He said that he would contact Ms. Harris and put together a compilation. What they don't want to do is get off-the-record meetings and

make decisions without it being public. Perhaps his concept is that the Commission can tackle the TAC at the next meeting and he asked if it is a consensus.

Ms. Mendonca asked if anyone else was curious what the members of the TAC think about it.

Ms. Harris stated that another option is that the next meeting could be a joint TAC and HSMC meeting.

Mr. Karatassos stated that they need to be told that they are going to be redone, reshaped, and reformed and that they really need to be present. He said that maybe instead of notifying the Board member to also notify the agency to make sure that the member is there too.

Ms. Harris stated that is an excellent suggestion. She said that she has been inviting the TAC members to this meeting which is why Mr. Carey is present, but she left the onus on the TAC to take the extra step.

Mr. Karatassos stated that Ms. Harris should spell it out for them because they could come back and say they didn't know.

Mr. Smith stated that it is a good suggestion and will see if it produces any results.

Ms. Harris asked if the Commission wants to have the next meeting be a joint meeting.

Mr. Smith suggested that the TAC be invited to the meeting and conduct it as a joint meeting. He said that it should be decided who will be the Chairman and the Vice-Chairman so that there won't be two Chairmen.

Mr. Harper stated that they could be invited, make the HSMC the predominate Commission, and have the TAC present to ask questions of the HSMC or give input.

Mr. Smith stated that it's to reassure them because the Commission does want the TAC's input and opinions on this.

Ms. Harris stated that it is a technical issue because she personally invited them all to the last two meetings and only one person showed up. She said that if they make it a joint meeting it makes it more official and more likely to get more people in attendance.

III. MEETING MINUTES: August 6, 2009

HSMC ACTION: Mr. Harper made a motion that the Savannah – Chatham County Historic Site and Monument Commission approve the minutes with the correction that Ms. Mary Soule was not present at the meeting. Ms. Mendonca seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Savannah - Chatham County Historic Site and Monument Commission, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 5:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ellen Harris
Preservation Planner

EH/jnp