



**SAVANNAH-CHATHAM COUNTY HISTORIC SITE AND MONUMENT
COMMISSION
HISTORICAL MARKER DECISION**

PETITIONER: GEORGIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY, Elyse Butler

FILE No.: 20-005337-HM

LOCATION: 342 DRAYTON STREET

DATE: February 4, 2021.

NATURE OF REQUEST:

The applicant is requesting approval for the installation of a Georgia Historical Society Historical Marker within the public right-of-way of 342 Drayton Street. The historical marker is proposed to be installed within the sidewalk parallel to the East Charlton Street frontage of 342 Drayton Street.

The marker is proposed to read:

Colonial Group, Inc.
Originally American Oil Company

Raymond McAllister Demere founded the American Oil Company on July 21, 1921, as Savannah's first independent wholesale petroleum company, and he opened his first service station at this site in 1923. Renamed Colonial Oil in 1933, the company is now known as Colonial Group, Inc. In 1934 the company built its first independent ocean terminal on the Savannah River, contributing to the growth and diversification of the Port of Savannah. In 1964 Colonial launched Interstate Stations, now Enmarket, for the operation of convenience stores in the Southeast. At its 100th anniversary in 2021, the fourth-generation family-owned company remained headquartered in Savannah and was one of the area's largest employers having expanded with multiple, diverse subsidiaries to become one of the largest privately-held corporations in the United States.

Erected by the Georgia Historical Society and Colonial Group, Inc.

HISTORY:

On December 3, 2020, the Board made the Decision to continue the petition to the January 7, 2021 meeting to allow the applicant to restructure the language presented on the proposed marker; however, the applicant deferred until the February 4, 2021 meeting.

FINDINGS:

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

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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.

Civil and Institutional.

Social and Humanitarian.

Industry and Commerce. Includes economics, agriculture, transportation, etc.

Local History. Includes folklore and/or local heroes.

Cultural and Ethnic History.

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

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

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

The petitioner provided the following statement regarding the theme of the historical marker:

“The Colonial Group, Inc. historical marker demonstrates the themes of Industry and Commerce, Maritime History, and Local History.

Established at a time when automobiles were leading a transformation of all aspects of American life, the American Oil Company was founded by the Demere family in 1921. Headquartered in Savannah throughout its one-hundred-year history, the company was the first independent wholesale petroleum company in the city. Since that time, the company has expanded its services from a petroleum company to include a group of subsidiaries including Colonial Oil Industries, Inc.; Colonial Terminals, Inc.; Colonial Fuel & Lubricant Services, Inc.; Enmark Stations, Inc./Enmarket; Colonial Compliance Systems, Inc.; Colonial Energy, Inc.; Colonial Towing, Inc.; Colonial Chemical Solutions, Inc.; Savannah Yacht Center, Inc; and Aqua Smart, Inc.

Thee fourth-generation, family-owned company maintains its headquarters, yacht services, marine terminal, distribution center, and several service stations (Enmark) in the Savannah- area. As such, Colonial Group has contributed to the success and expansion in Georgia’s ports as well as Savannah’s economic growth and prosperity through the creation of countless jobs that brought employment to generations of Savannahians. Further, through its kaolin terminals, Colonial Group plays a key role in Georgia’s vital paper and timber industry. Colonial Group continues to have significant economic impact on Savannah, Georgia, and the nation as one of the largest privately-held companies in the US, employing over 2,000 people and operating in nearly 40 states.

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In recognition of the significance of corporate citizens like Colonial in shaping the history of Georgia over the past century, the Georgia Historical Society has made a focused effort in recent years to acknowledge those contributions through the Georgia Business History Initiative. With the installation of this proposed historical marker, Colonial Group, Inc. joins other local companies and organizations such as Gulfstream Aerospace Corporation and Georgia Ports Authority, as well as iconic Georgia companies across the state such as The Coca-Cola Company, Delta Air Lines, and Chick-fil-A, as part of this Initiative. In this program, companies work with GHS to develop a historical marker that tells the story of that company's contribution to the development of our state and nation while maintaining the high standards of historical accuracy in the Georgia Historical Marker program. Theis executive summary of the company history is erected at a site of historical significance to the company and the community, in this case at the site of the first full-service American Oil Company (now Colonial Group, Inc.). Like all markers within the Georgia Historical Marker Program, this marker will be included in all online and print educational materials created to promote Georgia history through the marker program, including the award-winning GHS Historical Marker website and mobile app."

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 guideline is followed; The site currently does not have any "objects" other than a City of Savannah parking pay machine. The adjacent 'Andrew Low House' property includes one historical marker on the northern portion of the property and is not visible from the present marker petition location.

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

No vegetation is proposed to be altered in any way.

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

Information on the location of ground utilities was not provided. Staff recommends that the Historical Marker be located far enough away from the parking pay machine so as not to interfere with the associated 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 guideline is followed. The historical marker is to be located within a portion of sidewalk that does not include any other objects besides a City of Savannah parking pay machine.

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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.

To Staff's knowledge, the sidewalk surrounding the property is not utilized for special events.

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

The applicant is proposing the historical marker be placed within the sidewalk (public right-of-way) parallel to East Charlton Street in order to provide a safer location for pedestrians to view the historical marker, and to ensure the marker not undergo possible damage from vehicles on Drayton Street.

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

The guideline is followed. The historical marker will be visible from the accessible sidewalk surrounding the property.

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

The marker is to be visible from the sidewalk as well as the street.

The proposed site should be easy to maintain.

The marker is proposed within a presently maintained City of Savannah sidewalk.

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

The historical marker will bring light to a previously untold story of local industry within the neighborhood and enhances the 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 site includes existing mechanical (parking pay machine), however, will not require the removal of said pay machine, and will not significantly affect automobile traffic sight lines.

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

The historical marker is to bring attention to a previously uninteresting parking lot.

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.*

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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.

The guideline is followed. The historical marker is proposed to be within 100 feet of the property for which its' content represents.

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 on a freestanding pole should be the standard Georgia Historical Society (GHS) Marker style: two-sided, cast aluminum with a 30" x 42" plate size. The shape should match the GHS marker shape. The marker should have a black background with white, silver or gold text.

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 marker meets all design requirements.

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 applicant has stated that they have secured the necessary funds (\$5,000).

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*

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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 applicant has accepted and taken on the role of all future maintenance of the marker, relinquishing the requirement of supplying an escrow payment to the City of Savannah.

BOARD DECISION:

The Historic Site and Monument Commission recommends approval to the Savannah City Council for the installation of a Georgia Historical Society Historical Marker at 342 Drayton Street, with the following condition, because the petition otherwise meets the guidelines set forth within the HSMC Masterplan and Guidelines.

1. Ensure the installation does not require removal or alteration of existing above or below ground utilities.

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Kristopher Monroe 2-4-2021
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Kristopher Monroe, Chairman **Date**
Historic Site and Monument Commission

DocuSigned by:
Melanie Wilson 2-4-2021
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Melanie Wilson, Executive Director **Date**
Chatham County-Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission

DocuSigned by:
Leah G. Michalak 2-4-2021
DD74DE38FDE649C...

Leah G. Michalak, Director of Historic Preservation **Date**
Chatham County-Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission

LGM: raj