



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

**PETITIONER:** SONS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION, John Trussell  
306 Pheasant Ridge Drive  
Warner Robins, GA 31088

**FILE No.:** 22-000107-HM

**LOCATION:** JOHNSON SQUARE

**DATE:** February 3, 2022

**NATURE OF REQUEST:**

The applicant is requesting a recommendation for approval from the Historic Site and Monument Commission to install a granite memorial bench within Johnson Square on the corner of Bull and East Congress Streets.

The bench text is proposed as follows:

Top of the Bench: “Celebrating 250 years of American Freedom 1776-2026”  
Front End of the Bench: “The Sons of the American Revolution”  
Legs of the Bench: “SAR”

**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.*

*Politics and Government.*

*Military History. Includes people, places, or events.*

*Colonial History.*

*Local History. Includes folklore and/or local heroes.*

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

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

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

The standard is met. The primary theme is military history. In addition, the bench relates to local history, colonial history, and politics and government themes.

*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 Sons of American Revolution had previously placed a granite bench on MLK in Battlefield Park [file no. 21-003594-HM]. However, the text is different, and Staff has determined it meets the standard.

***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 standard is met. “Objects” are spaced to avoid crowding.

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

The bench is proposed to be adjacent to a large Live Oak tree. Staff recommends that the applicant confirm with the City’s Greenscapes Department that the marker will not damage or disturb significant tree roots.

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

The applicant indicated that 811 had been contacted the morning of January 19, 2022, to “scan the area” for utilities. Staff recommends that the applicant provide confirmation from the appropriate City Departments that the below ground utilities will not require removal or alteration.

*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 is large enough to accommodate the proposed bench. However, the Johnny Mercer bench is located adjacent to this proposed location approximately 20 feet to the east. Staff does not believe that the new bench will encroach on the existing bench.

*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.*

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The standard is met. Johnson Square is not utilized for special events on a regular basis.

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

The bench is proposed to be internal to the square, away from the streets.

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

The standard is met. The proposed site is a pedestrian traffic area and is adjacent to an existing sidewalk.

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

The standards are met. The bench is adjacent to an existing sidewalk and is easily accessible.

*The proposed site should be easy to maintain.*

The bench is proposed within a City-owned square in an area with low growing plants which are typically easy to maintain.

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

The bench will enhance an empty portion of the square.

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

The standard is 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.*

*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 standard is met. The bench is proposed to represent the entire city of Savannah. Johnson Square is the most central point of the Downtown.

***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.*

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The standard is met.

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

This information was not provided with the submittal packet.

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

The standard is met.

*Markers should be considered permanent and designed accordingly.*

The standard is met.

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

The bench is proposed to be granite, which is an enduring, non-corroding material.

***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 estimated cost of the proposed bench is \$2000 plus installation and is funded by Georgia Sons of the American Revolution, David Jessel, President.

***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.*

This information was not provided with the submittal packet. Contact the Mayor and Aldermen, or their designee, to determine the appropriate Escrow Payment.

**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. A sign was posted on the

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property fifteen days prior to the meeting. As of the writing of this report, no comments were received from the public; however, an email was received from Alderman Leggitt supporting the project.

**RECOMMENDATION TO CITY COUNCIL:**

The Historic Site and Monument Commission recommend approval to the Savannah City Council to install a granite memorial bench within Johnson Square on corner of Bull and East Congress Streets, with the following conditions, to be submitted to staff for final approval before the item can be docketed on a City Council agenda because the proposed work otherwise meets the Master Plan and Guidelines:

1. Provide a determination that existing utilities will not be affected.
2. Provide the text heights. Except the marker title, the marker text cannot be more than 1” in height, and not less than 1/2”.
3. Contact the Mayor and Aldermen, or their designee, to determine the appropriate Escrow Payment.

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*Kristofer Monroe* February 3, 2022  
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**Mr. Kristofer Monroe, Chairman** Date  
**Historic Site and Monument Commission**

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*Melanie Wilson* February 3, 2022  
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**Melanie Wilson, Executive Director** Date  
**Chatham County-Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission**

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*Leah G. Michalak* February 3, 2022  
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**Leah G. Michalak, Director of Urban Planning and Historic Preservation** Date  
**Chatham County-Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission**

MW: LGM: MG