



**SAVANNAH-CHATHAM COUNTY HISTORIC SITE AND MONUMENT
COMMISSION
MONUMENT AND PUBLIC ART RECOMMENDATION**

PETITIONER: Luciana Spracher

FILE No.: 25-004446-HM

LOCATION: Otis S. Johnson Cultural Arts Center, 201 Montgomery Street

STAFF REVIEWER: Kelli Mitchell

DATE: October 2nd, 2025

NATURE OF REQUEST:

The applicant is requesting approval to change the name of *Visual Arts Studio 1* in the Otis S. Johnson Cultural Arts Center to the *Bill Durrence Visual Arts Studio*.

FINDINGS:

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

Article E- Naming and Renaming of Public Property, Facilities and Streets.

General policy. As a general policy, the Mayor and Aldermen find that public property should be named after its principal function, location, or historical reference; however, significant community events, organizations or well-known persons with important contributions to the community, state or nation may deserve public recognition, which may occur by way of naming or renaming public rights-of-way or facilities.

Naming criteria and requirements.

Criteria. Naming or renaming of a public right-of-way or facility shall occur only when the proposed naming or renaming satisfied at least one of the following criteria:

It honors and commemorates a noteworthy person associated with the City of Savannah, Chatham County, the State of Georgia or the United States of America;

It commemorates local history, places, events or culture;

It will strengthen neighborhood identity; or

It recognizes native wildlife or natural geographical features.

Bill Durrence is a Savannah native who has worked in both Savannah and in other areas.

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Exclusions. *The following shall not be considered for purposes of naming or renaming:*

Persons that resided in the City of Savannah for less than five years, other than prominent national figures;

Durrence was born and raised in Savannah and has worked in Savannah as an adult.

Names assigned to existing public property within the City or unincorporated Chatham County where duplication of the name is likely to lead to confusion; and

The proposed naming would not lead to confusion.

Except as set forth in Section 4-1106 of this Article, commercial names where usage of such name would amount to advertising.

The proposed naming would not amount to advertising.

Considerations. *Naming requests shall consider:*

The number of residents and businesses directly affected;

Community diversity;

The standards are met.

The historical significance of preexisting name or location;

The current name of the studio is the *Visual Arts Studio I*. This name has no historical significance.

The appropriateness and compatibility of the request in relation to the existing area;

Staff finds that the proposed name meets the standard given the honoree's work in the visual arts.

The impact on emergency service delivery; and

The naming will not impact emergency service delivery.

Continuity and stability.

The standard is met.

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Additional considerations for persons. Requests to name a public right-of-way or facility in honor of a natural person should also consider the following:

Absent extraordinary or extenuating circumstances, the proposed honoree shall be deceased;

Bill Durrence has not passed and still lives in Savannah. The application provides information about his background and impact. Staff also found additional information about Durrence in the Municipal Archives finding aide for the *Bill Durrence Photographs* collection, which provides the following information:

Bill Durrence (1947-) is a life-long Savannah resident, professional photographer, and former City of Savannah alderman.

Durrence was born in the old Candler Hospital by Forsyth Park in Savannah, Georgia, in 1947. He lived all over downtown Savannah but mainly grew up in what was then considered the suburbs on DeRenne Avenue near Hess Elementary School. In 1966, at 18 years old Durrence got a job as a staff photographer for the Savannah Morning News, a local newspaper. While working there he was able to explore the Savannah area while also gaining photography experience.

Durrence enlisted in the United States Army in 1967 in which he served for three years. After his service, he went back to his photography work at the Savannah Morning News. He eventually received a bachelor's degree in Journalism from the University of Georgia with a Minor in Art and Photographic Design.

He worked for Nikon, Inc. for almost thirty years and helped create the Nikon School of Photography, in which he was an instructor for twenty-two years. Durrence also worked as a freelance photographer consulting, teaching, and leading travel photography trips and workshops. He married Barbara Gatens and they have lived in Savannah for over twenty-five years. He has over 50 years' experience as a photographer and has been teaching photography for over forty years. Durrence semi-retired in 2015 to pursue a more politically active career in Savannah.

In 2015, Durrence ran for a seat on Savannah's City Council. He was elected as alderman of the Second District, which includes Savannah's National Landmark Historic District. During his service as City alderman, he advocated for the interest of Second District citizens including improvements in zoning, crime, transportation, and housing. He left office at the end of his four-year term in 2019.

Durrence also served on the Chatham Area Transit (CAT) Board and the Metropolitan Planning Organization. He was appointed to represent Region 12 at the Georgia Municipal Association (GMA) and the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia on the Harold F. Holtz Municipal Training Institute Board. He also served on the Downtown Neighborhood Association Board, City of Savannah's Tourism Advisory Committee, and is a member of the Historic Savannah Foundation and the Telfair Museum.

Durrence is retired and lives with his wife in Washington Ward in Savannah, Georgia.

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Staff finds that the standard is met given Durrence's local and national impacts.

Whether the proposed namesake made a sustained contribution over an appreciable time period, exerted efforts of benefit or significance to local, state or national affairs and/or demonstrated leadership in governmental, cultural or historical affairs, humanitarian efforts, or community development;

Contributions that beneficially changed the nature and characteristics of the community; and

According to the application, Durrence worked a variety of roles in photography to include as a photographer with the Savannah News and as an instructor with Nikon Professional Services. He also served as an Alderman in Savannah along holding other positions within the community. The standard is met.

Achievement by a native Savannahian of national or international acclaim in a specific field of endeavor that has reflected positively on Savannah.

The standard is met.

Naming new facilities or public property.

Application requirements. All requests to name newly acquired, created or previously unnamed public property shall be made in writing and directed to the attention of the City Manager. Such requests shall include:

The precise location and description of the subject property;

This information was provided.

A thorough discussion regarding the history of the property or surrounding area, as may be applicable;

The City of Savannah website provided the following information about the Cultural Arts Center:

The Otis S. Johnson Cultural Arts Center (formerly the Savannah Cultural Arts Center), is a premiere visual and performing arts facility. It serves as a creative meeting space for residents, the local arts community, and organizations to experience, engage with, and create art.

Along with this, the same website provided the following information about the Visual Arts Wing:

The visual arts wing has five studio classrooms, three of which are specialized for metal and glass work, hand building, and wheel throwing. Each classroom is fitted with state-

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of-the-art equipment that allows students to fully realize their creative potential. Whether painting or drawing, making jewelry or pottery, our visual arts wing will enhance the artistic skills of the individuals who create here.

The name address and contact information of the request; and

This information has been provided.

An endorsement by the current Mayor, an at-large alderman or the alderman representing the district in which the property is located.

The Alderman provided a letter of support.

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RECOMMENDATION TO CITY COUNCIL:

The Historic Site and Monument Commission recommends approval to the Savannah City Council to change the name of *Visual Arts Studio 1* in the Otis S. Johnson Cultural Arts Center to the *Bill Durrense Visual Arts Studio* as requested because the proposed naming meets the standards within *Article E- Naming and Renaming of Public Property, Facilities and Streets*.

DocuSigned by:

Catherine Kostilnik

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**Catherine D. Kostilnik, Chair
Historic Site and Monument Commission**

October 2, 2025

Date

DocuSigned by:

Melanie Wilson

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**Melanie Wilson, Executive Director & CEO
Chatham County-Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission**

October 2, 2025

Date

DocuSigned by:

Caitlin Chamberlain

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**Caitlin Chamberlain, Director of Historic Preservation & Urban Design
Chatham County-Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission**

October 2, 2025

Date