




C H A T H A M   C O U N T Y - S A V A N N A H  
**METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION**

*“Planning the Future - Respecting the Past”*

M E M O R A N D U M

TO: Jay Melder, City Manager

FROM: Melanie Wilson, Executive Director & CEO 

DATE: July 1, 2024

SUBJECT: Recommendation of denial by the Historic Site and Monument Commission for the installation of a historical marker sign in Johnson Square as part of the Lafayette Trail

This memorandum serves to transmit a copy of the denial from the Historic Site and Monument Commission of the request to install a historical marker sign in Johnson Square, as part of the Lafayette Trail national program to commemorate the Marquis de Lafayette’s visit to Savannah in 1825.

On June 6, 2024, the Historic Site and Monument Commission voted to deny this request, stating that the proposed sign does not meet the City of Savannah’s Master Plan and Guidelines for Markers, Monuments, and Public Art. Their specific concerns were with the color scheme, possible overcrowding of Johnson Square, and the lack of information on the proposed sign.

The MPC Staff recommended approval of the project.

**BACKGROUND:**

The Lafayette Trail, Inc. is a non-profit group based in Maryland whose mission is to document, map, and mark General Lafayette’s footsteps during his Farewell Tour of the United States in 1824 and 1825. Their goal is to educate the public about the national significance of Lafayette’s tour and to promote a better understanding of his many contributions to American independence and national coherence in preparation for the 2024-2025 bicentennial celebrations, as noted on their website.

The signs are prefabricated by the Pomeroy Foundation and are of a uniform design for a consistency of the markers throughout the many sign locations in the United States.

**PROJECT HISTORY:**

At the Historic Site and Monument Commission Meeting of June 6, 2024, the following petition to install the sign was heard:

- Petition of American Friends of Lafayette, John Trussell | 24-002613-HM | Johnson Square | Historical Marker

MPC Staff presented the petition with the recommendation to approve the request, as follows:

*Staff recommends that the Historic Site and Monument Commission recommend approval to the Savannah City Council for the application to install the freestanding historical marker located in Johnson Square as requested because the project meets the standards in the Master Plan and Guidelines for Markers, Monuments, and Public Art.*

However, during the Commission Discussion, HSMC members felt that the sign did not meet the standards in the Master Plan and Guidelines, citing concerns with the color scheme, the potential to overcrowd Johnson Square with too many signs, and the lack of detailed information content on the signs. Their recommendation was as follows:

*The Historic Site and Monument Commission recommends denial to the Savannah City Council for installation of the freestanding historical marker located in Johnson Square, to be docketed on a City Council agenda because the proposed work does not meet the Master Plan and Guidelines.*

### **FINDINGS:**

1. The location of Johnson Square was proposed because during his stay in Savannah, the Marquis de Lafayette helped to lay the cornerstones for both the Pulaski and Greene Monuments. MPC Staff noted that the location within the square is appropriate and meets the standards.
2. Although there is a square named for Lafayette, there is not a freestanding historical marker sign like the one proposed, already in existence.
3. While the marker is slightly smaller than allowed (2' x 3') and while the letters are larger than what is typically allowed (3" – top row, 2" – middle, and 1' – bottom), the marker is already created and is a part of the National Lafayette Trail. This is a national program with markers throughout the country that have a consistent design.

### **POLICY ANALYSIS**

The Mayor and Aldermen shall evaluate the request based upon the Markers, Monuments, and Public Art Master Plan and Guidelines, specifically Chapter 4 "Evaluating Sites for Markers, Monuments, and Public Art," and Chapter 5, "Design for Markers Monuments, and Public Art."

After consideration of the information set forth in the Master Plan and Guidelines, the Mayor and Aldermen shall take one of the following actions:

1. Approve the request of American Friends of Lafayette to install the proposed historical marker sign in Johnson Square.
2. Approve the request with modifications; or
3. Deny the request to install the proposed sign.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

The Historic Site and Monument Commission recommends denial to the Savannah City Council for the installation of the freestanding historical marker located in Johnson Square, to be docketed on a City Council agenda because the proposed work does not meet the Master Plan and Guidelines.

Attachment