



SAVANNAH - CHATHAM COUNTY
HISTORIC SITE & MONUMENT COMMISSION

Petitioner: Dr. Otis S. Johnson Cultural Arts Center, C. J. Bogle

File No.: 25-004765-HM

Address: 201 Montgomery Street

PIN: 20031 02002

Staff Reviewer: Kelli Mitchell

Date: November 6, 2025

NATURE OF REQUEST:

The applicant is requesting approval of a Historical Marker at the Dr. Otis S. Johnson Cultural Arts Center (201 Montgomery Street).

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.

Arts and Humanities. Includes art, architecture, music, theater, literature, education, etc.

Science and Engineering. Includes technology, inventions, medical, communications, etc.

Civil and Institutional.

Social and Humanitarian.

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

Politics and Government.

Military History. Includes people, places, or events.

Religious History. Includes people, places, or events.

Maritime History.

Colonial History.

Local History. Includes folklore and/or local heroes.

Cultural and Ethnic History.

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Education.

Per the application, the historic marker will have themes related to architecture (arts and humanities), local history, and streets, lanes, and sidewalks. The standards are met.

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 marker will highlight the Wetter House and Savannah Female Orphan Asylum, the Oglethorpe Lane Building, and Elbert Ward. These are all well documented parts of Savannah's history. The standard is met.

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

The historic house was a prominent structure in town while Elbert Ward was first established in 1801. Staff finds that the standard is met.

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.

Staff finds that the standard is met.

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

The themes have a connection with the larger community and not only one distinct group. The standard is met.

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

The standard is met.

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

There is significant documentary evidence to commemorate the site and the Ward.

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 [hereunto 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 installation of the marker will not cause overcrowding.

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

While it will be located within a plant bed, the marker will not cause significant damage to the surrounding vegetation.

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

No utilities will be impacted.

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 site is large enough to accommodate the marker, and the marker will not encroach on the building.

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.

This portion of the site is not used for special events.

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

The proposed site is not prone to automobile accidents.

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

The standard is met.

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

The marker will be close to an existing public sidewalk.

The proposed site should not have a high probability of significant archaeology unless an archaeological study is part of the proposal.

This area has already been heavily disturbed.

The proposed site should be easy to maintain.

The site is easily accessible, allowing for maintenance on the sign.

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

The standard is met.

The installation of the object should not require the alteration or removal of existing signage (traffic, street, etc).

No existing signage will need to be removed to accommodate the marker.

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The installation of the object should not significantly affect automobile traffic sight lines.

The marker will not impact traffic sight lines.

The installation of the object should enhance the design of the overall site.
The standard is met.

The installation of the object should not require the removal or alteration of existing sidewalks, unless it is part of a comprehensive redesign for the entire site (which is generally discouraged).

The marker will not require the removal of existing sidewalks.

If periodic memorial services are likely, the site should be able to accommodate them without causing undue disruption to the neighborhood, plantings, etc.
Memorial services are not held on this portion of the property.

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.*
The proposed marker will be close to an existing public sidewalk.

Markers commemorating an event should be sited within 100 feet of the event site or adjacent to the nearest 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 proposed design will be located near an existing historic structure on the site. The standard is met.

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

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.
The proposed materials are provided in the application. The standards are met.

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Markers should be considered permanent and designed accordingly.
The marker will be permanent and will be designed as such.

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.

Per the application, the estimated fabrication cost is \$3,251 while the installation cost is \$250. The funding has been approved as part of the City of Savannah's approved FY25 Budget.

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.*

The escrow payment is part of the Cultural Resources Department's annual facility management budget.

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.*

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HSMC RECOMMENDATION TO CITY COUNCIL:

The Historic Site and Monument Commission recommends **APPROVAL** to the Savannah City Council for a Historical Marker at the Dr. Otis S. Johnson Cultural Arts Center (201 Montgomery Street) **AS REQUESTED** because the work meets the standards within the Master Plan and Guidelines for Markers, Monuments, and Public Art.

DocuSigned by:

Catherine Kostilnik

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Catherine D. Kostilnik, Chair
Historic Site and Monument Commission

November 6, 2025
Date

Signed by:

Pamela Everett

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Pamela Everett, Assistant Executive Director for
Melanie Wilson, Executive Director & CEO
Chatham County-Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission

November 6, 2025
Date

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Caitlin Chamberlain

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

November 6, 2025