



# INTEGRITY AND CONDITION ASSESSMENT RECOMMENDS PLACING SAVANNAH HISTORIC LANDMARK DISTRICT ON PRIORITY 1 THREATENED LIST

**EMBARGOED – 12:00 P.M. March 21, 2018 – SAVANNAH, GA** – The National Park Service recently released an Integrity and Condition Assessment of the Savannah National Historic Landmark District, conducted at the request of Historic Savannah Foundation. The report recommends Savannah’s district be placed on the “Threatened (Priority 1 List),” meaning the city’s National Historic Landmark District has suffered, or is in imminent danger of, a severe loss of integrity.

National Historic Landmark Districts have been determined by the Secretary of the Interior to be nationally significant in American history and culture. Savannah received its designation in 1966 and is one of the largest districts of its kind in the United States. It last was evaluated in 2002. A district is moved to Priority 1 status before becoming in danger of losing its National Historic Landmark listing.

To inform the community of these developments, answer questions and consider a list of actions to thwart the district’s decline and possible removal from the list, a panel of historic preservation specialists held a discussion at 11 a.m. today at the Kehoe Iron Works on East Broughton Street. Key speakers included Rebecca Fenwick, Director of Preservation for Lominack Kolman Smith Architects; Dr. Robin Williams, Savannah College of Art and Design Architectural History Chair; Historic Savannah Foundation President and CEO Daniel Carey; and Ellen Harris, Director of Urban Planning and Historic Preservation for the Chatham County-Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission.

Fenwick, who helped author the assessment, shed some light on how it was conducted and the criteria on which it is based.

"Completed for the National Park Service, the Integrity and Condition Assessment of Savannah's Landmark Historic District was completed by New South Associates of Pine Mountain, Georgia, and sub-consultant Lominack Kolman Smith Architects of Savannah from November of 2016 to May of 2017," Fenwick said. "The scope of work involved using the National Park Service's seven aspects of integrity – location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association – as a rubric to examine the district's current health. Rooted in on-the-ground fieldwork and an analysis of changes to the district since the district's listing in 1966, two major threats were identified – the loss of Oglethorpe's Savannah Town Plan and large-scale development. These and other analyses determined that the integrity and condition of Savannah's National Historic Landmark District is under significant threat, subsequently recommending the Savannah National Historic Landmark District be categorized as a Priority 1 Threatened National Historic Landmark."

Williams, who has served as chairman of SCAD’s Architectural History Department ever since he created it 1995 and is the lead author of a new definitive architectural guide to the city, *“Buildings of Savannah”* (2016), expressed serious concerns about the implications of the assessment.

“Savannah has long been recognized as a pioneering center of architectural preservation. In the context of the nation’s historic cities, Savannah is a major league place seen as a national role model,” Williams said. “The loss of National Historic Landmark status would be analogous to a major league sport team being demoted to the minor league. To see Savannah’s historical significance thus diminished would be very unfortunate.”

Carey – who has led HSF for nine years and, before that, worked for the National Trust for Historic Preservation for 18 years – is optimistic that with some effort and commitment from the community, the pendulum can swing the other way.

“This assessment is — in part — the result of going too long without a check-up. There’s a reason we should see doctors on a regular basis. Without objective, professional reviews, we can slide into a less-than-healthy lifestyle and wake up one day to find we have heart disease. It’s not too late, but we need to start dieting and exercising. That diet, it appears, is what the National Park Service is prescribing: go lighter on big infill and take care of Oglethorpe’s Plan,” Carey said.

Harris, who manages the City of Savannah and Chatham County’s historic preservation programs, believes small exceptions or variances have a way of adding up.

“The ‘take-away’ of this assessment is that every decision we make regarding the Savannah National Historic Landmark District — no matter how small — has a cumulative effect,” she said. “The most important question we, as a community, must now ask ourselves is, what do we do with this information going forward?”

Since Savannah earned its National Historic Landmark Designation status in 1966, approximately 28 buildings within the district have been demolished, and the Savannah Civic Center, Chatham County Courthouse and Jail, and the Cultural Arts Center have interrupted the Savannah Town Plan, which is the defining feature of the National Historic Landmark District. The most common infill types – entertainment facilities, hotels and townhouse buildings – can be seen throughout the district, according to the assessment. Over the last 50 years, 15 hotels have been built within or bordering Savannah’s Landmark District. Today, there are 15 additional hotels that are either under construction or proposed to be built.

For more information or to see the full assessment, please visit <https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/DownloadFile/598884>. For more information about Historic Savannah Foundation, please visit [www.myHSF.org](http://www.myHSF.org) or call 912-233-7787.

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