



## CITY OF ST. PETERSBURG, FLORIDA

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT

URBAN PLANNING AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION DIVISION

# STAFF REPORT

## COMMUNITY PLANNING and PRESERVATION COMMISSION MARKERS AND MONUMENTS REQUEST

Report to the Community Planning and Preservation Commission from the Urban Planning and Historic Preservation Division, Planning and Development Services Department, for Public Hearing and Executive Action rescheduled to **Tuesday, June 9, 2020 at 2:00 p.m.**, by means of communications media technology pursuant to Executive Order 20-69 issued by the Governor on March 20, 2020, and Executive Order 2020-12 issued by the Mayor on April 9, 2020. Everyone is encouraged to view the meetings on TV or online at [www.stpete.org/meetings](http://www.stpete.org/meetings).

According to Planning and Development Services Department records, *Commissioners Lisa Wannemacher* and *Copley Gerdes* both have a place of business within 2,000 feet of the subject property. *Commissioner Gwendolyn Reese* serves as President of the African American Heritage Association of St. Petersburg, Inc., the entity responsible for coordinating important aspects of this application. All other possible conflicts should be declared upon the announcement of the item.

**Case No.:** MM 20-90600001

Address: St. Petersburg City Hall  
Location: 175 5<sup>th</sup> Street No. (alternatively 440 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue No.)  
PIN: 19-31-17-74466-020-0040  
Owner: City of St. Petersburg  
Applicant: City of St. Petersburg  
Request: Installation of a historic marker to memorialize an event.

**PROJECT OVERVIEW:** The City of St. Petersburg is requesting approval to install a marker in the City Hall stairwell commemorating the 1966 removal of a racially offensive mural. This historic event marked a seminal moment in St. Petersburg's history during the Civil Rights Movement, and contributes significantly to St. Petersburg's local history and heritage.

**REVIEW OF MARKERS AND MONUMENTS:** In 2001, City Council adopted an official policy regarding markers and monuments. Under the criteria of this policy, if the proposed marker is used to commemorate an historic event, building or person or group, it must be reviewed by the Community Planning and Preservation Commission ("CPPC") for consistency with the adopted policy. In this role, the CPPC is reviewing the application to decide whether the event, that is the subject of the proposed marker, made a significant contribution to history at a local, state, or national level, and certify that the proposed text is historically accurate.

- A. For the city of St. Petersburg to consider the placement of a marker or monument on public property, the following criterion must be met:

1. To commemorate an Event, the event must have made a significant contribution to the history and culture at a local, regional, statewide, or national level. The location of the marker must have an association to the event or show just cause for its placement elsewhere within the City.

In 1942, George Hill Snow, local artist, was commissioned under a federal art project of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) toward which the City of St. Petersburg provided some materials and other items. Two canvases, seven-by-ten feet each, were designed to hang over the mid-landing of the grand staircase, between the first and second floors of City Hall.

The murals illustrated scenes of early St. Petersburg and nearby Pass-a-Grille Beach. One of the murals included African American minstrels playing music before a group of white beachgoers, a scene viewed by many as being racially offensive. Together, the two murals would remain on display from their time of installation in 1945 through December 1966.

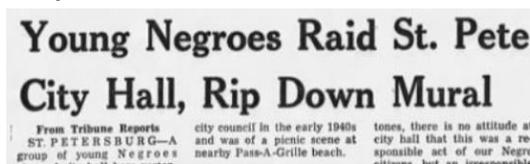
In December 1966, following a letter from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (“SNCC”) asking for the mural to be removed was ignored, twenty-five-year-old Joseph Waller, then-vice chairman of the Florida chapter of SNCC, physically removed the offensive mural from the wall. Approximately 10 individuals participated in the historic action. Waller was arrested, charged, and convicted of felony theft and spent at least 22 months in prison prior to having his rights restored by the Florida Cabinet in 2000.

This seminal moment in St. Petersburg’s history during the Civil Rights Movement was reported through local and national news media and other related literature describing the history of, and African American experience in, the City of St. Petersburg. Detailed news reports were published throughout Florida, as far north as upstate New York, and as far west as Los Angeles, California.

*St. Petersburg Times, December 30, 1966*



*Tampa Tribune, December 30, 1966*



*Pensacola News Journal, December 30, 1966*



*Miami Herald, December 30, 1966*



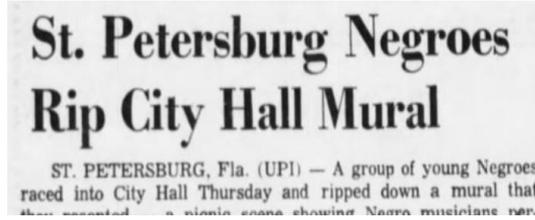
*Orlando Sentinel, December 30, 1966*



*The Miami News, December 30, 1966*



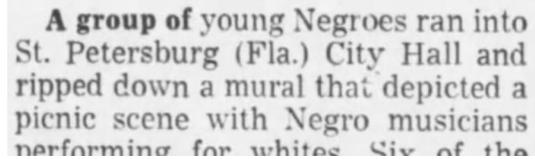
*Atlanta Constitution, December 30, 1966*



*The Post-Standard (Syracuse), December 30, 1966*



*Los Angeles Times, December 30, 1966*



*Oakland Tribune, December 30, 1966*



City staff finds that the proposed text is consistent with these historic accounts and recommends approval, as presented.

**B. Program**

**2. Non-Standard Marker Program: A Non-Standard Marker may be used if a citizen would like to Commemorate or Memorialize an event, person, or building, with a custom designed marker.**

- *The applicant must coordinate all the design and manufacturing of the marker.*

The applicant is coordinating all design and manufacturing of the proposed marker.

- *The applicant will be required to present the design, proposed text, location, and justification for the marker for review by Urban Planning and Historic Preservation staff.*

The proposed text is as follows and included in Attachment A:

“This plaque commemorates a seminal event in St. Petersburg’s history during the Civil Rights Movement.

Until 1966, two murals by painter and muralist George Snow Hill hung in this grand staircase. The murals illustrated scenes of early St. Petersburg. One of which, in this space, depicted a scene viewed by many as being racially offensive. Visitors to City Hall, including African Americans, were subjected to the mural for two decades.

In December 1966, after a letter from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee asking for the mural to be removed was ignored, twenty-five-year-old Joseph Waller physically removed the offensive mural from the wall. He was arrested, charged, and convicted of felony theft and spent at least 22 months in prison prior to having his rights restored by the Florida Cabinet in 2000.

This wall shall forever remain blank in recognition of this act and in tribute to the countless contributions our African American residents have made to the City of St. Petersburg.”

The proposed marker is a custom bronze plaque with single-line border, dark oxide background, leatherette texture, and raised text, as noted above. The following sample image demonstrates what the marker will generally look like:



The proposed marker will be placed in the stairwell at the location of the original mural, now preserved as a blank space in recognition of this historic action.

- *The applicant will be responsible for all costs associated with the marker including the manufacture, construction, permitting, and maintenance fee.*

The applicant, City of St. Petersburg, shall be responsible for all costs associated with the marker, including the manufacture and installation. Due to its location in City Hall, the marker will be incorporated into the building’s general maintenance plan.

- *When the marker is associated with an historic Event, Building, or Person, the application shall be reviewed by the CPPC and if the building is a local landmark, the applicant will also require COA approval.*

St. Petersburg City Hall is a local historic landmark, originally listed in the St. Petersburg Register of Historic Places on October 18, 1990 (Application HPC 90-01). Since the requirement for a separate Certificate of Appropriateness (“COA”) applies only to exterior installations, a COA is not required in this instance.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

City Administration and Staff finds that the proposed marker meets the criteria for the City's Markers and Monuments Policy and recommends the Community Planning and Preservation Commission **APPROVE** the contents of the marker **WITH CONDITIONS**:

1. The CPPC is certifying the proposed marker's historic accuracy and overall importance to St. Petersburg's local history and heritage;
2. Installation shall be coordinated through the City Development Administration, City Architect, and Real Estate and Property Management, Building Maintenance; and
3. Relocation or removal, if required, shall be conducted in accordance with the City's Markers and Monuments Policy.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

- A. Proposed Text

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**ATTACHMENT A:  
Proposed Text**

This plaque commemorates a seminal event in St. Petersburg's history during the Civil Rights Movement.

Until 1966, two murals by painter and muralist George Snow Hill hung in this grand staircase. The murals illustrated scenes of early St. Petersburg. One of which, in this space, depicted a scene viewed by many as being racially offensive. Visitors to City Hall, including African Americans, were subjected to the mural for two decades.

In December 1966, after a letter from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee asking for the mural to be removed was ignored, twenty-five-year-old Joseph Waller physically removed the offensive mural from the wall. He was arrested, charged, and convicted of felony theft and spent at least 22 months in prison prior to having his rights restored by the Florida Cabinet in 2000.

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