

Luciana Spracher

From: albert oetgen <albert.oetgen@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, May 15, 2023 9:15 AM
To: Squares
Subject: [Caution - External Email] PROPOSAL FOR NAMING SQUARE AT ABERCORN AND EAST WAYNE

I propose that the square at Abercorn and East Wayne streets, formerly named for John C, Calhoun, be named "W.W. Law Square."

W.W. Law was arguably the most influential Savannahian of the 20th Century. Not only did he lead what has been praised as the singularly peaceful desegregation of Savannah's public facilities and private businesses, he became involved in historic preservation efforts designed to preserve African American history and prevent displacement of low-income families.

His efforts combined the two most historically significant developments of 20th Century Savannah -- the Civil Rights and Historic Preservation movements. Together, these reforms set the stage for an economic renaissance grounded in the explosive growth of tourism, filmmaking and, most recently, the attraction of new and diverse industries to the city and immediate region.

As such, honoring Mr. Law meets the criteria that the honoree be a "noteworthy person associated with the City of Savannah, Chatham County, the State of Georgia or the United States of America.

Naming the square for Mr. Law would also meet the criteria that the naming commemorates local history, places, events or culture. In his career, Mr. Law affected all of those things.

Furthermore, "W.W. Law Square" would strengthen neighborhood identity by focusing on the Black history in the area, including efforts to locate and identify slave and free black burial grounds that were once located in the area.

Several hundred residents in the area would be affected by this re-naming. Tourist traffic could increase, but the impact would not be significantly more robust than elsewhere in that part of the city. The square is a short walk east from heavily-trafficked Monterey Square, location of the Mercer-Williams House Museum. A positive benefit would accrue to the Massie Heritage Center, a museum that caters to children, located on the Abercorn/East Wayne square. Exhibits and tours of the Massie facility would be enhanced by the nearby commemoration of W.W. Law, whose commitment to education was part of his lifelong activism.

<https://www.sccps.com/schools/massie/Pages/default.aspx>

Honoring W.W. Law would naturally buttress the diversity of the community and the immediate neighborhood.

The historical significance of the preexisting name has been considered by the City Council and the decision to rename the square is grounded in that consideration.

Naming the square for W.W. Law is appropriate and compatible not only because of the history of African-American Savannahians in the immediate neighborhood, but also because of Mr. Law's community-wide influence.

The renaming is likely to have minimal impact on emergency service delivery in the area.

Honoring W.W. Law in this way represents a continuity of historical considerations. As Savannahians rethink their history in the 21st Century, the strides made by Black Savannahians since the Civil War are part of a progressive continuum.

Furthermore, the renaming would represent stability for its sensible recognition of how his leadership led Savannahians into a new era of equal rights and toward a level field of opportunity.

Mr. Law died in 2002.

He made a sustained contribution over an appreciable time period. He was president of the local NAACP branch from the 1950s to the mid-1970s, and continued to work for equal justice after resigning that post until his death. He lectured on Black history from the 1950s until his death, and became seriously engaged in historic preservation from the late 1960s until his death.

His efforts significantly benefited local, state and national affairs. He pressed for better education facilities and fair treatment by the criminal justice system on the local, state and national level, frequently joining lawsuits to force the issues he confronted. He led efforts in cultural and historical affairs., leading the way to the establishment of a Civil Rights Museum, among other institutions that have enriched Savannah's cultural profile and attracted local visitors and out-of-town tourists by the thousands. His humanitarian efforts involved pressing for better health care access for underserved communities, as well as private assistance to individuals who turned to him for help. Correspondence in his extensive papers archived at City Hall shows these efforts stretched from the 1940s until his death.

His lifelong activism changed the nature of Savannah. Perhaps most dramatically, the opposition and criticism that he experienced during his early career transformed in the 1970s, after which he was showered with honors for his work. He also received citations from national organizations -- the NAACP being only one of them -- reflecting positively on Savannah.

Applicant information:

Albert Oetgen
453 Riverside Drive
Schuyler, Va. 22969
917-364-6956.

I am a native Savannahian and graduate of Blessed Sacrament Parochial School and Benedictine Military School. I am currently residing on Columbus Drive in Savannah, working on finalizing a biography of Mr. Law. The mailing address is 235 Columbus Dr., Savannah, Ga. 31405.

I have asked one of the city council members for a letter of support. I expect to receive it momentarily.

The proposed name is:

W.W. Law Square

The significance of the name is established in the above information. In addition, here are links to two articles I have written for the Savannah Morning News that illustrate Mr. Law's significance to Savannah:

<https://www.savannahnow.com/story/news/history/2023/01/01/savannah-civil-rights-icon-w-w-law-learned-activism-from-grandmother/69764473007/>

<https://www.savannahnow.com/story/lifestyle/features/2023/02/20/formerly-enslaved-georgia-man-inspired-civil-rights-activist-ww-law/69898331007/>

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Luciana Spracher

From: albert oetgen <albert.oetgen@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, May 15, 2023 2:22 PM
To: Squares
Subject: [Caution - External Email] SUPPLEMENT TO MY PROPOSAL FOR THE ABERCORN/EAST WAYNE SQUARE NAMING

I received the note copied below from Mayor Johnson this afternoon.

I believe it fulfills the requirement that the proposal should have the support of the mayor, an at-large council person or the 2nd District council person.

If not, please let me know.

Thank you,

Albert Oetgen

xxxxx

Mr. Oetgen,

Thank you for reaching out.

I believe that I have already endorsed the consideration of Mr. Law, but if it has not occurred, I will do so.

Thanks.

Van

Van R. Johnson, II (he/his/him)

Mayor

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