

STEVE WATKINS, MAYOR
NAOMI SHEPHERD, CITY CLERK



ALDERMAN:
JOE BROOKS, WARD 1
BRIDGETT M. PETERS, WARD 2
RONALD HOLLOWAY, WARD 3
STEVE NEELY, WARD 4
HARRY WHEAT III, AT-LARGE

Veto Message from the Mayor to the City of Quitman Board of Aldermen

Date Issued: March 29, 2023

Veto Message No. 004

RECEIVED

MAR 29 2023

REFERENCE: VETO NO. 004

CITY OF QUITMAN

**CONCERNING THE MOTION MADE BY ALDERMAN HARRY WHEAT
AND SECONDED BY ALDERMAN STEVE NEELY
IN RESPONSE TO THE ADDED AGENDA ITEM NUMBER 9.j.
"QUITMAN HISTORIC DISTRICT"**

The following background information contains important dates governing the City of Quitman Historic Preservation Commission and the City of Quitman Historic Downtown/Mill District:

- June 15, 1999 City of Quitman Ordinance No. 323 was signed creating the document used to appoint a Preservation Commission in the City of Quitman.
- April 1, 2016 The Quitman Historic Downtown/Mill District was drawn-up by Jeff Rosenberg, CSRS Inc. with a map of the Quitman Historic Downtown/Mill District including a listing of each property address located within the Quitman Historic Downtown/Mill District.
- March 2, 2021 Ordinance No. 385, an ordinance to create the City of Quitman Historic Downtown/Mill District, was presented to the Board of Aldermen by Mayor Eddie Fulton.

Alderman James Buchanan offered a motion to approve Ordinance No. 385 for the creation of the City of Quitman Historic Downtown/Mill District using the map designed by Jeff Rosenberg, CSRS Inc. on April 1, 2016.

Alderman Ronald Holloway seconded the motion, and the vote was as follows:

Alderman Bridgett Peters	Voted	NO
Alderman Ronald Holloway	Voted	YES
Alderman James Buchanan	Voted	YES
Alderman Harry Wheat	Voted	YES

(Alderman Joe Brooks was not present at the meeting.)

Mayor Eddie Fulton declared the motion carried.

At the Regular Board of Alderman meeting for March 21, 2023, Alderman Harry Wheat added Item Number 9.j. to the agenda listed as "Quitman Historic District." During Alderman Wheat's presentation, leading up to his motion, Alderman Wheat explained that he was seeking to abolish the Historic District because the Commission was administering their authority in a discriminatory manner. The only concrete example he used to make this point was the construction work performed at M&M Florist by the owner, Hunter Bonner. (On March 14, 2023, the Quitman Historic Preservation Commission conducted a special called meeting, and approved Hunter Bonner for a Certificate of Appropriateness for construction work at M&M Florist.) I assured him that the Quitman Historic Preservation Commission was not administering their authority in a discriminatory manner and advised that it would be best to table this issue until I could contact the Department of Archives & History. I informed him that I had questions concerning whether or not this vote from the Board of Aldermen conformed to procedures set forth by the Mississippi Department of Archives & History and what the ramifications could possibly be for the City of Quitman. Alderman, Steve Neely spoke up and stated that there was no need to table the issue. With that, Alderman Harry Wheat stated that he wanted to make a motion at this time.

Alderman Harry Wheat made a motion to dissolve the Historic Downtown-Mill District in the City of Quitman which includes the Quitman Historic Downtown/Mill District map and each property address located within the Historic Downtown/Mill District

Alderman Steve Neely seconded the motion, and a roll call vote was taken.

The vote was as follows:

Ward 1 Alderman Joe Brooks	Voted	NO
Ward 2 Alderwoman Bridgett Peters	Voted	YES
Ward 4 Alderman Steve Neely	Voted	YES
Alderman At Large Harry Wheat	Voted	YES

(Ward 3 Alderman Ronald Holloway was not present at the meeting.)

Mayor Steve Watkins declared the motion passed.

Therefore, I, Steve Watkins, Mayor of the City of Quitman, Mississippi operating under the authority and in accordance with Miss. Code Ann. § 21-3-15 *et seq.* do hereby VETO the above Order issued by the City of Quitman Board of Aldermen on March 21, 2023, concerning dissolving the Quitman Historic Downtown/Mill District, for the following reasons:

The Quitman Historic Commission is a committee of volunteer members providing an invaluable service to the City of Quitman. The Commission's actual work did not get started until I took office in July 2021. Historic Preservation work is not a sprint, but rather a marathon. As our Historic Preservation Commission committee members receive the necessary training and gain experience, the fruit of their efforts will be revealed over the coming years and decades. Dissolving the Quitman Historic Downtown/Mill District, leaves the Historic Preservation Commission with nowhere to work for the City of Quitman.. Their only authority lies within the Historical District. In my estimation, dissolving the District is equivalent to dissolving the Commission. I have placed phone calls and emails to the Certified Local Government Coordinator, Meredith Massey, but have been unable to speak with her due to her involvement in a

conference that started last week and extends into this week. I will be consulting with her to receive answers to my questions when she arrives back in her office.

However, at this time, from my understanding of reading City of Quitman Ordinance No. 323 and City of Quitman Ordinance No. 383, I am reasonably sure there is a requirement for a public notice/public comment period before the board can even vote on such an action as dissolving the Quitman Historic Preservation District. I am also reasonably sure that a replacement district has to be drawn up and approved by the National Park Service, Department of the Interior and the Mississippi Department of Archives & History prior to the current district being altered, removed, dissolved, or abolished.

I am also concerned whether or not Alderman Harry Wheat's decision to make an immediate motion to dissolve the Quitman Historical Downtown/Mill District, rather than table the issue to give time for guidance from the Mississippi Department of Archives & History, will cause the City of Quitman to lose Certified Local Government status and thus lead to the City of Quitman becoming ineligible for receiving the \$100,000 Certified Local Government Grant for which it has applied.

I am also unsure whether or not residents and businesses will be able to obtain Ad Valorem (Property Tax) Abatements or any other grants without having a Historic District or a Certified Local Government in place.

With the information I have available today, the possible consequences of recklessly dissolving the Quitman Historic Downtown/Mill District, as has been done by the Board of Alderman with the above mentioned motion second, and vote, without proper guidance from the Mississippi Department of Archives & History, are of such severity that I am compelled to VETO this order.

This VETO message was presented to the City Clerk for proper dissemination on Wednesday, March 29, 2023.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Steve Watkins". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Steve" and last name "Watkins" clearly legible.

Mayor Steve Watkins

April 3, 2023

Board of Aldermen, City of Quitman
101 E. Church Street
Quitman, MS 39355

Re: Motion to Dissolve the City of Quitman Historic District

To whom it may concern:

It has come to our attention that the City of Quitman's Board of Aldermen made a motion to dissolve Ordinance No. 385 that created the locally designated Quitman Historic District, at their regular meeting on March 21, 2023. As you know, the Certified Local Government program is a federal-state-local partnership between the National Park Service, the Mississippi Department of Archives and History and the City of Quitman. The Certified Local Government (CLG) designation is given to communities that have made a commitment to historic preservation by passing a historic preservation ordinance establishing a local historic preservation commission to assist with preservation planning and activities within the municipality or county.

There are basic CLG program requirements that must be fulfilled annually in order for a community to remain in good standing at the state and federal level. The goal of the CLG program is for a community to develop their own preservation plan that the local government adopts and enforces, which will ultimately ensure the long-term preservation of a community's historic resources. Quitman has been steadily working on its preservation programming for over 20 years.

While the City adopted its local enabling historic preservation ordinance in 1999 (Ordinance No. 323), significant progress was not evident until Quitman made a formal commitment to historic preservation by applying to become a CLG community in 2013. Since that time, Quitman was awarded a CLG grant to hire a preservation consultant to survey and create a National Register nomination that resulted in the listing of the Quitman Downtown-Mill National Register Historic District. This nomination and survey was the basis for the creation of the locally designated Quitman Historic District (Ordinance No. 385) that was adopted by the Board of Aldermen in March 2021. The formal local district designation is what ultimately gave members of the Quitman Historic Preservation Commission the ability to review applications for Certificates of Appropriateness for any exterior alterations, new construction, or demolition of buildings located inside the district boundaries.

Seeing the considerable amount of time and effort that has gone into developing Quitman's preservation program, we believe the Board's attempt to abolish Ordinance No. 385 to be shortsighted. Dissolving the local Quitman Historic District essentially reverses the achievements and progress that has been made over a period of two decades. Additionally, local designation could allow a property to be owner potentially eligible for local tax abatement, if the city has chosen to adopt such a program as provided by state law in section 17-21-5, Mississippi Code of 1972 as amended. Any local tax abatement program based on this law exempts a property owner who has rehabilitated a building within the district from any or all municipal ad valorem taxes (excluding school district taxes) for a period of not more than seven years. Quitman has adopted such program and removing the local district designation would no longer allow property owners access to the local tax abatement.

As your formal preservation partner, MDAH does not support the motion to dissolve the existing Quitman Historic District. This not only would take away local property owner's access to local tax abatements, but also could jeopardize Quitman's standing in the CLG program, and therefore its access to some grant funding. We also believe the Board of Aldermen and Mayor should consult with the city's attorney to ensure proper legal procedures were followed. It is our understanding that this item was added to the regular meeting's agenda without proper public notice. The procedure to designate and amend local historic district ordinances can be found in Quitman's enabling historic preservation ordinance.

We urge the Quitman Board of Aldermen to carefully consider the implications that this action would have on a program that has taken years to build. Local designation adds value to a community by protecting its historic resources and without the local ordinance in place, the Quitman Historic Preservation Commission can no longer support this effort moving forward.

Should you have any questions about the information provided in this letter, the Certified Local Government program, or the benefits of historic preservation, please contact me directly at mmassey@mdah.ms.gov.

Sincerely,



Meredith Massey
Chief of Preservation Planning
Historic Preservation Division

Cc: Barry White; Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer & Director, Historic Preservation Division
The Honorable Steve Watkins; Mayor, City of Quitman
Carole Loper; Chair, Quitman Historic Preservation Commission
Becky Watkins; Secretary, Quitman Historic Preservation Commission

See attachments.

Differences between the National Register of Historic Places and Local Designation

Although often confused, National Register listing is not the same thing as local landmark designation, nor is a National Register district the same thing as a locally-designated historic district. While eligibility requirements are similar, the designations are completely separate processes, function under different legal authorities, and one has no direct bearing on the other.

The National Register is maintained by the U.S. Department of the Interior. In Mississippi the program is administered by the National Register Coordinator at the Historic Preservation Division of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. By contrast, a local district is designated under a local ordinance by a local government. That being said, communities that have existing National Register districts often reference the boundaries of that district as a basis for local district boundaries.

Under federal law, it is expected that Certified Local Governments (CLG) designate local historic districts and/or local landmarks and be actively involved in their preservation. The role played by the Historic Preservation Division of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History in designating a local district is very small. Under state law, all that is required of a local government is that MDAH be given an opportunity to comment on the proposed district. MDAH does not tell the local government what to designate. In the case of local landmarks, the local government is not required to contact MDAH for comments. By contrast, in order to list a district or an individual property on the National Register, MDAH, in its role as the State Historic Preservation Office, is highly involved and works very closely with the applicant through all stages of the nomination.

There are a number of benefits associated with both the National Register designation as well as local designation. National Register listed properties, either individually listed or a contributing resource within a National Register district, are eligible for the Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit. In Mississippi, if a property has this designation and is income-producing, it could be eligible for a 20% Federal Credit and a 25% State Credit. The National Register designation also gives some properties access to CLG grant funding.

Local historic district designation helps retain the historic character of the buildings included within the district boundaries, protects efforts of residents and property owners, promotes higher property values, and regulates the design of new buildings within the local historic district to ensure compatibility. Additionally, local designation makes a property owner potentially eligible for local tax abatement if the city has chosen to adopt such a program.

The resources and benefits that National Register designation and local designation can provide often prove to be invaluable in communities hoping to preserve their culture and heritage. Should you have any questions about these programs, feel free to contact the Historic Preservation Division of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History.