

Policy Briefing Summary

City Council



Regarding:	Resolution allowing the installation of a sign recognizing the sale of enslaved persons in Court Square
Staff Contact(s):	Jeffrey Werner, Historic Preservation and Design Planner, James Freas, Deputy City Manager
Presenter:	James Freas, Deputy City Manager, Michael Goddard, NDS Interim Director
Date of Proposed Action:	October 19, 2026

Issue

A group of citizens, identified as the Court Square Enslavement Memorial (CSEM) group, have requested that Council place a marker on a lightpost near to the building known as "0 Court Square" and that this marker should read, " Auction Block of Enslaved Persons; Early 1800s - 1865; Removed 1920s." The Historic Resources Committee has submitted the attached statement on the proposal.

Background / Rule

There is an extensive history of discussion around memorializing the sale of enslaved people in Court Square, which is well documented in the attached statement from the Historic Resources Committee. Ultimately, any sign or memorial must be approved by Council.

Analysis

Staff has identified four potential directions for Council to consider:

1. Council could accept the proposal as submitted. A resolution has been provided to that effect.
2. Council could advise the Court Square Enslavement Memorial group to consider the feedback they have received from the Historic Resources Committee and City Council and bring back a new, different proposal.
3. In anticipation of upcoming planning for Court Square Park, and the establishment of our Public Art Commission, Council could direct staff to work with the Commission and in conjunction with the park planning process, to consider some form of memorial recognizing the City's history of the sale of enslaved persons. This work should be done consistent with the Blue Ribbon Commission report recommendations and with public engagement. Unless Council directs that Court Square planning be re-prioritized, the current Parks Master Plan anticipates this work in 2035.
4. Council could deny the request and take no action.

Financial Impact

Recommendation

Recommended Motion (if Applicable)

Attachments

1. FINAL-2026-09-21_HRC Position Auction Block

2. CSEM_Resolution