

Lenny Curry, Mayor

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February 26, 2021

Dr. Cheryl Brown, Director, Council Secretary
The Honorable Randy White, NCSPHS Chair
The Honorable Ronald Salem, TEU Chair
And Members of the City Council
117 West Duval Street
Jacksonville, Florida 32202

RE: Historic Preservation Commission Advisory Report / Ordinance No. 2021-64/ Naming of Henry L. Aaron Field at J.P. Small Memorial Park Stadium.

Dear Director Brown, Honorable Council Member and NCSPHS Chair White, Honorable Council Member and TEU Chair Salem, and Honorable Members of the City Council:

Pursuant to sections 122.103(b) and (c), Ordinance Code, the Historic Preservation Section forwards the Report and Historic Preservation Commission's Advisory Recommendation regarding Ordinance 2021-64, naming the "Henry L. Aaron Field at J.P. Small Memorial Park Stadium"

P&DD Recommendation APPROVE

JHPC Vote: 4-0 APPROVE

| | |
|---------------------------|--------|
| Jack C. Demetree, Chair | Aye |
| Andres Lopera, Vice-Chair | Aye |
| Erik Kasper, Secretary | Absent |
| Ryan P. Davis | Absent |
| Maiju Stansel | Aye |
| Maximilian Glober | Absent |
| Timothy J. Bramwell | Aye |

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at your convenience.

Sincerely,



Christian Popoli
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Jack C. Demetree, III
Chairman
Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission

MEMORANDUM

TO: Chairman and Members
Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission

FROM: Christian Popoli, City Planner Supervisor – Planning and Development

RE: *Designation of Henry L. Aaron Field at J. P. Small Memorial Stadium*

DATE: February 24, 2021

Consistent with Chapter 122.105 of the Jacksonville Ordinance Code on addressing Public buildings, public facilities and public parks naming and renaming procedures, requests to name or rename public facilities, parks and buildings require a review and recommendation from the Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission. In making a report and recommendation, the Commission shall address the following criteria:

1. The origin of the existing public building, public facility, or public park name, if applicable;
2. Any historical significance of the existing public building, public facility or public park;
3. Whether there are any historical structures or landmarks on the subject property
4. Whether the existing building name, name of public facility, or public park name is part of a common theme of names throughout the community where such building, park or facility is located;
5. The age of the public building, public facility or public park name
6. Whether there are other public buildings, public facilities, or public parks with the same or similar name; and
7. Whether the person (or persons) to whom the public building, public facility or public park is proposed to be named or renamed has contributed to the development of, or is a reminder of the history and/or culture of the City, State, or Nation.

Present Street Name: **J.P. Small Memorial Park Stadium**

Proposed Street Name: **Henry L. Aaron Field at J. P. Small Memorial Stadium**

Reason for Change: In recognition of the contributions of Henry L. Aaron to the game of baseball and to Jacksonville's unique history, the field located at J. P. Small Memorial Park Stadium, be named in his honor.

Background:

Beginning in 1911, the field at J.P. Small Memorial Park has been host to amateur and professional baseball for over 100 years. Having been known by different names, ranging from Barrs Field, Myrtle Avenue Ball Park, Joseph H. Durkee Athletic Field, and the current site name of J.P Small Memorial Park Stadium, the field has been home to some of the most notable players in baseball history. Having served as the home field of many baseball teams, from school teams to minor league teams, as well as the location for spring training for several major league teams, it has a rich and complicated past.

Report and Recommendation:

The origin of the existing public building, public facility, or public park name, if applicable:

The current structure was erected in 1937. The main structure, stands and dugouts were designed by locally noteworthy architectural firm of Marsh & Saxelbye. These structures remain largely unchanged, with some additional upgrades and refurbishment, the exterior and interior are in excellent condition. The current name of the Local Landmark site is the J.P. Small Memorial Park. The name is honorific of the famed coach and educator for 33 years at Stanton High School, Mr. J.P. Small.

Any historical significance of the existing public building, public facility or public park:

The history of the ballfield is long and illustrious. The field has been the home to many local teams, including local school teams, Negro League baseball teams, minor league and farm teams for professional baseball teams and spring training facilities for several major league teams. The site was cited as the home of the first Florida Georgia game. The field was also used for other special events, even once host to the Ringling Brothers & Barnum & Bailey Combined Circus and Show. The names of noteworthy baseball players who have played on this field are numerous. They include players such as Hank Aaron, Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Ted Williams, Connie Mack, and Bill Terry, The City's very own James Weldon Johnson, and many more.

Whether there are any historical structures or landmarks on the subject property:

The main structures and the site overall are a Locally Designated Landmark (LM-03-3) designated in 2003 by Ordinance 2003-0288. Additionally the park is individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Whether the existing building name, name of public facility, or public park name is part of a common theme of names throughout the community where such building, park or facility is located:

The current park itself, J.P. Small Memorial Park Stadium, is named for an influential teacher and coach from Stanton High School. The park itself has had several names throughout modern history, including Barrs Field, Myrtle Avenue Ball Park and Joseph H. Durkee Athletic Field, the naming system doesn't have a common theme. The names have been in reference to the location, influential citizens, and leaders in the community. The field itself has always been associated with the park at large, and there is no clear evidence the playing field itself has held any name different than the park overall.

The age of the public building, public facility or public park name:

The current name of the park, J.P. Small Memorial Park Stadium, was set by City Council on January 22, 1980, by resolution 1979-1299.

Whether there are other public buildings, public facilities, or public parks with the same or similar name:

Staff is not aware of any other public facility named for either J.P. Small or Henry L. Aaron (Hank Aaron).

Whether the person (or persons) to whom the public building, public facility or public park is proposed to be named or renamed has contributed to the development of, or is a reminder of the history and/or culture of the City, State, or Nation:

By 1938, the Jacksonville Tars had come under the ownership of Crowther and Jimmie Boyd, and were made a farm team for the New York Giants. Once he acquired the team in 1952, Samuel Wolfson signed a new contract making the Tars a farm team for the Milwaukee Braves, as well as hired former major league player Ben Geraghty (1912-1963) as manager. In 1953, the Jacksonville Braves along with the Savannah team were the first teams in the Class A - South Atlantic League to break the color line when Wolfson hired three African American players, Henry "Hank" Aaron, Horace Garner, and Felix Mantilla. The attendance at games skyrocketed as the presence of these three players drew the curious as well as many African American fans to Durkee Field. Although withstanding a full season of verbal abuse generated by racial hatred as well as forced to seek accommodations in private homes, nineteen-year old Aaron went on to have a successful season hitting twenty-two homeruns and achieving a batting average of .362. After being named the Most Valuable Player in the League and leading the Jacksonville Braves (Formerly the Jacksonville Tars) to the pennant, Aaron was promoted to the Milwaukee Braves in 1954. Once in the majors, Henry "Hank" Aaron went on to baseball fame by breaking Babe Ruth's career home run record by hitting his 715th homerun on April 8, 1974, and ended his career with a total of 755 homeruns. A native of Puerto Rico, Felix Mantilla also played in the majors first for the Braves and

later for the New York Mets, Boston Red Sox, and ending his career with the Houston Astros in 1966.

Recommendation:

Based on the best evidence available, the Planning and Development Department recommends that the proposed naming of Henry L. Aaron Field at J. P. Small Memorial Stadium be approved by the Commission.



Aerial view of park and ballfield



Current park circa 2006.



Early picture of the grandstand building



Early picture of the grandstand building