

# How Savannah Can Start Benefitting from an Archaeology Ordinance

Savannah Archaeological Advocacy Group (SAAG)

Savannah is Georgia's oldest city and holds national and international significance. Its history drives a massive economic engine. *This history, most abundant in its archaeological sites, is being destroyed daily.* Savannah can stop this destruction **without** slowing or stopping development.

## Lost Opportunities

Savannah lags behind more than 269 cities, including ones in Mississippi and Alabama, in protection of its priceless archaeological sites. During the past 30 years Savannah has revisited an archaeology ordinance but taken no action. In that time, hundreds of archaeological sites have been decimated. The irreplaceable information they contain is now lost forever, but it is not too late to save what remains.

## Five Myths About Archaeology

**Myth 1: Archaeology will slow or stop development.** Wrong. An archaeology ordinance will enable developers to know exactly what they need to do far in advance, allowing archaeology to be completed prior to construction start dates.

**Myth 2: Archaeology is cost-prohibitive.** Incorrect. An archaeology ordinance will allow developers to plan accordingly and include the low cost of doing archaeology along with other routine costs of developing a property. Archaeology costs are negligible on most projects and especially on many of the current projects such as the \$270 million dollar development along River Street.

**Myth 3: Developers will not develop if they are required to have archaeology done on their property.** Not true. Other cities with archaeological ordinances have shown no decrease in the level of development as a result of archaeology ordinances.

**Myth 4: A City Archaeologist position is an unnecessary expense.** False. A dedicated position will save the city money by helping insure front-end planning for developers, on-call expertise available for all city departments, lower cost and quicker "in-house" archaeological investigations, and the competent creation and execution of MOAs, PAs, Scopes of Work, RFPs, and RFQs. In 2011, San Antonio, TX saved "several hundred thousand dollars" by having a City Archaeologist.

**Myth 5: Few in Savannah really care about its archaeological sites.** Untrue. Residents, businessmen and women, and tourists care. The reason policy makers haven't heard this concern is that the public thinks the city is already protecting its non-renewable archaeological sites. In fact, many city leaders incorrectly think the same thing. The public is appalled when they learn otherwise

Number of people  
who signed the 2016  
petition for an  
Archaeology  
Ordinance in  
Savannah

1,245

Heritage tourists spend more per day  
and stay longer than other travelers.  
Archaeology feeds heritage tourism.

27% more \$  
per trip and  
stayed 1-3  
nights longer

## Benefits of an Archaeology Ordinance & City Archaeologist

- 1. Reduces expenses to city departments** currently required to deal with unexpected crises such as adverse impacts to archaeological sites from hurricanes, discovery of buried explosive ordnance, and other issues.
- 2. An awareness of heritage decreases blight** by providing a sense of place, pride, and connection for residents of all parts of the city. “Heritage anchors people to their roots, builds self-esteem, and restores dignity.” Cities such as Phoenix, AZ include archaeology in blight-reduction plans.
- 3. Eliminates “surprises” to developers and the city**, such as the discovery of unknown graves, unexploded ordnance, and other PR issues that would slow or stop development.
- 4. Provides developers with unique content**, artifacts, and information that can be used in exhibits and marketing within their development.
- 5. Diversifies tourism** and provides authenticity and accurate information for tourism content. This makes Savannah more than just another ghost tour town. “A city’s conserved historic core can differentiate that city from competing locations – branding it nationally and internationally...”
- 6. Provides outreach opportunities for disenfranchised youth**, K-12 STEM educators, and all residents.
- 7. Documents and preserves** local cultures before they are destroyed (ex. Gullah-Geechee village ).

## How Do We Create and Implement an Archaeology Ordinance?

Savannah first examined an archaeology ordinance in 1987, then in 1996, again in 2011 and now in 2017. In 2011, community interest and a request from a County Commissioner and a City Alderwoman to the Metropolitan Planning Commission resulted in the formation of a archaeology ordinance task force. City Council then ignored the MPC recommendation and agenda item for five consecutive meetings until it “disappeared”. On behalf of more than 1,245 current petitioners, SAAG requests:

### Step 1

That the City Manager, Mayor and City Council endorse an archaeological ordinance. That the city appoint an Archaeology Commission along the lines of Alexandria, Virginia’s Archaeology Commission.

### Step 2

That the City Manager appoint city staff to chair a committee to create a **comprehensive** Archaeology Ordinance integrated into the zoning and planning process. We recommend that the committee minimally include three members of the business community, a member of the city council, a member of the Historic Savannah Foundation, and two professional archaeologists. The committee should use examples of ordinances in other states to craft a comprehensive archaeology ordinance for the City of Savannah. SAAG is willing to provide content expertise and requests input into chair and committee member selection.

### Step 3

Establish the Archaeology Ordinance and City Archaeologist position in Savannah. The time is *now*.