



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION

Old State House 150 Benefit Street Providence, RI 02903

Telephone 401-222-2678  
TTY 401-222-3700

Fax 401-222-2968  
[www.preservation.ri.gov](http://www.preservation.ri.gov)

MINUTES  
RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION  
July 14, 2021

VIA VIDEO CONFERENCE

I. MEMBERS PRESENT

Mr. Michael Abbott, AIA  
Dr. Tripp Evans  
Mr. Jeffrey Emidy, Interim State Historic Preservation Officer  
Dr. Morgan Grefe  
Mr. Paul Jordan, representing Terrence Gray, Acting Director, Rhode Island Department  
of Environmental Management  
Mr. Kevin Nelson, representing Meredith Brady, Associate Director, Division of  
Statewide Planning  
Mr. Warren Ducharme, representing James Cambio, State Building Code Commissioner  
Ms. Kaity Ryan (arrived at 9:45)  
Mr. Clark Schoettle  
Ms. Ruth Taylor, Chair

MEMBERS ABSENT

Mr. Jesse Saglio, President, Rhode Island Commerce Corporation  
[Vacant]  
[Vacant]  
[Vacant]  
[Vacant]

STAFF PRESENT

Donna Alqassar, Heritage Aide  
Enerida Ademi, Data Control Clerk  
Elizabeth Rochefort, Principal Architectural Historian  
Sarah Zurier, Principal Special Projects Coordinator

## II. AGENDA

### 1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 9:32 A.M., Ms. Taylor, Chair, presiding.

### 2. Ms. Taylor explained the procedures that would be followed by Commissioners and attendees of the meeting.

### 3. Roll call

Ms. Taylor called the roll of commissioners. See page one of these minutes for the attendance list.

### 4. For approval: Minutes of June 9, 2021 Commission meeting

On a motion by Mr. Abbott, seconded by Mr. Schoettle, the commissioners voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the June 9, 2021 Commission meeting without changes.

### 5. Interim Executive Director's Report

Jeffrey Emidy reported that:

- a) The transition to an Interim Executive Director, himself, has occurred. Mr. Emidy has access to Executive Director Loether's computer and Mr. Loether has already answered one of his questions since retiring.
- b) Outgoing State Historic Preservation Officer Paul Loether's recommendation to the governor to appoint Jeffrey Emidy as Interim State Historic Preservation Officer was approved. The governor signed the paperwork a few days before Mr. Loether retired. Mr. Emidy has forwarded the paperwork to the National Park Service for their files and they have acknowledged receipt.
- c) Though we were told that the new commissioner candidates would be appointed before the close of the legislative session, that didn't happen, and the existing candidates weren't reappointed. So, they are serving voluntarily without new members, which we thank them for.

Ms. Taylor stated that she has been told that there is some possibility that if there is a special legislative session in the fall that this will be taken up. She asked Mr. Emidy to let her know if he hears that there will be a special session in the fall.

- d) The revamped RIHPHC website was rolled out in late June. It looks fantastic! Mr. Emidy thanked the state technology team for their work, but especially Sarah Zurier, for all of the hours she put in, and continues to put in, to get the new site

content revised, refined, and ready on time for the transition. Donna Alqassar and Tim Ives also did more than their fair share, and a lot of other staff did something, from proofing and editing text to providing photographs. He thanked them all. The address remains [preservation.ri.gov](http://preservation.ri.gov). He encouraged the commissioners and audience to check it out if they have not already. We are really proud of it.

- e) Regarding staff teleworking: State Human Resources hasn't told employees to come back to the office yet, so we haven't, at least not in full force. We understand that the state teleworking policy is under review, and Mr. Emidy is holding off asking everyone to come back until that is released. We are told it may be by the end of August. In the interim, we have at least one person in the building between 9 and 4 every day to answer the door, let the contractors in, etc.
- f) Which brings us to the public – Mr. Emidy stated that he prefers not to have the public coming in and out of the building while we are on a minimal coverage staffing pattern. He also prefers to not have the public in the building until we have all of our doors in place, the construction equipment is gone, and everything has been cleaned up and put back in its rightful locations. Then there is the question of COVID protocols. We have received a memo from the Department of Administration (DOA) explaining that they are going to send someone to each building to tell us what we need to do about physical changes for COVID, like plastic panels, air flow, etc. They have not come by yet. There are also screening materials and training that we have not received. Mr. Emidy stated that he hopes to open the building to the public and staff as soon as possible, but is not willing to risk people's health to do that, so he will wait for more guidance.

Ms. Taylor asked if the Commission will keep meeting remotely for the foreseeable future. Mr. Emidy replied that yes, that is the plan, however, even if our office is open, the Commission still cannot meet there because of ADA issues. We could pursue meeting off site, but will have to figure out what other buildings are open. Ms. Taylor asked if there is anyone who feels that remote meetings are not working well enough.

Dr. Grefe asked at what point we stop waiting for guidance and ask for it, because it seems months late. Mr. Emidy replied that his thinking is that we have been told specifically that the teleworking policy for staff will be done by the end of September at the latest. Mr. Loether had a conversation with someone at DOA who told him that we are in a holding pattern for three months. The word originally was July first would be the date we would return, but then the state gave everyone a three month deferment, so it became the end of September. They want to have the teleworking policy done by the end of August so that is the first step in the process. Mr. Emidy stated that he intends to get in touch with DCAMM about the physical plant issues and with DOA about the testing protocols and preparation for opening to the public, like screening questions, do we need to take people's temperature, etc. He hopes to be ready to open to the public and the staff when we are told to do so.

Mr. Nelson stated that he is on the Agricultural Land Preservation Commission

and they have been told that, as of August, their public meetings are no longer allowed to be held remotely, they must be done in person. That is from the governor's office. Ms. Taylor stated that we have not been so informed.

- g) The Old State House restoration continues. Contractors were working on the parade-side doors yesterday. Mr. Emidy believes that they said they have to fit them, then take them back to the shop to touch them up, then bring them back. He does not know how long that is going to take. All of the windows are in. The staff have submitted punchlist items to Ginger Hesse. So, we're getting closer.
- h) The amended State Preservation Grants regulations that the commissioners approved at the last meeting are going to a public hearing on July 22<sup>nd</sup> at 10:00. In conjunction with the R.I. State Council on the Arts, we sent out an email to past grantees asking them to look at the revised regulations and send comments to us. We have received a couple so far. As Mr. Emidy understands it, the process says that we receive comments now and address them at or after the public hearing, so that is what we are doing.
- i) A Rhody Awards update: our staff have been all over the state with Preserve RI staff doing site visits to nominees. We received 39 nominations this year, which is the most we have ever received. We're not giving out 39 awards, though it seems like every nominee is worthy. That will be a tough decision this year. Sarah will explain that in a minute.

The celebration of the winners will be a two-part event, out of an abundance of caution over COVID. On Saturday, October 16<sup>th</sup>, winning projects from both 2020 and 2021 will be open for tours or exterior viewing – if they are willing to do so – to those who purchase tickets. On Sunday, October 17<sup>th</sup>, there will be a ticketed reception – a different set of tickets - for the winners and a limited number of others at a location to be determined. This is where the videos of the winning people and projects will be unveiled for the first time.

Ms. Taylor asked that the record reflect that Kaity Ryan arrived during the interim executive director's report.

6. For consideration: 2021 Rhody Awards for Historic Preservation

Sarah Zurier reported to the Commission on the 2021 Rhody Awards for Historic Preservation. She stated that Mr. Emidy had just shared some background about the Rhody Awards program which we carry out jointly with Preserve Rhode Island (PRI). We received 39 nominations this year. We carried out site visits to more than a dozen locations of nominated Project or Stewardship Awards and have two locations left to visit on Thursday. We collaborated on the list of finalists that follows. A lot of hard decisions got us to 14, and we still want to get to 10 to 12 awards. We will meet with PRI to refine the slate after Thursday and will update you at the next Commission meeting.

For the Antoinette F. Downing Award for Volunteer Service, we are considering two nominees. One is the Friends of Hearthside. Starting with a wedding story, Hearthside is

the fieldstone house with the distinctive ogee-profile roof on Lincoln's historic Great Road. It was built by Stephen Hopkins Smith to woo a potential bride in 1810—she said no. In 2001, Kathy Hartley and fellow citizens founded Friends of Hearthside to preserve the property, restore the house, and share its stories with the public. Friends of Hearthside, led by Kathy, John Scanlon, and numerous volunteers, are Lincoln's preservation leaders. They have organized a consortium of Great Road historic properties to collaborate on tourism, transportation enhancement projects, and other local initiatives.

The second nominee under consideration is Ken Woodcock, of Matunuck, a philanthropist who believes in whole place preservation. He has protected more than 27 acres, including Weeden Farm, which he later donated to the South Kingstown Land Trust. He formed the Willow Dell Historical Association to gather oral histories from longtime residents in Matunuck. He purchased, restored, and donated the Hale House to the Land Trust. The house was the summer home of Edward Everett Hale and his family of artists and writers from 1873 to 1910. It is operated by the Matunuck Preservation Society.

For the Williamson Award for Professional Leadership, we are also considering two nominees. Ned Connors is a professional historian who has authored more than three dozen National Register nominations and one National Historic Landmark nomination. He was a founding member of the East Providence Historic District Commission. Historic preservation in Rhode Island is stronger for Ned's deep knowledge of industrial and social history, infectious enthusiasm for Modern architecture, mentoring, generous sharing of knowledge, excellent public presentations and tours, and passion for all things East Providence.

The second Williamson nominee under consideration is Rich Youngken. As a planner and historic preservation consultant, Rich is the go-to resource for owners and stewards of privately-owned historic properties and for numerous Rhode Island cities and towns. His projects include area revitalization plans that preserve and capitalize on historic character, National Register nominations, historic property master plans, historic tax credit applications, and planning for restoration projects. Rich has also worked for the Dunn and the 1772 Foundations.

We are considering eight nominees for preservation project awards. The Kendrick Prentice Tirocchi House was built ca. 1867 on Broadway in Providence. From 1915 to 1947, it was known as the shop of couture dressmakers Anna and Laura Tirocchi. After sitting vacant for many years, the Wedding Cake House, as it is known, found its saviors in the Dirt Palace feminist artist collective in nearby Olneyville. Renovations began in 2017: securing the building envelope, systems overhaul, and decorative finish preservation, with much of the work done by Dirt Palace artists and supported with Rhode Island Historic Tax Credits and State Cultural Facilities Grants. The property hosts an artist residency program and short-term rentals to arts, history, and preservation oriented tourists.

A second project award nominee is Pontiac Mills, in Warwick, a sprawling textile mill

plant erected by BB and R Knight, beginning in the 1860s. The \$35 million rehabilitation of Pontiac Mills involved the conversion of 15 separate buildings into 133 apartments and 50,000 square feet of retail/commercial space. Rechanneling the Pawtuxet River, and remediating a 100,000-gallon oil tank were just some of the environmental work. Then came the mill rehabilitation: framing repair, stucco and masonry work, you name it. The result is a vibrant, new setting for residences and businesses with unique outdoor spaces.

Another project nominee is the Prospect Heights Housing Complex. The Pawtucket Housing Authority completed a \$5 million rehabilitation to restore and refresh the 21-acre complex, built in 1941-42. This was the first Federal Rental Assistance Demonstration project in Rhode Island and the first RAD project to be listed in the National register. Improvements included new kitchens and bathrooms, new doors and windows, new roofs, and new boilers, as well as updates to interior and exterior community spaces.

In Providence, Crossroads Rhode Island rehabilitated 14 houses in Silver Lake, Smith Hill, and the West Side of Providence for 22 low-income families. The multifamily houses, several of which are listed in the National Register, are typical of Providence's turn-of-the-century building stock. In order not to disrupt the families, the work was phased. Project activities included installing new oak floors, insulation, and energy efficient heating, replacing vinyl siding and windows, restoring character-defining features like stairs, porches, columns, and trim, as well as accessibility improvements to ground-floor units, lead mitigation, and structural repairs. Partners included KITE Architects, C.A. Pretzer Associates, and TRAC Builders, among others.

Though we are honoring it as a preservation project, the restoration of the Samuel Clarke Farm has made a greater impact. John Peixinho purchased the 40-acre farm, had it nominated to the National Register, and restored its historic farmhouse, barn, schoolhouse, and other outbuilding, as well as the historic landscape, from driveway plantings to agricultural fields and stone walls. John's work at the farm has leveraged community awareness about preserving Richmond's rural character.

We are considering a nomination for the Providence Performing Arts Center. Designed by movie palace architects Rapp+ Rapp, the Loew's Theatre opened in Downtown Providence in 1928. Threatened with demolition in the 1970s, the venue was reborn as the Providence Performing Arts Center and has emerged as a top-flight destination for travelling Broadway shows, concerts, and community events. This project marked the first major exterior restoration, focused on restoring and replacing historic terracotta, repairing and repointing brick masonry, installing new flashing, roofing, and lighting. The project team included Consigli Group, Newport Collaborative Architects, C.A. Pretzer Associates, and Wessling Architects. Some of the work was funded by a State Preservation Grant.

The Greenwich Hotel was built in 1896 on Main Street in East Greenwich. The nominated project focuses on the restoration of a 1940s Art Deco bar and the creation of

a performance space with careful compliance to life safety requirements. Joann Joseph is the owner and the project was proposed and carried out by a member of the Sliding Capos, a band that plays regularly at the venue.

The final project nominee under consideration is the Mill Cove Bridge. It is located on the site of a causeway and cart path that crossed a stream in Wickford from 15 West Main Street to what is now Wilson Park. Twenty-some years ago, a town project caused significant erosion to the site and largely cut off this pedestrian route. The Land Conservancy of North Kingstown collaborated with the town and the Coastal Resources Management Council to stabilize the trail and install a footbridge.

One Community Award nominee is under consideration. The Providence Community Library was created to operate the city's nine branch libraries in 2009. They completed a facilities needs assessment, developed a comprehensive plan, built relationships with donors, city council people, and constituents, and raised over \$3 million. They are systematically tackling deferred maintenance projects for these buildings that serve as both libraries and community centers. Several are significant historic buildings—Smith Hill, Rochambeau, Knight Memorial, Wanskuck, South Providence—all built in the 1920s and 1930s. Too many stories to tell!

One Homeowner Award nominee is under consideration, so let's end with a wedding story. The early 19<sup>th</sup>-century Mill at Glen Farm was built as a grist mill or fulling mill and later incorporated into the Glen Farm property. The building was eventually abandoned and fell into ruin. A young couple thought this ruin could be their dreamhouse. They hired a dream team of design/construction professionals and began the sitework, the structural repairs, the reuse of found artifacts, and the transformation of the old ruin into a comfortable 21<sup>st</sup> century home. Some of the work was carried out by the owners, from tree and brush removal to framing and finish work. They said YES.

Ms. Taylor stated that the commissioners are going to be asked to vote on a motion to endorse the staff's right to choose the winners from this list of finalists. Mr. Emidy informed the commissioners that they are going to be asked to vote on a slate of projects, not on individual ones, so if they believe they have a conflict of interest because of involvement with one or more projects, they do not need to recuse themselves.

Dr. Grefe asked if the commissioners are allowed to express any concerns about nominees as awards winners. Ms. Zurier responded yes. Ms. Taylor stated that she believes any concerns should be expressed to Mr. Emidy and Ms. Zurier subsequent to the meeting for consideration before the decision is made.

Ms. Taylor made the motion to endorse the staff's right to choose, in conjunction with PRI, the winners of the Rhody Awards from among the nominees just presented. Ms. Ryan seconded the motion. The Commission voted unanimously to approve the motion.

7. For discussion: Hiring process for RIHPHC Executive Director

Ms. Taylor reported that the hiring process will probably start in the fall. When we get permission to hire, she will form a search committee. She will chair that committee, as our regulations suggest she is supposed to. Outside experts can serve on the search committee and she would like to have them do so. She is hoping to look at some of the incoming commissioners, maybe some commissioners who have left us, and even folks who have never served on the Commission but have engaged with us and understand the nature of the work. She does not have a list at the moment.

She stated that she is looking to create a route for staff input into the process. The likely scenario is that she will work with Joyce Gervasio to set up a least one, or maybe several, meetings with the staff to collect concerns and desires. As we look at this process, she will use that input to create a document outlining those concerns and desires, which she will send back to staff to make sure that we are all on the same page, and that document will be used to inform the search and selection process.

She also wants to create a route for transparency, and believes that this meeting is the best route for that, so she has asked Mr. Emidy to put an update about the process on the Commission agenda regularly. She encourages the staff to attend these meetings so they, too, will know what is happening. She stated that her email is open. If people hear her report something that they don't think is right, she encourages them to email her and she will be happy to talk about it. Human Resources has its transparency process, but our process is one step outside of that, but we do not want to do anything that violates state policies about hiring. Apparently, we did do that occasionally the last time, so we are going to do our best to maintain a nice, tight process while still being transparent, especially to the staff, but also to the public.

She stated that she thinks we are in good hands in the interim, so if this process takes a little while to pull together, she does not think anyone will suffer. She also stated that she has asked Mr. Emidy to be very conscious of the fact that we are light on commissioners right now and she is not in favor of the Commission taking up anything that is hugely controversial or has potential implications when we are not assembling the expertise that the law says we are supposed to have when we make those decisions. There is a tenuous nature to the Commission right now that she does not mind for routine things but does not like for things that might be consequential, so we are going to try to be conscious of that, as well.

8. For discussion: State tax credit legislative actions

Mr. Emidy stated that, as the commissioners may be aware, there were two actions in the general assembly in June that affected the Rhode Island Historic Preservation Tax Credit Program.

The program sunset was extended for another year, to June 30, 2022. That means we can continue to do new projects. Because, for the first time ever the assembly allocated



funds into the tax credit program. \$20 million was put into the fund. We have been working off the \$34 million that was originally allocated in 2013 for eight years. Since the maximum amount of credits a project can get is \$5 million, that means at least four new projects can be funded, but any project that comes in under \$5 million means we have more money for another. We are pretty sure that there are at least 20 projects on the waiting list right now for credits, so this is an important action by the General Assembly, and we thank them for their support. I also want to thank all of the preservationists and others out there, including many of you, who have continued over the years to promote the program and talk to their representatives about it and really have sold it. That's a job well done!

Mr. Abbot asked if the waiting list of credit applicants is shareable. Mr. Emidy replied that it is not. We do not even know what projects are on the list because the Division of Taxation won't give it to us. The last project that we know received a credit was number 95 on the list, and we understand that number 115 was just assigned to a project, so we think there are at least 20 projects on the list, but we don't know how many more.

Mr. Schoettle stated that he had not heard about this either, so he reached out to Dawn Ewer, the representative who put this forward, to thank her. She was very gracious and said that she thinks it's a great program. He said she seems to have done it single-handedly, but he doesn't know where the impetus came from. He then asked if the same rules for the 2013 program are going to apply to this pool of funds, or if new rules will be created. Mr. Emidy stated that he does not know the answer to that question.

Ms. Taylor stated that this is a very welcome development, and surprising, and she has not spoken to Representative Ewer, but now she is curious.

9. Old Business

There was no old business.

10. New Business:

There was no new business

12. Announcements

The next Commission meeting will be held August 11, 2021. As of right now, it will be by video conference.

13. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 10:22 am.

Minutes recorded by,



Jeffrey D. Emidy  
Interim Executive Director  
Interim State Historic Preservation Officer