



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION

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MINUTES

RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION

May 11, 2022

Location:

R.I. Department of Business Regulation
560 Jefferson Boulevard, Warwick, R.I.
DBR Board Room, First Floor

I. MEMBERS PRESENT

Mr. Michael Abbott, AIA
Mr. Warren Ducharme, representing James Cambio, State Building Code Commissioner
Mr. Jeffrey Emidy, Interim State Historic Preservation Officer
Dr. Morgan Grefe
Ms. Roberta Groch, representing Meredith Brady, Associate Director, Division of
Statewide Planning
Ms. Kaity Ryan
Ms. Ruth Taylor, Chair

MEMBERS ABSENT

Ms. Hilary Fagan, President, Rhode Island Commerce Corporation
Mr. Paul Jordan, representing Terrence Gray, Director, Rhode Island Department
of Environmental Management
Mr. Clark Schoettle
[Vacant]
[Vacant]
[Vacant]
[Vacant]
[Vacant]

STAFF PRESENT

Joanna Doherty, Principal Architectural Historian
Timothy Ives, Principal Archaeologist
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. For approval: Minutes of April 13, 2022, Commission meeting

On a motion by Dr. Grefe, seconded by Ms. Ryan, the commissioners voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the April 13, 2022, Commission meeting as they appear in the draft.

3. Interim Executive Director's Report

Jeffrey Emidy reported that:

- a. The Old State House Exterior Rehabilitation project ribbon cutting went off without any problems on April 13th. The Governor and Lieutenant Governor spoke, as did the president of the Mile of History Association and Mr. Emidy. They all made points about how important the building is to the state. It was a beautiful day, and we had a good turnout of people who worked on the project, DCAMM staff, past and present staff, including our last two executive directors, Ted Sanderson and Paul Loether, and neighbors. Mr. Emidy thanked Ginger Hesse and Sarah Zurier for putting the event together, and all of the other staff who helped out at the event whom he did not see because he was mingling and preparing his speech.
- b. Cemetery Weeks continues through the end of May. We have topped 100 programs. There has been press coverage on Channels 10 and 12, in *Providence Monthly*, the *Providence Journal* - including a big feature on River Bend Cemetery in Westerly-, in the *Westerly Sun*, *The Bay*, and the *Valley Breeze*. Staff have reported good experiences at the events. Mr. Emidy thanked Sarah Zurier and Charlotte Taylor for all of the work that they have done on this, and other staff who are participating.
- c. The Conference Evaluation project continues and is starting to wrap up. Our consultant, Susan West Montgomery, convened another in-person meeting at the Old State House with some of our core partners, including commissioners Dr. Grefe and Ms. Groch. She has shared her preliminary findings and recommendations with us and we will offer feedback in anticipation of a final report later this spring. Mr. Emidy thanked Sarah Zurier and Joanna Doherty and the other staff and the commissioners who have participated. We are getting a lot of great feedback and ideas.
- d. On March 28, President Biden submitted his FY2023 budget request to Congress. It includes \$151.8million for the Historic Preservation Fund (HPF), which is the same as the FY2022 budget request. Congress appropriated \$173.07 million in FY2022, but given budget delays, the President was not aware of this higher level of Congressional support. For FY2023, the National Trust has recommended funding the HPF at \$200 million. This includes significant increases for State and Tribal Historic Preservation

Offices and several high-impact grant programs.

There is also an effort afoot in Congress to permanently authorize the HPF at \$300million. Known as the *Historic Preservation Enhancement Act*, this would be the first increase in the amount that the HPF is authorized to receive since its inception in 1976.

Also, the NPS's Semiquincentennial Grant Program deadline was extended to May 17th.

4. For consideration: Easement Review
The Breakers Landscape Project
44 Ochre Point Avenue, Newport

Joanna Doherty reported that the Preservation Society of Newport County (PSNC) has submitted plans for Phase III of the landscape rehabilitation project at The Breakers. RIHPHC review and approval of the project is required by the terms of a historic preservation easement signed in 2003. The PSNC hopes to complete the project, which is focused on the northeast quadrant of the property, in Summer 2022.

At the north entry drive, the project will reestablish the pin oak allée and reintroduce potted bay trees. In the vicinity of the Children's Cottage, Victorian-style foundation plantings and planting beds will be created. Dense screening vegetation will be installed along the Shepherd Avenue fence line and near the service drive. The sidewalks at the north entry drive, currently surfaced with asphalt or pea stone, will be replaced with an exposed aggregate concrete surface. The project will reestablish the missing walkway in the northeast quadrant and replace the existing, bituminous walk; both will receive an oil-and-stone paving surface. Portions of the walks will be planted with layers of evergreen trees, shrubs, and herbaceous plants, as is the case on other, already rehabilitated sections of the serpentine path. Several trees, shrubs and hedges will be removed as part of the project; none are historic and many are in poor condition. These include several Norway maples to the east of the Children's Cottage, the removal of which will create a more open lawn overlooking the ocean, as was present during the historic period. Finally, unobtrusive lighting will be installed along the service drive and along both the north and west entry drives, for pedestrian safety. The overall design of the project and the planting plan are consistent with the Cultural Landscape Report and the Master Plan (2016) for The Breakers.

Ms. Ryan asked if the curbing shown in the proposed plans is historic. Ms. Doherty stated that it is, and it will remain.

Ms. Taylor asked if Ms. Doherty has any major concerns about the plan. Ms. Doherty replied that she does not have major concerns. The grass pavers are a little concerning, but she spoke with Reed Hildebrand, the landscape architecture firm working on the

project, and they are still working on that element. Dr. Grefe stated that they might try this design and if it is not successful, will come back for a replacement treatment at a later time.

Mr. Abbott asked if, at the end of the path at the Cliff Walk, there had always been a gate, or if it was originally open to the Cliff Walk. Ms. Doherty stated that she is not sure, however, she presumes that, if not original, the gate was an early installation.

A motion to approve the easement project proposal was made by Dr. Grefe and seconded by Ms. Ryan. The Commission voted unanimously to approve the motion.

5. For consideration: Authorization of Expenditure of funds for the 2022 Rhody Awards for Historic Preservation

Mr. Emidy reported that every year since 2009, the RIHPHC has partnered with Preserve Rhode Island (PRI) to host the Rhody Awards for Historic Preservation. The event is typically held on a Sunday evening in September or October. It has been in Newport a few times, in Providence, Warwick, Westerly, and in Bristol at Linden Place last year. There is a cocktail hour, then we give out between 10 and 15 awards. PRI Executive Director Val Talmage and the RIHPHC Executive Director cohost. Before COVID came in 2020, we created our own PowerPoint presentations and read a prepared script. In 2020 we started having videos for each award professionally shot and edited.

Over the past few years, a dinner has been added to the program. This is a fundraiser for PRI, so RIHPHC has no part in it. Sometimes the RIHPHC Executive Director attends as a guest.

For RIHPHC, the Rhody Awards are generally considered a part of our big-picture partnership with PRI. They're also a part of our outward-facing presence in the preservation community. Like the conference, this is a time for us to not be regulators – it's a chance to be friendly and mingle as fellow preservationists.

Mr. Emidy stated that, as the commissioners see on the agenda, the reason we are talking about this today is that, for the first time, he is seeking authorization from the Commission to enter into a financial agreement with PRI for the Rhody Awards, which will be held on October 23rd.

In past years, our RIHPHC Rhody team has consisted of the executive and deputy directors, our architectural historians – Liz Rochefort, Sarah Zurier, and Joanna Doherty - and to varying degrees our architects and CFO. Ms. Talmage and Mr. Emidy started talking about the 2022 awards in the fall of 2021, when he was about five months into his term as interim executive director, with no deputy director and no CFO, and he might have just lost architectural historian Liz Rochefort. He was also aware that we would be dealing with vacations in the summer that would further stretch thin the limited staff. He told Ms. Talmage that he was concerned that we were not going to be able to handle our part this year. The two talked about hiring a consultant to decrease the RIHPHC

workload.

When they reconvened in February or so, they again talked about hiring a consultant, and Mr. Emidy was concerned about escalating cost, but they figured that they would decrease the award count by a couple – and hence the video cost – and the resulting savings would pay a consultant. They were thinking about two or three thousand dollars to be split evenly.

When they spoke again in mid-April, the price for the consultant was in, at \$10,000. That is \$5,000 for RIHPHC. Our total monetary contribution was \$6,000 in 2021. With this new item, the cost was going to balloon to between \$10,000 and \$12,000 in 2022. It was then that Mr. Emidy decided he needed to get approval from the Commission.

Mr. Emidy stated that he is apprehensive about two things regarding the Rhody Awards: the amount of staff time we put into it, and the amount of money we provide. This year, we are considering decreasing the staff time significantly, but increasing the monetary support. If we are going to be a “partner”, we have to provide something to the partnership. It has to be one or the other, or both.

Mr. Emidy stated that it seems to him that we have four options for 2022:

- Stay in at \$10,00-\$12,000
- Try to have our staff take on more of the work, thereby reducing the monetary cost. He stated that he honestly thinks this is a non-starter.
- Back out completely and leave PRI hanging.
- Withdraw as partners and be a sponsor at some reduced monetary level.

Mr. Emidy asked if, when you actually look at what we gain from the Rhody Awards, is it worth the expenditure of, \$10,000-\$12,000 to remain a partner, because we cannot provide the staff time. We don't have the staff, and even if we did, he would be concerned about it taking away from our ability to carry out our other responsibilities. The problem is, if we back out completely right now, PRI is left in a tough spot. They just lost one of their best staff and they would have to absorb the entire financial hit on their own.

Mr. Abbott stated for the record that he is on the board at PRI.

Ms. Taylor concurred that the staff do not have the time to devote as in years past. The commissioners discussed, with staff input, the relative merits of the options that Mr. Emidy presented. It was determined that it is too late to walk away completely; that is not fair to PRI. Various dollar amounts for sponsorship or partnership were discussed.

A motion was made by Ms. Taylor to authorize Mr. Emidy to have further conversations with Ms. Talmage where the RIHPHC financial contribution would be capped at \$6,000 – reflecting the 2021 cost – and staff time is zero or close to it. The motion was seconded by Dr. Grefe. The Commission voted unanimously to approve the motion, with Mr. Abbott abstaining.

6. For information: Update on RIHPHC executive director hiring process

Ms. Taylor reported that there has recently been a lot of action on the Executive Director hiring. The position has been approved and posted on the state website. She is putting a small search committee together of approximately five people. She told the commissioners that, if any of them would like to be involved, they should contact her.

Ms. Taylor stressed that confidentiality is key in this process. This directive has come from the state's human resources department. There are people who will want to apply for the position, but don't want it known that they have applied, and we must protect that.

Any calls that are received by commissioners or staff inquiring about the position should be referred to Ms. Taylor. Resumes cannot be submitted to commissioners or staff; they must be submitted through the state website.

The opening has a short posting time. It can, however, be extended if necessary. Approximately 10 applications have already been received.

Regarding commissioner and staff input on the process, Ms. Taylor stated that she has a series of questions that were used in another search which she will send to the staff and commissioners. These are related to preservation, as a whole, and to what the search committee should consider when hiring. The answers will be confidential.

Ms. Taylor stated that she will report on any progress of the search as it moves forward. For confidentiality reasons, however, she will not share the names of applicants.

Ms. Taylor stated that she has been in communication with state human resources, but that they will not be directly involved in the hiring process.

Mr. Abbott asked about the length of time for the process. Ms. Taylor stated that she does not know, but that she hopes that it will be complete by the end of the year.

7. Announcements

The next Commission meeting will be held on June 8, 2022.

8. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 10:58am.

Minutes recorded by,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jeffrey D. Emdy". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial 'J' and 'E'.

Jeffrey D. Emdy
Interim Executive Director