



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION

Old State House 150 Benefit Street Providence, RI 02903

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MINUTES

RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION

July 13, 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
Ms. Roberta Groch, representing Meredith Brady, Associate Director, Division of
Statewide Planning
Ms. Kaity Ryan
Mr. Clark Schoettle
Ms. Ruth Taylor, Chair

MEMBERS ABSENT

Ms. Hilary Fagan, President, Rhode Island Commerce Corporation
Dr. Morgan Grefe
Mr. Paul Jordan, representing Terrence Gray, Director, Rhode Island Department
of Environmental Management

[Vacant]

[Vacant]

[Vacant]

[Vacant]

[Vacant]

STAFF PRESENT

Joanna Doherty, Principal Architectural Historian
Charlotte Taylor, 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 June 8, 2022, Commission meeting

On a motion by Ms. Ryan, seconded by Mr. Abbott, the commissioners voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the June 8, 2022, Commission meeting as they appear in the draft.

3. Interim Executive Director's Report

Jeffrey Emidy reported that:

- a. An article was published last week in the *Boston Globe* about the R.I. Marine Archaeology Project's Executive Director, Dr. Kathy Abbass, and the search for HMB *Endeavour*. Mr. Emidy stated that he had sent the link out to the commissioners with the agenda for today's meeting. He thought that the article was good and balanced, and didn't go overly far into the RIMAP/Dr. Abbass/RIHPHC relationship. He sent an email to the author, Brian Amaral, last week, thanking him for the good work.
- b. The Old State House accessibility project is moving closer to construction. The architect, Corrie deBoer, and estimators and mechanical systems team have been in the building looking for things, measuring, and taking notes, all toward the preparation of final construction documents.
- c. He met with Rebekah Kreiger and Eric Breitreutz, of the Roger Williams National Memorial/National Park Service, to discuss the hydropower project proposed for Ashton Village, in particular, and other common interests, in general. One of the things that came up was the Kelly House, in Lincoln. The R.I. Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) owns the house and the property that it is on, but they have recently signed a use easement with the National Park Service (NPS). RIDEM recently initiated a maintenance/repair request for proposals (RFP) for the Kelly House that included, among other things, window repair/replacement. The RFP did not include a specification for this work. There are other problems with the overall project stemming, at least in part, from the minimal RFP. RIDEM got too far into the process before they asked us for our input, and this apparently upset NPS, too. We also talked a bit about the stalled process to put fish ladders in at Slater Mill and an agreement for how the Memorial is used.

4. For consideration: Easement Review

Jenks Park playground area plan
Broad Street, Central Falls

Mr. Emidy reported that the City of Central Falls is moving ahead with improvements to Jenks Park which were discussed, in concept, at an earlier Commission meeting. The first phase of the project will be the playground phase, at the west end of the park. He reminded the commissioners that the park stretches between Washington Street at the west end and Broad Street on the east, adjacent to Central Falls City Hall. The park is listed in the National Register and the commission holds a preservation easement on it.

The playground phase will remove the existing playground from an area that historically was not a playground, but we do not know exactly what it was, closer to Washington Street, to an area that is flat ground containing an entrance pathway. The pathway is not a historic element, being the third iteration of an entrance to the west end of the park.

In the Commission's earlier discussion of the concept for this phase, they approved the staff recommendation that this location for the playground is acceptable, and that the playground equipment should be a natural or neutral color palette. The city's proposed design has a color palette of sky blue, teal, bronze, and light grey, with a teal, rubberized play surface. The particular pieces of playground equipment have not been finally determined yet. Commission staff recommend the approval of the new entrance and path, playground location and equipment, landscaping and hardscaping, with the condition that the rubberized surface be a more naturalistic color than teal.

Ms. Ryan asked if the determination that the new location is acceptable is because that location has been altered. Mr. Emidy replied that that is the staff's opinion.

Ms. Taylor encouraged a motion to support the staff recommendation. Mr. Abbott made a motion to support the staff recommendation, with muted colors for the rubberized surface, and to authorize the staff to make final detail decisions. Ms. Ryan seconded the motion. The Commission voted unanimously to approve the motion.

5. For consideration: Easement Review
Cogswell Tower masonry work
Jenks Park, Broad Street, Central Falls

Mr. Emidy reported that the City of Central Falls is moving ahead with the State Preservation Grant project for masonry restoration and roof repair on Cogswell Tower, in Jenks Park. The details of the work are not ready for review yet, but since the Jenks Park easement includes the tower, the staff recommends that the Commission grant the staff authority to review and approve the scope of work for the masonry restoration and roof repairs. There is a cantilevered deck from the north side of the tower base proposed as part of the park improvement plans; the staff recommends that the Commission review that when it is in the design phase.

Ms. Ryan made a motion to authorize the staff to conduct the review and approval. Mr.

Abbott seconded the motion. The Commission voted unanimously to approve the motion.

6. For consideration: Easement Review
Providence Athenaeum exterior vestibule project
251 Benefit Street, Providence

Mr. Emidy reported that the Providence Athenaeum is proposing a project to construct a glass-enclosed vestibule under the building's rear entrance hood. The project is funded in part by a grant from the R.I. State Council on the Arts, and the Commission also holds a preservation easement on the property.

The glass enclosure is proposed to provide an airlock to prevent cold air from rushing into the building. It will fit inside the existing hood and support system, which is not a historic feature. This is not an accessible entrance, nor is it the primary entrance; it is used primarily by staff.

Mr. Schoettle and others stated that this entrance is regularly used by the public because it is closest to the parking lot behind the building. Mr. Ducharme stated that the vestibule is too small to function as an airlock. The commissioners discussed Mr. Ducharme's point. Ms. Taylor recommended that the staff have a conversation with the project proponent about the usefulness of the vestibule as designed.

Mr. Abbott made a motion that the staff should have a conversation with the project team about the usefulness of the vestibule as designed, and that, if the staff is satisfied with the outcome of the conversation(s), they can approve the project. Ms. Ryan seconded the motion. The Commission voted unanimously to approve the motion.

7. For Information: Final report on 2022 R.I. Historical Cemeteries Awareness and Preservation Weeks

Sarah Zurier introduced the final report on R.I. Historical Cemeteries Awareness and Preservation Weeks (RICW), a two-month long program presented by the Commission and the R.I. Advisory Commission on Historical Cemeteries (RIACHC) this April and May. She then introduced Charlotte Taylor, the RIHPHC's representative on the RIACHC.

Ms. Taylor explained that the RIACHC was established by law in 1991. It contains representatives of each county and various agencies and organizations, including the R.I. Historical Society, R.I. Veterans Cemetery, and the League of Towns. April 15th is R.I. Cemeteries Awareness Day by law as of 2017, but in reality, events associated with that are spread out.

Ms. Zurier continued, stating that the project started when she joined Ms. Taylor at a meeting of RIACHC in November. They have hosted a Cemeteries Awareness and Restoration Day since 2015. During COVID times, this evolved into two months of programming; largely clean-ups, conservation demonstrations, and some tours. We agreed to collaborate. RIACHC has the experience with this event, loads of contacts and volunteers, and a faithful Facebook following. RIHPHC brought a small budget, additional contacts, graphic design, a communications plan, and a statewide audience of preservationists.

Ms. Zurier asked Mr. Emidy and former RIHPHC Grants Manager Katy Pomplun for \$5,000 for the collaboration. Of this, \$2,630 came from a Certified Local Government grant. The rest came from unspent preservation conference funds as well as some minor expenses paid by the State. We spent \$4,043 on postcards/ mailing, advertisements in 25 local newspapers, social media promotion, reusable yard signs, and a few other odds and ends.

RIHPHC and RIACHC collected program ideas and compiled them on calendars posted on our websites. We were constantly adding more programs as they emerged—or we heard about events and asked if they could join Cemetery Weeks. We promoted everything in social media and by e-news. By last count, there were 103 events, all free, and mostly in-person, from early April to late May. They took place in 27 towns, 13 of which are Certified Local Governments. Of the 75+ burying grounds, churchyards, and cemeteries visited, at least 12 are listed in the National Register of Historic Places. We estimate that there was a total of 2,000 attendees; a handful for a clean-up, dozens for tours and open houses, etc. 125 people attended an open house at River Bend Cemetery; other events had but a handful.

There were 35 clean-ups—volunteers raking, picking up trash, painting fences, weeding, and clearing brush. Some clean-ups incorporated tours, and some tours incorporated clean-ups. There were nine conservation demonstrations and workshops led by experts. Betty and Carlo Mencucci shared their knowledge of resetting fallen monuments and cleaning gravestones. Dennis Montagna, one of the chief monuments conservators for the National Park Service, led a workshop at Grace Church Cemetery. At Richmond cemetery 37, volunteers lifted and reset sunken headstones. Participants included three generations of descendants.

In terms of programs, we were able to expand the number of tours to 44. Expert guides included Corrie de Boer interpreting the architecture at Providence's Swan Point Cemetery, Keith Stokes talking about preserving the stories and the stones at God's Little Acre in Newport, and archaeologist Holly Herbster talking about cemetery archaeology—while picking up trash—at Mineral Spring Cemetery in Pawtucket. A volunteer-led tour at Woonsocket's Precious Blood Cemetery drew 55 attendees.

There were a handful of memorable special events as well. Stone carver Karin Sprague invited people to her open studio in Scituate. River Bend Cemetery and Babcock Smith House volunteers hosted a big open house with tours in Westerly. One of the only indoor

events was a talk by archaeologist Kim Smith on her recent work on cemeteries. Ms. Zurier co-hosted a Jane's Walk in Locust Grove Cemetery in Providence. And of course, there were several Memorial Day events.

Ms. Zurier made a special mention of North Burial Ground in Providence. It was the site and the inspiration for nine programs—an exhibit and tour on the Potter's Field and Free Grounds, a photo contest, a game, a "conversation" between a signer of the Declaration of Independence and a Black Revolutionary War soldier, a tour of amphibian habitats, a meeting for docents, a scavenger hunt for kids, and an Edgar Allan Poe-inspired walk.

RICW received a lot of media coverage. We also surveyed the event hosts. 88 percent of them were happy or delighted with their programs. Besides getting work done, they noted that they got new volunteers, learned from their audience, connected with descendants, and raised awareness—in addition to all the cleaning and stone resetting. Hosts were happy with the collaboration, as was RIACHC, as was Ms. Zurier. We have a great structure in place for future years of collaboration. This structure could also be reworked for other resource types, like mills or farms or neighborhoods.

Ruth Taylor thanked Ms. Zurier and Ms. Taylor for a job well done.

8. For Information: Update on the RIHPHC executive director hiring process

Ms. Taylor reported that the executive director search committee has met twice. The minutes are posted on the RIHPHC and Secretary of State websites. The search committee is utilizing a checklist to evaluate candidates and establishing priorities based on surveys that were distributed among the preservation community. They will be conducting a large number – about nine – of virtual screening interviews. Some of those whom they expect to interview are traditional candidates, others are non-traditional, but interesting. After the screening interviews, they will evaluate whether they need another set of screening interviews or if they can go right to one to three in-person interviews. Confidentiality remains an issue, particularly because there are local candidates, and the committee is managing that with input from state human resources.

Mr. Abbott asked if, after the search committee has made its decision, it goes to state human resources. Ms. Taylor responded that the search committee will make a recommendation to the Commission. She feels strongly that the top candidate should meet with the Commission and staff, but exactly how that is managed will be determined. Ms. Ryan asked if the selected person has to be endorsed by the governor. Ms. Taylor stated that the governor does not have to endorse the decision, the Commission does. State human resources does not, either; they write the contract and handle the administrative side of the hiring. The governor appoints the State Historic Preservation officer. After the executive director decision is made, Ms. Taylor said that she will speak with the governor about that appointment.

Ms. Zurier asked if it would be possible for more than one candidate to meet with the

staff. Ms. Taylor said that that is not out of the question. Ms. Zurier asked if Ms. Taylor will have a virtual meeting with the staff. Ms. Taylor stated that she would like to do that in early August.

9. Announcements

The next Commission meeting will be held on August 10, 2022.

10. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 10:25am.

Minutes recorded by,



Jeffrey D. Emidy
Interim Executive Director

DRAFT