



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

MINUTES

RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION

September 14, 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
Mr. Clark Schoettle
Ms. Ruth Taylor, Chair

MEMBERS ABSENT

Ms. Hilary Fagan, President, Rhode Island Commerce Corporation
Terrence Gray, Director, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management
[Vacant]
[Vacant]
[Vacant]
[Vacant]
[Vacant]

STAFF PRESENT

Donna Alqassar, Heritage Aide
Joanna Doherty, Principal Architectural Historian
Virginia Hesse, Principal Historical Architect
Elizabeth Totten, Senior Project Review Coordinator
Sarah Zurier, Principal Special Projects Coordinator

II. AGENDA

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 9:34 A.M., Ms. Taylor, Chair, presiding.

2. For approval: Minutes of July 13, 2022, Commission meeting

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

3. Interim Executive Director's Report

Jeffrey Emidy reported that:

- a. Dr. Timothy Ives resigned from the RIHPHC last month. His last day was August 31st. He has taken a position in the private sector. This leaves the Commission staff at 10 full positions and six vacant. The request to fill the CFO position is moving slowly through the state human resources (HR) and budget offices right now. It has made progress over the past 10 days. As he has mentioned before, we are trying to increase the pay grades of most of the vacant positions and some others, and this requires a public hearing to be scheduled by the HR department. They are inundated with requests right now and cannot give us a timetable for when that hearing may take place. Ms. Taylor and Mr. Emidy have a meeting with one of the governor's deputy chiefs of staff next week to see if we can figure out a way to get this moving. The issue is that, if we try to hire at the current rates, we don't think we are competitive. However, with the departure of Dr. Ives, we are at the point where we are likely going to start the process for at least one position in a couple of weeks, public hearing or not.
- b. As the commissioners may know, we have been staffing the Old State House (OSH) at the minimum level since COVID started. The week after next, we will begin having everyone in the office a minimum of two full days per week and working remotely the rest. With only 10 staff, this still doesn't mean that there will be a lot of people in the building at any one time, but it starts us on a path to returning to a normalized schedule. The state is a year overdue issuing a revised telework policy, so when that comes out, we will see if what we are doing fits and adjust if necessary.
- c. The RI250 Commission had a flurry of activity in June around the Gaspee anniversary, and since then have slowed their collective acts. However, the Executive Committee has been meeting and a few things have happened: a logo package has been selected, a vendor for website development has been selected, and we've made preliminary decisions on merchandise that will be available.
- d. The apportionment of federal funds to State Historic Preservation Offices is made based on a formula that was worked out over a decade ago, based primarily on number of historic properties, population, and area. That formula was recently

- revisited and tweaked. Some states' apportionments were reduced, some increased. Rhode Island came out on the increase side, with our apportionment slated to increase by \$471. That's less than half of one day's pay for one of our staff, but at least we were not on the reduction side. Many SHPOs and others in preservation are not happy with the reallocation, with even those that received an increase backing a reconsideration that will have no state's apportionment decreased. He stated that he is not sure if they will revisit the apportionment.
- e. Mr. Emidy added the following item to the agenda: Rhody Awards. He stated that, as the commissioners will recall, the RIHPHC is not a partner of Preserve Rhode Island in the Rhody Awards this year, but is a sponsor at the platinum level. This means that we get eight tickets to the event. He is making those tickets available to the voting Commissioners first, then to staff. He asked if the voting Commissioners will let him know ASAP whether or not they want one of our tickets. Then, he will raffle off the remaining tickets to staff. The Rhodies are Sunday, October 23rd, at Ochre Court, in Newport. Mr. Emidy will present one of the awards, though he does not yet know which one.

4. For consideration: Easement Review
Harbour Court Boathouse
5 Halidon Avenue, Newport

Virginia Hesse informed the commissioners of a project at the boathouse and seawall at the New York Yacht Club's Harbour Court, at 5 Halidon Avenue, in Newport. We hold an easement in perpetuity on the property, but this is also a Coastal Resource Management Council review and a Federal Emergency Management Agency variance request review. The easement trumps the others.

The existing seawall is a mix of granite blocks and rubblestone with a granite cap. The proposal is to increase the height of the seawall by 15 inches at its high point and 27 inches at its low point to make it level. Existing stones will be reused, including the granite cap stones, and granite is proposed to be used as infill. The adjacent grade will be increased to maintain the relationship between grade and the top of the wall.

Harbour Court was constructed in 1906 for the family of John Nicholas Brown. What is now known as the boathouse was constructed as a playhouse for the Brown family children. The proposal is to relocate the boathouse 19 feet to the south, away from the seawall, and 35 feet to the west. The boathouse is very close to the seawall and is affected by waves during storms. Damage to the stucco and other features of the north elevation are a recurring problem. The chimney and fireplace will be moved with the building.

When the boathouse is moved, the owners want to make some changes to it to enclose the west end to contain two ADA-compliant bathrooms. The center bay will stay open as a pass-through. The infill is proposed to be stucco panels and half-timbering to match the east end, with divided-light, double-hung sash windows. A paved terrace will be added at the west end of the building, similar to, but larger than, the one that is at the west end

now.

Ms. Taylor asked for confirmation that the Commission is only reviewing the project for the easement. Ms. Hesse stated that that is correct.

Ms. Ryan made a motion to approve the seawall work and moving the building, then discuss the changes to the building separately. Mr. Abbott seconded the motion, which was approved unanimously.

Project architect Marth Werenfels addressed the Commission to say that the project is trying to meet a lot of needs, including ADA and FEMA regulations. They will be managing the existing restrooms while increasing the number of fixtures in the building. Keeping the pass-through has been identified as an important element of the design.

Mr. Abbott made a motion to approve the proposal, describing it as sensitive to the original design. Ms. Ryan seconded the motion. The commissioners further discussed the details of the proposed design, ultimately making the suggestions that the infill panels be held back from the wall plane and their divisions on the north end match the existing divisions on the kneewall, leaving the existing end framing visible, and not altering the opening width on the west side of the building and not widening the east side opening as much as proposed.

Mr. Abbott emended his motion, stating that the staff should work with Ms. Werenfels to find ways to keep the end and center framing on the north end, be less replicative of the original, keep the west opening and reduce the width of the east opening, and not add more half-timbering. Additionally, the proposed windows are acceptable. Ms. Ryan seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

5. For consideration: Easement Review
Newport Congregational Church
73 Pelham Street, Newport

Mr. Emidy informed the commissioners of a project at the Newport Congregational Church, at 73 Pelham Street, at the corner of Spring Street, in Newport. The project is to add an access ramp, and we are reviewing it under an easement that we hold through 2041 as the result of a State Preservation Grant.

All of the entrances to the building have stairs. The proposal would build a concrete ramp along the north elevation of the building, in the place of an existing brownstone stair. The stair will be retained inside the ramp, with a sacrificial layer between the stairs and the concrete. The ramp will also be separated from the foundation. A new railing will be fabricated to match the existing railing at the front of the building.

The staff recommend approving the proposal.

Dr. Grefe made a motion to approve the proposal, which was seconded by Ms. Ryan. There was no discussion and the motion passed unanimously.

6. For vote: 2023 Certified Local Government Grant Criteria

Donna Alqassar addressed the Commission regarding the criteria for the Certified Local Government Grant program. The program operates annually and is funded with a set-aside amount from the Historic Preservation Fund appropriation that the RIHPHC receives each year from the National Park Service (NPS). This appropriation funds our general office operations, but we are required to distribute not less than 10 percent of it to our Certified Local Government communities, of which there are 18. We have not yet received notice of our appropriation for the federal fiscal year 2023, which begins October 1, and we probably won't until the spring, but we anticipate level or near-level funding from last year, which would give us approximately \$65,000 to award this year.

The general structure of the program and eligibility requirements are unchanged from prior years. We will receive applications in categories including identification and evaluation of historic resources, planning activities, resource-specific activities, public education activities, and statewide projects.

We anticipate releasing the grant application in late October or November using eCivis, the state's new grant system, with a due date of late December or January. Staff will review applications from January to February, and recommendations for funding will be presented to the Commission in the Spring. We expect authorization of our appropriation from NPS no later than June (hopefully earlier), so projects will ideally start by then, and awardees will have about 15 months until completion, which must be by September 30, 2024.

As you do every year, the Commission needs to consider and vote on the review criteria and funding priorities for the 2023 grant program. To evaluate the applications, we will use the rubric that was provided to you with your agenda, which is the same as we used last year:

- Project need considers the relative priority of the project in the applicant's city or town, the project's urgency, and whether the project stems from a RIHPHC recommendation.
- Impact considers whether a project's reach will be primarily local or if it will extend beyond its community and/or serve as a model for future projects.
- We also assign points for the significance of the resources that may be involved with the project, and a smattering of points are awarded for administrative performance and whether the applicant is providing a match.

A point boost is awarded to any project that meets one of the funding priorities we've chosen to emphasize. Like last year, we have identified three funding priorities that will merit special consideration:

- Projects that help communities plan for protecting historic resources from the effects of climate change and sea level rise.
- Projects that promote the recognition or preservation of resources associated with historically underrepresented groups.
- Projects that will provide training opportunities for historic district commissions and municipal planning staff.

All three funding priorities are linked to specific goals and objectives from the State Historic Preservation Plan. As we tailor the application and rubric to fit the new grant system, the point values for some criteria may change from what is shown on the information that you received, but the criteria and the relative value between criteria will be maintained.

Mr. Abbott made a motion to approve the Certified Local Government Grant Criteria. The motion was seconded by Dr. Grefe and passed unanimously without discussion.

7. For information: 2022 Annual Heritage Festival Update

Ms. Alqassar reminded the commissioners that the 44th Annual Heritage Festival is coming up on September 17th from 12 to five, at the Waterfire Arts Center. There will be dance, singing, and musical performances, exhibits, and food trucks. The event is free and all are welcome.

Ms. Taylor and Mr. Abbott congratulated Ms. Alqassar on a fabulous lineup and the commissioners thanked her for her effort.

8. For Information: Final report on Conference Analysis/Recommendations Project

Sarah Zurier reported on the final Conference Analysis/Recommendations Project report that was prepared by consultant Susan West Montgomery. The project began in January 2021, with Ms. Montgomery gathering information about past conferences, stakeholders, the Rhode Island preservation community, other conveners of public programs, and more. She held several group discussions, conducted interviews with stakeholders and others in related fields, and surveyed past participants and conveners of other statewide preservation conferences.

The report found that the conference doesn't fully align with RIHPHC's work, mission, and strategic goals; the funding model is not sustainable; and yet, the RIHPHC is the only organization that is capable of hosting such a convening. Ms. Montgomery reported what RIHPHC programs should do, and offered prioritized goals for public programs that reflect the goals that the RIHPHC has already set forth in our planning efforts.

The report presents a menu of sorts of new options for convening the preservation community that are tied directly to our goals. Among these are:

- Empowering Preservation series

- Build and host an online program series
- Expand the series for other audiences, forums, hands-on workshops and tours
- RIHPHC Lecture series
 - Create a lecture series and present it around the state
 - Focus the lectures on office and staff expertise
 - Use a speaker bureau model
- Community Heritage Assessments
 - A deep dive into preservation initiatives and needs in one or more similar communities
 - Bring the RIHPHC staff to the community/ies
 - Listen to the community members' impressions of what they do and need
 - Relate to earlier town survey projects
- Placefulness
 - Following up on the Community Heritage Assessments
 - Bring the state to the Community Heritage Assessment town through a convening or professionals and the public
 - Dive deep and solve problems
- Historic District Commission training
 - A new law has recently passed mandating annual education for historic district commission members
 - RIHPHC will take part in the development of the training programs
- Preservation In the Community events
 - Crowd-sourced preservation programming
 - Convene and/or participate in the programming with RIHPHC endorsement
- Archaeology Month and Preservation Month
 - Continue Rhode Island Archaeology Month in October
 - Create Preservation Month programming in May

Next, the staff will develop plans for future programs. This will be both a short-term and a long-term effort.

9. For information: Rhode Island Archaeology Month

Ms. Zurier reported that Rhode Island Archaeology Month is shaping up. Tim Ives established it in 2015 and started the planning for this year's event before he left. As of now there are 13 events scheduled, both online and in-person. These include talks, hands-on projects, walks, and more. All of the events are led by professional archaeologists and are free to attend. The calendar is posted on our website.

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

Ms. Taylor reported that there will be a Zoom briefing for the staff next week to answer

their questions. The Search Committee is holding in-person interviews with three candidates, after which, they will make a decision regarding next steps. She will have more to report in October.

11. Announcements

The next Commission meeting will be held on October 12, 2022.

Ms. Groch announced that the Southern New England Planning Conference will be held October 6th and 7th in Providence.

12. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 10:42 am.

Minutes recorded by,



Jeffrey D. Emidy
Interim Executive Director