

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION



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MINUTES

RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION

October 12, 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

Rosemary Carreiro, Fiscal Aide
Joanna Doherty, Principal Architectural Historian
Virginia Hesse, Principal Historical Architect
Roberta Randall, Principal Historical Architect

II. AGENDA

1. Call to Order

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

Ms. Taylor asked for a motion to move agenda item 6, "Update on the RIHPHC executive director hiring process," to after the approval of September's minutes because guests who plan to speak on the executive director search need to leave early due to other commitments. Ms. Abbott made the motion, which was seconded by Dr. Grefe. The motion passed unanimously.

2. For approval: Minutes of September 14, 2022, Commission meeting

On a motion by Mr. Abbott, seconded by Ms. Ryan, the commissioners voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the September 14, 2022, Commission meeting as they appear in the draft.

3. For information: Update on the RIHPHC executive director hiring process

Ms. Taylor introduced Wendy Nicholas and Lucie Searle, members of the Executive Director Search Committee, to give the update.

Wendy Nicholas read a prepared statement, which is **attached** to these minutes.

Ms. Ryan stated that the Preservation Roundtable was doing some of the outreach that Ms. Nicholas asked the commissioners to consider and asked what the Roundtable's role should be. Ms. Nicholas replied that the search committee interviewed Roundtable members and the belief is that it needs to be reenergized. This is not high on Preserve Rhode Island's priority list. She suggested that Mr. Emidy talk to Val Talmage about this.

Dr. Grefe stated that the question of who on the Roundtable is empowered to do what has been a topic of discussion. Also, many of the commissioners are on expired terms and not empowered to do things. We need new commissioners and reappointed commissioners who have the capacity to do what the search committee is suggesting.

Mr. Abbott asked who hires the executive director and whether or not there is a human resources process. Ms. Taylor stated that the Commission hires the executive director and human resources does the paperwork. The governor may want to meet the candidate, but doesn't have veto power. Mr. Abbott asked who appoints the State Historic Preservation Officer. Ms. Taylor stated that the governor makes that appointment. Mr. Abbott asked who hires a replacement deputy director. Ms. Taylor replied that the executive director hires all of the staff.

Ms. Searle asked if the expired commissioners want to stay on. The search committee predicated their information collection on working with the Commission. Recapturing the agency's place at the table in the state was the most important thing that came up. The commissioners can be that connection. She suggested that the commissioners should meet with Mr. Emidy over the next year to do this.

The commissioners discussed the need to approve the search committee's recommendation. They decided that, in an effort to move the process along, they would schedule a special meeting to consider the recommendation before the November 9 Commission meeting. Ms. Taylor stated that she will reach out to the commissioners to gauge their availability for a meeting next week.

Ms. Taylor thanked Ms. Nicholas and Ms. Searle for their report.

4. Interim Executive Director's Report

Jeffrey Emidy reported that:

- a. Last week he appointed Charlotte Taylor as the State Archaeologist. Ms. Taylor has been with the Commission for over 20 years, is a Principal Archaeologist, and has vast experience and knowledge of Rhode Island archaeology both on land and underwater. This is largely an administrative issue – it's not related to her job description or salary level. She will represent our state with the other state archaeologists and can use "State Archaeologist" next to her name in print or online.
- b. R.I Archaeology Month continues. There weren't any scheduled activities over the holiday weekend, but it picks up again next weekend. On Saturday there is a tour and data collection at the North Burial Ground in Providence, and a program at the Kelly House in Lincoln. On Sunday, there is an event at Slater Mill. There are also two events next Wednesday, in Bristol and online. The calendar is on our website.
- c. The RI250 Commission met two weeks ago. Sarah Zurier attended on Mr. Emidy's behalf. This was Secretary Gorbea's last full meeting as Chair of the Commission. The Secretary of State elected next month will be the next Chair. Mr. Abbott made a motion that the Commission should send a resolution of thanks to Secretary Gorbea thanking her for her service as the Chair of the Semiquincentennial Commission. Dr. Grefe seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.
 - i. The Varnum Armory made a presentation requesting support from the RI250 Commission in arranging for two of Rhode Island's battle flags to be restored before 2026 and to be exhibited: one by Varnum Armory and one by the National Museum of the United States Army. The Division of Capital Assets Management and Maintenance currently has control of the flags. The request has been forwarded to the Executive Committee. One idea suggested at the meeting was to have the flags transferred to State Archives. Dr. Grefe stated concern over whether the State Archives has the space to store the flags.
 - ii. A representative of the Butts Hill Fort Restoration/Battle of Rhode Island Association gave a report on their activities. They are raising funds, hosting events, raising awareness, planning preservation and improvements, and

working with the Town of Portsmouth, which owns the Fort. The organization is eager to make everyone aware of the Battle of Rhode Island in anticipation of its anniversary in 2028.

- iii. Tall Ships America, which is headquartered in Newport, is planning Rhode Island events in 2026, possibly on May 4th. Ms. Zurier reminded the RI250 Commission that May 4th is Providence's day, specifically the Old State House's day, and that we should not schedule competing events. The RIHPHC will have to keep an eye on that and it is a cue for reaching out to the governor's office after the election about starting the planning for that event – whatever it will be. The new leadership of the RI250 Commission may be able to start that effort.
 - d. He submitted our State FY2024 Operating Budget on September 23rd, and a corrected version on the 30th. Our budget analyst caught an error requiring the correction. In the corrected version, Mr. Emidy put all of the proposed changes to existing staff in revisions to the FY2023 budget and some of the new hires extending into FY2024. The FY2023 budget ends June 30, 2023. Our total budget increase for those items, which includes replacing some higher-level vacancies with lower-level hiring, is about \$202,000. He also included a modest increase on other line items of approximately \$51,000 over FY2023. Our total operating budget ask for FY2024 is about \$3,768,000. It was about \$3,653,000 in FY2023.
5. For vote: Easement Review
Vernon House – R.I. Slave History Medallion
46 Clarke Street, Newport

Mr. Emidy informed the commissioners of a project at Vernon House, at 46 Clarke Street, in Newport. We hold an easement on the property that ends in May 2041 from a 2015 State Preservation Grant. The project for review is the addition of a R.I. Slave History Medallion (RISM) on the exterior of the building. Vernon House is an individual National Historic Landmark (NHL) and is listed in the National Register as a contributing resource in the Newport Historic District, which is also an NHL. According to the NHL nomination form from 1975, the oldest part of the house dates to the late 17th or early 18th century and an addition was put on in 1759.

Vernon House is one of four houses in Newport with rusticated wood siding. The proposed location for the plaque is next to three existing plaques at the west end of the south elevation. The Slave Medallions are bronze, 18 by nine inches, with a QR code in the center that links to the RISM website and space for a text plaque on the lower section. There is not room on the sidewalk to add a pedestal to hold the medallion.

Ms. Ryan asked if the idea behind this location is that this is a high traffic area. Mr. Abbott stated that it preserves the façade, as well. Ms. Taylor asked if the staff has comments. Virginia Hesse stated that plaques beget more plaques, as happens at the State House. Mounting the medallion on the fence to the north of the house would be better,

and moving all of the plaques there would be best. Ms. Taylor stated that the difference between the State House and this is that the state doesn't own this building, so the Commission is one step removed. Dr. Grefe stated that she likes the idea of getting the plaques off of the building. Ms. Ryan stated that the significance of Vernon House warrants this conversation. Mr. Ducharme stated that the fence installation idea is a good one. The current location is too high for someone in a wheelchair; to get the right viewing angle, they would have to be in the street. The fence and a signboard would be ideal.

Mr. Abbott made a motion that the Commission not object to the proposal, but recommend that all of the plaques be moved to a location near the fence. Ms. Ryan seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

6. For vote: Easement Review
Forestdale Schoolhouse
190 School Street, North Smithfield

Mr. Emidy informed the commissioners of a project at the Forestdale Schoolhouse, at 190 School Street, in North Smithfield, the home of the North Smithfield Heritage Association. The building was constructed in 1877 and is listed in the National Register as a contributing property in the Forestdale Mill Village Historic District. The project is to replace an exterior stair on the rear of the south elevation and to rebuild a cupola base, for the later installation of a new cupola. We hold an easement on the property that ends in October 2043 from a 2017 State Preservation Grant.

The building is in the midst of a series of projects to renovate the building, including siding and paint, window repair, and new front stairs. The stair on the south side has been removed due to unsafe condition. The proposed stair is a bit wider than the one it is replacing, to provide a bit more space on the landing. The stair will be constructed of wood with 1¼-inch square balusters, wood stair treads and decking, and a pipe rail on the building side; there was one there previously.

The old cupola was removed in 1958, down to the roof. The base of that cupola appears in historic photographs to have been close to or level with the peak of the roof. The new base will be taller. It will have clapboard siding to match the building, and a copper sheet cap.

The commissioners discussed the proposed stair and expressed concern that, even with this stair, the building will not be accessible. However, they also questioned whether it is within their purview to consider that in their review. Roberta Randall, who has reviewed the project for the staff, stated that a ramp was proposed previously, but because of the height required, it would have to start on the north side of the building, and wrap around the entire rear to this location.

Ms. Taylor asked Ms. Randall if she thinks that the cupola base is acceptable as designed.

Ms. Randall stated that it is; the change is imperceptible.

Dr. Grefe made a motion to approve the proposal for the stairs and the cupola base. Mr. Abbott seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

7. Announcements

The next Commission meeting will be held on November 9, 2022.

Dr. Grefe announced that the 201st Annual Meeting of the Rhode Island Historical Society will be held on November 10th at the State House.

8. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 10:47 am.

Minutes recorded by,



Jeffrey D. Emidy
Interim Executive Director

DRAFT

MEMO

TO: Members, RI Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission
FROM: Members, Executive Director Search Committee
Ruth Taylor, chair; Wendy Nicholas, Ron Onorato and Lucie Searle
DATE: 10/12/2022
RE: Proposed new Executive Director

The Search Committee has completed its search for a new Executive Director of the RI Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission. We are unanimous and enthusiastic in our recommendation that Jeff Emidy be hired as the Commission's Executive Director.

The Committee conducted a national search. Members interviewed stakeholders to get some external input regarding priorities for the new Executive Director and chair Ruth Taylor surveyed staff and Commission members. Members and staff posted the job in numerous pertinent places with national reach. We reached out to potential candidates to encourage their application. Twenty-eight people from across the country applied. We conducted Zoom interviews with eight and in-person interviews with the three most equipped to do the job.

Ultimately, we concluded that the Commission, its mission and its staff and will be best served by promoting Jeff Emidy to the permanent position of Executive Director and State Historic Preservation Officer. Jeff knows the job and has been doing it well. He is already familiar with many pertinent people in state government and in Rhode Island's cities and towns, and he has momentum in addressing some of the most urgent issues for getting the office back into a well-functioning mode.

One priority the Search Committee recommends, based on conversations with staff and constituents, is to work deliberately to re-establish the agency's presence within state government. The Executive Director, with help from Commission members and perhaps staff, must be a strong voice for historic preservation inside state government, communicating and demonstrating the relevancy of historic preservation and its connection to contemporary concerns for economic development, climate change, affordable housing, etc. to the Governor's Office, other state agencies, and legislators.

Another clear issue that emerged is the need to modernize all aspects of the RIHPHC office. The physical changes underway are one step. Others include working within the state guidelines to develop appropriate job descriptions, salaries and hybrid work schedules. Also to complete the hiring of needed staff, and to fill out the Commission. These are the issues that will make the RIHPHC a great place to work.

Modernization of the program schedule should also be considered, comprising the increased use of technology including digitization of records and GIS mapping, redoing/expanding surveying to encompass the passage of time and new scholarship, and approaching the issues that have developed recently in historic preservation – diverse perspectives, climate change, solar and wind installations, et al.

Finally more attention to the heritage program, and the ways that historic preservation and heritage intersect, are issues that arose regularly with all groups.

As he takes on a more permanent leadership role, Jeff will need and wants the help – increased engagement – of Commission members. The Search Committee urges the Commission to work closely with Jeff at the outset to identify and agree on his key priorities for the year ahead. Make clear the Commission’s expectations for accomplishment. Also, we urge you to identify the ways in which you as Commissioners can and will help Jeff and the staff to advance those priorities.

DRAFT