



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION

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MINUTES
RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD

October 3, 2022

9:30 am

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
Dr. Patrick Malone
Dr. Ronald Onorato, Chairman
Mr. Edward F. Sanderson
Ms. Martha Werenfels, AIA

MEMBERS ABSENT

Dr. Marisa Angell Brown
Mr. Keith Stokes
Vacant
Vacant (archaeologist)
Vacant (architectural historian)
Vacant (landscape architect/historian)

STAFF PRESENT

Ms. Joanna Doherty, Principal Architectural Historian
Mr. Jeffrey Emidy, Deputy Director

II. AGENDA

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 9:32 A.M. by Chairman Onorato.

2. Approval of minutes of June 6, 2022, meeting

On a motion by Mr. Sanderson, seconded by Mr. Abbott, the Review Board unanimously VOTED TO APPROVE the Minutes of June 6, 2022, without changes.

3. Interim Executive Director's Report

Mr. Emidy reported that:

a) Regarding nomination processing updates

- i. Joanna Doherty has continued integrating comments on the Newport Spring addition to the Newport Historic District. She will tell us more about that later in the meeting.
- ii. Ms. Doherty was the primary reviewer for the draft nomination for St. Mary's Church, in Portsmouth. Sarah Zurier and he also reviewed Kathy Cavanaugh's draft and Ms. Doherty sent the comments back to her.
- iii. Ms. Doherty has also been working on some preliminary review requests that we will see today
- iv. Mr. Emidy has had some correspondence with the National Park Service (NPS) tax credit reviewers about the Federal Street Historic District, in Woonsocket. They wanted some more clarification about boundaries and the reasoning behind not adding the Federal Street properties to the existing Main Street Historic District. Once Mr. Emidy explained our rationale, they don't seem to have a problem with that decision any longer.
- v. The following properties have been listed in the National Register since our last meeting
 1. Cedar Point Historic District in North Kingstown was listed July 21
 2. Wakefield Historic District – boundary increase in South Kingstown was approved August 1
 3. St Columba's, the Berkeley Memorial Chapel in Middletown was listed August 1

b) Executive Director hiring process

The most recent information that Ruth Taylor shared at the last Commission meeting was that second interviews are planned, after which the search committee will determine if they need to do third interviews or if they are ready to make a decision. She said they expect to be done by the end of the year.

c) State Review Board Working Group

The Working Group members are: Ron Onorato, Ted Sanderson, and Pat Malone from the Board; Kaity Ryan from the Commission; Nancy Letendre, planner from Westerly; Shantia Anderheggen and Ned Connors, preservation consultants. We tried to get a meeting set up for the end of September, but in the end, it was pushed it off to late October.

Dr. Onorato stated that the June Review Board minute contained some good information that may be useful to the working group members, so it would be good to make that available to them. Mr. Emidy said he will do that.

4. For vote: National Register of Historic Places final review Newport Historic District – Additional Information

Newport

Ms. Doherty reminded the board members that they reviewed the Newport Historic District (Additional Documentation) document in February. The document provides information about the Newport Town Spring site, which includes a historic, underground Spring Box. At that time, the Review Board approved the nomination. Comments were received from reviewers of the nomination, and it has taken a while for those to be incorporated. Since more than three months has passed – the NPS maximum – we are asking the Board to vote again so that we can send the updated nomination.

Dr. Onorato asked what kind of changes had been made to the nomination since the Board last saw it. Ms. Doherty replied that the most substantive change was to the construction date of the Spring Box; the PAL had assigned a date to the feature that the Newport Historical Society thought was not supported by evidence. A broader date range of “early 19th century” was assigned. The nomination was also re-formatted to better meet NPS standards; edited to remove general information about Newport’s historical development; and updated to clarify that the additional information will become part of the official record for the Newport National Historic District but not, at this time, part of the Newport National Historic Landmark District record.

A motion to approve the nomination to the National Register was made by Mr. Abbott and seconded by Dr. Onorato. The Board voted unanimously to approve the motion.

5. For consideration: National Register of Historic Places preliminary review
Elmwood Christian Church/Impact Center Providence
353 Elmwood Avenue, Providence

Ms. Doherty made a presentation for preliminary review of the former Elmwood Christian Church at 353 Elmwood Avenue, in Providence. The building is now the home of a different congregation, and is known as the Impact Center Providence.

The Elmwood Christian Church was formed in 1912 from the merger of two nearby congregations, the Elmwood Congregational Church (the oldest Protestant church in the neighborhood) and the Broad Street Christian Church. The building was constructed in 1914-1915 and designed in the English Tudor Revival style by local architect Gorham Henshaw (1879-1963), who was known for his ecclesiastical work. It features a square, crenelated tower; a mix of arched and rectangular window openings, some with eared architraves; faux half-timbering; wood panels with quatrefoil motifs; and a multi-gabled roof, originally sheathed in slate but now covered with asphalt shingle. Interior finishes include oak paneling with a pickled wash; original window sash, doors and trim; intact stair halls; and wood plank flooring in some locations. The floor plan remains largely unchanged from its original configuration, with a domed nave in the southern part of the building and a former Sunday School area in the northern part. The former Sunday School area includes a two-story hall lit by a large skylight and surrounded on three sides by classrooms on both the first and second-floor levels. The fourth side of the hall

connects to the nave, via three large wood doors that slide up into the wall above. This scheme, known as the “Akron Plan,” gained favor among Protestant churches in the late 19th century. It allowed for varying levels of communication between the classrooms and nave so that, for example, students could hear the beginning of worship and then, with doors closed, attend Sunday school classes.

After the Elmwood Christian Church closed in 1954, the building was occupied by the First Presbyterian Church, then by the Providence Assembly of God, and is now home to Impact Center Providence Church.

Dr. Onorato asked if any consideration has been given to amending the existing Elmwood Historic District nomination. Ms. Doherty replied that she has spoken to our NPS National Register reviewer. They determined that the nomination is old enough that it would need a lot of work. It might save some effort, but would need more context because the existing context is not strong enough by today’s standards. Ms. Werenfels asked if amending the nomination would be more work than individual listing. Ms. Doherty replied that it wouldn’t necessarily be. Ms. Werenfels asked if amending the nomination would be for the greater good. Ms. Doherty replied that it probably would. Another option is to nominate it individually under the Multiple Resource Area nomination. Mr. Sanderson stated that there were serious gaps when the Elmwood Historic District nominations were prepared.

Mr. Sanderson stated that he suspects that further research on the parishioners – who they were, occupations, ethnicity, etc., could help to provide some context. This was constructed during the brief high point of Elmwood and the church is a window into what was going on in the area at the time.

Mr. Abbott stated that he is struck by how intact the church is. The central atrium appears to be a special place.

Ms. Werenfels asked for more information about the Akron Plan. Ms. Doherty explained it, including that its origin was in Akron, Ohio, and that it allowed children to experience the first part of the church service from the classrooms, then close the doors to pursue catechism.

Dr. Malone stated that it is unusual to have a full set of drawings as we do here. This could make a great tool for comparison with other churches, including those by Henshaw.

Ms. Werenfels made a motion that the former Elmwood Christian Church is worthy of further exploration toward a final nomination. The motion was seconded by Mr. Abbott and unanimously approved by the Review Board.

6. For consideration: National Register of Historic Places preliminary review
Neutaconkanut Hill Park
675 Plainfield Street, Providence

Ms. Doherty made a presentation for preliminary review of Neutaconkanut Hill Park, at 675 Plainfield Street, in Providence. The park is owned by the City of Providence.

Located on the western edge of Providence and comprising the highest point in the city, Neutaconkanut Hill was, according to both archaeological evidence and oral tribal histories, a location of concentrated Narragansett and Pokanoket Indian settlement, resource collection, and communal gatherings. Much of the hill was owned and farmed by members of the Borden and, later, King families beginning in the second half of the 17th century. Neutaconkanut Hill has attracted recreational use since at least the late 19th century, as the nearby neighborhoods of Silver Lake and Olneyville grew. In 1892, the Providence Public Parks Association (est. 1883) identified the hill as potential parkland, and the city acquired a forty-acre parcel near the intersection of Plainfield Street and Sunset Avenue in 1903. The Olmsted Brothers landscape architecture firm, hired in 1908 to consult on the development of a metropolitan parks system, argued for additional land acquisition at Neutaconkanut Hill. The city eventually assembled 88 acres of the hill through purchase and by donation, notably from Abby King, who gave sixteen acres in 1915.

Research to date does not suggest that a comprehensive landscape plan was ever developed for Neutaconkanut Hill Park; rather, the park has evolved over time, with different periods of use and development reflected in its resources. Stone walls, a cemetery and the Borden/King homestead ruins pre-date the creation of the park. Circle Road, the bandstand foundation, and the bus shelter relate to the park's early development, while a number of resources – including the trail system, the “great stone stairs,” the stone bleachers, and stone-lined culverts – were constructed by the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s. Late-20th-century/early 21st-century additions like the recreation center, playground, and skate park are confined to the northeastern area of the park and do not detract from the property's overall character.

Mr. Sanderson stated that this seems like a place where events occurred over time and there is a memory of these things happening that is important to many people. It doesn't seem to be a National Register archaeological site based on what has been found and doesn't seem to have a National Register-eligible plan – there seems to be an evolution of use. It is hard to document a Traditional Cultural Place in most cases. In his own view, this is an interesting place, but it is not a National Register-eligible place. In the past, there was an effort to list many of the Providence parks and a lot of places were described as having landscape history, but ultimately, listing them in the National Register was not seen as a good use of resources.

Ms. Werenfels asked if the Commission staff see the park as worthy of listing. Ms. Doherty replied that they do. They think it is a complicated, multi-layer landscape that evolved over 100-plus years. It is more a vernacular landscape than a formal one.

Ms. Werenfels made a motion that Neutaconkanut Hill Park is worthy of further exploration toward a final nomination, though with a couple of areas of concern. The

motion was seconded by Mr. Abbott and unanimously approved by the Review Board with Mr. Sanderson abstaining.

7. Announcements

The next meeting will be held on Monday, December 5, 2022.

8. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 10:57 A.M.

Minutes recorded by,



Jeffrey D. Emdy
Interim Director
Interim State Historic Preservation Officer

DRAFT