

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION



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MINUTES

RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION

December 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. Jeffrey Emidy, Interim State Historic Preservation Officer
Dr. Morgan Grefe
Dr. Rod Mather (excused at 10:20)
Mr. Clark Schoettle
Ms. Ruth Taylor, Chair

MEMBERS ABSENT

Mr. Warren Ducharme, representing James Cambio, State Building Code Commissioner
Ms. Hilary Fagan, President, Rhode Island Commerce Corporation
Terrence Gray, Director, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management
Ms. Roberta Groch, representing Meredith Brady, Associate Director, Division of
Statewide Planning
Ms. Anjali Joshi
Ms. Kaity Ryan
[Vacant]
[Vacant]
[Vacant]

STAFF PRESENT

Joanna Doherty, Principal Architectural Historian
Roberta Randall, Principal Historical Architect
Elizabeth Totten, Senior Project Review Coordinator

II. AGENDA

1. Call to Order

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

Mr. Emidy introduced Dr. Rod Mather as a new member of the Commission. Dr. Mather is the Chair of the Department of History and a professor of maritime history and underwater archaeology at the University of Rhode Island. Dr. Mather sat in on a meeting a few months ago when he had not yet been confirmed as a Commission member. He was officially appointed in May, but we were not informed by the governor's office until October. Dr. Mather fills one of our archaeologist spots on the Commission.

Mr. Emidy stated that Ms. Anjali Joshi has also been appointed to the Commission, but cannot be at today's meeting. She will be introduced at her first meeting. These appointments leave us with three vacancies on the Commission. When Mr. Emidy met with the governor, it was suggested that we put some names together and send them to the governor's office for consideration, so we are going to do that.

We look forward to benefitting from Dr. Mather's and Ms. Joshi's experience and expertise.

Ms. Taylor asked for a motion to move agenda item 4, "Easement Review: Providence Performing Arts Center – exterior addition," to the first item on the agenda because Dr. Mather needs to leave early due to other commitments. Dr. Grefe made the motion, which was seconded by Dr. Mather. The motion passed unanimously.

2. For vote: Easement Review Providence Performing Arts Center – exterior addition 220 Weybosset Street, Providence

RIHPHC principal historical architect Roberta Randall made a presentation about a proposed addition at the Providence Performing Arts Center (PPAC). The RIHPHC holds a historic preservation easement on PPAC through January 1, 2054, as a result of the theatre's receipt of multiple grants, including a federal Save America's Treasures grant. PPAC would like to construct a rooftop addition on the one-story, commercial building that it owns and utilizes as dressing rooms on Richmond Street, adjacent to the theatre. This rooftop already supports an addition that contains restrooms for the theatre. In addition to the easement review, the project is receiving bond funds from the State Council on the Arts (RISCA), which triggers RIHPHC review.

The proposed addition duplicates the size of the PPAC stage to provide simultaneous opportunities for technical setup, choreography rehearsal, and actors and directors to establish blocking for the performances. The space will also be able to meet other community outreach and engagement program needs.

The proposed location of the addition is at the Richmond/Pine streets corner. The tall, one-story addition will be 50 feet by 40 feet in plan, set back from the undulating parapet 2½ feet along Richmond Street and 1 foot along Pine Street. In these locations, the addition walls will be directly supported by structure below.

The design of the addition is essentially a brick box. Its thin brick walls are windowless, with only a single, horizontal band of stone tile to carry the terra cotta banding to the addition. Simple lettering at the corner will spell out “Providence Performing Arts Center.”

Ms. Taylor asked how the staff views this proposal. Ms. Randall stated that, when the staff first saw the proposal, the addition was set back five or six feet further, which was better, but the structure below brought the walls out toward the edges. Staff were also a little concerned about the height, however, staff now understand PPAC’s need to replicate the stage dimensions and include lighting.

Dr. Grefe stated that she understands the desire not to mimic the historic appearance, but that the addition looks a little jarring because it is so streamlined. She asked if there was an effort to pay homage to the ornament on the commercial block. Mr. Emidy replied that the banding on the addition is designed to do that.

Mr. Schoettle asked if the addition wall along Richmond Street could be extended to the restroom addition. Ms. Randall stated that there is mechanical equipment on the roof in the space between.

Ms. Taylor stated that the addition has a negative impact on the view as it removes attention from the appearance of the first floor. Dr. Grefe added that the first floor is in conversation with the wall behind it, but the addition disrupts that. Ms. Taylor added that the negative impact is mitigated in part or in whole by the community impact.

Mr. Schoettle stated that the design was better when the addition was recessed, but it is located at the back corner of the building. The pedestrian experience will seem pretty similar to now, because the perspective view that is being presented isn’t seen often. Ms. Randall stated that, when the addition was set back, it looked shorter.

Ms. Taylor asked if the design changed when the addition was moved forward. Ms. Randall stated that it was not. Mr. Schoettle asked if there is a way that, structurally, the building can extend toward the center and be held back from the edges. It seems that, if the deck structure exists as a platform, the walls could go anywhere.

Ms. Taylor stated that, as usual, we want to get to a “yes” for this project and asked if it is possible to continue thinking about the design.

PPAC General Manager Alan Chille asked, if it would be helpful, if they could build a false wall in front of the mechanicals to continue that appearance across the Richmond

Street elevation. Ms. Taylor replied that that seems better, but the Commission would have to see it to know for sure. Mr. Schoettle agreed.

Ms. Taylor encouraged the project team to consider the elements of the conversation and the questions that were raised and come back as soon as possible so that the Commission can continue to work toward a “yes” vote.

3. For vote: Easement Review
Trinity Repertory Theater – exterior addition
201 Washington Street, Providence

RIHPHC Project Review Coordinator Elizabeth Totten made a presentation for a proposed project at Trinity Repertory Theater, at 201 Washington Street in Providence. Trinity Repertory Company is proposing an addition to the east elevation of the building that will contain an elevator and additional space for offices and educational programming. The RIHPHC holds a preservation easement on the exterior and the lobby and upper lobby levels of the building through June 1, 2062. Additionally, the project will receive funding from a RISCA bond, which triggers RIHPHC review. Trinity seeks Commission approval of the size, scale, proportion, massing, and material of the addition to make RISCA funds available to advance the concept through the development of further designs.

The proposed addition is in concept form at this point, and the RIHPHC has received a conceptual drawing and floor plans for review. These show a five-story addition, set back from the façade plane, fronted by a glass tower with a buff-colored masonry exterior behind. The addition will not cover the terra cotta tiles that wrap around the southeast corner of the building. The tower will serve as an entrance and will support signage for the theater. The elevator will be within the front part of the masonry section of the addition, with open space behind.

Ms. Taylor asked if the staff have looked at a lowered glass section, because the wall behind it that would become exposed might be jarring. Ms. Totten replied that the staff has not seen that design – if the Commission decides to authorize the release of funds today, they might pay for that type of exploration.

Dr. Grefe asked if the impacts to the alley have been looked at. Trinity Executive Director Kate Lieberman stated that the city is abandoning the alley. Trinity hopes to turn it into a landscaped, open, gathering space as part of an effort to beautify this part of downtown. Ms. Taylor asked how old the alleyway is. Ms. Totten replied that we do not know.

Mr. Schoettle asked if the design will leave the ornament at the back corner of the building exposed. Ms. Lieberman replied that it will not. Ms. Lieberman stated that the details of the design have not been settled as this conceptual review is about getting funding released by RISCA so that design can continue. Ms. Taylor stated that

performing a review based on a concept drawing is difficult. Ms. Schoettle stated that this is really approval for the concept of adding to the east elevation of the building.

Ms. Taylor stated that she has a general dislike for the removal of historic streets for this purpose, but might not object in this case. Mr. Schoettle observed that there will still be a sidewalk, but further opined that the addition should be as small as possible. Mr. Abbott replied that the addition will give the theater additional interior space that is needed.

Ms. Totten reported that the staff recommend that the location of the addition is acceptable, and suggest that the glass portion of the building be lower than the existing building façade, the masonry portion of the addition not be taller than the façade, and if the elevator is to be taller than the façade, that it be placed at the rear of the addition. Further, staff suggest that the masonry portion of the addition be faced with buff brick and the design should draw inspiration from the historic pilasters. The new addition must utilize existing entrances on the first floor and minimize punched openings through the historic east exterior wall, which should remain exposed. The proposed canopy must not tie into or obstruct existing terra cotta elements. Finally, though a new entrance will be added, the existing lobby doors at the façade should remain in use during performances.

Ms. Taylor asked if there is a letter that can be crafted that says that the Commission recommends that Trinity be allowed to design an addition to this space? The commissioners agreed that this is an appropriate step to take; the staff will craft a letter to RISCA.

4. For vote: State Historic Preservation Review Board action
St. Mary's Episcopal Church
324 East Main Road, Portsmouth

RIHPHC Principal Architectural Historian Joanna Doherty reported that, at its December 5th meeting, the State Historic Preservation Review Board voted to approve the nomination of St. Mary's Church, on East Main Road in Portsmouth, to the National Register of Historic Places.

St. Mary's is being nominated to the National Register at the local level of significance under Criterion A for religion and Criterion C for architecture and art. The period of significance for the nomination is 1842 to 1973.

The church was designed in the Gothic Revival style by Richard Upjohn and constructed in 1847-49 on land donated by Sarah Gibbs, who lived on the estate known as Oakland Farm, just north of the church. Sarah Gibbs played an active role in the establishment of St. Mary's Parish and is considered its founder. Richard Upjohn was a British-born American architect who built a reputation for Gothic Revival-style ecclesiastical architecture, perhaps most famously at Trinity Church, in New York City.

In addition to the church, the property includes a historic cemetery, a 1936 Rectory, and two non-contributing buildings; the Gibbs House, which was built in 1970, and the Parish House, from 2012. Historic fieldstone walls delineate the lot boundaries and run through the property, which includes 68 acres, much of it held in a conservation easement.

In addition to being an excellent, highly intact example of the Gothic Revival style, St. Mary's contains 17 stained glass windows, including six by Frederic Crowninshield. The church also houses a large memorial tablet dedicated to Sarah Gibbs's parents and designed by Horatio Greenough, an American sculptor. The cemetery contains grave markers by Richard Morris Hunt and Richard Upjohn & Sons.

There was no discussion by the Commission. A motion to endorse the State Review Board approval was made by Mr. Abbott and seconded by Dr. Grefe. The Commission voted unanimously to approve the motion.

5. For approval: Minutes of October 12 and October 20, 2022, Commission meetings

On a motion by Mr. Abbott, seconded by Mr. Schoettle, the commissioners voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the October 12 and October 20, 2022, Commission meetings as they appear in the drafts.

6. Interim Executive Director's Report

Jeffrey Emidy reported that:

- a. Having already introduced Dr. Rod Mather as a new member of the Commission, he would move on to letter "B" of the agenda list of his report items.
- b. Commissioners may have seen an article or two last week about a project at South County Hospital. This is a land swap project. South Kingstown got a grant from the federal government in the 1980s to purchase land for recreational use. Now, the abutting South County Hospital would like to acquire that land from the town to expand its parking. The hospital will purchase other land in town and swap it with the town for recreational use. The parking lot site is adjacent to the Salt Pond archaeological site. We requested a Phase I archaeological study of the site, which turned up features that could be graves, consistent with what has been found at Salt Pond. The hospital is talking with the Narragansett Tribal Historic Preservation Officer. The town, however, pulled back from the swap at a meeting last week. The sides are still working on a resolution and we will continue our review.
- c. Included in the packet of information distributed this morning is the Office of Management and Budget's fiscal year 2023 first quarter report. Mr. Emidy distributed this because it mentions RIHPHC a few times and also gives some reference for what RIHPHC is going through budgetarily in the context of other agencies. At the top of page two, commissioners will see that HPHC is projected to spend \$200,000 less than budgeted. This is due almost entirely to personnel cost savings due to vacancies. Later on the same page it shows that we are not the only state office in this situation.

- Page five, bullet point six says the same thing. The specific numbers are shown on the tenth page, which is not numbered.
- d. Also included in this morning's packet is the 2023 meeting schedule. It was also included in the email to commissioners with the agenda. The schedule does not specify a location but we have reserved the Department of Business Regulation Board Room for each month's meeting, if we need it. We could, potentially, be able to meet at the Old State House late in 2023, if all of our projects go smoothly.
 - e. He met with Governor McKee. They had an hour-long meeting during which they discussed preservation and economic development, tax credits, bridges, and needing more commissioners. As for the hiring process, the state human resources department has said that Mr. Emidy will start as executive director the first week of January.

7. Announcements

The next Commission meeting will be held on January 11, 2023.

Dr. Grefe announced that the John Brown House landscape project is underway. The plan is to get as much ready as possible before the bad weather sets in with planting and hardscaping planned for the spring. The project will be completed in the spring.

8. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 10:34 am.

Minutes recorded by,



Jeffrey D. Emidy
Interim Executive Director