

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION



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MINUTES

RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION

April 12, 2023

Location:

R.I. Department of Business Regulation  
560 Jefferson Boulevard., Warwick, R.I.  
DBR Board Room, First Floor

I. MEMBERS PRESENT

Mr. Jeffrey Emidy, State Historic Preservation Officer  
Dr. Morgan Grefe  
Ms. Roberta Groch, representing Meredith Brady, Associate Director, Division of  
Statewide Planning  
Dr. Rod Mather  
Ms. Kaity Ryan  
Mr. Clark Schoettle  
Ms. Ruth Taylor, Chair

MEMBERS ABSENT

Mr. Michael Abbott, AIA  
Mr. Bill Ash, Interim President, Rhode Island Commerce Corporation  
Mr. James Cambio, State Building Code Commissioner  
Mr. Terrence Gray, Director, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management  
Ms. Anjali Joshi  
[Vacant]  
[Vacant]  
[Vacant]

STAFF PRESENT

Joanna Doherty, Principal Architectural Historian  
Virginia Hesse, Principal Historical Architect

## II. AGENDA

### 1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 9:32am., Ms. Taylor, Chair, presiding.

### 2. For approval: Minutes of February 8, 2023, Commission meeting

On a motion by Ms. Ryan, seconded by Mr. Schoettle, the commissioners voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the February 8, 2023, Commission meeting as they appear in the draft.

### 3. Executive Director's Report

Jeffrey Emidy reported that:

- a. He is saddened to report that Denise Oliveira passed away on March 20<sup>th</sup>. Denise worked at the RIHPHC from 2000 to 2011. She was hired as a fiscal clerk, then within months moved over to a Heritage Aide position, where she would work for years alongside Mercedes Monteiro. Denise retired in 2011 with 33 years of state service. Outside of work, she was one of the founders of what is now the Cape Verdean Museum. She was very dedicated to the heritage program, was a tireless worker, and really lit up the room with her smile and happy disposition. The staff always loved to see her come in the door to HPHC functions in the years after she retired and will miss her.
- b. The Deputy Director search continues. We received 17 applications and have conducted interviews with three candidates. Narrowing down that number was difficult, as we had a number of strong applicants. We are continuing the process, and he hopes that we are able to make an announcement before the end of the month.
- c. There is one National Register nomination to report on. St Mary's Episcopal Church in Portsmouth was listed in the National Register on Mary 24<sup>th</sup>. He thanked the congregation for their enthusiasm, Kathy Cavanaugh for preparing an excellent nomination, and Joanna Doherty for the work that she put in editing, presenting to the Review Board and Commission, and handling all of the administrative work.
- d. 2023 R.I. Cemetery Weeks are underway. They started on April 1<sup>st</sup> and run through the end of May. Ninety events have been scheduled to date, and more are possible. There is a link on our website that takes you to the schedule on the R.I. Advisory Commission on Historical Cemeteries website. This weekend there's a Photographing Monuments Demonstration in Coventry, Flagging Veterans' graves in Exeter, Walking Tours at Trinity Churchyard and God's Little Acre in Newport, and a Walking Tour of four Lawton Valley Cemeteries in Portsmouth, among others.
- e. March 6<sup>th</sup> through 9<sup>th</sup> he attended Historic Preservation Advocacy Week in Washington. Brent Runyon and Adriana Hazleton from PPS organized and made up the rest of the RI contingent. He attended the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers (SHPOs) Annual Meeting, attended a SHPOs dinner, spent a

- day of advocacy training, updates, and panels presented by Preservation Action, and had tours of the Library of Congress Jefferson Building and the U.S. Capitol. The effort culminated with Brent, Adriana, and him meeting with staff from Representative Cicilline's and Senator Whitehouse's office, and with Senator Reed and his staff. We could not find a time that worked for Representative Magaziner's office, so we met with him and his staff here in Rhode Island last Friday, with Alyssa Lozupone from the Newport Restoration Society joining us. The asks that we were making were for support of the expansion of the Historic Preservation Fund from a \$150million annual apportionment (set in 1976) to \$300million - the apportionment was \$204.5million last year; for support of the Historic Tax Credit Growth and Opportunity Act ("HTC Go"), which will make some changes that will help smaller projects and increase the credit amount for a few years; and for our House members to join the Historic Preservation Caucus and our Senate members to establish one. Mr. Emidy was able to spend some time with the SHPOs of Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Carolina (who says he loves RI and swears he'll stop in when he next comes back), Arizona, New Jersey, Guam, and deputies from Maryland, Washington state, and Nebraska.
- f. He made a presentation at the state's House Finance Subcommittee in March to present our budget. He spoke about the programs that we manage here at the HPHC, and also about our budget increase request to raise salaries and create new positions that more accurately reflect the work that our staff do on a daily basis. The Committee members asked only one question; what is the most interesting thing in our archaeological collections in the basement?
  - g. The State House Restoration Society met in February and March and elected a new Chair, Mike DiBiase, formerly of the state's Department of Administration. Right now, the Society is interested in getting into some planning activity, in the state's battle flags, which used to be displayed in the State House but were removed to more appropriate storage, and in the Division of Capital Assets Management and Maintenance master planning effort for the State House.
  - h. Since the February Commission meeting, he has had two monthly meetings with Governor's Deputy Chief of Staff Kim Ahern and Policy Advisor Tori Scott. They came to the Old State House in March for a tour – neither had ever been. He just keeps them up to speed on any big efforts: public hearings for staff position upgrades, I-195 parcel developments that we are reviewing, etc. We have a standing meeting every month, either in person or virtual.
4. For vote: Easement Review  
    Wilcox Park Caretaker's Cottage  
    Westerly

Mr. Emidy made a presentation regarding a proposal by the Memorial and Library Association of Westerly for a project to rehabilitate the Caretaker's Cottage in Wilcox Park. RIHPHC holds a preservation easement on Wilcox Park that includes the legal boundary of the park with all the buildings and improvements thereon. The exterior of the

cottage is included. The easement is the result of a Save America's Treasures grant and a subsequent State Preservation Grant and expires March 15, 2059.

Wilcox Park was founded in 1898. The Cottage was likely constructed in the mid- to late-19<sup>th</sup> century, possibly before 1885. By 1912, it had been moved to the south. When the house was moved, its orientation was flipped; the south, which was the front, became the rear. Its porch was removed and a kitchen ell added. The north became the front, and a porch, probably including the entrance vestibule, was added.

A new addition is proposed to expand the rear ell to accommodate a first-floor accessible bathroom. This will require the removal of the bulkhead and rear entrance, to the right of center on the rear elevation. The fenestration of the rear elevation will be altered by the removal of the center window on the first floor, which is presumably not in its original position, and removal of the windows on the rear ell. Staff recommend approval of this item. While the addition will require alterations to the building, it will only be visible to those accessing the adjacent stables and using the new rear entrance to the Cottage.

Ms. Ryan made a motion to approve the construction of the rear addition. The motion was seconded by Dr. Grefe. There was no discussion and the Commission voted unanimously to approve the motion.

A second part of the project is to replace the existing asphalt roof shingles and repair the brick chimney as needed. The concealed gutter system will be repaired and the ell will get a new membrane roof with K-style gutters. The staff recommend approval of this item with the following conditions: staff will review and approve mortar specifications for the chimney, and the new gutters and downspouts must be painted to match the cornice and trim.

Dr. Grefe made a motion to approve the roof and chimney work with the staff's conditions. The motion was seconded by Ms. Ryan. There was no discussion and the Commission voted unanimously to approve the motion.

A third part of the project is work on the porch, which dates from between 1902 and 1912. It spans the façade and is supported by wood columns, and has a simple, wood railing, handrail, and a decorative post. It is accessed by granite steps. An entrance vestibule projects from the façade into the porch space. The columns, post, beadboard ceiling, entrance vestibule, and door appear to be historic. The owner would like to make the porch ADA compliant. There is not enough room at the rear of the building to construct a ramp of the required dimensions.

The proposal is to remove the front porch and vestibule in their entirety. The proposed new columns would be fiberglass to match the profile of the existing. The front door is proposed to be an insulated, half-glass chosen to match the existing as closely as possible. Though the architect believes that they are the most damaged part of the structure, if the columns or railings can be saved, they will.

The staff do not believe that the proposed work meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. The work will result in the complete removal of the porch to the point that it will be a reconstructed feature, rather than historic. Staff are not certain that accessibility can be achieved in a less destructive way, nor that the entire structure is deteriorated beyond repair. Staff request that the Commission allow the staff to continue working with the applicant on this item to find a solution that preserves historic features while accommodating the new use.

John Walsh, architect for the project, stated that the proposal for access is via a graded ramp that will be in the form of a bluestone path at the end of the porch. The approach to the building will be the same for everyone else. Based on staff response, the plans have been changed and the vestibule will be rebuilt as it is, floor and ceiling will remain the same, the railing will be restored at the same height, and the front door will be kept.

RIHPHC architect Virginia Hesse asked if the ramp could go around the north end of the building to the rear. Mr. Walsh stated that it cannot, because that encroaches on a property line. There is also not enough room behind the building to have the entire ramp in that area. Finally, it's never a good policy to send people with mobility impairments to the back door of a public building.

Mr. Schoettle asked about the desire to raise the porch floor. He stated that if the roof and ceiling were left in place and the deck were raised to meet the level that is needed to deal with the floor level at the entrance, the only difference that would be needed is the replacement of the columns.

Ms. Taylor stated that it seems that what the Commission is saying is that it does not want to see a complete porch demolition. Dr. Grefe stated that we need to be sure that all modern ADA codes will be met so that we are not allowing for the demolition of historic materials toward a goal that will not be fully achieved.

Ms. Taylor asked the commissioners if they need to see this again, or if the staff can be given the responsibility of coordinating with the project team and approving the design. She proposed a resolution that the staff work with the project team to develop a solution that does not demolish the porch in its entirety and then brings that solution back to the Commission. Dr. Grefe reworded the resolution into a motion that the project is sent back to the staff for further review of ADA compliance and the integrity of the historic materials that are proposed to be removed. The Commission should see the solution for approval. Ms. Ryan seconded the motion. The Commission voted unanimously to approve the motion, with Mr. Schoettle abstaining.

The final part of the project includes siding, trim, wood features, and windows. The proposal is to remove all of the clapboard siding and wood trim, insulate the walls, and install Boral trim and composite or cementitious siding. The existing windows are vinyl replacement sash with interior sandwiched grids. The proposal is to install Marvin Elevate windows, which are wood clad in fiberglass on the exterior. They will be a simulated divided lite, with a spacer bar, in an off-white color. Larger windows will be a

two-over-two configuration, and upper-story windows will simulate a two-lite window.

The staff opinion is that the siding and trim work does not meet the Secretary's Standards. No justification has been submitted to document that the existing siding or wood features are deteriorated beyond repair. There is evidence of rot on some of the window surrounds, but in general, the existing wood elements appear to be in good condition and have been maintained. Staff recommend that wood features be retained, repaired, and repainted. Any features that are deteriorated beyond repair must be replaced in-kind to match per the Standards. For the windows, there is no documentary evidence that the proposed two-over-two window configuration ever existed in the building historically. The historic photograph from before 1912 shows six-over-six windows in the larger openings and likely three-over-three windows in the upper story openings. Staff recommend that the new windows match this configuration.

Mr. Walsh stated that the owner has agreed to return the spec for siding to wood, not composite. They would like to repair and repaint the siding on the front of the building and replace the sides and back with wood clapboard. They would still like to use the Boral composite at least on the upper portions of the building – soffit and brackets, window surrounds.

Ms. Taylor asked why they chose two-over-two windows. Mr. Walsh stated that that was to match the adjacent stable, however, they stand corrected, they should be six-over-six.

Dr. Grefe asked Ms. Hesse if, per National Park Service guidance, there is a percentage of replacement products that is allowable. Ms. Hesse said there is not. The problem that she has with these composite materials is that they have not been around long enough to have a good idea of how they will act in the long term. Mr. Schoettle stated that, if the brackets need to be replaced, which it doesn't look like they do, that should be done in wood. There doesn't seem to be a compelling reason to replace them all. They are original fabric.

Ms. Taylor proposed a resolution that the staff meet with the project team to reach consensus on the work on these elements, and that they do not need to bring these back to the Commission for review. Dr. Mather made the resolution and Dr. Grefe seconded it. The Commission voted unanimously to approve the motion.

5. For discussion: State Preservation Grants ballot question in 2024

Mr. Emidy stated that a couple of people have asked him recently about whether or not the Commission intends to propose a ballot question for State Preservation Grants in November 2024. He said that the Commission needs to think about what we want to do sooner, rather than later. Among the questions are whether we want to partner with another agency, like RISCA, how much we want to ask for, whether we want to have designated projects, and who we can get as supporters of the initiative.

The Commission unanimously agreed that we should have a ballot question in 2024. The idea was proposed to tie this to the semiquincentennial efforts. This might be a good way to get an added level of interest from both the administration and the citizens. We could propose a higher bond amount than we have in the past and might even be able to go alone under these circumstances. There was discussion of structuring the grants slightly if we choose this course; tying them more directly to properties that have ties to the Revolution. Maybe we could partner with the RI250 Commission.

Next steps that were identified include: getting a sense of what the need is, how we would evaluate projects, and a mission statement for the grant program that we would propose.

6. Announcements

The next Commission meeting will be held on May 10, 2023. Mr. Emdy stated that he will be on vacation, so someone else will have to take notes and prepare the minutes.

8. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 11:03am.

Minutes recorded by,



Jeffrey D. Emdy  
Executive Director