

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND



HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION

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MINUTES

RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION

June 14, 2023

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  
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. 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  
Dr. Morgan Grefe  
Ms. Anjali Joshi  
[Vacant]  
[Vacant]  
[Vacant]

STAFF PRESENT

Donna Alqassar, Heritage Aide  
Sarah Zurier, Principal Architectural Historian

## II. AGENDA

### 1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 9:35am., Ms. Taylor, Chair, presiding.

### 2. For approval: Minutes of April 12, 2023, Commission meeting

On a motion by Ms. Ryan, seconded by Dr. Mather, the commissioners voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the April 11, 2023, Commission meeting as they appear in the draft. Mr. Abbott did not vote, as he was not present at the meeting.

### 3. Executive Director's Report

Jeffrey Emidy reported that:

- a. No Rhode Island properties have been listed in the National Register of Historic Places since the Commission last met in April. Preliminary presentations were made to the State Review Board on June 5 for the Portsmouth Camp Meeting on Hedley Street in Portsmouth, and an update to the Conant Thread/Coats & Clark Mill Complex District on the Central Falls/Pawtucket line. The Conant Thread update is being prepared to reflect the conditions after the fire that destroyed some of the buildings in March 2020. There is interest in tax credits at one or more of the remaining buildings.
- b. He certified the Copley Chambers building, at 206 Broad Street in Providence, as listed in the State Register of Historic Places on May 19. The building is eligible as a local historic district property that is over 50 years old, is related to a broad theme of the community's history, and retains integrity. The certification was requested because the owner is pursuing state historic preservation tax credits. At this time, they are not pursuing federal credits, so a National Register nomination is not needed. The property was presented to the State Review Board in February 2021. The Board had some reservations and requested more information about the history of the building, but ultimately voted for preliminary approval for the nomination to go forward with the caveat that it needs some more focused research.
- c. Ms. Taylor, Ron Onorato, Joanna Doherty, and Mr. Emidy have compiled a list of proposed candidates for both the Commission and the State Review Board. We will discuss the Review Board in a few minutes. The Commission list goes to the governor's office, then to the state senate for consent and approval. Just as they were about ready to submit that list, they found out that the window had closed for this legislative session. They were informed, however, that a recommendation from the legislature was being moved forward. Mr. Emidy does not know if that appointment has cleared through the senate. They requested a special allowance to get one additional member appointed, but were not successful. Ms. Taylor stated that she spoke with Craig Dwyer, from the governor's office and we will meet in the fall to speak about moving quickly when the next session begins.

- d. The office received 121 applications for the “Assistant Administrator, Financial Management” position, which staff refer to as their CFO. Ms. Doherty and Mr. Emidy have set up scoring systems for the applications and have started reviewing them. They have some qualified candidates to consider, and the decision may be difficult, which is good. At this point, making an offer to someone in July is probably the most likely scenario.
- e. Within Brenton Point State Park in Newport is a long-vacant building known alternatively as “The Bells” and the Brenton Point Stable. It was built between 1880 and 1890 as a stable for the estate known as “The Reef,” the house of which is long-since demolished. It is a contributing resource in the Ocean Drive Historic District, which is listed in the National Register and is a National Historic Landmark District.

On Memorial Day, May 29<sup>th</sup>, four boys aged 12 to 16 were injured when one climbed on the building’s roof and fell through, along with a slab of the concrete roof, onto the three others below. According to news outlets, the teen who fell was airlifted to Hasbro Children’s Hospital, two were taken there by ambulance, and the 12-year-old was treated at the scene and released. We have not received any updates on the conditions of the hospitalized since May 30<sup>th</sup>.

The R.I. Department of Environmental Management (DEM) was asked about the building and told media outlets that they want to demolish it but that they were in disagreement with the RIHPHC over the demolition. This resulted in Mr. Emidy being interviewed by print media outlets and three local television stations.

The timeline of our involvement in the demolition is:

- i. February 2021: DEM notified RIHPHC of their intent to demolish the building
- ii. February 2021: HPHC staff visited the site with DEM staff. HPHC executive director Paul Loether issued a letter stating that DEM has not proven that demolition is the only available course of action and requesting that other alternatives be considered. The letter also stated that we would revisit this opinion if DEM supplied a structural evaluation for the building.
- iii. February 2022: HPHC received PARE Engineering’s structural report. The report analyzed two scenarios for the retention of the structure, both essentially as a ruin. They had two different scopes of work, one with an estimated cost of \$1.04m the other \$2.4m. In neither case was there any use planned for the structure going forward.
- iv. July 2022: HPHC responded that, based on the engineering report, there appears to be no prudent alternative to demolition, and that a memorandum of agreement (MOA) is needed to spell out the stipulations to mitigate the demolition. Going back to the response to the accident, this proves that for DEM to say that we were disagreeing about what to do after the accident was not correct. Mr. Emidy does not fault the DEM spokesman for this, he presumes there was a break in the communication within DEM.
- v. February 2 and 28, 2023: DEM emailed Mr. Emidy to request a sample MOA
- vi. March 2: Mr. Emidy sent a sample MOA

- vii. May 30: DEM reached out to Mr. Emidy to continue working out the mitigation and start finalizing the MOA. DEM has what will probably be the final copy for review now.
  - viii. A reporter told Mr. Emidy that DEM is talking about demolishing the building in three months.
  - f. The Old State House accessibility project continues to slowly move ahead. We are awaiting code approvals that we believe are coming. Then it will go to purchasing to start the process of putting it out for bid, etc. We are still expecting to be out of the building for four months due to the electricity being shut off for a total redo of the system.
  - g. Kim Ahern, the Governor's Deputy Chief of Staff with whom Mr. Emidy has been meeting monthly since the fall, has been nominated to be the chair of the state's Cannabis Control Commission. Mr. Emidy has heard that she will be leaving her Deputy Chief of Staff position, but he hasn't received confirmation yet. Working with Ms. Ahern and Policy Advisor Tori Scott has been a good way to make our concerns known in the governor's office and has allowed Mr. Emidy to answer their questions about what we do and how we do it.
  - h. The House Finance Committee included our request for increased funds for staff pay grade increases in the bill that it sent to the House and Senate floors for debate. It contains \$1.9m in general revenue funds for a total of \$3.58m. This is an increase of about \$70,000 from the FY2023 enacted budget. Our revised FY2023 budget is down \$621,000 due in large part to reduction in payroll expenses. The House passed it last Friday without changes that affect us, and the Senate is looking at it this week.
4. For vote: Easement Review  
The Breakers Landscape – Phase III  
Newport

Mr. Emidy made a presentation regarding a proposal by the Preservation Society of Newport County (PSNC) for a project to expand Phase III of the landscape improvements at the Breakers. RIHPHC holds a preservation easement on the Breakers that includes the landscape. Joanna Doherty typically handles the landscape reviews at PSNC properties and has been handling this one, as well, but could not attend today's meeting.

In May 2022, the commission approved Phase III of the landscape rehabilitation project. Phase III work is underway, and there are a few items that the PSNC wants to add to this phase of work. The PSNC's landscape architect, Reed Hilderbrand, has submitted information describing the work. Jim Donahue, Curator of Historic Landscapes & Horticulture at the PSNC, is here with us.

Phase III is focused on the two entry drives and the area around the Children's Cottage. Additional items are proposed for the west entry drive, which extends off Ochre Point Avenue and is the main point of entry for visitors. The previously approved plan includes resurfacing the sidewalks on either side of the drive and installing planters in the grass median. Like all phases of work at the Breakers landscape, the design for the west entry

drive is based on a master plan from 2016, which in turn was informed by a Cultural Landscape Report and historic research.

The first additional item being proposed is to extend the design treatment within the entry gates to just outside the entry gates. This would consist of adding four planters with bay trees, to match those already planned and approved, and extending the grass median and sidewalk surface to outside the gate. There is historic precedent for this – the 1899 photo shows pairs of standard catalpa trees on either side of entry drive, planted within a grassed median next to a paved walk. Potted trees are proposed for this location for consistency and ease of maintenance.

The remaining items being proposed are intended to address erosion issues in the lawn, alongside the sidewalks, and in the grass median. These sidewalks see a tremendous amount of foot traffic, which often spills onto the grass. In anticipation of this, fiber reinforced soil was installed in these areas but has proven ineffective. It cannot withstand this much traffic.

PSNC proposes to address erosion and compaction on the grass median through the installation of bollards and chains along the edge of the median, where it abuts the sidewalk. They will be purposely placed to the outside of the planters, so as not to interfere with view down the drive toward the palazzo. Bollards and chains had been in this location up until a few years ago, when they were replaced with the reinforced grass that has proven ineffective. PSNC also proposes installing granite paving thresholds to take the serpentine path across the median. There is currently grass in those locations, as it was historically. Granite paving would also be installed along the edge of the lawn, where it meets the sidewalk.

Reed Hilderbrand considered a variety of material for that paved edging where the lawn and the sidewalk meet. Mulch was deemed too messy and maintenance-heavy. Chipseal was determined to also pose maintenance problems. Concrete pavers with lawn joints would not be sufficient for this application; there is too much foot traffic. Laurentian green granite has been used elsewhere on the site – at the benches in the donor garden. Reed Hilderbrand believes it would offer the best performance in this location, would be distinguishable from the historic features of the landscape and, having already been used elsewhere on site, offers some continuity.

Finally, PSNC proposes to replace the non-historic benches along the entry drive sidewalks with new benches that match those installed on the serpentine path and to move the benches closer to the sidewalks. The area in front of the benches gets compacted by people using the benches. The benches would be set on a chip seal base - the same surface as the serpentine path - and placed right up against the granite paving.

Mr. Emidy asked PSNC's Jim Donahue if he had any comments. Mr. Donahue stated that the reintroduction of the serpentine path is causing the need for the crossing to connect it. Prior to the recent efforts, that was not a concern. Outside the gates has become the most popular place for people to take "selfies", which has changed the impacts there and led to

the requested work. Regarding the choice of green granite for the edges, because the granite curbs are original, they want the new to be differentiated, to respect the old. Regarding bollards, they had been centered on the verge previously, but people sat on them, so they have moved them for this new attempt.

Ms. Taylor stated that the proposals appear sensitive and appropriate, but the bollards and chain do not seem to fit and may be an attractive nuisance. Mr. Abbott stated that he is also hesitant about the bollards and chain. Mr. Donahue stated that the chains were present as recently as three years ago and that they simply cannot maintain that strip of turf under the current conditions.

A motion to approve the additions to Phase III of the Breakers Landscape Plan was made by Mr. Abbott and seconded by Ms. Ryan. The motion passed by unanimous vote.

#### 5. For discussion: 2023 Certified Local Government Grant Recommendations

Donna Alqassar made a presentation about the RIHPHC's 2023 Certified Local Government (CLG) grants. Each year, the office receives a federal apportionment through the National Park Service. We are required to pass at least 10 percent of the apportionment on to the state's CLG communities through a subgrant program. Our 2023 apportionment, once approved, is going to be \$704,548, so we need to make CLG grants totaling at least \$70,455.

For the 2023 round, we received 11 applications totaling \$145,500 from nine of the 18 CLG communities. Staff scored them based on a rubric that the Commission approved last year. The top scorers, which we are presenting to the Commission for approval, are:

- Arkwright/Harris and Greene Historic District National Register Nomination (Coventry). The initial request was for \$5,000. The reviewers liked a project in these areas, but thought that a National Register nomination is a later step; a survey is needed first. In any case, they thought that the proposed budget is insufficient, so they propose granting \$10,000.
- National Register of Historic Places Nomination for Garden City (Cranston). Though the requested grant was for \$12,000, the reviewers think that the grant should be for \$16,500 toward a \$19,000 project. This is a very important nomination, and more information is better than less.
- Grant's Mill National Register Nomination (Cumberland). The applicant requested a grant of \$7,000 toward a \$10,000 project. Based on recent experience with reviewing bids, the grant reviewers feel that to be too low, so propose increasing the grant to \$12,000.
- Condition Assessment and Preservation Plan for the Newman Cemetery (East Providence). The city requested an \$8,000 grant toward a \$10,000 project.
- Neutaconkanut Hill National Register Nomination (Providence). The city requested a \$7,500 grant toward a \$10,000 project. This builds on a previous CLG grant to research the property and evaluate its National Register eligibility.

- Surveying Historic Resources in Areas Subject to Adverse Impacts from Sea Level Rise (South Kingstown). The town requested a \$20,000 grant toward a \$25,000 project.

The total funding recommendation is \$74,000, which is about \$3,500 over the 10 percent minimum of our federal grant.

Those projects not selected by the reviewers are:

- Chepachet Village Historical Guide and Walking Tour (Glocester), \$10,000
- Newport Landscape Resiliency Guidelines for Flood Mitigation and Building Elevation (Newport), \$25,000
- Museum of Natural History Historic Preservation Story (Providence), \$8,500
- National Register Nomination for Elmwood Christian Church/Impact Center Providence AG (Providence), \$8,000
- Caleb Greene House Feasibility Study (Warwick), \$20,000

Mr. Schoettle commented that it is a shame that we did not make a grant to the Elmwood Christian Church. We could have done that with the extra money that was added to other grant requests. Mr. Emidy stated that they are not excluded from applying next year.

A motion to approve the slate of 2023 CLG grants was made by Ms. Ryan and seconded by Mr. Abbott. The motion passed by unanimous vote.

#### 6. For vote: State Review Board appointments

Ms. Taylor stated that, like the Commission, we have vacancies on the State Review Board (SRB). As Mr. Emidy explained during his report, Ms. Taylor, Ron Onorato, Joanna Doherty, and Mr. Emidy have been working to assemble a slate of candidates to fill the SRB openings. They have contacted potential candidates to inquire about their interest, reviewed their resumes, and are proposing the following:

- Shantia Anderheggen, the owner of Preservation Strategies, a consulting firm that works with historic property owners to protect historic buildings, landscapes, and structures.
- Karst Hoozeboom, a landscape architect who has worked at Cape Cod National Seashore and the Massachusetts Department of Conservation & Recreation. Mr. Hoozeboom previously served as chair of the Commission.
- Itohan Osayimwese, Ph.D., an Associate Professor of History of Art & Architecture at Brown University, where she is also an affiliate faculty in Africana Studies, Urban Studies, and the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies.
- Kate Wells, the Curator of Rhode Island Collections in the Special Collections department at Providence Public Library where she facilitates communication, inclusion, and connections to history by supporting community archives as well as outreach and creative use of library collections.

A motion to approve the slate of State Review Board appointments was made by Ms. Ryan and seconded by Mr. Schoettle. The motion passed by unanimous vote.

7. For discussion: 2023 Rhody Awards for Historic Preservation fiscal support

Mr. Emidy provided background on RIHPHC's participation in the annual Rhody Awards for Historic Preservation. For a long time, RIHPHC gave out annual historic preservation awards at our statewide preservation conference. In 2009, we started a partnership with Preserve Rhode Island (PRI) to give out the Rhody Awards for Historic Preservation. Our roles were primarily in the selection of winners and financial support for the event. In the early years, we had a fair amount of input into the event, itself, but that faded as the years went by and it became more and more of a fundraiser for PRI.

In 2022, our cost under the previous agreement was going to surpass the \$10,000 mark. Mr. Emidy didn't think that was an appropriate use of our funds so he brought it to the Commission for a vote. The Commission decided to offer PRI \$6,000 as sponsorship of the event, with our staff's role greatly decreased. We offered our input on the awards nominations but were not involved in the selection. As a platinum sponsor, Mr. Emidy was given the opportunity to present two of the awards. However, this ended the partnership. We were just a sponsor.

PRI would like to have us back as a \$5,000 sponsor this year. Mr. Emidy reminded the commissioners that he emailed PRI's sponsorship package, which includes a letter from PRI Executive Director Val Talmage and explains the benefits of each sponsorship level, to them in advance of the meeting.

Our partnership in preservation matters with PRI is beneficial. We rely on them to be the statewide organization that advocates for things that are of consequence to us. So, it is important that we support them when we can and maintain a united posture. When Mr. Emidy was given the job of executive director, there was a directive to be out in the preservation community. This is one opportunity to do so. Having said all of that, he remains concerned about putting a large amount of public funds toward this fundraiser for our friends at PRI.

Mr. Abbott and Mr. Schoettle stated that they are members of the Preserve Rhode Island Board of Trustees. Discussion among the members indicated that they did not support sponsoring at the \$5,000 level again this year. There was discussion of either \$1,000 or \$2,500 being more appropriate.

Mr. Emidy asked about the value of his presenting one or more awards versus being present at the ceremony in terms of the type of visibility that the Commission has in mind. Ms. Taylor stated that the presentation is not necessary, being present to show support is. Mr. Schoettle stated that, since we need PRI, this is a way to show support for the organization and providing more than \$1,000 would stand out.



Mr. Emidy summarized the discussion by saying that what he is hearing is that there is definitely support among the commissioners for sponsoring at \$1,000 but slightly less support for \$2,500. The commissioners confirmed.

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

Mr. Emidy reminded the commissioners that, at our April meeting, we started a conversation about trying to get a State Preservation Grants (SPG) program bond issue question on the November 2024 ballot. The commissioners had a lot of interesting ideas regarding the amount of money that we should request, tying the program to RI250, and going it alone versus teaming up with the State Council on the Arts (RISCA) or some other agency. He has to include the request for funding in our Fiscal Year 2025 Capital Budget request at the end of July. Our fiscal analyst at the Office of Management and Budget has advised him to talk to the governor's office about our plans.

Mr. Emidy spoke with Lynne McCormack, executive director of RISCA, last week about this. RISCA is still interested in teaming up with us on a single ask, but they are just beginning to work on this, too. We both believe that we have a larger, stronger coalition of supporters if we are together than without the other side.

Mr. Emidy asked how should we proceed administratively? Do commissioners want to make decisions in this meeting and the July Commission meeting, do they want to put together a working group, or something else? If we proceed, we should consider these questions:

- a. Should we team up with RISCA or someone else?
- b. How much should we ask for?
- c. We will need a theme: we will need to prepare a pitch to the governor, so we will at least need to know the theme of the grant round. Not all of the details, but, for example, if we are going to tie it to RI250, how?
- d. It would be helpful to know if we plan to include dedicated grants to specific organizations.

The commissioners supported convening a working group to make recommendations to the Commission at the next meeting. That group must not contain enough Commission members to make a quorum. Staff should also be included. Ms. Taylor recommended that one of our commissioners who serves on the PRI Board should be included. When asked who was interested in serving on the working group, all commissioners present expressed interest. Mr. Emidy stated that he would follow up with potential members.

9. Announcements

The next Commission meeting will be held on July 12, 2023.

10. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 11:20am.

Minutes recorded by,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jeffrey D. Emidy". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Jeffrey D. Emidy  
Executive Director