

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION



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MINUTES

RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION

July 12, 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. Anjali Joshi
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. Elizabeth Tanner, Secretary of Commerce, Rhode Island Commerce Corporation
Mr. James Cambio, State Building Code Commissioner
Mr. Terrence Gray, Director, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management
Dr. Morgan Grefe
Dr. Rod Mather
[Vacant]
[Vacant]
[Vacant]

STAFF PRESENT

Donna Alqassar, Heritage Aide
Joanna Doherty, Deputy Director
Virginia Hesse, Restoration Project Manager
Roberta Randall, Restoration Project Manager
Sarah Zurier, Principal Architectural Historian

II. AGENDA

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 9:33am., Ms. Taylor, Chair, presiding.

2. For approval: Minutes of June 14, 2023, Commission meeting

On a motion by Ms. Ryan, seconded by Mr. Abbott, the commissioners voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the June 14, 2023, Commission meeting as they appear in the draft.

3. Executive Director's Report

Jeffrey Emidy reported that:

- a. He and Ruth Taylor met with Craig Dwyer, the governor's Manager of Boards and Appointments, on June 20 to discuss Commission appointments. The takeaways were that we were not getting any new commissioners in the now-closed legislative session, and that we should get an early start in the fall for the session start in January. Mr. Dwyer suggested that we send a slate of candidates to him in November. He will then try to get it on the agenda as early in the session as possible.

Mr. Emidy stated that Mike Walker, from Commerce Rhode Island, contacted him to let him know that Secretary of Commerce Elizabeth Tanner has designated him to serve on the Commission on her behalf. He has conflicts for the next two meetings, but will begin attending in October.

- b. He and Joanna Doherty have completed the initial reviews of the 121 applications that we received for the "Assistant Administrator, Financial Management" position. They then did a further screening and scoring of 30+ applications. Based on that scoring, they are in the midst of choosing a group to interview. They hope to complete that this week. Mr. Emidy stated that he would still like to make an offer in July, but early August may be more realistic.
- c. Regarding the staff job classifications: three staff members submitted the paperwork to be elevated to the upgraded job descriptions that they are already working under: Sarah Zurier, Michaela Jergensen, and Charlotte Taylor. Elizabeth Totten requested a promotion from Senior Historic Preservation Specialist to Principal Historic Preservation Specialist. All four were approved. The Division of Human Resources is processing the paperwork. That leaves two staffers yet to complete their process, but they are both fulfilling other roles in addition to their normal ones right now, and will wait until we fill some vacancies to proceed.
- d. Regarding "the Bells" at Brenton Point State Park: Mr. Emidy has been talking to the Office of the Attorney General, who will represent the RIHPHC in any litigation that may come up, and the advice from them remains to make no comment. Mr. Emidy advised the commissioners that if anyone calls, emails, texts, writes, or otherwise

- engages them about this subject, they should make no comment and refer the inquisitor to the Office of the Attorney General.
- e. The Old State House Accessibility Project team continues to have meetings to refine little things, but DCAMM is preparing to put the project out to bid. The hope is that a contractor will be chosen in October, and that construction can start before the new year.
 - f. Back in late May, Ms. Doherty and Mr. Emidy made a presentation with Newport Planning Department staff about historic preservation, in general, and historic district zoning, in particular, to some members of the Newport City Council and members of the public. After that, the Planning Department asked us for comments on their historic district ordinance. Mr. Emidy stated that he emailed a copy of RIHPHC's response to the commissioners prior to the meeting. He has not heard back from the city since he sent that letter to the Planning Department. A group of preservation advocates are monitoring this closely, including Ms. Taylor, the Preservation Society of Newport County, Preserve Rhode Island, and several concerned citizens. Mr. Emidy asked Ms. Taylor if she had anything to add. She said that this has been a scary time in Newport. One new member of the city council has been pushing an effort to revise the historic district ordinance under the guise of it being incompatible with affordable housing. Some of the other councilors and the mayor seem to be buying into this argument, even though we know it not to be true.
 - g. Donna Alqassar was contacted on Friday, June 30 with a complaint about this year's Heritage Festival being scheduled for the Saturday of Rosh Hashanah. Over the course of a number of subsequent emails and phone calls with the person who contacted Ms. Alqassar, Mr. Emidy and Ms. Taylor found out that the person who contacted Ms. Alqassar planned to email all of the Festival's sponsors, vendors, participants, and the governor's office to express their displeasure with the "passive-aggressive antisemitism" that our act represented.

Mr. Emidy stated that he acknowledges that we made a mistake. Neither Ms. Alqassar nor he recognized that we had made this scheduling error. Had we realized the conflict, we never would have scheduled the festival for that date. It was by no means an intentional act of aggression. On Monday, July 3, we issued a letter to all of our sponsors apologizing for our mistake and letting them know that we were going to reschedule the festival. Ms. Alqassar also began reaching out to our vendors to see if we even could reschedule it for any time close to the September date, keeping in mind that it was scheduled for the Waterfire Arts Center, which is in high demand. Mr. Emidy also reached out to the governor's office and Ms. Alqassar to the participant groups.

Mr. Emidy stated that he is pleased to report that Ms. Alqassar has secured the Waterfire Arts Center for Saturday, October 21st. The vendors are almost – or all – lined up, the emcees have committed to the new date, and the participant groups are starting to confirm. We are only awaiting a response from one sponsor – all of the rest have confirmed their support. According to Ms. Alqassar, all of the responses have been understanding and appreciative of our rescheduling to respect the Jewish community.

Ms. Taylor expressed her appreciation for all of the work that Ms. Alqassar has done to reschedule the festival. She acknowledged that a mistake was made and expressed her confidence that that there was no ill intent on Ms. Alqassar's part.

4. For vote: Easement Review
Franklin Farm farmhouse kitchen and bathroom and rear addition
142 Abbott Run Valley Road, Cumberland

Roberta Randall made a presentation regarding a proposal by the Town of Cumberland, working with the Historic Metcalf-Franklin Farm Preservation Association, to add a porch to the rear bumpout on the farmhouse at the Metcalf-Franklin Farm. The porch will provide ADA-compliant access and associated interior work will improve accessibility in the kitchen and restroom. The RIHPHC holds a preservation easement on the property that does not reach to the interior of the building.

The project plans call for retaining the existing rear entrance bumpout and extending it with a porch to provide access. Ms. Randall stated that the staff recommend approval of the proposed work with the condition that staff review the plan again when a contractor has been hired because the ramp may be able to be reduced through grading work.

Ms. Joshi observed that there is a pair of large, important trees near the proposed work area and there is nothing on the project plans about protecting them from construction impacts. The foundation for the addition needs to be thoughtfully done to avoid impacting the trees' roots and movement and storage of construction equipment needs to avoid compacting the soil within the trees' driplines.

Ms. Taylor made a motion to approve the project in principle and to require tree protection measures and continued consultation on the ramp and the foundation. The motion was seconded by Mr. Abbott and passed unanimously.

The Commissioners voted unanimously to move item #5 on the agenda, the easement review for the Spring House Hotel, to #8 on the agenda. There was no public objection.

5. For vote: Easement Review
Vernon House: Rhode Island Slave History Medallion installation
46 Clarke Street, Newport

Virginia Hesse made a presentation about the installation of a Rhode Island Slave History Medallion at Vernon House, at 46 Clarke Street, in Newport. The RIHPHC holds a historic preservation easement on the property, which is owned by the Newport Restoration Foundation (NRF). This is the continuation of a review that was initiated at the October 2022 Commission meeting.

The initial proposal was to install the medallion on the south elevation of the building. The Commission was not in favor of that location and proposed that the NRF consider locating the medallion on or near the fence on the north side of the house. The revised proposal is to remove the fence between the northwest corner of the house and the north property line and install a granite plinth with the medallion mounted on it, flanked by plantings that will limit access to the yard beyond. RIHPHC staff recommend approval of this proposal.

A motion to approve the proposal was made by Mr. Abbott and seconded by Ms. Ryan. The motion passed by unanimous vote.

Ms. Hesse reported that between the June and July Commission meetings, the PRF informed RIHPHC staff that they wanted to install a handicap ramp at the rear entrance to the house in time for the opening of the property in early July. Staff consulted with Ms. Taylor, who determined that, due to the time constraint, staff review would be sufficient in this case. Staff reviewed and approved the proposal. [Ms. Hesse presented images of the proposed design, which has been constructed.]

6. For vote: Easement Review
the Music Mansion: accessible entrance and new egress
88 Meeting Street, Providence

Ms. Hesse made a presentation about a project to create a new egress and an accessible entrance at the Music Mansion, at 88 Meeting Street, in Providence. The RIHPHC holds a historic preservation easement on the property. The Music Mansion is a performance space, mostly for children who are taking music lessons.

The Music Mansion was the recipient of a State Preservation Grant a few years ago for a project to replace the roof. Since then, the building has undergone a master planning effort to understand needs and code issues. Corrie de Boer is the architect. The proposed project would provide accessibility at the tenant entrance and a service entrance by bumping out the landing and adding a small ramp. Proposed egress from the performance space will be provided by an extant window opening that will be enlarged to a door opening; the door will replicate the extant window.

A motion to approve the proposal was made by Mr. Abbott and seconded by Mr. Schoettle. The motion passed by unanimous vote.

7. For vote: Easement Review
the Steelyard: new accessible entrance
27 Sims Avenue, Providence

Ms. Hesse made a presentation about a project to create a new accessible entrance at the

office building at the Steelyard, at 27 Sims Avenue, in Providence. The RIHPHC holds a historic preservation easement on the property as a condition of a previous State Preservation Grant.

The office building fronts on Sims Avenue and does not have an ADA-compliant entrance. The proposal is to create an accessible entrance on the rear of the building, facing the complex's courtyard, at the location of a pair of windows. The left window will remain, while the right window opening will be enlarged from the sill down and a metal door with a sidelight will be installed. A steel canopy will be cantilevered over the entrance.

There was discussion of the suitability of the perforated metal door that was proposed, including the concern that it does not have a historic precedent. Ms. Joshi stated that the perforated metal is a fitting solution for this site and user.

A motion to approve the proposal subject to final review by the staff was made by Mr. Abbott and seconded by Ms. Joshi. The motion passed by unanimous vote.

Ms. Hesse reported that between the June and July Commission meetings, the Steelyard executive director informed RIHPHC staff that a second floor emergency egress door had been vandalized and rendered inoperable, and needed to be replaced as soon as possible. The door, which was not historic, was constructed of wood with four panels and four, small lights near the top. The Steelyard staff could not locate a door that matched, but did find a source for a two-panel door with four lights near the top. Staff consulted with Ms. Taylor, who determined that, due to the door not being historic and it being an emergency egress door, staff review would be sufficient in this case. Staff reviewed and approved the proposal. [Ms. Hesse presented images of the existing and proposed doors.]

8. For vote: Easement Review
Spring House Hotel: new event pavilion
52 Spring Street, New Shoreham

Ms. Hesse made a presentation about a project to construct a new event pavilion at the Spring House Hotel, at 52 Spring Street in New Shoreham. The RIHPHC holds a historic preservation easement on the property in perpetuity.

In 2014, the property owner requested that RIHPHC approve a seasonal tent adjacent to the east elevation of an ell extending south from the rear of the historic main block of the hotel. The RIHPHC approved a metal-frame-and-fabric structure that would be removed in the offseason. The owners built a permanent metal frame with a cloth cover that they remove seasonally.

In consultation with the project proponent, staff have requested that the pavilion be moved away from the building and recessed partially into the ground to lessen its visual impact and obstruction of the east elevation of the building when viewed from Spring

Street. While drawings of the proposed structure in accordance with these requests have been provided, the RIHPHC staff do not feel that they provide enough information to fully evaluate the proposal. Staff propose that we request renderings and sightline studies of the proposed structure.

Discussion among the commissioners centered on whether, even moved away from the main building and recessed, this is the best location for the structure. In the end, the suggestion from the commissioners was to consider orienting the pavilion perpendicular to the south end of the rear ell, preferably detached. This would not obscure the east elevation of the historic ell nor introduce a structure to the broad lawn on the east side of the property. They encouraged the project proponent to provide renderings and sightline studies of this siting, as well.

Based on the need to have more information, the item was continued for further review.

9. For discussion and consensus: State Preservation Grants program details

Mr. Emidy briefly explained, for the benefit of any commissioners who were not present at the May and/or June Commission meetings, that the RIHPHC's FY2025 capital budget is due at the end of July and if we want to request that a bond issue for the State Preservation Grants (SPGs) program be included on the November 2024 ballot, it has to be included in this budget request. At the June Commission meeting, the commissioners decided to appoint a workgroup to discuss the funding request and to report back to the Commission.

Mr. Emidy reviewed a memo that he distributed to the commissioners prior to the meeting that describes the meeting and recommendations of the workgroup, which met on July 3rd. [A copy of the memo is attached to these minutes.]

The commissioners supported the idea of including landscapes as projects and as parts of other projects. They briefly discussed whether it might be possible to not require tie landscape grant eligibility to National Register status. Climate change was mentioned as a potential consideration in scoring applications. Sarah Zurier mentioned that the R.I. State Council on the Arts (RISCA) requires ADA accessibility at grant sites and that this could be another scoring consideration for SPGs. She also introduced the idea of heritage museums that are not in historic buildings as potentially eligible because heritage preservation is part of our mission and it would be a great opportunity to strengthen those relationships.

The consensus among the commissioners was that the recommendations of the workgroup, including a \$12 million bond issue in conjunction with additional funds for RISCA, are what Mr. Emidy should include in the 2025 Capital Budget.

10. Report on 2023 Rhode Island Cemetery Weeks

Ms. Zurier reported on 2023 Rhode Island Cemetery Weeks. A partnership of the RIHPHC and the R.I. Advisory Commission on Historical Cemeteries, 2023 Rhode Island Cemetery Weeks was built from the framework established in 2022. The 2023 RIHPHC budget was less than \$2,000. Over the course of April and May, there were 125 events, including clean-ups, tours, contests, games, conservation workshops, and open studios. John Kostrzewa previewed an Exeter tour in the *Providence Journal*. We surveyed the event hosts, and 26 responded. They were pleased with this year's organization. Some highlight responses included:

- Cleaned up the entire cemetery containing over 600 burials. Restored several headstones and repaired one granite post column.
- With so many volunteers, the cemetery was cleaned within 2 hours.
- We were able to show off a major cleanup-restoration effort in a heavily populated and historically significant part of the city
- We put out over 2,000 flags and filled multiple bags of trash
- Learned a lot about repairing stones.
- Brought 20 people to a cemetery that they knew of but most had never set foot in—even neighbors. Invited people to explore and share what they found.
- A geological tour of part of the burial ground
- Hosted an open studio where hand carved gravestones were designed and created using traditional methods.
- 13 Bryant University students cleaned up a large cemetery that they have adopted on their campus.

11. Announcements

The next Commission meeting will be held on August 9, 2023.

12. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 11:00am.

Minutes recorded by,



Jeffrey D. Emidy
Executive Director



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To: Commission
From: 2024 State Preservation Grants Workgroup via Jeff Emidy
cc:
Date: 11 July 2023
Re: 2024 State Preservation Grants bond issue

The 2024 State Preservation Grants Workgroup met on July 3 at the Old State House. Those present were Roberta Groch, Rod Mather, Joanna Doherty, Roberta Randall, and Jeff Emidy. Clark Schoettle was invited to be in the workgroup, but was unavailable. Sarah Zurier provided written comments but was not present.

The workgroup proposes the following:

- Coordinate with RISCA for a single, unified bond issue
- RIHPHC request should be \$12M for State Preservation Grants
 - To be divided over four grant cycles 2025-2028
 - Each grant cycle will be for \$3M
 - The 2025 cycle will be earmarked for projects related to RI250 (details TBD)
 - 2026-2028 grant cycles will be traditional format

In the course of discussion, the workgroup came up with some more specific details that should be considered. We expect that a panel of members of the preservation community will be assembled to provide input for the details of how the program will be administered. Among the considerations suggested to this panel by the workgroup are:

- Like CLG grants, annual designations may prioritize projects with specific areas of focus, for example, climate change or ADA improvements
- Expand the project pool from museums, cultural arts centers, and historic sites to include landscapes, historical- and cultural-affiliated groups that utilize non-historic buildings, possibly others
- Change the “small project” maximum grant request
 - from \$50,000 toward a \$75,000 (total cost) project to
 - \$70,000 grant toward a maximum \$105,000 project cost
- Change the “large project” maximum grant award to
 - \$300,000 toward a project with total cost greater than or equal to \$600,000.
 - The minimum large project grant would be \$105,001.

I met with Lynne McCormack, executive director of RISCA, on July 7th. She says that RISCA does want to work with us. The total bond request should be under \$20M. RISCA is thinking of requesting \$6M to

\$8M right now, but that is still TBD. Ms. McCormack has heard through the grapevine that the governor wants to keep the bond issue request relatively low in 2024.

For reference, past bond issues have totaled:

- 2022: \$400M for three bonds
 - all passed
- 2021 (March): \$400M for seven bonds
 - Included \$7M for RISCA/RIHPHC (\$1M for RIHPHC SPG)
 - All passed
- 2018: \$367.3M for three bonds
 - All passed
- 2016: \$227.5M for five bonds
 - All passed
- 2014: \$248M for four bonds
 - Included \$35M for RISCA/RIHPHC (\$5M for RIHPHC SPG)
- 2012: \$201M for five bonds
 - All passed
- 2010: \$177.4M for three bonds
 - All passed