



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION

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MINUTES
RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION
April 14, 2021

VIA VIDEO CONFERENCE

I. MEMBERS PRESENT

Mr. Michael Abbott, AIA
Ms. Meredith Brady, Associate Director, Division of Statewide Planning
Mr. Warren Ducharme, representing the State Building Code Commissioner
Dr. Morgan Grefe
Mr. John Paul Loether, State Historic Preservation Officer
Ms. Kaity Ryan
Mr. Clark Schoettle
Ms. Ruth Taylor, Chair

MEMBERS ABSENT

Ms. Janet Coit, Director, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management
Dr. Tripp Evans
Dr. E. Pierre Morenon
Mr. Jesse Saglio, President, Rhode Island Commerce Corporation
[Vacant]
[Vacant]

STAFF PRESENT

Donna Alqassar, Heritage Aide
Enerida Ademi, Data Control Clerk
Rosemary Carreiro, Fiscal Aide
Joanna Doherty, Principal Architectural Historian
Jeffrey Emidy, Deputy Director
Katherine Pomplun, Senior Grants Coordinator
Elizabeth Rochefort, Principal Architectural Historian
Elizabeth Totten, Project Review Coordinator

GUESTS

Kevin Nelson, Division of Statewide Planning

II. AGENDA

1. Call to Order

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

2. Ms. Taylor explained the procedures that would be followed by Commissioners and attendees of the meeting.

3. Roll call

Ms. Taylor called the roll of commissioners. See page one of these minutes for the attendance list.

4. For approval: Minutes of March 10, 2021 Commission meeting

On a motion by Mr. Abbott, seconded by Ms. Ryan, the commissioners voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the March 10, 2021 Commission meeting without changes.

5. Executive Director's Report

Mr. Loether reported that:

- a) He made the draft State Guide Plan element available for review by commissioners and staff. He thanked Meredith Brady and her staff, particularly Kevin Nelson, for their assistance. The document is fully consistent with the Statewide Historic Preservation Plan and the RIHPHC Strategic Plan. It is targeted to state agencies and municipalities. After Commission approval, it will be made available to the public for 30 days and a webinar will be scheduled to discuss it.
- b) He participated in Section 106 Consultation with the federal Bureau of Ocean Management (BOEM), Massachusetts SHPO, New York SHPO and other interested parties regarding the planned South Fork Wind Farm project in Rhode Island Sound off Block Island. The South Fork project is leading the consultation. They have been treating the project as a standalone, however, there are two other wind turbine projects under review in the same area. Mr. Loether's opinion is that the three projects should be considered together because of their cumulative visual impact. The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation has agreed with this opinion. Mr. Loether is advocating for BOEM to take a wider view of the projects because of the cumulative effect.
- c) With Roberta Randall and Katy Pomplun, he reviewed the RIHPHC easement requirements for Linden Place with representatives of the museum. The Museum

wants to sell some items, including parts of the building that have been removed and replaced. None of the items are significant to the history or interpretation of the house, so he agreed that they could be sold. We do not believe that this will have any significant impact on the property. Ms. Taylor stated that it did not do the field a lot of good for the Museum to have a tag sale.

Dr. Grefe asked how the RIHPHC ends up holding easements on collections when they are not pertinent to architecture, and if we know if the Museum approached the Office of the Attorney General regarding their sale. Mr. Loether replied that we have a number of odd easements. He had never seen a collection in a historic preservation easement before, but his recommendation is that we not do this again. Katy Pomplun stated that the Linden Place easement is different from our other easements because the building was essentially purchased by the state using bond funds and instantly transferred to the Friends of Linden Place. Ms. Taylor stated that presumably and hopefully the Friends did get the Attorney General's permission to divest itself of some of its collection.

- d) With Ruth Taylor, he met with representatives of the R.I. Slave History Medallions project to discuss potentially installing a marker at the Colony House, in Newport. Mr. Loether explained that, because the building is state property, we need information in writing regarding where the marker is proposed to be located and we will also review the information on their website related to the building.
- e) With Jeff Emidy, he attended the virtual National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers (NCSHPO) annual meeting. It was a typical annual meeting, including reviewing their budget and briefings by partner agencies on a number of topics.
- f) He met with representatives of the federal Bureau of Ocean Energy Management for a pre-Section 106 consultation briefing on the planned Revolution Wind Farm project in R.I. Sound off Block Island. Revolution Wind is just starting its National Environmental Policy Act review and Section 106 will be wrapped into that. It is the closest to the mainland of the three proposed projects. At the end of the day, he doesn't see any of the three projects not being permitted, but we will do what we can to ensure that impacts to historic properties are minimized.
- g) He attended the NCSHPO sponsored "Open House" meeting with representatives of the federal Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP). Again, nothing overly exciting was discussed, but he appreciates that the National Park Service (NPS), NCSHPO, and ACHP communicate with our office frequently.
- h) He conducted a site review of the Malbone Estate on Malbone Road in Newport to review a proposal for the construction of a new caretaker's house on the property, which is individually listed in the National Register. The Preservation Society of Newport County (PSNC) holds an easement on the property, but doesn't have much experience with enforcement, so they asked for our assistance. In addition to the historic house, there are some significant landscape features on the property, but they are away from the location of the new house, which is in the least adverse spot on the property, is small, and will have no major visual impact on the main house, in Mr. Loether's opinion. He offered input to the PSNC on its process, but not a decision.

- i) With Jeff Emidy and Joyce Gervasio, he completed the hiring and induction process for our new Project Review Coordinator, Elizabeth Totten. It has been a little complicated because the staff are not on site regularly. He is pleased to have Elizabeth on board and looks forward to shifting Coastal Resource Management Council reviews over to her in six to eight weeks.
- j) He announced his planned retirement as Executive Director of the RIHPHC and as R.I. State Historic Preservation Officer, effective June 25, 2021. He thanked the commissioners for the opportunity to serve. He expressed his hope that he made some contributions to long-term preservation in Rhode Island. Ms. Taylor thanked Mr. Loether for his service.

Mr. Schoettle asked if Mr. Loether has a sense of the procedure for finding his replacement. Mr. Loether replied that it is his understanding that the same process that was followed three years ago will be followed again for the executive director position. For the SHPO, it is one of the reasons he has requested a meeting with the governor's chief-of-staff. In almost every other state, the executive director is the SHPO. His suggestion is that when he leaves, Jeff Emidy is made acting executive director and SHPO until a new director is hired. Ms. Taylor added that the Commission regulations stipulate the basic outline of a search committee.

Mr. Abbott asked Mr. Loether if he has had any follow-up conversations with the governor's office regarding commissioner appointments. Mr. Loether replied that he is doing his best; he has found out who the new contact is and recently sent over the full package again. He has a meeting with the deputy chief-of-staff next week and will bring it up at that meeting. Mr. Abbott stated that previously when appointments were up, the candidates had to go to the state house and meet with a subcommittee. Ms. Taylor stated that they may waive that for sitting members. Mr. Loether stated that if he gets any information, he will pass it on to the commissioners.

6. For approval: Appointment of Keith Stokes to the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Review Board

Mr. Loether stated that Keith Stokes's resume and a newspaper clipping about his work were sent to the commissioners prior to the meeting. Mr. Stokes is one of the leading practitioners of African American history in Rhode Island. He is active and would be a great contributor at the Review Board level in terms of his knowledge base.

Ms. Taylor asked for a motion to appoint Keith Stokes to the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Review Board. Mr. Abbott made the motion, which was seconded by Dr. Grefe and Mr. Schoettle. The commissioners voted unanimously to approve the motion.

7. For approval: *Protecting Our Legacy of Buildings, Places, and Culture: An Historic Preservation Plan for Rhode Island: STATE GUIDE PLAN ELEMENT 210*

Ms. Taylor stated that the commissioners all received this document earlier and then again with the agenda for today's meeting. She asked for a motion to accept the document. Ms. Ryan made the motion, which was seconded by Mr. Abbott.

Mr. Loether stated that this is the first update in about 25 years. It fulfills a statutory requirement that we provide assistance to the Division of Statewide Planning to keep the element updated. Ms. Brady expressed her thanks to Kevin Nelson, Roberta Groch, and Caitlin Greeley. She said it is wonderful to see this updated, as it is long overdue, adding that the HPHC's element is not the only one that is overdue. Mr. Nelson stated that this element is a fascinating topic. It was a pleasure working with Mr. Loether on this and he is proud of the result. The next step is for Statewide Planning to bring it to the State Planning Council, which will include a public hearing.

Ms. Taylor stated that it is a great triumph that a lot of old policies and documents have been updated during Mr. Loether's tenure. Ms. Ryan asked if there are plans to push these plans out to drum up public engagement. Mr. Loether responded that we will make a general announcement that they are available, but there is no further plan than that. Elizabeth Rochefort stated that we received comments from our NPS reviewer on the Statewide Preservation Plan. She intends to have these addressed by next month. This is why we have not put the Statewide Plan out yet, but we do plan to.

The Commissioners voted unanimously, with Dr. Grefe abstaining, to approve the motion.

8. For approval: Certified Local Government Grant Awards

Katherine Pomplun made a presentation of the staff's determinations regarding 2021 Certified Local Government (CLG) grants. These are annual grants that RIHPHC is required to award per the terms of the federal funding we receive from the NPS. We must pass-through at least 10 percent of our funding to Rhode Island's CLG communities in the form of these grants. The amount of funding available for these projects has been increasing in recent years, and this year we have a little over \$65,000 to award.

The Commission approved the funding criteria and rubric for evaluating these grant applications last fall and approved new criteria for 2021 that are intended to encourage proposals for projects that address climate-change related planning issues and projects that would recognize or promote resources associated with underrepresented communities. We really emphasized this theme in our outreach to the CLGs and it did generate a few very responsive proposals.

Ms. Pomplun stated that we have enough money to fund all eight of the applications that we received. We are recommending a few changes to projects as proposed, but none had to be cut this year.

The Town of Bristol applied with a proposal to complete an assessment of resources in the town's historic district that are located within the 100-year flood plain and potentially endangered by sea level rise and storm flooding events. The project will help the town determine which properties are at the greatest risk for damage or loss and will include a GIS map of affected parcels. We are recommending full funding of \$7,000 for this project.

The City of Cranston planning department has proposed to hire a consultant to update the city's inventory of historic resources and complete a summary report that evaluates the current state of preservation in Cranston and defines priorities and goals for the future. We are recommending full funding of \$9,000.

The Town of Cumberland is proposing to hire a consultant to complete a feasibility study for the Old Post Office building at 16 Mill Street, which is a contributing structure in the Cumberland Town Hall Historic District. The study will evaluate the physical conditions of the building and provide cost estimates for its restoration, as well as an evaluation of various reuse scenarios that have been proposed. We recommend full funding of \$10,000 for this project.

The Town of North Smithfield submitted an application for a \$2,500 project to prepare a National Register nomination for a single house on Grange Road. Knowing that this area was specifically called out in the RIHPHC survey as a potentially eligible district, we approached the town about expanding the scope and they were entirely enthusiastic. They revised the proposal into a project to survey and evaluate the entire Grange Road area as a potential district, and we agreed to consider a larger grant amount. We are recommending funding of \$5,000, with fairly significant cash match from the town, to complete this survey.

The City of Providence submitted two applications. The first is a project that will be deferred to the non-profit Neutaconkanut Hill Conservancy. The Conservancy will use this funding to hire a consultant to research and evaluate Neutaconkanut Hill Park's National Register eligibility and to provide recommendations for its nomination if applicable. This project will include tribal outreach to determine whether the property is considered significant from a Native American perspective. We recommend full funding of \$9,000 for this project.

Providence's second application is for a project that would be deferred to the Providence Preservation Society (PPS). They are requesting funding for a project to diversify the PPS Online Guide to Providence Architecture by adding sites associated with underrepresented groups and updating information about existing sites in the guide. We recommend full funding of \$8,500 for this project.

The City of Warwick has submitted a proposal related to their recently completed HDC standards and guidelines. They've completed three draft documents – a lengthy standards and guidelines handbook, a condensed "guide" that will be mailed to all property owners, and new application forms. We reviewed their completed draft documents, and felt that

there was an opportunity to make the guide a more attractive, user-friendly document. We discussed with them additional funding to hire a professional graphic designer to focus on the condensed guide and make it more visually impressive. We are recommending \$7,000 in funding for this project.

We are recommending reserving \$10,000 for planning and to pay a coordinator for our 2022 statewide historic preservation conference. This is the standard amount we typically reserve for conference planning.

Dr. Grefe made a motion to approve the slate of awards. Mr. Schoettle seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

9. For consideration: State Historic Preservation Review Board action
Review Board final approval: Beaver River Road Historic District, Richmond:

Ms. Ryan recused herself from the discussion. Ms. Taylor pointed out that without Ms. Ryan, the Commission does not have a quorum. Mr. Loether stated that these Review Board actions are presented to the Commission not for approval, per se, but for endorsement. He stated that the nomination probably should not be discussed because there is not a quorum and submission to the NPS can wait until the next meeting if the commissioners want to discuss it then. Ms. Taylor stated that it has been the Commission's practice to endorse nominations and in the absence of a compelling reason, she would like to hold it until there is a quorum.

Mr. Loether stated that it's worth noting that there are objections to this nomination. These will be processed as the regulations dictate. Because of the objections, he will request that the Keeper of the NR substantively review this nomination, which essentially means that the NPS reviewer will go through the nomination in more detail than is typical.

Mr. Nelson asked if it is absolutely necessary that Ms. Ryan recuse herself. Ms. Ryan responded that she has a financial relationship that requires her to recuse herself.

Ms. Taylor stated that, if there are no objections, she would like to table this until the next meeting. There were no objections.

10. For discussion: Update on Heritage Month Virtual Celebration

Donna Alqassar reported on the 2020 and 2021 Heritage Month Virtual Celebrations. For more than 42 years, the Commission has offered a free, family-friendly Rhode Island Heritage Festival that has allowed people from all over the state an opportunity to partake in various cultures and traditions through art, dance, musical performances, and food. The festival is designed to provide public access to meaningful programming and exhibits in an effort to help expand cultural awareness and provide a stronger sense of community.

We believe that the exposure to ethnic and cultural artistic expressions for all ages helps open the door for cross-cultural understanding and appreciation for those who are different from ourselves.

Last year, due to COVID-19, we had to pivot from an in-person festival to a virtual one. In place of the live festival, September 2020 was designated as Rhode Island Heritage Month. Being able to provide this virtual celebration where our audience could still experience various art forms that have been passed down from generation to generation while simultaneously increasing the reach and the impact of all participating artists was a win-win for everyone.

Every Saturday during September, we hosted a 60-minute virtual event on Zoom, which featured "Heritage Highlights" from visual artists, cultural performance groups, museums, organizations, and hands-on activities for children. In all, there were 41 video segments from more than 20 cultures, including 14 newcomers. The event consisted of 22 performances, 11 cultural education pieces, a children's yoga demonstration, six crafts, and two cooking demonstrations. In February we launched a new YouTube channel and rebroadcasted all four weeks of programming, gaining additional viewership.

In light of the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic and the possible constraints it may continue to impose on large social gatherings, we have decided to build upon the success of last year's event by hosting another Rhode Island Heritage Month Virtual Celebration in September 2021. This year's gathering will be simultaneously broadcast on Facebook and our new YouTube Channel. We are currently on track to have over 40 video segments from 23 cultures, including 15 newcomers that will be added to our program. So far, the event will consist of 19 performances, 10 cultural-educational pieces, five cooking demonstrations, three dance demonstrations, a meditation instruction, and a family Zumba demonstration. Ms. Alqassar stated that she looks forward to the commissioners supporting and attending this year's event.

Mr. Abbott asked what the YouTube channel address is, and Ms. Alqassar replied that she would email it to the commissioners after the meeting. She will also send the office Instagram handles that she and Sarah Zurier have recently established. Ms. Taylor congratulated Ms. Alqassar, stating that she has really broadened the reach and scope of the heritage festival; a job well done.

11. Old business

Jeffrey Emidy stated that Sarah Zurier is not able to be at the meeting today, but asked him to relay information about the annual Statewide Historic Preservation Conference, which will be held April 21st through the 23rd. "Come Back to the Future" is Rhode Island's 35th historic preservation conference. Commissioners can view the agenda and register at preservationconferenceri.com. The code for complimentary commissioner registration is COMM21. We look forward to the commissioners joining us.

12. New business

There was no new business.

13. Announcements

The next Commission meeting will be held May 12, 2021 by video conference.

14. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 10:29 am.

Minutes recorded by,



Jeffrey D. Emidy
Deputy Director
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer