



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION

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MINUTES  
RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION  
June 9, 2021

VIA VIDEO CONFERENCE

I. MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

Dr. Tripp Evans  
Dr. Morgan Grefe  
Mr. Paul Jordan, representing Janet Coit, Director, Rhode Island Department of  
Environmental Management  
Mr. Jesse Saglio, President, Rhode Island Commerce Corporation  
[Vacant]  
[Vacant]  
[Vacant]

STAFF PRESENT

Donna Alqassar, Heritage Aide  
Enerida Ademi, Data Control Clerk  
Joanna Doherty, Principal Architectural Historian  
Jeffrey Emidy, Deputy Director  
Virginia Hesse, Principal Historical Architect  
Michaela Jergensen, Senior Reviewer RIDOT Projects  
Katherine Pomplun, Principal Grants Coordinator  
Elizabeth Rochefort, Principal Architectural Historian  
Elizabeth Totten, Senior Project Review Coordinator  
Sarah Zurier, Principal Special Projects Coordinator

## II. AGENDA

### 1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 9:36 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 May 12, 2021 Commission meeting

On a motion by Mr. Schoettle, seconded by Mr. Abbott, the commissioners voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the May 12, 2021 Commission meeting without changes.

### 5. Executive Director's Report

Mr. Loether reported that:

- a) He continues to review the South Fork and Revolution Wind Section 106 projects. Revolution Wind is north of South Fork, so it will have the biggest impact and any mitigation that is done for Revolution Wind will affect South Fork as well. He attended Revolution Wind's first of three planned public meetings. They are doing the Section 106 consultation combined with the National Environmental Policy Act review. He does not see a major issue with these projects; they do have some benefit on a macro sense in terms of climate change. It's mostly a visual impact and the cable in the West passage doesn't appear to have negative impacts. So, we will focus on mitigation that is feasible.
- b) He continues to work with the Division of Human Resources on updating staff job descriptions and compensation schedules and staff Desk Audit requests. The new Deputy Director position and salary range have been approved. The two historical architects' job descriptions have been modified to a Restoration Project Manager position. The salary has also been significantly increased. This is competitive with the low end of the market. State HR has been very supportive so far, as have the budget and governor's offices. The Grant Manger title has been removed from the general Historic Preservation Specialist section because grant management is unique in terms of the job tasks. The Fiscal Clerk position has been modified to a Fiscal/Property Manager description. He is about to send over the Principal and

Senior Historic Preservation Specialist, which hasn't been changed a lot, but Grants Manager and Historical Architect have been removed. Hopefully, these changes will help us with retention and with hiring new employees in the future.

Ms. Taylor asked where this will all stand at the time of Mr. Loether's retirement. Mr. Loether replied that, in the cases where the positions have been approved, the current employees will have to go through the desk audit process. He hopes that the Deputy Director and Restoration Project manager positions will be through the process by then. Joyce Gervasio went through a desk audit and her job description has been updated. As for those that are having public hearings, since they schedule those as needed, it's unclear when the hearings may take place. He hopes those hearings will be completed. The others won't likely have gone through a hearing, but they should be in line for that before he departs. This process was delayed about 14 months because of COVID.

Ms. Taylor asked if, beyond the minutes of these meetings, Mr. Loether is preparing a things-in-motion status report to hand off. Mr. Loether replied that he is, and he is also meeting with Jeffrey Emidy and Joyce Gervasio on the 22<sup>nd</sup> to discuss these matters.

- c) He worked with the Governor's office on new and reappointments of commissioners. He sent information on three proposed appointments and restructuring the terms of reappointments to the Governor's Office in February. He spoke to the governor's director of boards and commissions about two weeks ago and was told that he didn't think that they were going to be able to get the reappointments through the process and the Senate in time this session. They were going to focus on the new appointments with the idea that the reappointment candidates would continue to serve for another year or until they are reappointed.

Ms. Taylor stated that she considers this an emergency regarding the good of the Commission and doesn't think that the Commission can go on with the reduced number. She asked Mr. Loether what his advice is going forward. Mr. Loether replied that he will put in another call to the Governor's Office and will send a letter that details the impact it has on the ability of the Commission to do its work. Ms. Taylor stated that, unless he thinks it would be a detriment, she would like to cosign that letter. Mr. Loether stated that the governor can make interim appointments and he will include that in the letter.

- d) He responded to "earmark" requests from Senator Reed's office. When he met with Senator Reed's staff by Zoom in March, he expressed his concern about restoring the Old State House to meet OSHA and disabled access requirements. About a month and a half ago, we were notified by the Senator's office that an earmark process was going to go forward and that we should consider submitting something. We ended up asking for about \$1.8 million, which is more than we've asked for in our Save America's Treasures (SAT) grant application, because of increased construction costs. Typically, what they would do is make this an earmarked SAT project. If we can get an earmark it would set up this building to

have a thoroughly done interior, including finishes. The building then becomes useful not only by the Commission, but also by the public.

- e) He arranged an existing-conditions tour of the interior of the Old State House for DCAMM architect Mikael Powell. Virginia Hesse and Roberta Randall had been working with the Governor's Commission on Disabilities to try to get a significant grant to do the disabled access to the bathrooms in the Old State House. There had been some positive response, but when it came time to action by the Commission, they did not support the project. Mr. Loether's sense was that it did not go forward because we did not get a particularly positive recommendation from the architect. So, he called Mr. Powell to set up a site visit. In addition to seeing the current status of the interior, it also allowed Mr. Powell to see the excellent exterior work that has been done to date. Not meeting ADA is bad, but the building also does not meet OSHA regulations. We are supposed to have one accessible bathroom for every 15 people, and we have none for 16 people. His hope is that we have built an ally with Mr. Powell.
- f) He participated as a panelist with Tom Mayes, Counsel for the National Trust, and Alyssa Lozupone of the Newport Restoration Foundation in Touro Synagogue's "Why Old Places Matter" program. It was an interesting discussion. A lot of comments and concerns haven't changed over Mr. Loether's time in the field. Of course, climate change is a major concern now for most of Rhode Island, not just Newport.
- g) He conducted two "listening session" Zoom webinars to provide opportunities for the public to hear about and discuss the State Guide Plan element. He also emailed links to the document to every state agency for their review. We got some good input and he will incorporate it.

One additional thing about the Statute is that it requires that we provide training for commissioners. He has put together a manual and Elizabeth Rochefort has put together a PowerPoint presentation. At some point when we have the new commissioners on board, we will make that presentation available when the new commissioners are appointed.

Ms. Taylor thanked Mr. Loether, stating, "Thank you for bringing the whole agency along as much as you have into the modern era and thank you for your time of service, it is much appreciated." Mr. Loether responded by thanking the commissioners for the opportunity to serve and for putting up with his little idiosyncrasies.

## 6. For consideration: State Preservation Grants regulations

Katherine Pomplun reminded the commissioners that, at last month's meeting she walked them through the proposed changes to the State Preservation Grant regulations. This is all due to the program being refunded thanks to the bond issue that was approved by voters in March. She stated that she was not going to go through the changes again as they had

been redistributed to the commissioners prior to the meeting, however, she did need approval from the Commission to begin the promulgation process.

Ms. Pomplun explained that she has been meeting bi-weekly with the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts (RISCA) to ensure that the two programs are in synch. Once the Commission approves Ms. Pomplun to go forward and RISCA has the same approval from its board, the two agencies will begin their promulgation processes on the same day. The two public hearings will be scheduled for the same day and the public hearing period will be the same 30 days. After that, we will assess any comments that are received and then finalize the regulations together. Hopefully, an October 1 deadline for the next round of grants will be feasible after the process is complete.

Ms. Taylor asked if there has been any furtherance of discussions about how the two programs will interface. Ms. Pomplun replied that there has: they have been meeting regularly and reviewed the two applications to identify overlap. RISCA has also offered to show us their online application interface, which, along with their grants management software, we hope to be able to use. We may even do a joint application.

Ms. Taylor stated that this is a huge step forward and that she hopes it continues, and congratulated Ms. Pomplun.

A motion to approve the regulations was made by Mr. Abbott and seconded by Mr. Schoettle. The Commission voted unanimously to approve the motion.

7. For consideration: State Historic Review Board action  
Review Board final approval: Donwell's Diner  
Pawtucket

Jeffrey Emidy made a presentation for endorsement of the State Review Board's final National Register approval for Donwell's Diner, at 560 Mineral Spring Avenue, in Pawtucket. The nomination was prepared as part of a tax credit application and was written by Ryan Cameron on MacRostie Historic Advisors. Mr. Cameron and Kim Smith Barnett, also of MacRostie, were in attendance. Mr. Emidy stated that, as this is the review for endorsement of the Review Board action, his presentation is less detailed than the one presented at the Review Board, but more information is available in the nomination, which was made available to the commissioners.

Donwell's Diner was built in 1941 by the Worcester Lunch Car Company, arguably the standard-bearer for diner manufacturers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The company was established in 1906 by Worcester resident Philip H. Duprey as the Worcester Lunch Car and Carriage Manufacturing Company to specialize in manufacturing pre-assembled lunch cars. Each was built to the customer's specifications – from tile color to plate designs – and the company assured customers that it would never build two dining cars exactly alike.

Worcester lunch car designs were refined in the late 1920s to include the characteristic

round-hipped roof with a clerestory monitor for improved light and ventilation, and, as they grew in length, gained a central entrance where previous iterations had only end entrances. Porcelain panels on the exterior were also a hallmark of Worcester designs. On the interior, initial designs wholly of wood gave way to polychrome ceramic tile, then eventually elaborated stainless steel panels accompanied by marble, copper, and nickel. Between 1906 and 1961, the Worcester Lunch Car Company built 651 diners, of which Donwell's, built in 1941, was the 575<sup>th</sup>.

One could argue that the social history of diners is as interesting as the story of the Worcester Lunch Car Company. In the early days, and really into the 1920s, lunch cars and diners were considered a male domain. This was due in part to holdover Victorian ideas of what was acceptable for women to do, but also to the early days of lunch cars being specifically targeted to crowds of men emerging from their shifts in New England's factories. By the mid-1920s, however, this had begun to change, and diners were considered to be "family friendly". The 1950s saw the emergence of fast-food franchises, which, with their modernity, cleanliness, consistency across locations, and specific targeting of families, began to put diners out of business. The Worcester Lunch Car Company did not adapt to the times, refusing to introduce new designs despite requests from potential buyers, and as an inevitable result, sold its last diner in 1957. In 1961, the company was sold and reorganized as the Worcester Deluxe Diner Manufacturing Company. Today, it is believed that about 90 of the 651 Worcester diners survive.

Donwell's Diner opened on Asylum Street, in Hartford, Connecticut, in September 1941. It was steps away from Union Station, and across the street from the Hotel Bond and Bushnell Park, essentially the grounds of the Connecticut State Capitol.

The name, Donwell's, comes from a combination of the names of the original owners: J. Edward and Edith Donnellan and Chester L. Wells. The Donnellans, from Cleveland, and Wells, a Connecticut native, ran the diner from 1941 to 1945. By 1949, it was owned by Elliot Drake and John Hibben and had been renamed Drake's Diner. Drake's operated until 1953, after which it ran briefly as Donovan's Diner before the Hotel Diner between 1955 and 56.

On December 6, 1956, the Hotel Diner was auctioned with the caveat that it must be removed from the premises. It was moved to Kensington, Connecticut in 1966 where, soon after, it was stripped of its interior furnishings by creditors. It was purchased at auction in 1969 by Ida and Stanley "Squeak" Zawisa, who relocated it to Middletown, Connecticut and reopened it as Squeak's Diner. Squeak's was a fixture in Middletown for almost 30 years, closing in 1997. In 2003, the diner was purchased and moved into storage by Colin Strayer. It was later located in a Connecticut field by Jonathan Savage, who purchased it in 2011 and moved it to its current site in Pawtucket. The diner has been placed adjacent to the north side of the Lorraine Mills Complex, which has been redeveloped for mixed uses.

An extensive rehabilitation process began in 2013 under the careful oversight of Mr.

Savage and based on photographs, published descriptive information, and the original plan for the diner from Worcester's lead designer, Charles P. Gemme. The project started with setting the diner on a brick-faced, concrete foundation so that it could be connected to the Lorraine Mill for additional space, much like other diners that have had dining rooms and/or expanded kitchens added at the rear.

Donwell's Diner is a Worcester Lunch Car Company semi-streamliner model, of which only eight survive of 25 produced. It is 48 feet long and 14½ feet wide with the characteristic Worcester round-hipped, monitor roof. The exterior has porcelain enamel panels and stainless steel trim. Only the corner trim pieces remained at the start of the project. New pieces to match were fabricated by the manufacturer of the originals – Cherokee Porcelain Enamel Corporation – in the same “ivory” color with “tomato red” trim as the originals. Above the enamel panels is a red, enamel sill that runs around the ends and front. Above that are new stainless steel panels with fluted pilasters at the corners and stainless-clad, fixed, mahogany sash. The original window frames were used as models for the new frames. The original door was in poor condition, so it was replicated in-kind; it is stainless-steel clad with an oval glass panel, and it is flanked by red, porcelain-enamel pilasters.

The original metal roof was repaired, and a silver-colored, liquid EPDM coating was put on the main roof and a grey elastomeric coating was put on the monitor roof. The rear elevation of the diner is covered with galvanized metal panels from the foundation to the cornice, as it was originally.

On the interior, there are four booths to the right of the entrance and three booths plus the cashier's stand to the left. Two of the booths are original, made of mahogany. These were repaired in-kind and reupholstered and used as models for the other five, which are also mahogany. All of the original cream and salmon basketweave floor tiles were retained, as were most of the original wall tiles. In areas where floor tiles were missing, replacements that match as closely as possible were used. Where wall tiles were missing, tiles from the backbar area were salvaged and used. The original back wall was tile, and some tile does remain, however, due to damage and sourcing replacements for the dining room from the back wall, the decision was made to install stainless steel wall panels in a sunburst pattern based that was used in other Worcester cars of the period. Remaining original mahogany trim was stripped, restored in a manner consistent with the original process, and reinstalled. The 19 chrome stools are original. They were repaired, reupholstered, and reinstalled. The countertop is pink Tennessee marble, cut from the same quarry as the original. All original built-ins that remained, including the three-bay refrigeration unit, were made operable and remain.

The doorway at the right end of the back wall and one in the middle of the back wall used to lead to a combined kitchen/restroom addition. The right end doorway leads through one of three connectors to the mill building. The brick connectors are made so that they are reversible, from existing window openings, the sills of which were dropped. The opening in the center of the back wall leads to the kitchen and the right leads to additional dining space and restrooms. The third opening is located on the east wall and connects to

the mill's stair tower, where it serves as the ADA accessible entrance.

The National Park Service (NPS) and MacRostie worked together to determine that the boundary should be the footprint of the diner. It does not include any of the mill.

Donwell's Diner, now the Miss Lorraine Diner, is being nominated to the National Register at the local level under criteria A and C: Under A for the role that diners like this one played in the evolution of restaurant design and dining concepts in the early- to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and under C as a rare surviving example of a Worcester Lunch Car Company semi-streamliner diner, one of only eight remaining. The period of significance runs from 1941, the date of the diner's construction, through 1971, the 50-year cutoff for National Register listing. The State Review Board unanimously approved the nomination at its meeting on June 7<sup>th</sup>.

Ms. Taylor asked about the diner being nominated for local significance despite never being in use in Rhode Island. Mr. Emidy replied that, though the NPS does not like resources to be moved, diners are an exception because they are designed to be mobile. As far as the "local" designation, the choices are local, state, and national, and local makes more sense than the other two in this case.

Ms. Taylor stated that, although it looks great, there have been a number of changes, but she is still in favor of listing. Mr. Emidy replied that this has already gone through the entire tax credit approval process, so all of the changes that have been made are in keeping with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards.

Mr. Schoettle made a motion that the Commission endorse the Review Board's approval. The motion was seconded by Mr. Abbott. The Commission voted unanimously to endorse the Review Board's approval of the nomination.

8. For discussion: Commissioner onboarding

Mr. Loether stated that this was covered in the executive director's report.

9. For discussion: American Rescue Plan Act funding opportunity

Mr. Loether reported that, in March, Department of Administration Acting Director Thorson sent a memo regarding \$1.2 billion in federal funds that were coming to the state for COVID-related projects. Mr. Loether does not recall ever seeing the memo, however, Ms. Pomplun and Sarah Zurier heard about it, and even though the March 31 application deadline has passed, have come up with some program ideas that we may want to pursue. They won't likely benefit our office, but could benefit our constituents. Mr. Loether is looking into what we are able to do by statute. We have talked about supporting preservation organizations by funding them to open for free for children to bring in more guests. We are also looking into whether there is a way to supplement our State



Preservation Grants program. While there is nothing to vote on today, we did want to let you know about it.

Ms. Taylor asked what the deadline is. Mr. Loether replied that the memo was sent out on March 19<sup>th</sup> with a March 31<sup>st</sup> deadline. However, it is his understanding that they may be still willing to accept submissions.

10. Old Business

There was no old business.

11. New Business:

There was no new business

12. Announcements

The next Commission meeting will be held July 14, 2021 by video conference.

Ms. Taylor made a resolution to recognize Pierre Morenon for his over 40 years of service to the Commission. He could not be present today, at what would be his last meeting. Mr. Abbott seconded the resolution. The Commissioners voted unanimously to accept the resolution.

13. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 10:31 am.

Minutes recorded by,



Jeffrey D. Emidy  
Deputy Director  
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer