



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS
HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION
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MINUTES
RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION
May 9, 2018

I. MEMBERS PRESENT

Mr. Michael Abbott, AIA
Mr. Warren Ducharme, representing the State Building Code Commissioner
Dr. Tripp Evans
Dr. Morgan Grefe
Mr. Paul Jordan, representing Ms. Janet Coit, Director, DEM
Ms. Tanya Kelley
Dr. E. Pierre Morenon
Mr. Edward F. Sanderson, State Historic Preservation Officer
Mr. Clark Schoettle
Ms. Lucie Searle
Mr. John Smith
Ms. Ruth Taylor, Chair

MEMBERS ABSENT

Mr. Kevin Nelson, representing the Associate Director of the Division of Planning
Mr. Jesse Saglio, President, Rhode Island Commerce Corporation
Vacant

STAFF PRESENT

Ms. Rosemary Carreiro, Fiscal Aide
Ms. Joanna Doherty, Principal Architectural Historian
Mr. Jeffrey Emidy, Acting Executive Director/Deputy Director
Ms. Virginia Hesse, Principal Historical Architect
Dr. Timothy Ives, Principal Archaeologist
Ms. Michaela Jergensen, Senior Reviewer RIDOT Projects
Mr. Glenn Modica, Senior Project Review Coordinator
Ms. Katherine Pomplun, Senior Grants Coordinator
Ms. Elizabeth Warburton, Senior Architectural Historian
Ms. Sarah Zurier, Principal Special Projects Coordinator

GUESTS

Shanna Vecchio-Schubert, Senate Finance
Rachel Robinson, Providence Preservation Society

II. AGENDA

1. Call to Order

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

2. Minutes of March 28, 2018

On a motion by Mr. Abbott, seconded by Ms. Kelley, with Mr. Ducharme abstaining, the Commission unanimously VOTED to approve the Minutes of March 28, 2018.

3. Acting Executive Director's Report

- a) Mr. Emidy reported on the 2018 Statewide Historic Preservation Conference, held in Providence on April 26-28. The conference was attended by approximately 200 people. Mr. Emidy reported that all comments he had heard during and after the conference were positive, and that he had attended three excellent walking tours.

The Commissioners noted that attendance was lower than in past years and hypothesized about reasons, including too much walking, new topics, lack of sit-down sessions, and the conflict with events in Newport and elsewhere, and also that the three-day conference was a change from our typical one-day event, which may have conflicted with potential attendees' work schedules or otherwise dissuaded them from attending.

Dr. Grefe mentioned that the keynote address by Ray Rast, while addressing primarily Latino preservation issues, could be extended to parallels in the working class and their historic environs.

Ms. Taylor stated that the press leading up to the conference was excellent.

Ms. Zurier invited the commissioners to discuss the conference more among themselves and with her and to take part in the planning for the 2019 conference.

Mr. Emidy thanked Ms. Zurier, Janet Balletto, the staff, sponsors, and commissioners for their hard work and support.

- b) Mr. Emidy reported that R.I. House Bill H7890 was introduced on May 8th to make changes to 44-4.1, entitled "Historic Residence – Tax Credit." This is the legislation that allows cities and towns to provide tax relief, in the form of a credit, to the owners of historic homes if those buildings are the subject of a preservation project. In this act, "historic properties" are defined as those that are on the State Register of Historic Places. Currently, the RIHPHC is responsible for setting the guidelines for project

approval and for inspecting the work to assure the local tax assessor that the work is worthy of a tax credit. For each project that is approved, the RIHPHC is supposed to receive a five-year easement on the property.

Michael DeLuca, the Town Planner from Narragansett, proposed a change, which was introduced by Representative McEntee. The change would have given the responsibility for inspection to the local historic district commission (HDC), and the easement to the town, effectively eliminating the RIHPHC from the process.

Overall, we were supportive of giving review of local tax initiatives to the towns where they are occurring, however, we could not support the changes the way that they were written. Two particular problems were that not all towns have an HDC, and that under the proposed language change, the towns were given the ability to set contributing and non-contributing status to properties on the State Register, thus changing the Register, which is maintained by the RIHPHC.

Ms. Taylor, Mr. DeLuca, and Representative McEntee worked out changes to the proposed language prior to the hearing before the House Fiscal Committee, so that the change was presented in an amended form that we could support. Mr. DeLuca and Representative McEntee stated that they would submit a revised version of the bill to Ms. Taylor and Mr. Emidy for review, so that it could then be submitted as revised.

4. Report: Executive Director Search Committee

Ms. Taylor reported that Mr. Loether is due to arrive on June 25th and that plans to introduce him to preservationists and others around the state will be prepared.

5. Consideration of revised RIHPHC regulations

Katherine Pomplun explained that Commission action is required on two current RIHPHC regulations: "Registration and Protection of Historic Cemeteries," and "Rules and Regulations for the State Preservation Grants," have been lightly edited per the guidance of the state's Office of Regulatory Reform and reformatted to match the new Rhode Island Code of Regulations standards.

Ms. Pomplun further described non-substantive changes to the "Registration and Protection of Historic Cemeteries" regulation, including updates to Rhode Island General Laws citations and removal of non-regulatory language.

After a question by Ms. Kelley, the commissioners discussed whether the word "artistic" in the Section 2.2 ("Purpose") should include architecture, landscape architecture, and design. Mr. Sanderson stated that the term might be included in the statute, and that we would have to refer to that in determining whether or not the definition should be changed.

Ms. Kelley noted that section 2.6(A) of the regulation says that in the event of the inadvertent

location of a previously unknown cemetery, unmarked cemetery, archaeological burial site, or human skeletal material, the building official must be notified, but not that work must stop. Ms. Pomplun replied that Part B states that work must stop. Mr. Emidy asked if the two sections should be reordered, to stop work, then notify the official.

Ms. Kelley noted that there is a section on the criteria for identifying Native American burial sites, however, she does not feel that we have the knowledge to offer judgement on that topic. Also, that she doesn't know how that section came about. Mr. Sanderson replied that archaeologists Paul Robinson, Charlotte Taylor, and Pierre Morenon were involved in writing that language. It attempts to establish minimally invasive ways of determining if there is a burial present. Ms. Kelley asked if ground penetrating radar (GPR) should be included. Mr. Sanderson stated that GPR is not foolproof – it is good at locating all sorts of things, but can miss others. He continued, saying that the regulation tries to lay out a framework for determining whether or not a human burial is present, then one moves to establishing whether or not there are more.

Dr. Grefe asked if approving the language as proposed in the version that the commissioners have before them prohibits them from making future changes. When Ms. Pomplun replied that it does not, Dr. Grefe asked if we should consider making some of these changes at a later time.

Mr. Ducharme stated that the requirement to notify the building official is problematic because the official doesn't have purview over all types of projects, specifically not roads and sewer lines as examples. Mr. Sanderson stated that he believes that language to be statutory.

Ms. Taylor asked whether or not the commissioners were comfortable approving the proposed language with one change, around the definition of “artistic”, and having a longer conversation about other changes at a later time?

On a motion by Mr. Abbott, seconded by Mr. Schoettle, the Commission unanimously VOTED to approve the regulation with the discussed addition to the definition of “artistic”.

Ms. Pomplun further described non-substantive changes to the “Rules and Regulations for the State Preservation Grants,” including updates to Rhode Island General Laws citations and removal of non-regulatory language.

Ms. Kelley asked if landscape features are eligible for SPG funds for restoration/preservation. Ms. Taylor replied that the Commission has considered this issue in the past and determined that they are not eligible.

On a motion by Dr. Grefe, seconded by Ms. Taylor, the Commission unanimously VOTED to approve the “Rules and Regulations for the State Preservation Grants” as revised.

6. Consideration of State Review board actions

a) Ms. Doherty made a brief presentation about the Alexander Van Rensselaer House, also known as “Restmere”, located at 1 Ichabod Lane, in Middletown. “Restmere” is a south-

facing, three-story, wood-frame, Italianate-style dwelling built in 1857-1858 on the north side of Miantanomi Avenue in Middletown. The building has a three-bay-wide, symmetrically-composed façade; a one-story, colonnaded, flat-roof entry porch; and a hip roof with deep eaves and brackets. Exterior walls are clad in wood clapboard, with decorative stickwork at the third floor (attic) level, in the form of half-timbering and cross-bracing. The principal entrance is centered on the façade and consists of a pair of wood, paneled doors set within a pilastered surround and beneath a round-arched transom window with wood tracery. Window openings are filled primarily with 2/1, double-hung, wood sash and feature simple wood trim with drip caps. The main block of the building is roughly square in plan; a two-story ell was built off the rear (north) elevation in the late 19th century, and two-story bay windows were added to the east and west elevations in the late 19th or early 20th centuries. Other exterior changes, likely dating to the early 20th century, include the addition of a porch railing with a balustrade that mimics the colonnaded porch, and a sweeping set of stairs to the porch. The flat-roofed porch originally had a roof balustrade, which has been removed. On the interior, the center-hall plan remains intact, as do many historic finishes such as wood floors, plaster walls, doors, and window and door trim. Some Classical Revival/Beaux Arts-style details were added, probably in the early 20th century, notably elaborate door surrounds in the first-floor hall, with fluted pilasters, Corinthian capitals, and friezes ornamented with swags and dentils.

“Restmere” was erected as a country home for Alexander Van Rensselaer and his wife, Mary Howland. It was built on land subdivided from the property to its west, the three-story, hip-roofed, Italianate-style Hamilton Hoppin House (NR, 1996), which had been built for Hoppin and his wife, Louisa Howland, one year earlier. Louisa and Mary Howland were sisters. The architect Richard Upjohn designed both the Hamilton Hoppin House and Oak-Lawn, built in Newport in the 1850s (not extant) for Charles H. Russell and Caroline Howland (sister to Louisa and Mary). The family connections to Upjohn strongly suggest he was the architect for Restmere, as do the strong stylistic similarities between it and the Hoppin House. In addition, there is evidence that Richard Morris Hunt was involved either in the initial design of Restmere or in renovations completed in the 1860s. In any case, it is an excellent example of a mid-19th-century, Newport-area estate and, with its unusual stickwork at the third-floor level, presages the picturesque styles that would become popular in subsequent decades. Restmere has experienced some alterations over time, most of which are significant in their own right, and it retains a high degree of integrity.

The building is proposed for listing under Criterion A for Community Planning and Development and Criterion C for Architecture at the local level.

The State Review Board granted final approval for the nomination at its April 2, 2018 meeting.

On a motion by Dr. Grefe, seconded by Ms. Searle, the Commission unanimously VOTED to endorse the State Review Board action.

b) Mr. Emidy made a brief presentation related to changes to the Rumford Historic District, in East Providence, which was listed in the National Register in 1980. In 2015, the City of East Providence received a CLG grant from the RIHPHC to resurvey the District and update

the NR nomination with a goal of later establishing a local historic district based on the NR boundaries. The revised work includes additional information for the nomination, removing 15 properties, and adding 8 properties to the NR district. The National Park Service (NPS) prefers this to be accomplished in two actions: an *Additional Information and Boundary Decrease* and a *Boundary Increase*.

Mr. Emidy made a single presentation for the two actions recommended by the NPS. The Rumford Historic District was listed in the NR as part of the Multiple Property Submission entitled *Historic Resources of East Providence, Rhode Island: Partial Inventory, Historic and Architectural Resources*. Because of this format and the time period in which the nomination was prepared, there is not as much information included in the nomination as there would be if it were prepared today.

As listed, the district contained 91 properties along Pawtucket Avenue, Pleasant Street, and Greenwood Avenue, and in the Hunts Mills area. The original nomination stated that the district “contains most of the extant structures that comprised the civic center of east Providence and its parent communities, Seekonk and Rehoboth, through the 18th and 19th centuries.” While no specific period of significance was given for the district in the original nomination, contributing buildings were defined as “those which represent when Rumford was East Providence’s civic center – from 1643 to circa 1890 – and those which contribute to the visual continuity of the district including early 20th century buildings whose form, scale, and materials are compatible with the Colonial, Federal, and Victorian structures in the district. In general, buildings constructed after 1930 were not considered to contribute to the district.”

Mr. Emidy discussed the removal of 15 properties from the district. These include two vacant lots, two buildings that appear to have been included as a map error, one building that was recently constructed in what had been the yard of an included property, plus 10 properties in the southeast part of the district, on what was, at the time of listing, a single parcel that was included in the district. Most, if not all, of the houses on these properties were constructed after 2000.

Eight contributing resources are proposed to be added to the district: two houses on Greenwood Avenue at the northwest end, three houses and the Cole’s Bridge on Pawtucket Avenue at the southwest end, a house on Pleasant Street at the northeast boundary, and the Hunt’s Mills Bridge on Pleasant Street at the southeast end of the district. All are within the period of significance, which has been expanded to 1953 to include expanded history of the Hunt’s Mills area.

On a motion by Dr. Evans, seconded by Dr. Grefe, the Commission unanimously VOTED to endorse the State Review Board action.

7. Discussion of expectations for commissioners regarding public comment

Ms. Taylor reminded the commissioners that their comments to the press and others about Commission actions may be perceived as the official opinion of the Commission. Accordingly, care should be taken when speaking publicly about projects under review or with

the potential to come under review by the Commission. The commissioners discussed recent projects that have been reviewed by the Commission and have received media coverage, and instances of their experiences of dealing with the media and how their comments have been represented. The commissioners recognized that they need to be cognizant of their audience when speaking about projects that may involve Commission review.

8. Announcements

Mr. Emidy announced that the next Commission meeting is scheduled for June 13th, 2018 at 9:30am.

9. Report of the Loan Committee

Ms. Pomplun reported that there have been some significant developments pertaining to the loan granted to Ms. Anne Marie Omweg, which the Commission should discuss.

On a motion by Mr. Schoettle, seconded by Mr. Abbott, the commission VOTED unanimously to go into executive session to discuss the details of the Omweg loan. The commission entered executive session at 11:10am.

Minutes recorded by,



Jeffrey D. Emidy
Acting Executive Director
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer