



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION

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MINUTES  
RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION  
July 8, 2020

VIA VIDEO CONFERENCE

I. MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

Mr. Paul Jordan, representing Janet Coit, Director, DEM  
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  
Jeffrey Emidy, Deputy Director  
Elizabeth Rochefort, Principal Architectural Historian  
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. Roll call

Ms. Taylor called the roll of Commissioners. See page one of these minutes for the attendance list. Mr. Schoettle, shown as present in the list, was not present at the start of the meeting. He arrived at approximately 10:05am.

3. Meeting procedures overview

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

4. Minutes of March 11, 2020 Commission meeting

On a motion by Mr. Abbott, seconded by Ms. Ryan, the commissioners voted unanimously to approve the minutes of March 11, 2020 without changes.

5. Executive Director's Report

Mr. Loether reported that:

- a) He worked on a second draft of the RIHPHC State Element Plan for the Department of Administration's Division of Statewide Planning.
- b) He reviewed the draft components of the RIHPHC's federally-mandated State Historic Preservation Plan.
- c) He has worked to establish a new memorandum of agreement (MOA) with the R.I. Department of Transportation to continue RIDOT's funding of a dedicated project reviewer position within the RIHPHC. This MOA will succeed the current MOA which expires June 30, 2020. Previously a five year agreement, RIDOT chose to renew the MOA for one year, without explanation for the change.
- d) With the departure of James Toner, he has completed several dozen reviews of CRCM project permit applications. Jeffrey Emidy is doing most of the Section 106 review work.
- e) He has reviewed and tracked revisions to a proposed agreement with the Australian National Maritime Museum for a five-year loan of a cannon to be raised from the wreck of the former *HMS Endeavour*. The agreements continue to be reviewed by the parties involved. Covid-19 may cause the postponement of the Australian events, and therefore the loan of the cannon, until 2021.
- f) With staff architects Virginia Hesse and Roberta Randall, he continues to monitor the daily progress of the Old State House rehabilitation project. A report on the project was recently emailed to the Commissioners. The flashing crew, who were previously on strike, are back at work. Significant progress is being made on the building.

- g) He has approved staff requests for voluntary participation in the state employees' Workshare Program. Most of the staff are participating in the program. This will have them working three days each week until early September.
- h) He extended the COVID-19-related staff telecommuting regimen through early August 2020. RIHPHC staff are doing extremely well working from home. New laptops have been supplied by the state to allow the staff to log in to the office network through a VPN.
- i) He participated in application reviews for the 2020 Rhody Awards for Historic Preservation with RIHPHC and Preserve Rhode Island staff.
- j) He has approved the technical report for the Hopkinton 2019 CLG grant project to survey and inventory the stone features at the town's Manitou Hassannash Preserve. There has been some unanticipated participation from the Narragansett Tribal Historic Preservation Office regarding their concerns about releasing sensitive tribal information. Mr. Loether intends to discuss the issue with the National Park Service to determine how much of the document can be released and how much redacted while still fulfilling the requirements under the CLG grant.

Mr. Smith asked if, regarding historic monuments that are the subject of controversy, there are any monuments within RIHPHC jurisdiction and whether the Commission has a position on them. Mr. Loether replied that, at the moment, no one has officially raised any such concerns. He, as SHPO, has not taken a position, nor has the Commission. He is not sure that it is necessary for the Commission to take a position at this time.

6. For consideration: Recognition of Lucie Searle's and Tanya Kelley's departure from the Commission

Ms. Taylor read the following proposed resolution into the record:

***WHEREAS**, Ms. Tanya Kelley has completed a four-year term of dedicated service to people of the State of Rhode Island as an active, thoughtful, and respected member of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission; and*

***WHEREAS**, Ms. Kelley also served the Commission and the people of Rhode Island as an active member of the Commission's Strategic Planning Committee; and*

***WHEREAS**, Ms. Kelley always provided expertise, guidance, encouragement, and support for the work of the staff of the Commission in identifying and documenting historic designed, vernacular, and ethnic landscapes; and*

***WHEREAS**, Ms. Kelley recognized and promoted the important role historic landscapes play in the long-term preservation of the distinct physical character and diverse heritage of Rhode Island's communities; and*

***WHEREAS, Ms. Kelley ably served as the Commission's representative at meetings of the State of Rhode Island's Scenic Highway Board; and***

***WHEREAS, Ms. Kelley shared with the Commission, Commission staff, and others her considerable "hands-on" expertise and experience in the evaluation and treatment of historic landscapes; and***

***BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED: The Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission hereby votes to recognize, commend, and thank Ms. Tanya Kelley for her dedicated and faithful service to the Commission and the people of Rhode Island.***

Dr. Grefe asked if this is a new type of resolution, or if it is traditionally done when a member leaves the Commission. Mr. Loether replied that he has not been here long enough to know, but it seemed proper to do so. He also sent flowers and a 'thank you' to Ms. Kelley and Ms. Searle on behalf of the Commission and the office. Ms. Taylor stated her belief that this is a new type of action.

On a motion by Mr. Abbott, seconded by Dr. Evans, the commissioners voted unanimously to approve the resolution.

Ms. Taylor read the following proposed resolution into the record:

***WHEREAS, Ms. Lucie Searle has completed a four-year term of dedicated service to people of the State of Rhode Island as an active, much-appreciated, and respected member of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission; and***

***WHEREAS, Ms. Searle also served the Commission and the people of Rhode Island as an active member of the Commission's Strategic Planning Committee; and***

***WHEREAS, Ms. Searle always provided sound guidance, encouragement, and support for the work of the staff of the Commission on a broad range of preservation and heritage issues; and***

***WHEREAS, Ms. Searle demonstrated an unusually keen sense of and interest in the important role historic properties play in the long-term preservation of the distinct physical character and diverse heritage of the State of Rhode Island as a whole; and***

***WHEREAS, Ms. Searle was and remains a leading proponent of the important role that rehabilitated historic buildings can play in stimulating and maintaining the economic vitality of the state's communities; and***

***WHEREAS, Ms. Searle has been and remains quick to share with the Commission and others her considerable "hands-on" expertise and experience in the use of state and federal historic rehabilitation tax credits to successfully finance the adaptive reuse of vacant and underutilized historic buildings; and***

***WHEREAS, Ms. Searle has been a strong proponent of how historic preservation and the arts can work together in the adaptive reuse of historic properties; and***

***WHEREAS, Ms. Searle's tireless commitment to supporting the arts in conjunction with preserving historic buildings in Providence resulted in the singular honor of the City of Providence renaming a street "Lucie Way" in the downtown arts district; and***

***BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED: The Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission hereby votes to recognize, commend, and thank Ms. Lucie Searle for her dedicated and faithful service to the Commission and the people of Rhode Island.***

On a motion by Ms. Ryan, seconded by Mr. Smith, the commissioners voted unanimously to approve the resolution.

7. For consideration: Emergency State Preservation Grant to the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association

Mr. Loether explained that we have discussed this grant potentially coming up at an earlier meeting. The Beavertail Lighthouse property is owned by the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), with a management agreement with the R.I. Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM), who has a subagreement with the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association (BLMA) to deal with taking care of the buildings and to raise funds for that purpose. RIDEM is particularly interested in the property, which is a state park.

Our State Preservation Grant (SPG) program requires that a historic preservation easement held by the RIHPHC be placed on the property as a condition of the grant. While the BLMA is an authorized applicant, that easement must be signed by the property owner, in this case the USCG. Federal law does allow this sort of easement on federal property to be held by a state. In this case, a memorandum of agreement could be substituted for the easement. It would be written to be materially the same as the requirements of an easement. Both options are being investigated.

Mr. Loether stated that the project needs to move forward; it has been months with a tarp on the roof. He spoke with Megan DiPrete, Chief of Planning and Development at RIDEM, regarding the project. He understands that the BLMA has the grant match in place or committed. There are funds in the SPG program account that could be used for this. The staff recommendation is to move forward and affirm the Commission's commitment to the property.

Ms. Taylor asked if Mr. Loether's request is for the Commission to award the grant if an easement or other restriction is given. Mr. Loether replied in the affirmative.

Ms. Taylor read the following proposed resolution into the record:

*The Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission votes to award a*

*State Preservation Grant in the amount of \$20,000 to the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum to complete emergency repairs to the roof of the complex's Fog Horn Building. This award is contingent upon the U.S. Coast Guard or its authorized agent providing the Commission with a preservation easement or comparable Memorandum of Agreement acceptable to the Commission prior to the Commission's release of any grant funds for the project.*

Ms. Taylor noted that Mr. Schoettle had entered the meeting.

Dr. Grefe stated that, as the Commission moves forward, it would be useful to be thoughtful about policies regarding federal properties in both non-emergency and emergency situations.

On a motion by Dr. Grefe, seconded by Mr. Abbott, the commissioners voted unanimously to approve the resolution.

8. For consideration: Valentine Whitman House (Lincoln) easement modification

Ms. Taylor stated that Mr. Abbott has recused himself from the discussion of this issue because he is a board member at Preserve Rhode Island.

Mr. Loether stated that the Valentine Whitman House, in Lincoln, is owned by the town. The RIHPHC holds a preservation easement on the property that expires in 2030. A "Friends of" group is managing the property, but its membership and ability to do so are decreasing. The town does not want to care for the property. Preserve Rhode Island (PRI) has proposed a plan to change the easement duration to perpetuity, then PRI will acquire the property with the intent of rehabilitating it then transferring it to a new owner in three to five years, at which time the easement will transfer to PRI. If PRI ever ceases to exist, the easement would revert to the RIHPHC. Mr. Loether stated that he believes this is a good proposal.

Ms. Taylor asked why the Commission would not simply continue to hold the easement. Mr. Loether replied that he doesn't see a downside to transferring it. There is a provision in the current easement for assigning it to another body. Working with PRI in this way is an acknowledgement of the Commission's partnership with PRI.

Ms. Taylor read the following proposed resolution into the record:

*The Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission votes to authorize the Executive Director to amend the preservation easement between the Commission and the Town of Lincoln for the Valentine Whitman House property on Great Road in Lincoln, RI, the property being more fully described in the Lincoln Tax Assessor's Records as Plat 29, Lot 148, and in Exhibit A of the current easement as recorded in the land evidence records of the Town of Lincoln, Book 1285, Page 96.*

Dr. Grefe asked if we see this as a one-off type of process or is there a sense that stewardship is progressing and stronger and will be interested in these types of situations in the future? Also, is this a movement outside of Rhode Island? Ms. Taylor replied that this is the opening of a door to a larger conversation with the public. Everything can't be a museum – there are too many already – and we can't rely on the continued existence of “friends of” groups to be able to raise funds and staff these properties as state and local governments change their priorities.

Mr. Loether replied that 90 percent of preservation is private, as reflected in the National Historic Preservation Act. PRI, in this case, doesn't want to own this property forever, but merely to facilitate its continued existence as it can.

Ms. Taylor stated that this is a fairly open-ended request, so the Commission will want to be kept informed as it progresses.

Mr. Schoettle asked for confirmation that we are in essence trading our easement, with 10 years remaining, for an easement in perpetuity, which seems to make sense in terms of the long-term preservation of the building. Mr. Loether replied in the affirmative.

On a motion by Ms. Ryan, seconded by Dr. Grefe, the commissioners voted unanimously to approve the resolution.

9. For discussion: Candidates for 2020 Rhody Awards for Historic Preservation

Ms. Zurier introduced 39 applications for the Rhody Awards – a record amount. She showed a photograph with the name of each. They are:

- Historic Preservation Project Award: Smith Wilcox Building, Bristol
- Historic Preservation Project Award: the Gladding Shops, Bristol
- Historic Preservation Project Award: Hopkins Hollow Church, Coventry
- Historic Preservation Project Award: St. Columba's Lych Gate, Middletown
- Historic Preservation Project Award: Block Island Southeast Lighthouse
- Historic Preservation Project Award: Surf Hotel at Block Island Beach House
- Historic Preservation Project Award: BankNewport, Washington Square, Newport
- Historic Preservation Project Award: Catherine Lorrillard Wolfe House, Newport
- Historic Preservation Project Award: Edward King House, Newport
- Historic Preservation Project Award: Church Hill Grammar School, Pawtucket
- Historic Preservation Project Award: Hope Artiste Village, Pawtucket
- Historic Preservation Project Award: Miss Lorraine Diner, Pawtucket
- Historic Preservation Project Award: Atlantic Design Works, Providence
- Historic Preservation Project Award: Bomes Theater, Providence
- Historic Preservation Project Award: Former Asa Messer Annex (Althea Elementary School), Providence
- Historic Preservation Project Award: G Reserve (Union Trust Building), Providence
- Historic Preservation Project Award: Knight Memorial Library, Providence

- Historic Preservation Project Award: Rhode Island State House, Providence
- Historic Preservation Project Award: Sharpe House, Providence
- Historic Preservation Project Award: the Steel Yard, Providence
- Historic Preservation Project Award: Schoolhouse at the Samuel Clarke Farm, Richmond
- Historic Preservation Project Award: the Power House, Westerly
- Homeowner Award: Idlewild, Narragansett
- Homeowner Award: Edgar House “Sunnyside”, Newport
- Landscape Preservation Award: the Breakers, Newport
- Preservation is Green Award: the Compass School Barn, South Kingstown
- Advocacy Award: Shirley Eastham, Narragansett
- Advocacy Award: Robert Grandchamp
- Education Award: Lisa Konicki, Westerly
- Education Award: Little Compton Historical Society, *Little Compton: A Changing Landscape*
- Stewardship Award: URI Quadrangle District, South Kingstown
- Downing Volunteer Award: Friends of Hearthside, Lincoln
- Downing Volunteer Award: Linda Getgen and Bill Deveney, Mile of History Association
- Downing Volunteer Award: Henry Brown, Pawtuxet Village Association, etc.
- Downing Volunteer Award: Ken Woodcock, South Kingstown Land Trust
- Tyson Artisan Award: Jared Hartley, Winsor Blacksmith Shop
- Williamson Professional Award: Alisa Augenstein, Public Archaeology Lab
- Williamson Professional Award: Mary Anthony, 1772 Foundation
- Williamson Professional Award: Ned Connors, East Providence

Ms. Zurier stated that RIHPHC and PRI staff are gathering information on all of these applicants, making site visits, and whittling the pool down to 10 awardees. Mr. Loether stated that, as a reminder, the Rhody Awards are in collaboration with PRI, so their input has been valuable.

#### 10. Old Business

- a. Mr. Loether stated that we are still waiting to hear from the National Park Service about our grant application for repairs to the Old State House through the Save America’s Treasures grant program.
- b. Mr. Loether reminded the Commissioners that the offices remain officially open during the agency’s normal operating hours – Monday through Friday, 9:00am to 4:00pm, excluding holidays, though public access remains limited. Staff are telecommuting and come and go from the office as needed, without regular schedules. If Commissioners want to discuss issues with the staff, it is helpful if they call ahead.

## 11. New Business

- a. Mr. Loether reported that a push was made to have the State Historic Preservation Tax Credit program's sunset clause, which is scheduled to end the program at the end of this fiscal year, continued indefinitely. The legislature instead extended it for one year, to June 30, 2021.
- b. Mr. Loether reported that he will submit a request to refill the currently-vacant Senior Historic Preservation Specialist - Project Review Coordinator position to Human Resources next week, however, there is a hiring freeze on right now. If we are able to hire, contributing to our difficulty in hiring a qualified candidate is the low salary range for our staff. We are not competitive with other states. He continues to work on having this issue corrected.
- c. Mr. Loether reported that he will have a telephone conference with the governor's Chief of Staff, David Ortiz, on Thursday, July 10<sup>th</sup>. He wants to express his concern that he has been hearing undercurrents about combining agencies in this fiscally challenging time. He will explain that about 70 percent of our staff time is involved in environmental reviews and that there are potential conflicts of interest involved if were to be combined with almost any other state agency for which we would review projects.
- d. Mr. Loether reported that he will be away from the office on medical leave from October 19<sup>th</sup> through November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020, inclusive. Deputy Director Emidy will be in charge during that time.
- e. Mr. Loether thanked the RIHPHC staff, especially Sarah Zurier, for setting up this virtual meeting and their superior effort to make it run smoothly.

## 12. Announcements

The next Commission meeting will be held August 12, 2020. It will likely be a virtual meeting.

## 13. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 10:41 am.

Minutes recorded by,



Jeffrey D. Emdy  
Deputy Director  
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer