STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS
HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION
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MINUTES
RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION
December 10, 2008

I. MEMBERS PRESENT
- Mr. Robert E. Cusack
- Mr. Robert Goff
- Ms. Patrice O'Malley Hagan
- Mr. Michael Hebert, NR Review Board
- Mr. Karst Hoogeboom
- Dr. Patrick Malone
- Dr. E. Pierre Morenon
- Dr. Ronald Onorato
- Mr. Jared L. Rhodes, Chief of Statewide Planning representing Kevin Flynn
- Dr. Patricia Rubertone
- Mr. Frederick C. Williamson, Chairman & SHPO

STAFF PRESENT
- Ms. Mercedes Monteiro, National Register Assistant
- Ms. Roberta Randall, Principal Architect
- Mr. Edward F. Sanderson, Executive Director
- Mr. Wm. McKenzie Woodward, Principal Architectural Historian

GUESTS
- Mr. Michael Hogan, House Policy Office
- Kathryn Cavanaugh, National Register Consultant

MEMBERS ABSENT
- Dr. Michael Sullivan, Director DEM
- Dr. James Garman, NR Review Board
- Mr. John Grosvenor, AIA
- Mr. Saul Kaplan, Executive Director, EDC
- Mr. Bradford Kopp
- John P. Leyden, State Building Commissioner

II. AGENDA

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 9:40 A.M.

2. Minutes of November 12, 2008

The Minutes of November 12, 2008 will be distributed for approval at the January 2009 meeting.

3. Executive Director's Report

a) The vacant Staff position of Supervising Historic Preservation Specialist/Deputy Director has been filled by appointment of Dr. Richard Greenwood.

Dr. Richard Greenwood meets and exceeds the position requirements for education and experience. He meets National Park Service professional qualifications in three historic preservation disciplines: Historian, Architectural Historian, and Archaeologist. He holds a Ph.D. in American Civilization from Brown University, and he has been employed in a variety of professional historic preservation positions for 34 years. He was employed at the RIHPHC from 1987 to 2007 as Principal Historic Preservation Specialist – Project Review Coordinator. He was a senior member of the RIHPHC professional staff and performed outstanding service in a position that required difficult and complex regulatory and policy work. He left RIHPHC to teach fulltime as Assistant Professor, Historic Preservation Program, Roger Williams University. Previously he taught at Brown University as Visiting and Adjunct Professor. Early in his career, Dr. Greenwood worked as a historian at the National Park Service and as a historic preservation consultant to the Maryland State Historic Preservation Office.

Dr. Greenwood's professional work demonstrates thorough knowledge and successful experience in the methods and procedures of professional historic preservation practice that are required in the full range of RIHPHC's work. In addition, he is experienced with the procedures and professional practices of the RIHPHC and with the relevant processes of State government. He is a widely recognized expert on Rhode Island history and architecture, and he is the author of many scholarly articles, publications, lectures, and author of 140 National Register of Historic Places nominations. Dr. Greenwood's career demonstrates a strong personal commitment to the preservation of Rhode Island's cultural resources.

In accordance with State procedures, RIHPHC previously received approval from the Budget Office and the Division of Personnel to refill the essential position of Supervising Historic Preservation Specialist / Deputy Director. This position became vacant upon the resignation of the 33-year incumbent who has retired. The vacancy notice was posted in accordance with State procedures. In addition, notice was distributed among local historic preservation organizations and individual leaders in the historic preservation field. We received 19 applications for the position and conducted interviews with the five candidates judged most qualified. In reviewing

and evaluating the qualifications of all the applicants for this position, each applicant was rated and scored using a standardized qualifications score sheet. The top scoring five candidates were interviewed; their scores were reevaluated; and the applicants were ranked.

The Supervising Historic Preservation Specialist is a critical staff position at the RIHPHC because it is the senior field services professional, and it is one of only two supervisory positions; it serves as deputy director for the Commission. RIHPHC is a small agency with 17 staff. The RIHPHC staff is divided into two sections: program services and field services. Program services are directly supervised by the executive director and include regulatory review of projects; administration and review of tax credits, grants, and loans; Eisenhower House, Heritage programs, and general office, fiscal, and personnel management.

The Supervising Historic Preservation Specialist plans, organizes, and supervises historic preservation planning functions, identification and evaluation of historic properties, archaeology, National Register of Historic Places and State Register, certification of historical significance for tax credits, grants, and loans, local government assistance, and public information. The person appointed to this position must meet National Park Service professional qualifications and must have the ability and knowledge to participate in and supervise the work of archaeologists, historians, and architectural historians. The position is responsible for accomplishing the most difficult and complex work as well as reviewing and editing the work of others. As deputy director of the Commission, the position prepares the annual federal work program application to the National Park Service (which accounts for approximately $500,000 in annual funding) and the annual end-of-year report; and the position interprets and applies federal regulations and guidelines to the work of the field services section.

A number of the Commissioners expressed their satisfaction with the appointment of Dr. Greenwood, based on his excellent qualifications and his prior service to the RIHPHC.

b) At the November 12, 2008 Commission meeting, Principal Architectural Historian Mack Woodward made a presentation on the revised National Register of Historic Places documentation for Ocean Drive Historic District, Newport. In order to provide Commissioners with an opportunity to read the full document, Commission action to accept the revised documentation was deferred to the December 10, 2008 meeting. On a motion by Dr. Onorato, seconded by Mr. Goff, the Commission unanimously

VOTED to accept the revised National Register of Historic Places documentation for Ocean Drive Historic District, Newport.

c) Mr. Sanderson reported that the homeowner at 20 Moore Street, Providence accepted the Commission's review of his appeal regarding painting porch hand-railings and steps as part of his Historic Homeownership Tax Credit project.

d) In reply to a question from Mr. Hoogeboom, Mr. Sanderson reported that restoration work has been proceeding at the Smithfield Exchange Bank Building (Waterman Tavern).

4. Loan Committee Report

a) A report (dated 12/5/2008) on the current status of the Historic Preservation Loan fund was distributed.

b) Mr. Goff and Mr. Sanderson reported on discussion with representatives of Cornish Associates regarding the proposed loan to rehabilitate the first floor retail space of the historic Fletcher Building, Union and Weybosset streets, Downtown Providence Historic District. The building is owned by a real estate company affiliated with the RI School of Design, and the retail space will be leased to Cornish Associates of Providence which will develop a grocery store with a sub-lessee.

The RIHPHC loan program was created in 1987 and was primarily oriented toward preservation and rehabilitation of historic residential properties, mostly single-family homes. The program regulations do not exclude loans for the preservation and rehabilitation of historic commercial properties, and several loans have been made to owners of commercial properties, including AS220 Arts Center and the Smith Building, both located in the Downtown Providence Historic District.

Loans have been made to owners of the property. A mortgage security interest has been recorded. Owners have been required to record a historic preservation easement for a term of years ranging from five years to twenty years based on the amount of the loan.

Loan projects have generally encompassed rehabilitation of the entire building or of a substantial portion of the building.

<u>A Storefront Rehabilitation Loan is a special case.</u>

The recent application by Cornish Associates for loan financing for rehabilitation of the storefront of the historic Fletcher Building, Union Street, Providence has raised several new issues for the RIHPHC loan program. The Cornish loan project was approved by the RIHPHC at its October 8, 2008 meeting, and the RIHPHC Loan Committee has approved loan terms as follows:

- $200,000 toward the rehabilitation of the ground floor of the Fletcher Building.
- security in the form of a personal guaranty by Arnold B. Chase.
- 6-year term for repayment (which corresponds with the terms granted by the co-lender Providence Revolving Fund)
- interest rate of 5%, over 6 years, with a 12-year amortization, and a final balloon payment.

1) Cornish is a leaseholder and is not the owner of the property. The property is owned by the RI School of Design, and Cornish has a 12-year renewable lease on a portion of the ground-

floor commercial space. Cornish intends to sublet to "Gourmet Heaven," a grocery retailer.

2) The scope of the loan project is limited to the Gourmet Heaven commercial space, and the RIHPHC loan is specifically directed to rehabilitation of the historic storefront occupied by Gourmet Heaven facing Weybosset Street and Union Street. The Fletcher Building was substantially rehabilitated several years ago and received tax credits approved by RIHPHC. The ground-level commercial spaces were not included in that larger project. Cornish now proposes to rehabilitate a portion of the ground-level commercial space. A separate retail tenant occupies ground-level space along the northern Union Street frontage. This additional ground-level retail space could be the subject of a separate rehabilitation project in the future.

3) The property-owner, RI School of Design, is not willing to grant an easement beyond the 12-year term of the Cornish lease, and RISD believes the scope of easement review should be limited to the leased premises.

Recommendation

Mr. Goff has consulted with the other members of the Commission's Loan Committee: John Grosvenor and Brad Kopp, and they join him in offering the following recommendation:

RIHPHC should consider special storefronts loan criteria for loans made to lessees:

- the historic character of the storefront
- a minimum lease term of 10 years
- the financial qualifications of the lessee
- a recorded historic preservation easement applied to the storefront improvements with a term of at least ten years
- an agreement with the lessee-borrower that RIHPHC shall have the right to review and approve any further improvements made by the lessee that would affect the historic character of the property.

These special criteria would apply to the limited situation of loans to lessees (not owners of the property) for the purpose of preserving and rehabilitating storefronts on historic commercial buildings.

It is possible that the Cornish loan for Gourmet Heaven could become a model for other historic storefront renovations in the future. Preservation and rehabilitation of historic storefronts is an important historic preservation objective in the Downtown Providence Historic District. However, in some cases, the owners of large historic commercial buildings in office use are not involved in retail trade. It is possible that real estate entities like Cornish Associates could become leaseholders of ground-floor retail space in several buildings, and create and manage subleases to individual retail tenants. Such arrangements could encourage physical improvements that preserve historic character, and effective management of ground-level retail could have benefits for the revitalization of the Downtown Providence Historic District.

During discussion, Mr. Cusack noted that establishing a grocery store will have a positive impact on efforts to revitalize surrounding properties in the Downtown Providence Historic District. Dr. Morenon agreed that this project should be evaluated positively in the context of the historic district as a whole. On a motion by Mr. Goff, seconded by Dr. Onorato, the Commission unanimously

VOTED to approve the use of special criteria and terms that would apply to the limited situation of the proposed loan to Cornish Associates as lessee (not owners of the property) for the purpose of preserving and rehabilitating the storefront on the historic Fletcher Building.

5. National Register of Historic Places

Final Presentation: Blackstone – Cole – Grotto Historic District, Providence

Ms. Kathryn Cavanaugh presented information about the proposed nomination. Funding for the field survey and preparation of the National Register nomination was provided by a Certified Local Government grant awarded by RIHPHC to the City of Providence and administered by the Providence Preservation Society. Upon completion of the draft nomination, written notice was provided to all affected property-owners and public officials, and a public information meeting was held on November 19, 2008 at the headquarters of the Providence Preservation Society.

The Blackstone Boulevard-Cole Avenue-Grotto Avenue Historic District, containing 253 primary buildings (233 contributing) and 160 secondary buildings (143 contributing) on approximately 100 acres of land on Providence's East Side, is roughly bounded by Blackstone Boulevard and Grotto Avenue on the east, President Avenue on the south, Cole Avenue on the west, and Rochambeau Avenue on the north. The district, located in one of the last areas of Providence to develop as a residential neighborhood, is predominantly characterized by a visually diverse and generally well-preserved collection of early 20th century single-family houses built for middle- and upper-income residents, but it also contains examples of earlier and later construction that reflect more than two centuries of development activity, as well as changing trends in neighborhood planning, housing design, and American lifestyles. The district retains integrity of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association

The Blackstone Boulevard-Cole Avenue-Grotto Avenue Historic District, a well-preserved example of a late 19^{th-} to mid-20th-century residential suburb in Providence, Rhode Island, attains National Register significance in the areas of community planning and development and architecture. Its period of significance is from ca. 1732 to 1958, although most of the contributing buildings were constructed between 1900 and 1940, during the period when automobiles replaced streetcars as the predominant form of transportation.

The district is associated with the broad national trends of suburban development, as embodied in this northeast corner of Providence, which evolved from farmland and natural open space into a definable, and fairly affluent, suburban residential neighborhood between the turn of the 20th century and World War II. This evolution corresponded with the boom years of Providence's

industrial economy and a variety of associated developments, including the city's growth into a major metropolitan area; the rise of the middle class; the popularization of the suburban ideal; advances in transportation (particularly the electric trolley and the automobile), and their influence on community planning; the impact of changing lifestyles and technological innovations on housing typologies and designs; and the advent of balloon frame construction and mass-produced architectural components, which made single-family houses more affordable.

The district is significant for architecture. Architecturally it illustrates a mainstream mix of both traditional and modern approaches to residential living that were popular from the late 19th century and beyond the first half of the 20th century. Architectural styles range from the unique 18th-century farmhouse to mid-20th-century Ranch and Contemporary, but by far the most common is the Colonial Revival style (including its many variations such as Georgian Revival, Federal Revival, Dutch Colonial, and Garrison Colonial); Tudor Revival and other English-inspired designs are also well represented. Many buildings combine elements from more than one style, indicating a preference for customized design to suit an owner's personal needs and tastes. Thirty-six houses (about 14%) are documented as having been architect-designed (three as their architects' own personal residences); several prominent local architects and architectural firms of the period, including Prescott O. Clarke, Howard K. Hilton, Eleazer B. Homer, F. Ellis Jackson, and Franklin J. Sawtelle, have examples of their work in the district, and some are credited with multiple buildings here (the successor firms of Clarke & Spaulding, Clarke & Howe, and Clarke, Howe & Homer collectively account for 10 houses). The many houses not known to be associated with a particular architect still reflect a sophisticated design aesthetic and a conscious effort to create distinctive individual buildings that also responded well to the larger neighborhood context.

Following discussion, on a motion by Ms. Hagen, seconded by Dr. Onorato, the Commission unanimously

VOTED to approve the Blackstone – Cole – Grotto Historic District National Register nomination.

6. Other Business

There was no other business.

7. Next meeting date: Wednesday January 14, 2009.

8. Adjourn: The meeting adjourned at 11:30 A.M.

Minutes recorded by,

Edward F. Sanderson, Executive Director
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer