



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS
HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION
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MINUTES

RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION

June 12, 2013

I. MEMBERS PRESENT

Mr. Michael Abbott, AIA
Mr. Mohamad Farzan, AIA
Dr. Omur Harmansah
Mr. Karst Hoogeboom, Chairman
Dr. Patrick Malone
Dr. E. Pierre Morenon
Dr. Ronald Onorato
Mr. Jared L. Rhodes, Chief of Statewide Planning representing Kevin Flynn, Asso. Dir
Mr. Pieter N. Roos
Mr. Edward F. Sanderson, State Historic Preservation Officer
Mr. Clark Schoettle

STAFF PRESENT

Ms. Joanna Doherty, Senior Architectural Historian
Mr. Jeffrey Emidy, Sr. Project Review Coordinator
Dr. Richard Greenwood, Deputy Director
Ms. Virginia Hesse, Principal Historical Architect
Dr. Timothy Ives, Principal Archaeologist
Ms. Michaela Jergensen, RIDOT Reviewer
Ms. Mercedes Monteiro, National Register Assistant - Heritage Aide
Ms. Roberta Randall, Principal Historical Architect
Mr. Wm. McKenzie Woodward, Principal Architectural Historian
Ms. Sarah Zurier, Sr. Special Projects Coordinator

MEMBERS ABSENT

Ms. Janet Coit, Director DEM
Ms. Morgan Devlin
Mr. Michael Hebert, NR Review Board
John P. Leyden, State Building Commissioner
Executive Director, EDC

INVITED GUEST

Mr. Jonathan Stevens, Office of Governor Chafee

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE Representing the PSNC

Mr. Monty Bucham
Ms. Trudy Coxe, Executive Director
Mr. John Grove
Mr. Terry Dickinson
Mr. Curt Genga
Mr. Pierce Irving
Mr. Alan Joslin, AIA
Mr. William Landry, Esq.
Mr. Matt Leys
Mr. Doug Reed
Mr. John Rodman
Mr. Donald Ross
Ms. Kaity Ryan
Mr. John Tschirch
Mr. Bill Wilson

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE

Ms. Barbara Lloyd Baker
Mr. Jason Bouchard
Mr. Eric Hertfelder
Mr. James Moore, Bellevue – Ochre Point Neighborhood Association
Ms. Patricia O'Donnell
Mr. Turner Scott, Esq.
Ms. Gladys Szapary

II. AGENDA

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 9:30 A.M., Karst Hoogeboom, Chairman, presiding. Mr. Hoogeboom acknowledged the presence of the members of the public in attendance, and each of the Commissioners introduced themselves.

2. Minutes of May 8, 2013 and June 6, 2013

On a motion by Dr. Onorato, seconded by Mr. Roos, the Commission unanimously

VOTED to approve the Minutes of May 8, 2013.

On a motion by Dr. Omur Harmansah, seconded by Mr. Michael Abbott, the Commission unanimously

VOTED to approve the Minutes of the June 6, 2013 Special Meeting.

3. Executive Director's Report

a) Mr. Sanderson reported that information about federal Hurricane Sandy Disaster Relief Grants for Historic Properties was reported in The Providence Journal, June 1, 2013. Commission staff are developing grant program guidelines and procedures in consultation with the National Park Service and will present draft guidelines and procedures for Commission review and approval. However, in order to expedite the process, the RIHPHC has published preliminary information about the program and invited potential applicants to submit summary information about potential projects by August 1, 2013.

b) RIHPHC has announced the 2013 Certified Local Government Grants approved at the Commission's February 13, 2013 meeting. The announcement was not made until after the federal budget for FY2013 was adopted and the National Park Service determined the final apportionment for Rhode Island.

4. Easement Review: The Breakers Welcome Center

Mr. Sanderson reported that Commissioner Mohamad Farzan has recused from participation in review of The Breakers Welcome Center, and RI Ethics Commission recusal forms have been filed.

Mr. Sanderson explained that RIHPHC historian Richard Greenwood would present the staff analysis of the project and recommendations. Following Dr. Greenwood's presentation, the Commissioners were invited to ask questions and offer their own comments. The Preservation Society of Newport County, the applicant, has requested that their representative briefly address the Commission. Likewise, the Bellevue – Ochre Point Neighborhood Association, an opponent, has requested that their representative briefly address the Commission, and that their landscape expert, Patricia O'Donnell also have an opportunity to address the Commission. Following public comments, the Commissioners will resume their consideration of the application.

Dr. Greenwood distributed a written memorandum and presented information about the 2003 Breakers historic preservation easement, the history of the estate, the Welcome Center project, and recommendations.

Background

On April 5, 2013, the Preservation Society of Newport County (PSNC) submitted a proposal to construct a Welcome Center at The Breakers for RIHPHC review in accordance with a historic preservation easement granted by PSNC to RIHPHC on 22 August 2003. The Welcome Center structure would consist of four connected 1-story components: a southern ticketing pavilion, a central vestibule pavilion, a northern refectory pavilion, and a western restroom wing. The three pavilions feature steel-framed glass walls and copper-shingled pavilion roofs with glass

skylights. The restroom wing is a flat-roofed structure with cement panel siding. Proposed pathways include: a 10'-wide stone paved path for the southern approach; a similar path and a c. 35'-wide stone paved patio on the east; a 10'-wide stone path on the north and a concrete walk along the western side that includes a handicap ramp into the rear of the Caretaker's House.

The easement grants RIHPHC the right to review and approve:

- construction of additional buildings on the premises;
- changes to the landscape features and improvements;
- alteration of the topography and removal or cutting down of specimen trees; and
- materials, methods, and cleaning substances and colors to be used in any such work.

With regard to ticketing and refreshment and food service, the 2003 easement specifically provides that the design and siting of new construction or installation of permanent fixtures and/or exterior alteration or rehabilitation of the caretaker's cottage would be subject to RIHPHC review.

In exercising its review, RIHPHC agreed to apply the Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings, issued and as may be amended from time to time by the Secretary of the United States Department of the Interior. In reviewing the Welcome Center project, the RIHPHC has considered the Standards and given particular attention to Standards #1 and #2:

1. A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment.
2. The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.

Landscape Setting

The landscape setting contributes to the historic character of The Breakers. The historic landscape design of the western half of the Breakers estate of 1895-6 created an outer perimeter border of trees and evergreen shrubs to screen the property from the street, loosely paralleled by a serpentine Garden Path that had sections planted on one or both sides by a tiered succession of inner herbaceous border and two rows of outer mid-height evergreen shrubs. The inner grounds bounded by the entry drives and the Garden Path was designed as a bosque, i.e. lawn planted with specimen trees. This plan incorporated some existing trees and shrubs from the previous landscaping effort with new materials, including numerous sapling trees. As the trees matured over the following decades, their canopy spread, and filtered sunlight replaced the direct sunlight that characterized much of the 1896 landscape. The design of the western half of the property differed significantly from the eastern half which featured the imposing Breakers mansion at the center with its formal parterres, facing an open lawn out to Easton's Bay.

The historic landscape received a serious blow from the 1938 hurricane which destroyed or severely damaged approximately 100 trees on the property. This was followed by an extended period of little or no landscape maintenance through the mid-20th century, during which time age and weather claimed more trees, shrubs became overgrown, and volunteer plants established themselves. The Preservation Society of Newport County initiated landscape restoration efforts in the 1990s, notably with the reintroduction of the allee of pin oaks along the western driveway.

Although the landscape in the northwest quadrant presently retains some elements of the historic landscape design of 1895-6, the overall integrity of the historic landscape in this quadrant of the property is poor. A number of specimen trees have survived, and they shade much of the area. The character of the Garden Path has evolved from the original layout of 1896 as growing conditions changed and the plantings matured: evergreen shrubs are now overgrown beyond the intermediate heights shown in the early photographs and the herbaceous planting beds bordered by clipped hedges have disappeared. Due to these changed conditions, a return to the original 1896 design for a largely open setting would not be possible without removing many specimen trees. In its current state, the landscape would benefit from careful maintenance of existing elements and the reintroduction of some of the mid-height vegetation along the path and the outer perimeter.

Project Findings

The proposed Welcome Center would be located on a portion of the northwest quadrant of the property that features the historic Caretaker's House, the associated historic underground Boiler House, and the historic landscape setting that includes historic plantings and a section of the Garden Path. The site is also in close proximity to the historic Ochre Point Avenue entrance gates and the western driveway and sidewalks. This is a location that has traditionally been characterized by dense landscape plantings and consequently has had little visibility from the Breakers mansion. The area has historically been thickly planted with trees and shrubs that screen views from all directions. In particular, the view toward the Welcome Center site from the Breakers porte cochere is filled by the specimen trees and other vegetation. The Welcome Center site will remain screened from view from The Breakers mansion by the existing and planned additional vegetation.

The architectural design of the proposed new pavilions, which references park pavilions and greenhouses of the 19th century and features largely transparent walls, curved forms and complex massing, is compatible with the architectural character of The Breakers and its landscape setting.

The proposed project would have impacts on the Gate House, Boiler House and perimeter fence. The Gate House would be affected by the insertion of a screening wall along its eastern porch and by the construction of a handicapped ramp in a rear entrance at the eastern porch. In addition, forward placement of the new southern pavilion and its landscape planting may detract from historic views of the Gate House from the east and south. Moving the south facade of the

southern pavilion a little further to the north so that the building does not project beyond the rear wing of the Gatehouse could help to maintain the architectural prominence of the Gate House. Substituting a trellis or lattice planted with an evergreen such as Boston ivy for the proposed masonry wall would maintain the vegetated character of this area and avoid the need to introduce a new architectural element to the historic Gate House. Design development of the proposed handicapped access ramp will be important so that it does not detract from the historic character of the Gate House.

The Boiler House will be affected first by construction to protect its roof by reducing its overburden and mitigating water penetration, and second by the placement of a Welcome Center foundation wall on top of its eastern bearing wall. The first measure, which will be accompanied by an appropriate landscape replanting plan, is actually historic rehabilitation. The second measure has been reviewed by a structural engineer and found not to be a structural issue that would endanger the stability of the Boiler House.

The monumental perimeter wall and fence would be affected by the disassembly of a section along Shepard Avenue to accommodate a construction access road. The proposal calls for careful disassembly and reconstruction of the wall and fence to match its existing historic appearance.

The proposed Welcome Center and rehabilitation of the Boiler House has the potential to affect the historic landscape setting. The existing rhododendrons and other shrubs on top of the Boiler House would be transplanted to allow work on the Boiler House roof and then replanted. Two copper beech trees that would be affected by the Boiler House work and that are located in the footprint of the Welcome Center will be removed. Approximately 85 feet of the Garden Path will be relocated eastward (approximately 10 feet at its greatest distance), requiring the removal of eleven historic evergreen trees (*Thuja* and *Chamaecyparis*); two mid-20th-century replacement trees will be removed to accommodate the construction access road. The northern pavilion of the Welcome Center will be too visible through light vegetative screening in views across the landscape to the north and northeast. The Welcome Center and its patio and walkways have insufficient vegetative screening to maintain the Garden Path's historic sense of enclosure within a planted landscape.

Recommended Commission Resolution

After carefully considering the information that has been provided by the PSNC and its consultants, the National Historic Landmark nomination, the Historic Designed Landscape Assessment prepared by Patricia O'Donnell, the comments of the public, and the results of the Commissioners' onsite inspection of the project area, the Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission finds that the proposed Welcome Center can be developed in such a way that it does not cause an adverse effect on the historic Breakers property. This approval is conceptual and based on schematic plans; the Commission's final approval must be based on more detailed plans. The Commission believes that further study and review is needed for the following

elements in the plan:

- a) design of the screen wall and handicap ramp at the Gate House;
- b) siting of the southern pavilion and its landscaping in relation to the Gate House;
- c) construction details for disassembly and restoration of a portion of the Shepard Avenue perimeter wall and fence;
- d) further detailed review of the proposed landscaping plan and plant materials, including screening of the northern and southern pavilions, replacement/addition of specimen trees, additional screening for the north lawn and the Garden Path (perhaps by restoring the tiered hierarchy of the Path's landscape borders, using plants of a height at maturity that will minimize the visibility of the new buildings);
- e) consideration should be given to the possible use of landscape archaeology to evaluate a portion of the affected Garden Path in order to document its historic treatment;
- f) review of any other proposed landscape work not directly associated with the Welcome Center, such as treatment of the existing granite curbs at the western entrance drive where the Garden Path intersects on the north and south sides of the drive;
- g) review of specifications and samples for architectural and paving materials;
- h) review of construction plans and specifications (including mechanical plans);
- i) review of signage, lighting, and any other project elements not shown on the current plans.

In addition, the Commission recommends that PSNC should develop a historic landscape masterplan to inform and coordinate landscape improvements that are part of the Welcome Center project with future historic landscape preservation efforts. It would also be appropriate for PSNC to prepare a plant materials succession plan to understand how the proposed landscape will develop and be maintained over time.

During discussion following Dr. Greenwood's presentation, Mr. Schoettle expressed concern about whether the Welcome Center might interfere with future efforts to interpret the Gate House and Boiler House; and he noted the close proximity of the Welcome Center to the historic Garden Path limited the area available to establish a landscape screen between the two. Dr. Morenon noted that the repairs and rehabilitation of the Boiler House should be considered to be historic preservation which is needed for interpretation of these features in the future. Dr. Onorato stated that in his opinion the project would not adversely affect the historic architectural values of The Breakers mansion, and that the integrity of the historic landscape in the project area is weak while the historical integrity of the Gate House is strong; he expressed concern

about the proposed Gate House screen-wall and the siting of the southern pavilion of the Welcome Center in relation to the Gate House. Mr. Rhodes observed that approximately 40 percent of the Welcome Center floor area is devoted to food service.

Mr. Alan Joslin, project architect, spoke on behalf of the PSNC. He stated that the project can work successfully with all of the RIHPHC staff recommendations. The intention of the project is to have minimal impacts to the Boiler House and Gate House, other than to repair the Boiler House structure and to provide accessibility to the Gate House via a ramp to the rear entrance. He stated that the Welcome Center is very important to the museum program of the PSNC and that the revenue generated by ticket sales to visitors supports the PSNC historic preservation work. He noted that a number of alternatives were studied before settling on the current plan for the Welcome Center.

Mr. James Moore, President of the Bellevue – Ochre Point Neighborhood Association, spoke in opposition to the project. Mr. Moore stated that the Association has worked cooperatively with PSNC on previous projects. The Association's opposition to the Welcome Center is based in part on the 2006 vision statement between the Neighborhood Board, the PSNC, and Salve Regina University that no action should jeopardize the neighborhood's National Register of Historic Places listing and its National Historic Landmark designation. The Association understands the PSNC business motive for the Welcome Center and has not objected to the ticketing tent that has occupied the project site; however, Mr. Moore finds the scale of the project is excessive and particularly the restaurant for which he feels there is no demonstrated need. The Association feels that that historic landscape should not be impacted by commercial use, and there is concern that other properties in the neighborhood also might wish to construct visitor facilities in the future. The Association believes that preservation of the historic property should be PSNC's highest concern.

Ms. O'Donnell addressed historic landscape issues raised by the Welcome Center project. [Ms. O'Donnell's written Historic Designed Landscape Assessment was distributed to Commissioners on June 4, 2013.] Ms. O'Donnell noted that the whole property is designated as a National Historic Landmark, and she said best practices should be followed. She said the Welcome Center would diminish The Breakers authenticity and could reduce the possibility that it might be included in a World Heritage listing sometime in the future. She said historic landscape documentation is good. With the 1896 images, paired with the 1914 images and the 1929 aerials, documentation is sufficient for restoration. The NHL documentation set the period of significance at 1893 to 1899, a short 6 year period, which is defined by Cornelius Vanderbilt II and his design team. This is not the landscape of today, she stated. There are so few trees remaining after the destruction in 1938 and subsequent losses, and those can have canopies managed and lightened to be more storm resilient. That will let in more light. Plantings can be selected for character and scale, adjusting to sun or shade, and the landscape could have the intended historical character. She stated that the proposed Welcome Center project would remove original landscape features, including 80 feet of the Garden Walk path, two mature beech trees and shrub plantings. The proposed construction obviates the ability to restore part of the

Garden Walk landscape. A Cultural Landscape Report which includes the prescribed elements guided by the National Park Service should be carried out before interventions. It requires historic research, existing conditions documentation, analysis, consideration of the period of significance, and treatment for the future. The Preservation Society, as owner and steward of this historic NHL property and potential World Heritage site, should move forward to preserve, restore and present the historic designed landscape as an authentic composition shaped for Cornelius Vanderbilt II, 1893 to 1899, in accord with the NHL Period of Significance.

Dr. Onorato stated that in order to help the Commission's deliberations progress, he would move to adopt the RIHPHC staff recommendations, and the motion was seconded by Mr. Hoozeboom.

During discussion of the motion, Mr. Abbott inquired which items that require further study would be presented to the full Commission for final approval. Mr. Sanderson noted that the Commission routinely delegates authority to professional staff to review and approve technical items, but that if the Commission approves the motion the procedure for final approvals should be discussed. Dr. Onorato stated that his motion intended to recognize the need for additional design development of the project in order to reach plans for final approval.

Dr. Morenon expressed concern about the size and scale of the Welcome Center pavilions being too large. Mr. Schoettle also noted the expanse of the project footprint and the amount of space for food service.

Dr. Harmansah asked if the architectural design of the Welcome Center is making a local reference, such as to the former greenhouses on the property, and he expressed concern about the building too closely imitating a historic building. Dr. Onorato said he saw the design as referencing turn-of-the-century garden or park structures but not a copy or replica.

Mr. Rhodes questioned if PSNC had considered alternate locations on The Breakers property. Mr. Sanderson noted that the application materials submitted by PSNC included discussion of a number of alternatives that were considered before the current plan.

Dr. Malone noted his own professional experience operating a National Historic Landmark property, and he strongly supported the value of on-site versus off-site visitor facilities. As an industrial historian, he expressed interest in the historical value of the Gate House – Boiler House complex for preservation and interpretation, and he warned against trying to convert those historic structures to use for visitor facilities. He said that he found the architectural expression of the new buildings to be “evocative” of historic architecture rather than “imitative.” He did not find the Welcome Center to be intrusive in the landscape, and he believed that through further RIHPHC review, PSNC can refine and improve the project plan and design.

Mr. Roos noted his professional museum experience; he said he understands the need for visitor services and that they can be a valuable part of the overall museum experience. He noted that the

Welcome Center is technically a reversible alteration: although removal of the facility after construction is not likely, it requires no destruction or alteration of historic structures and the landscape in the immediate project area has poor integrity.

Mr. Schoettle requested further information about the alternative of constructing the Welcome Center in the PSNC parking lot across Ochre Point Avenue. Mr. Joslin replied that with attendance of 400,000 visitors per year, The Breakers parking lot operates at full capacity most of the time. Relocating existing parking and/or tour bus waiting would impact the surrounding neighborhood. Underground parking was considered but the high cost would drain funds from PSNC preservation work. The flow of activity and delivery of visitor services would operate more effectively on-site. The food service function is actually a quite limited amount of space and would involve no cooking or food preparation.

Mr. Moore responded that current PSNC food service takes place inside the Elms mansion and the Chinese Tea House at Marble House rather than on the grounds. The Association objects to a new facility at The Breakers not contained within the historic structure. He suggested that Breakers visitors could be directed to use food services at The Elms or Marble House.

Mr. Doug Reed, project landscape architect, informed the Commission that Reed – Hilderbrand is currently in the process of preparing a cultural landscape report for The Breakers in addition to landscape planning for the Welcome Center project.

Mr. Turner Scott, attorney for the Association, expressed concern that the RIHPHC staff recommendation for further review of a number of items would violate the time period allowed for RIHPHC review in the 2003 easement. Mr. William Landry, attorney for PSNC, volunteered to stipulate on the record that PSNC would agree to extension of the time period required for review of the additional items enumerated and review of final plans and specifications.

Prior to voting, several Commissioners suggested specific edits to the motion.

In the first paragraph of the motion, Mr. Schoettle suggested that the statement “This approval is conceptual” should be changed to read “This approval is preliminary.”

In item “b,” several Commissioners suggested editing to read “siting and scale of the pavilions and their landscaping in relation to the Gate House.”

In the final paragraph, Mr. Hoogeboom requested the addition of the words “cultural landscape report” in addition to the other provisions.

Dr. Onorato, as the original proposer of the motion, asked to withdraw the motion, and Mr. Hoogeboom, as the original seconder of the motion, agreed. Therefore the motion was withdrawn.

Dr. Onorato moved, seconded by Mr. Schoettle, and Commissioners Abbott, Harmansah, Hoozeboom, Malone, Morenon, Onorato, Roos, Sanderson, and Schoettle

VOTED to approve the following resolution:

After carefully considering the information that has been provided by the PSNC and its consultants, the National Historic Landmark nomination, the Historic Designed Landscape Assessment prepared by Patricia O'Donnell, the comments of the public, and the results of the Commissioners' onsite inspection of the project area, the Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission finds that the proposed Welcome Center can be developed in such a way that it does not cause an adverse effect on the historic Breakers property. This approval is preliminary and based on schematic plans; the Commission's final approval must be based on more detailed plans. The Commission believes that further study and review is needed for the following elements in the plan:

- a) design of the screen wall and handicap ramp at the Gate House;
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- d) further detailed review of the proposed landscaping plan and plant materials, including screening of the northern and southern pavilions, replacement/addition of specimen trees, additional screening for the north lawn and the Garden Path (perhaps by restoring the tiered hierarchy of the Path's landscape borders, using plants of a height at maturity that will minimize the visibility of the new buildings);
- e) consideration should be given to the possible use of landscape archaeology to evaluate a portion of the affected Garden Path in order to document its historic treatment;
- f) review of any other proposed landscape work not directly associated with the Welcome Center, such as treatment of the existing granite curbs at the western entrance drive where the Garden Path intersects on the north and south sides of the drive;
- g) review of specifications and samples for architectural and paving materials;
- h) review of construction plans and specifications (including mechanical plans);
- i) review of signage, lighting, and any other project elements not shown on the current plans.

In addition, the Commission recommends that PSNC should develop a cultural landscape report and historic landscape masterplan to inform and coordinate landscape improvements that are part

of the Welcome Center project and future historic landscape preservation efforts. It would also be appropriate for PSNC to prepare a plant materials succession plan to understand how the proposed landscape will develop and be maintained over time.

Commissioners Farzan and Rhodes were recorded as not voting.

5. Approval of the 2013 Rhody Awards for Historic Preservation

Ms. Sarah Zurier presented nominations for the 2013 Rhody Awards for Historic Preservation. Following the presentation, on a motion by Mr. Farzan, seconded by Mr. Roos, the Commission unanimously

VOTED to approve the following awards:

Award	Name/Project	Project	Town/City
Williamson	John Tschirch		Newport
Downing	Tim Cranston		North Kingstown
Chafee	Greg Shultz & Michael Rubin	Salt Pond	Narragansett
Pres Projects	Octagon House	Rehab	Providence
Pres Projects	Weekapaug Inn	Rehab	Westerly
Pres Projects	TK Club	Rehab	Pawtucket
Pres Projects	Pocasset Mill	Rehab	Johnston
Pres Projects	Willett Free Library	Rehab	North Kingstown
Pres Projects	Cranberry Processing Barn	Rehab	Coventry
Stewardship	Town of Narragansett		Narragansett
Education	Newport Historical Society	Tour App	Newport

6. Other business

There was no other business.

7. Next regular meeting date: Wednesday July 10, 2013 at 9:30 AM.

8. Adjourn: The meeting adjourned at 12:30 P.M.

Minutes recorded by,



Edward F. Sanderson, Executive Director