

**Joint Meeting of the
Executive Committee and the Exhibition Committee
Of the
Rhode Island 1663 Colonial Charter 350th Anniversary Commission
Thursday October 25, 2012
Room 111 State House**

1. The Meeting was called to order by Commissioner Jon Stevens at 2:30 P.M. with the following people in attendance: Secretary of State Ralph Mollis, Paul Caranci (Deputy Secretary of State for Policy & Planning), Gwenn Stearn (Rhode Island State Archivist), Edward Sanderson (RI Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission), Ruth Taylor (Newport Historical Society), Kamlyn Keith (RI Department of Elementary and Secondary Education), Eric Hertfelder (Fort Adams Trust), Roseanna Gorham (RI W3R Committee), Betty Capozzi (RI State House Restoration Society), Steven Lubar (John Nicholas Brown Center, Brown University), SueEllen Kroll (RI Council for the Humanities), Alison Maxell (Providence Athenaeum), James Hall (Providence Preservation Society), Brian Jones (Brian Jones Design) invited guest, Marco Schiappa (Associate Director for Facilities Management) invited guest, Jonathan Stevens (Office of the Governor), Jess Unger (Office of the Governor)

2. Commissioner Stevens provided an overview of the purpose of this special joint meeting and the issues to be discussed. These include the use of the hallway as a potential exhibition space and the

relocation of the Colonial Charter in its present encasement to the new Charter Room until the funds can be raised for the development of a new encasement. Marco Schiappa noted that contractors may need to be hired for the move and Commission Chairman Ted Sanderson raised concerns about the logistics of using the hallway space for exhibition purposes. Commissioner Lubar began a discussion of the interpretative theme that would be required of the Charter Room. Brian Jones suggested that the hallway can be used as a transition zone to display that which is not necessarily as “precious.” That concept was reinforced by Chairman Sanderson who noted that the MA Archives uses similar quality reproductions outside of the “Charter Room.”

3. Sec. Mollis described his visit to MA Archives as a most impressive experience noting the “beautiful display” he found in the Charter Room as well as the quality of the museum leading up to the entrance of the Charter Room. It made him think about his desire to do something similar in Rhode Island to the extent possible. He noted how he was initially apprehensive about not displaying Colonial Charter in its entirety. He does not want to diminish the magnificence of the document in any way. However, after seeing the MA presentation, realizing the logistical problem with a display the size of the full document and speaking with his Archivist, he realizes that presenting the top panel of the Charter and placing the balance of the document in the secure and environmentally sound confines of the Archives is a better way to proceed. A second concern he has is for the frustration of having such precious documents locked up where

so few people can enjoy them. Therefore he would suggest that the Commission consider moving the full Charter in its current case into the Charter Room in time for the ribbon cutting because it will be a better environment for preservation of the document than the conditions that currently exist. Further, it will be far more impressive to open the new room with the actual document, even if presented in the current encasement, than showing a reproduction. Commissioner Stevens noted that he has discussed the concept with Governor Chafee who concurs with that plan. Adding a second document will ensure that the “ribbon cutting” isn’t for a new room which houses the same document that was already on view in a different location. Sec. Mollis suggested that since the Archives copy of the Declaration of Independence is already beautifully framed and mounted in a Cherry wood case that for the cost of relocation it can be on display in the Charter Room. Sec. Mollis was very receptive to the use of the hallway for further exhibition utilizing high quality reproductions as does the MA Archives and other national museums. Marco Schiappa said that the visitor center renovations will be completed next week and after a short break to accomplish other tasks work will begin in the Charter Room. With the introduction of an additional document into the Charter Room a discussion ensued relative to the theme of the new room. While a case was made for the inclusion of other documents rather than the Declaration, documents more in keeping with the plan to tell the story of the moment the Charter was written, Sec. Mollis noted the significance of the Declaration to so many Rhode Islanders. Commissioner Caranci

pointed out that even the MA Archives includes the original plate of the drawing of the Boston Massacre in their Charter Room and it is something that has nothing to do with the theme of the room. Commissioner Stearn explained that there is a connection that can be made between the Charter and the Declaration. Commissioner Taylor agreed that the language of the Charter is picked up in many subsequent founding documents. Brian Jones asks the Commissioners to consider the intention of the space and whether it should be educational, Historical and/or awe-inspiring. His design would need to reflect that intent. Commissioner Hertfelder said that the MA exhibition is about veneration, but there is the additional space outside to engaged visitors and get them excited about the documents. Sec. Mollis comments that the Charter is not exciting simply by virtue of its age, but rather by because of what it did, namely, provide for religious freedom. Brian Jones suggested the use of a takeaway brochure to provide more information to visitors to continue to keep them engaged even after they leave the State House.

Commissioner Stevens reminded the group that we had two meetings to determine that the narrative should be all about 1663 and the charter and he prefers not deviating too far from that theme. However, Commissioner Lubar noted that that determination was made prior to entertaining thoughts of using the hallway as exhibition space. Commissioner Stevens suggests the need for movement so that we can have the announcement that need to take place to enable fundraising activities to begin. Sec. Mollis, however, believes that content should drive the exhibition. He noted that we can be vague

with the announcement, but we should designate it as a Charter/Treasure room. Chairman Sanderson suggests a clear distinction between the “real” objects inside the room, and the hallway of facsimiles and then weaving together the story. Commissioner Stevens noted that the Exhibition Committee will meet to draft the narrative in subsequent in the near future. Sec. Mollis agreed stating that the main point is that the space will still be called the “Charter Room” and that will be the primary document that this room promotes. The room may also provide an opportunity to promote other documents in a climate controlled setting. Commissioner Taylor suggested that we decide on between a treasure room with minimal interpretation or a singular story of the moment of the Charter (with info about Roger Williams and John Clarke). A discussion took place regarding the need to keep the Declaration Case in its present condition or altering it to be more compatible with the Charter’s Vault. Commissioner Stearn replied that there is no magic to the current case as it currently is constructed. Commissioner Taylor pointed out that the 4 oak cases already in the state house are appropriate for storytelling, but not good for keeping original “treasures.” Commissioner Stevens is summarized the action steps needed: Rehabbing the space, moving the Charter to the new room and the process of raising \$300,000 for re-encasement. Commissioner Stearn suggested that the Exhibition Committee meet to develop a new narrative to present to Secretary Mollis. That narrative will include information on what to include in the four cases to be used in the Charter Room. Commissioner

Stevens suggested that we make a new rendering to be used for the announcement. We may need to sacrifice narrative in the short term and then back into it over time. The announcement will be cast as a groundbreaking. The Commission members entertained a short discussion of the design elements of the exhibition space and what the encasements will look like for the various documents. There is an agreed upon desire to see visual consistency in the display. Commission members also discussed the span of interpretation to potentially be included in the hallway. Commissioner Stevens suggested opening it up to the arts community but Chairman Sanderson fears that the wide variety of concept designs submitted might lead us astray of the narrative we want to depict. James Hall noted that there is a lack of a State House curator, something most museums have. Commissioner Stevens suggested that such a position could be created as a volunteer position. Finally there was a short discussion of the actual announcement. It was suggested that the commissioners be present, that we postpone mention of the visitor's center, and have an artist's rendering of the exhibition space to provide as a graphic.

4. The meeting was adjourned at 4:15 P.M.