

**HISTORIC PRESERVATION COUNCIL MEETING
STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
Wednesday, June 5, 2024 @ 9:30 am**

Microsoft Teams Meeting

Meeting will be held virtually on Microsoft Teams (see code for meeting in your email or contact Jonathan.Kinney@ct.gov for the code)

MINUTES

Council: Ms. Elizabeth Acly, Ms. Vincencia Adusei, Ms. Elizabeth Burgess, Vice-Chairman Paul Butkus, Ms. Marguerite Carnell, Mr. Thomas Elmore, Dr. Leah Glaser, Dr. Andy Horowitz, and Ms. Sara Nelson

Absent: Ms. Deanna Rhodes, Dr. Sarah Sportman

Staff: Mr. Kevin Berger, Ms. Julie Carmelich, Ms. Mary Dunne, Ms. Erin Fink, Ms. Deborah Gaston, Mr. Jonathan Kinney, Ms. Catherine Labadia, Mr. Todd Levine, Ms. Jenny Scofield, Ms. Elizabeth Shapiro, and Ms. Marena Wisniewski

Guests: Dr. Daryn Raymond-Lock, Mr. Stephen Bartkus

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order @9:32 a.m.

II. Review of Public Comment Procedures

Vice-Chairman Butkus read aloud the Review of Public Comment Procedures.

III. Code of Conduct/Conflict of Interest

Vice-Chairman Butkus read aloud the Code of Conduct/Conflict of Interest and asked if there were any conflicts with staff members or Council. There were no conflicts reported.

IV. Review and Approval of Minutes and Transcripts

A. Minutes – May 1, 2024 Meeting

On a motion by Dr. Horowitz, second by Ms. Carnell, the Council voted to approve the May 1, 2024 meeting minutes with corrections.

(Y-5, N-0, Abstaining-4, Absent-2, Recused-0) (Roll call vote)

V. State Historic Preservation Grants – Action Items

- A. Unfinished Action Items
- B. New Action Items

VI. State Register of Historic Places Nominations

- A. Unfinished Action Items
- B. New Action Items

1. Listing to the State Register of Historic Places, West Lane Schoolhouse, West Lane, Ridgefield

On a motion by Dr. Glaser, second by Ms. Burgess, the Historic Preservation Council voted to list the West Lane Schoolhouse, located on West Lane, Ridgefield, to the State Register of Historic Places. Staff recommended this item for approval.

(Y-8, N-0, Abstaining-1, Absent-2, Recused-0) (Roll call vote)

Ms. Wisniewski presented this application to the Council. The West Lane Schoolhouse, located in Ridgefield, is eligible for listing on the State Register of Historic Places under Criterion 1, at the local level, for its association with the development of education within the town of Ridgefield and Criterion 2, at the local level, in the area of architecture as an intact example of a rural district schoolhouse with early 20th century modifications. The majority of alterations to the schoolhouse are related to the renovation campaign, and the building retains the majority of its integrity of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. Dr. Daryn Raymond-Locke, author of the nomination, and Mr. Steven Bartkus, Executive Director of the Ridgefield Historic Society, were both on the call for any question and or concerns. Ms. Carnell has already provided some helpful edits for clarification.

Ms. Carnell asked if the properties were considered for the National Register of Historic Places. Ms. Wisniewski answered yes, as is typical, usually the properties were also considered for the National Register and Ms. Wisniewski had some dialogue back and forth with National Register Coordinator Jenny Scofield. Ms. Carnell noted that this is a building that has changed and been altered over time and is really a late 19th century, early 20th century building. SHPO is looking at a lot of these small schoolhouses. These are in better condition than some that have been seen recently. SHPI is also looking to see if there may be an opportunity to do a statewide Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF) that would be helpful in listing additional schoolhouses. Ms. Carnell was intrigued by the idea of an MPDF because these are important buildings in which the integrity is frequently questionable, but yet they're still important pieces of history.

Ms. Wisniewski added that she originally had a conversation with Dr. Raymond-Lock on whether to complete an MPDF for all the ones in Ridgefield, but this did not work for a number of reasons.

Dr. Horowitz congratulated the author on the strong nomination and appreciated the rigor of the description. He believes there is an opportunity to talk more about about the demographics and character of the residents of Ridgefield...such as people's religious affiliations, their class status, what were the kids in that school building expecting or being prepared for in the school, what was their world view?

Dr. Raymond-Lock commented, some of those questions are hard to answer for West Lane because a lot of the students did not have regular attendance, particularly in the late 18th century. We have instances of kids going to school three weeks out of the year, non-consecutively. It's hard to really know which students those were or how far they're coming for school. It was a rural community, so a lot of the surrounding areas were farm based and continue to be farm based in the West Lane District. Dr. Raymond-Lock will do her best to incorporate what information she has, but it was one of those black holes and certainly it felt at times a little divergent from what she was trying to accomplish pulling all this educational history together, but it's a great point. She really appreciated the questions being asked.

Dr. Horowitz added that even the sentence Dr. Raymond-Lock just shared about this being an agricultural community and attendance being sporadic because most families expected the kids to be working on the farm is important. That sentence alone would be a great addition and give us a whole window into the students, even if you don't have more to say than that. Maybe there is a historical context study of education in Connecticut with some of those broader trends. It seems like it would be a valuable overall context, especially if these are going to come up more.

Ms. Wisniewski added that originally, she we wanted to use the district number nomenclature because you always want to use numeral nomenclature, if possible, but that number can shift and change over time. She ended up just going for the actual location, West Lane Schoolhouse. She will change that on the form to update it and the alternative name will be District 7 and the following one District 10.

2. Listing to the State Register of Historic Places, Branchville Schoolhouse, Old Branchville Road, Ridgefield

On a motion by Ms. Nelson, second by Ms. Burgess, the Historic Preservation Council voted to list the Branchville Schoolhouse, located on Old Branchville Road, Ridgefield, to the State Register of Historic Places. Staff recommended this item for approval.

(Y-8, N-0, Abstaining-1, Absent-2, Recused-0) (Roll call vote)

Ms. Wisniewski presented this application. The Branchville Schoolhouse, located at Old Branchville Rd, Ridgefield, is eligible for listing on the State Register of Historic Places under Criterion 1, at the local level, for its association with the development of education within the town of Ridgefield and Criterion 2, at the local level, in the area of architecture as an intact example of a late 19th century rural schoolhouse. Alterations have been minimal. The building retains integrity of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association as a small schoolhouse serving the Branchville area of Town. Dr. Daryn Raymond-Lock and Mr. Stephen Bartkus were on the call for any questions or concerns.

Vice Chairman Butkus asked if this schoolhouse consisted of the shed. Dr. Raymond-Lock replied yes. Ms. Wisniewski added there's a slightly difference because the previous District 7 school had a renovation campaign and took on a different appearance. This one retains most of its original construction style. Dr. Rayman-Lock added that is correct. This one is pretty much intact. The shed is a little bit later. It's not the original outhouse to the building. Whereas West Lane was revamped in the early 20th century and mid-20th century because it was going to be used as a setting for educational discourse or students at Ridgefield, this one has been maintained intact and has been used as storage more than a living history place.

Ms. Carnell asked if there is any archaeological potential at this site? Dr. Rayman-Lock replied that's a great question. She has her PhD in archaeology, so her answer to most things is yes, just because you never know what's going to be found. But, in this instance, the possibility for finding things is low. She doesn't think that there's a huge amount of soil depth and the area is very rocky to excavate. She wouldn't expect there to be anything significant uncovered.

Ms. Burgess asked if there were plans for this building since it was mentioned that it's been closed and largely just used as storage. Is this nomination going to be the impetus for something else? Dr. Raymond-Lock replied she believes that the whole impetus for this is to get that schoolhouse back online for use by the Ridgefield Historical Society. A conditions assessment is needed to make sure the building envelope is tightly sealed. The roof might have a small leak, but these are the two remaining schoolhouses, and the impetus is to get them back online for use for the public and to be active parts of the community again.

VII. Local Historic District/Property Study Report/s

VIII. Archaeological Preserves

IX. Threatened Properties - CEPA Updates – Todd Levine

There is a possibility of a CEPA case in July. Mr. Levine will keep everyone updated.

X. Preservation Restrictions

XI. Report on State Historic Preservation Office – Jonathan Kinney

Mr. Kinney reported that he is actively working with the governor's office to get HPC membership reappointments and new appointments considered. As mentioned at last month's meeting, the governor's office was ready and had a candidate review meeting scheduled for May 9th, which did not happen unfortunately. But, they do have another one on the books for next Thursday, June 13th and those recommended items are on the agenda, so Mr. Kinney will have a better update next month. He received a resume for a prospective candidate to fill the existing vacancy on the Council. SHPO will be reviewing it over the next week and will provide an update as to whether that new member will be coming on. He envisions that person filling the vacancy that was left open when Ellen Zappo Sassu resigned.

XII. Report on Museum Properties – Liz Shapiro

None

XIII. Old Business

XIV. New Business

a. Historic Restoration Fund process discussion - Jonathan Kinney

At the last meeting in May, Mr. Kinney provided a high-level overview of the Historic Restoration Fund and some of the new updates to that program. Following that meeting, Vice Chairman Butkus sent a follow up email with some bullet points requesting additional clarification, both on the points that were provided at the meeting and also an expanded conversation on how HPC would be involved in that discussion and that process. Talking points and responses to those bullets were read to the Council. The current structure of the program as it exists now reflects smaller than average deposits from the Community Investment Act, which is the source of funding for the program. The HRF budget was developed taking into consideration that funding is needed also for the Survey and Planning grants, basic operating support for our nonprofit preservation organizations and partners, Partners in Preservation grants, the Circuit Rider program, SHPO's in-house projects and staff salaries, all of which partially or entirely funding with the CIA. The changes to the program were publicly announced on our website and at the HPC meeting in October 2023.

The first question that Mr. Kinney responded to was regarding the unintended consequences of switching to a single round of funding per year. The transition to once-a-year applications was necessary for the following reasons. It's important to determine a yearly budget based upon the average CIA quarterly deposits, so based on the limited funding, it does create help to create a competitive program. It's more manageable for staff for sure. It also encourages applicants to develop all the necessary documents to have a complete application. The Survey and Planning grant program remains a rolling application schedule, so applicants will have the time and the funding available to complete the necessary planning and construction documents prior to submitting their letter of intent.

The next question was how the grant deadlines and decisions impact the timing of design and documentation for the projects. The schedule and timeline for the programs take into consideration multiple conversations that staff have had with practitioners in the field, construction companies, craftspeople, and project managers, all of whom requested that funding be awarded in the spring so that projects can be bid out and started during the building season.

The schedule also reflects the quarterly deposits of the CIA, which is needed to build up the balance of \$1,000,000. We're trying to build that account back up, so we have a little bit of a buffer there and it also reflects the state's fiscal year and the gradual closure of finance offices and state agencies as the state transitions to the new fiscal year.

The next point was to clarify the criteria that were used to make the initial selections as far as the letters of intent go and what will be used to make the final selections for review by HPC. The criteria that SHPO and Preservation Connecticut staff used to evaluate the projects that initially came in were: (a) the project is a high priority for the organization and a logical choice in the organization's preservation plan (b) that the project was urgent (c) the project is shovel ready and full project funding is in place. (d) the analysis, drawings, plans, specifications, construction documents and bid package meet the National Park Services Secretary of the Interior Standards. (e) the organization demonstrates the ability to manage the project. (f) the project benefits the building or archaeological site rather than noncontributing resources. (g) the project will benefit and have a substantial positive impact on the Community and leverage additional funding. (h) the organization has not received recent historic Restoration Fund program funding. Based on the requests for funding, the Connecticut SHPO saw the need for new organizations to have the opportunity to receive funding as well. Additional points were awarded if the project is in an underserved community and/or the applicant attended the pre application workshop.

There was a question for clarification on the types of projects that were rejected, and the response would be the types of projects in the letter of intent that were rejected did not demonstrate project readiness and or did not meet the criteria above. Applicants were made aware of the criteria at a one-on-one meeting with Ms. Fink between January and March of this year and applicants were made aware that the program would be very competitive this year.

The net discussion point was that the desire to serve as many projects as possible with the available funding may make the size of grants less than they requested. This was essentially a question about partial funding. SHPO will not be granting partial funding to organizations based on experience. Partial funding has not been a successful granting technique because additional fundraising is needed before a project can begin.

The next point pertained to the distribution of HRF funds at the end of the project in order to address the realities of organizations needing to raise the full amount of a project, or borrow some portion, just to get the grant funds as a reimbursement later leads to added project costs. If the applicants could easily raise the full amount needed, they wouldn't need the grant in the first place. It may make it impossible for some traditionally underserved applicants to participate. Mr. Kinney responded that the program will remain a reimbursement grant for this year, but SHPO will look into finding a way to be

accommodating with interim payments. This may require a conversation with DECD legal, who have explained that an easement must be placed on a finished product and DECD Finance, who explained that payment can only be issued once an easement is placed on the property. In addition, it has been the experience of staff that those without full funding in place rarely complete the project.

The next discussion point was the prospect for increasing the available funds for the program in the future. The Historic Preservation Council should consider joining Connecticut Historic Preservation Action, which is an organization that advocates for historic preservation, with a focus on increasing historic preservation funding and the HPC can be active proponents of preservation funding in the state. HPC could also consider a plan to build strong relationships with local and state legislatures.

The final point of discussion concerned HPC involvement in the review of the full applications. Ms. Fink and Vice Chairman Butkus had a conversation yesterday and discussed having a subcommittee of HPC members, perhaps four or less, to join the SHPO staff and Circuit Riders from Preservation Connecticut at the office to review the full applications. This group will decide which projects to present to the full HPC for funding approval.

XV. Liaison with Public & Private Agencies

None

XVI. Public Forum

XVII. Adjournment

On a motion by Ms. Sara Nelson, second by Ms. Carnell, this meeting was adjourned at 10:51 a.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Deborah D. Gaston

*Next regularly scheduled Council meeting:
Wednesday, July 10, 2024 – Meeting Format TBD*