

MINUTES

**State Historic Preservation Review Board
Friday, December 2, 2022, 9:30 a.m.
In-Person at 450 Columbus Blvd, Hartford and
Teleconference via Microsoft Teams (Recorded)**

Present: Dr. Bucki (via Teams), Ms. Dyer-Carroll, Mr. Edwards, Mr. Herzan (via Teams), Mr. McMillan, Ms. Saunders (via Teams), Mr. Wigren

Absent: Mr. Barlow, Dr. Feder

Staff: Jenny Scofield (presenting), Corey Atkinson, Julie Carmelich, Mary Dunne, Jonathan Kinney, Cathy Labadia, Todd Levine, Elizabeth Shapiro, Marena Wisniewski

Guests (by Agenda Item):

IV.A.1 Laura Crosskey, Lynn Haig, Paul Loether, Kathy Maher

I. Call to Order

Ms. Scofield confirmed that a quorum of Board members was present in person and via Teams. Mr. Edwards called the meeting to order at 9:39 a.m.

II. Review of Public Comment Procedures

Ms. Scofield provided the hybrid meeting procedures and announced that the meeting will be recorded. Ms. Scofield acknowledged guests in attendance and asked that guests introduce themselves under the agenda items they are affiliated with. There will be an opportunity to speak for each action item. She reminded the SRB that voting will be done with a roll call because some members are participating remotely.

III. Approval of the September 16, 2022 meeting minutes

Mr. Edwards requested comments on the September minutes. SRB members provided minor edits.

A motion was made by Mr. Herzan, second by Mr. Wigren, to approve the minutes of the September 16, 2022 meeting (Y-7, N-0, Abstained-0).

Board members voting yes: Dr. Bucki, Ms. Dyer-Carroll, Mr. Edwards, Mr. Herzan, Mr. McMillan, Ms. Saunders, Mr. Wigren

IV. Action Items

A. Completed National Register Nominations

All registration forms are subject to changes made by the State Historic Preservation Review Board (SRB) and by the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) staff.

**1. Bridgeport Downtown North and Bridgeport Downtown South Historic Districts
Amendment, Bridgeport (Criteria A and C, state level)**

Ms. Scofield introduced that this action is a National Register nomination amendment for the Bridgeport Downtown North and Bridgeport Downtown South Historic Districts, listed as part of a Multiple Resource Area in 1987. The purpose of this amendment is to combine the districts into one cohesive district and adjust the district boundary, both in an area of expansion and to recede the boundary in areas of loss where demolition has occurred. The period of significance is expanded into the urban renewal period and urban renewal resources that contribute to the downtown are added to the district. Some of those resources are in an area that previously separated the two districts. The total number of properties in the revised district boundary is 130, including 91 previously listed, and 39 newly listed properties within areas of boundary expansion. 21 properties at the periphery have been removed from the district because of demolition. The revised areas of significance are under Criteria A and C at the state level. The two districts were already listed under Criterion C for architecture and Criterion A for Community Planning and Development is being added. The original nominations included general development history in the text, but Criterion A was not checked. The proposed period of significance is 1841 to 1972, the age cut-off. This aligns well with the end of the urban renewal program in Bridgeport, within a couple of years.

The project was initiated by an owner of multiple properties in the expanded area and supported by the City. Notice of a public meeting and the SRB meeting was sent on October 19, 2022 via direct mail to all property owners of record, the City, Historic District Commission, Bridgeport History Center, General Services Administration, Amtrak, State of Connecticut (courthouse properties), and the Bridgeport Downtown Special Services District. A community meeting was held in Bridgeport on October 26, 2022. Bridgeport is a CLG; the CLG response is in process. Two letters in support of the nomination were received from one owner (of two properties in the district). One letter was received from the General Services Administration; the GSA is not opposed to this amendment but is opposed to the classification of the federal courthouse as a contributing property.

Mr. Edwards invited public comment. Ms. Scofield acknowledged Laura Crosskey, Lynn Haig, Paul Loether, and Kathy Maher as guests.

Ms. Lynn Haig introduced herself as the Director of Planning for the City of Bridgeport and noted that she has been working with the team. She stated that the City is supportive of combining the districts; it has always been confusing. They also support the boundary revisions; by expanding the timeframe, additional properties can access historic tax credits that could not access them before even though their properties are old enough. These changes help with economic development in the city and give developers additional tools. She requested the SRB's approval of this request.

A motion was made by Mr. Herzan, second by Ms. Dyer-Carroll, to discuss the nomination.

Mr. Edwards requested SRB comments.

Mr. Wigren commented on the format of the amendment. There are four separate tables of resources in the district; a single table would be helpful. He also requested a single map showing the new boundaries in comparison to the old boundaries. Identify property addresses on the map.

Dr. Bucki added that the photos are not labeled. Ms Scofield clarified that the photos are sent to NPS at tiffs and are not embedded in the document. The PDFs shared with the SRB are just for SRB review. That format can be addressed for SRB meetings, but that is not the format that is sent to NPS.

Ms. Dyer-Carroll requested a color-coded map showing contributing and non-contributing properties, along with a photo viewpoint map.

Ms. Scofield clarified that this amendment is complicated, and she is not surprised to hear formatting comments. The addresses of properties within the district have changed over time, the lots have been merged, the status of some properties are changing, and some buildings have been demolished. Adding a unified table at the beginning is a good idea, but that is the reason for the compartmentalized tables.

Dr. Bucki also requested a map showing the old district boundaries with what's been added and removed. She asked about the historic theaters downtown and if those are in a different district. Ms. Scofield clarified that those are listed separately.

Mr. Wigren asked if the Criterion A discussion should include urban development history for the whole period of significance. Ms. Scofield stated that the original nomination has that history but did not check that box. It was not possible to add that to the text within the timeframe, but one unified Criterion A significance could be added (under Commerce). The Criterion A text for the expanded period of significance is for urban renewal, which does not apply to the earlier time period. She noted that National Register documentation standards are different now than they were in 1987.

Mr. Wigren requested more statewide context to support the state level of significance, including a comparison to urban renewal programs in other cities. He mentioned significant non-governmental actors in Hartford and New Haven (role of Yale). Bridgeport relied more on local partners. Bridgeport and New Haven both have a shopping mall, but Bridgeport is the only one that has a plan with a grand entrance. Mr. Edwards also mentioned Stamford for comparison. Dr. Bucki suggested Lizbeth Cohen's book as a source (which is referenced in the nomination). Mr. Wigren suggested looking at the National Register nominations for Hotel America and the Phoenix Building in Hartford and the New Haven Moderns project context (Rachel Carley). Another source might be the Connecticut Architect from the 1960s from AIA.

Mr. Wigren commented on the building facades updated in the 1960s, which were originally categorized as non-contributing because of the alterations. He suggested recognizing that as a theme that happened. Ms. Scofield clarified that the trend is mentioned in Section 7 and the request is to highlight that in Section 8. Mr. Wigren added that New Haven consciously encouraged renovation of older buildings during urban renewal, particularly in Wooster Square. He also requested correction of the names of the two sculptors. He asked if Nivola executed the sculpture.

Mr. Edwards commented on the history of recognizing merit within twentieth-century architectural practice. The AIA gives awards for architecture of distinction, nationally and in each state. Many architects listed in this nomination are not familiar names; Mr. Edwards asked if they were members of the AIA or if any had received awards. He noted that the [recently listed Nieditz] Building on Pearl Street was created with commercial products – a selection of available products offered by corporations, which involved skill [but not original design] . Until this point in construction history, there have been high merit and lower merit projects [in terms of design]. It is necessary to balance out the significance statement with additional analysis, not just what local newspapers write; there is no reference to aesthetic accomplishments.

Dr. Bucki noted a discrepancy in the resource tables regarding the p. 7-6 resource table Sterling Block and Bishop Arcade annex, which is listed on pages 7-6 and 7-25.

Mr. McMillan Criterion A- Urban renewal and historic preservation at polar opposites. 18th and 19th c. commercial architecture- how does this context fit in. It is bold to address urban renewal and talk about planning in the Criterion A context, but there needs to be more there. Is this simply that we now have 20th c. architecture? What did it replace? It's a rich topic to explore

Ms. Scofield responded that the significance statement contains a paragraph on the community that was replaced. The urban renewal construction that caused demolition of the neighborhood is in the area of expansion. The original nomination, which focused on the 19th century downtown is very much intact, with the exception of the façade updates. The area of expansion to the west is where parcels were cleared and the large blocks were created; there are historic aerial images included that show that change in the density pattern.

Mr. McMillan suggested reflecting upon urban renewal and if it worked here or not. He noted that the nomination may not be the place to explore that but requested some data about whether it had any success or if it just resulted in building clearance. SRB members noted the demolition of the shopping mall here and failed plans in New Haven. Mr. Wigren stated that this is a major period of significance for a lot of Connecticut cities.

Dr. Bucki asked about the façade updates completed in the district during the urban renewal period. Some of the updates are lackluster and are covering up earlier facades; she asked if listing those would restrict restoration of the earlier facades. Ms. Scofield clarified that current preservation policy is not to fund removal of equivalent phases of history, but National Register listing does not place a restriction on properties that would prevent façade work. Rehabilitation tax credit projects are evaluated for the incentive on a case by case basis. Mr. McMillan discussed the Woolworth building.

Dr. Bucki stated that she is glad the city is organizing this; much has been lost in downtown Bridgeport.

Ms. Maher asked why the theaters [2 blocks north] are not being added to this district. Ms. Scofield clarified that the north corner of the district was receded because of substantial demolition and the theaters are included in another designation. Mr. Loether added that the theaters are in the Golden Hill district. Mr. Wigren added that the theaters are also individually

listed. Ms. Dyer-Carroll added that it doesn't make sense to add them if there is demolition in between. Ms. Scofield confirmed that the theaters are in the Golden Hill district, which is more residential. Golden Hill was not pulled into this project because the focus of the update is urban renewal, which does not apply in Golden Hill.

Ms. Dyer-Carroll asked about the boundary at Lafayette Circle- there seems to be a lot of demolition within the circle, which is at the edge of the proposed district. Ms. Scofield answered that the Circle was included because of the street layout, which was part of the urban renewal plan. Mr. Wigren asked if Lafayette Boulevard and Circle should be a contributing resource.

Mr. Wigren suggested addressing the GSA's objection to the federal courthouse being counted as a contributing resource. He commented that they appear to be evaluating it individually; based on the exterior and the way it fits into the streetscape, he does not see a problem calling it a contributing resource to the district. Dr. Bucki asked what the GSA said. Ms. Scofield gave a summary of SHPO's 2018 review and GSA's practice of doing national inventories and contexts for their properties. Nationwide, GSA did not feel that this example of Modern/Post-Modern rose to the level of significance.

Ms. Scofield pointed out resources excluded from the district boundary on the east side of the district that are explained in the text. These include 10 Middle Street, a Victor Bisharat-designed plaza building that has a completely reclad curtain wall system. There is also a 1975 Brutalist train station that is at the edge of the district and is not quite old enough yet. The SRB discussed that the Bridgeport Transportation Center consists of the bus station (contributing) and the train station (outside the boundary). Mr. McMillan noted that he supports adding it to the district as a non-contributing building, until it becomes of age. Mr. Edwards reminded the SRB to consider the merit of the design, not just the age of the building. Mr. Wigren stated that the train station was featured in *Connecticut Architect* magazine at the time. A question was raised about owner objection. Ms. Scofield clarified that she reached out to Amtrak and they would be evaluating it in a few years; they are open to information about the property. The juxtaposition is that the resource is at the periphery of the district and would not be contributing at this moment due to age.

Ms. Dyer-Carroll requested that photo references be added to the significance statement when extant buildings are mentioned. She also mentioned a photo reference error on p. 7-36 for 915 Lafayette Boulevard. Mr. Wigren suggested a review of photo numbers.

Mr. Herzan asked about the name of the district. This is a reconceptualization of the whole area, with a major new theme. It is confusing to call this an amendment from the public point of view. Ms. Scofield noted that this is our first try at updating a substantial-sized MRA; Hartford is also coming. We are almost rewriting these massive MRAs without wanting to lose the good architectural statements in the original documents. Mr. Loether added that the NPS would request that the nomination be considered an update rather than an amendment. The SRB discussed calling the nomination Downtown Bridgeport Historic District (the former names can be added in parenthesis). Ms. Scofield noted that in this case, there is a lot of information in the previous National Register documentation that is important to retain.

The SRB discussed the amount of work needed to complete the nomination and whether to approve the nomination now. Discussion continued regarding the process, proposed boundaries,

and edits to the contexts under Criteria A and C. Mr. Herzan stated that products of urban renewal are part of a historical phenomenon – to call them non-contributing because of architectural merit skirts another area of significance. Mr. McMillan recommended tabling the nomination until a subsequent meeting to allow time to make edits to the significance statement.

Mr. Herzan revised his original motion to edit the name of the district as the Bridgeport Downtown Historic District; and to table the nomination to revise the context statement to include urban renewal context throughout the state of Connecticut, enhance the architectural significance statement and to provide a Criterion A statement for the entire period of significance. Dr. Bucki seconded the motion. (Y-7, N-0, Abstained-0).

Board members voting yes: Dr. Bucki, Ms. Dyer-Carroll, Mr. Edwards, Mr. Herzan, Mr. McMillan, Ms. Saunders, Mr. Wigren

V. Discussion

A. 2023 SRB Schedule

Ms. Scofield asked the SRB to review the proposed 2023 SRB meeting dates. All SRB members present approved the dates as proposed.

VI. New Business

No new business was discussed.

VII. SHPO Staff Report

Ms. Scofield stated that she is still working on the larger National Register updates project. Some delistings and more discussion on the priorities list will come in the spring. Also, the four state museums are all looking at the original documentation for their properties and are moving forward – first with National Register updates.

VIII. Adjournment

A motion was made by Mr. McMillan, second by Mr. Herzan to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at approximately 11:10 a.m.