

DRAFT MINUTES

**State Historic Preservation Review Board
Friday, December 1, 2023, 9:30 a.m.
In-Person at 450 Columbus Blvd, Hartford and
Teleconference via Microsoft Teams (Recorded)**

Present: Dr. Bucki (Teams) Ms. Dyer-Carroll, Dr. Feder (Teams), Mr. Herzan (Teams), Mr. McMillan, Ms. Panjwani, Ms. Saunders (Teams), Mr. Wigren (serving as Chair via Teams)

Absent: Mr. Barlow, Mr. Edwards

Staff: Jenny Scofield, Cory Atkinson (via Teams), Julie Carmelich (Teams), Mary Dunne (via Teams) Jonathan Kinney, Todd Levine (Teams), Marena Wisniewski (Teams)

Guests: Mary Jo Blain Andrews, Rachel Carley, Cate Hewitt, Melissa Josefiak, Keith Kelley, Robert Marelli Sr., Susan Marelli, Chelsea McCallum, Lisa Melnicsak, John Russo, Brian Tetreault (All guests attended remotely)

I. Call to Order

Mr. Wigren confirmed a quorum and called the meeting to order at 9:32 a.m. He summarized the role of the Board.

II. Review of Public Comment Procedures

Ms. Scofield provided the hybrid meeting procedures.

III. Approval of the September 15, 2023 meeting minutes

Minor edits to the minutes were recorded.

A motion was made by Mr. Herzan, second by Mr. McMillan, to approve the minutes of the September 15, 2023 meeting, as amended (Y-6, N-0, Abstained-1).

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

Board members abstaining: Dr. Bucki

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. Pratt House, Essex (Criteria A and C, local level)

Ms. Scofield introduced the nomination as a Timber-framed saltbox on less than one-acre; it has two outbuildings classified as non-contributing because they are outside the period of significance. Staff recommends the property eligible at the local level under Criteria A and C in the categories of Settlement and Architecture. This is one of the early families in the river valley that was involved in the town's development. The period of significance extends from the construction of the house in c. 1720 to 1817, when it was sold out of the Pratt family. Ms. Scofield noted that the nomination author has already started working on additional copy edits to the document.

Ms. Scofield stated the nomination was initiated by the property owners. Notice of the SRB meeting was sent to the owners, Town of Essex First Selectman and Land Use Official, and the Essex Historical Society, 30 days before the meeting. No letters of support or objection received. The Town of Essex is not a CLG.

Ms. Scofield acknowledged that Rachel Carley (consultant) and Lisa Melnicsak and Keith Kelley (property owners) were present via Teams.

Mr. Wigren invited public comments. None were heard.

Mr. Wigren invited SRB comments.

Mr. McMillan asked whether the carriage house was moved or rebuilt and where it moved from. Ms. Carley clarified that it was moved and rebuilt but retains original framing. The owners responded that the previous owner had moved the carriage house from property on River Road in Essex. Ms. Carley noted that the carriage house visually contributes to the setting. Ms. Carley discussed classifying resources on the property as contributing. The Board suggested describing the carriage house as enhancing the setting. Ms. Scofield clarified that the carriage house and house are counted as one building because they are attached. Mr. McMillan stated that the description and floor plans stop at carriage house and don't mention this addition. Ms. Carley clarified that there is a breezeway between the house and carriage house building. Ms. Carley added that the conservation about the building enhancing the setting is germane to the barn and chicken coop/shed.

Mr. McMillan asked about the history of the Pratt family during the Revolutionary War. Ms. Carley responded that the Revolutionary War history doesn't relate to the settlement association of the property; After Caleb Pratt died, the property stayed in Pratt ownership but was passed around within the family.

Dr. Bucki commented on settlement history provided under Criterion A and as a social historian, she liked the fact that the farm was described. The property is called a subsistence farm on page 13, based on 1880 census; it evokes an earlier kind of subsistence farming (eggs, butter, potatoes). It would be helpful to find out what kind of crops were grown in previous years or if it was mostly cattle grazing. Mention this property use earlier in the text. Having the surroundings understood as a working farm is helpful.

Mr. Herzan asked about the relationship of this property to the William Pratt House on West Avenue, which was listed in the National Register in 1985. He requested that the correlation between the two properties be mentioned in the nomination. The Pratt family is a very prominent early family in town. Mr. Herzan noted that the William Pratt House was previously owned by [Historic New England] and was deeded to the Essex Historical Society; they had a construction date of 1732 so this house would precede that one. Ms. Carley added that the provenance of the Pratt houses is complicated because there are different accounts of how the William Pratt house property was developed over time. It may have an older section or a portion of it was moved. Mr. Kelly shared that –originally built in 1600s and 1730s part built in front. Keith Kelly clarified that William Pratt was Caleb’s grandfather. William’s house was originally built in the late 1600s, then it was moved back from the road and another section was attached in the 1730s.

Ms. Josefiak introduced herself as Director of the Essex Historical Society and noted that they use the date of 1701 for the William Pratt House based on research by the former town historian. It was located farther down West Avenue and moved to its present site at 19 West Avenue. As the Pratt family’s fortune increased, they moved the earlier section back and began adding onto the front. Essex historical society uses a date of 1732 through 1832 for the main block of house; it is built in stages. The ell is the earlier [potentially 1701] section. There are 29 Pratt houses extant in Essex. SPNEA completed a restoration/renovation in 1952 and lots of work has been completed since the 1985 National Register nomination. There aren’t too many timbers left that could help date the early section. Mr. Wigren noted that William Pratt died in 1678; there may be another William Pratt.

Ms. Dyer-Carroll provided copy edits and requested that the outbuildings be labeled as non-contributing on Figure 2.

Mr. Wigren commented on the architectural description. He requested that the vertical sheathing and raised panels mentioned on p. 15 be consistently referred to as sheathing. He noted that the cellar under half the house is similar to an observation by Abbot Lowell Cummings; 18th-century houses often didn’t need a full cellar and had a half cellar under the parlor because then the stair goes up and you have access to the kitchen. The half cellar may indicate that the building was originally constructed as a one-over-one house that was later expanded. Mr Wigren also commented that the arched fireplaces are rare during the 18th century and sometimes appear in the homes of shipbuilders (based on images in Frederick Kelly’s book). The Hayden House at the waterfront in Essex (built 1765) has an arched fireplace. The arched fireplaces are relatively small and shallow. It may be that an earlier large fireplace was reduced in size. This gives you a sense the Pratts are a little bit above average in terms of wealth. Ms. Carley responded that she would note enhancements made in the Pratt House in the late 1700s.

Mr. Wigren noted that the hearth appears raised above the floor level in Photo 18. This trend may date to the 1710s or 1720s. An example is the Buttolph-Williams House in Wethersfield Mr. Kelley confirmed that the upstairs hearths are raised about 3 inches above the floor.

Ms. Carley researched half houses that get stretched into center chimney houses, but the two types also develop independently of each other. She noted that the rafters in this house are numbered sequentially.

Ms. Panjwani referenced the description of the acreage changes on page 13. She asked if the 50 acres referenced in the census could be mapped to understand where it was. She also requested that the regional preference for saltbox houses be explained (ex. harsh climate, opportunity for expansion). Ms. Panjwani asked for photos of the cellar and a zoomed-in image of the barn.

Ms. Carley added that the connections from England to the Massachusetts Bay Colony coming down to Connecticut are strong and an interesting part of the architectural history.

Mr. Herzan asked for a list of the Pratt houses in Essex to be added to the nomination.

A motion was made by Ms. Saunders, second by Dr. Feder to recommend the Caleb Pratt House for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (Y-8, N-0, Abstained-0).

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

B. Review of Status of National Register Listed Property

1. 80 Shore Rd, Waterford, Hartford Colony Historic District

Ms. Scofield summarized that the SRB can advise the State Historic Preservation Office on matters related to National Register eligibility. In cases when property is proposed for demolition, the SRB is asked to review if the property retains the characteristics that qualified it for listing originally. The property owners and their representatives were notified of the SRB meeting on November 20, 2023 in accordance with the SRB policy statement signed December 2020.

Mr. Levine referenced the summary provided to the SRB [and posted online] and also shared that the property owners allowed access to the property on November 30, 2023. He gave a brief presentation to show the existing floorplan and explain the building sections. The building consists of an original c. 1850 house, with additions dating to the 1890s, 1940s, 1950s, 1970s, and 2007 (garage with breezeway). Mr. Levine showed floorplans, an aerial image, and current photographs.

Mr. Herzan asked what changes occurred after the National Register nomination, besides the construction of the garage. Mr. Levine responded that interior alterations were completed.

Mr. Wigren invited public comment.

Chelsea McCallum introduced herself as an attorney at Shipman & Goodman who represents the owners, Robert and Susan Marelli. She referenced that she shared a letter in advance of the meeting. She provided an overview and referenced the National Register aspects of integrity and criteria. Ms. McCallum stated that there is no association with the Shingle Style and Colonial Revival Styles that are highlighted in the nomination. She stated that Henry C. White's association with the property is limited. Ms. Marelli commented on the materials present in the building. She argued that the property is not appropriately contributing to the district.

Nina Peck introduced herself as an architect who works on renovations to historic homes, new construction in historic districts, and new coastal homes. She has served on the Old Lyme Historic District commission for over 15 years. She stated that labeling a building as vernacular does not absolve it from being a series of bad decisions and this property is a conglomeration of poorly conceived additions. She shared a PowerPoint presentation of current images depicting the building's sections including the original c. 1850 Greek Revival-style house and alterations. Ms. Peck stated that the house has inconsistent window configuration, a lack of high artistic value and craftsmanship, and poor integration of the additions to original house. She noted that the additions do not reference the historic design. On the interior, the circulation is poor and there are minimal decorative finishes. She stated that the purpose of the house appears to have been to provide a lot of bedrooms and bathrooms for summer residence. Ms. Peck summarized that 80 Shore Rd does not contribute to the feeling of other houses in district.

Mr. Wigren invited other public comment. No additional comments were heard. He invited State Review Board comment.

Mr. McMillan clarified that the property is not being reviewed for individual eligibility; he suggested reframing the discussion to focus on whether or not the house contributes to the district. It would not be individually eligible. Mr. Herzan added that individual components within a district do not always have to have architectural distinction; the National Register criteria are broader and more forgiving about changes to individual property, in a district. Mr. Herzan noted that the high-style buildings shown at the end of the PowerPoint presentation are likely individually eligible; this property does not have the same level of distinction but is still part of the history of the area.

Mr. Wigren stated that the crux of the matter is the nature of listing a district on the National Register. He read the definition of National Register Criterion C, which includes the statement that districts may meet Criterion C if they "represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction." He summarized that the buildings that may not be eligible themselves, but when put together, tell a bigger story. In this case the story is of the development of a summer vacation community, largely by of middle upper class people coming from Hartford. Not every resource in the district has to meet every criterion of significance. The fact that Henry White only spent one summer in the house doesn't exclude it from eligibility. It is purchased later by a significant Hartford financier who altered the house. The house was altered and expanded as part of the summer colony and using Colonial Revival design; the other Colonial Revival houses in the district which have similar features to this house were not shown in the presentation. Those features have not been altered; the Board is looking at what has changed since the listing, not whether it was eligible in the first place.

Dr. Bucki asked whether the significance of the property was its original component, but not all additions. Mr. Wigren clarified that the additions that existed by 1941, the end of the period of significance defined in the nomination, are considered part of the story of the development of the summer colony.

A motion was made by Ms. Saunders, second by Mr. McMillan, that 80 Shore Road retains its historic integrity and significance as a contributing property to the Hartford Colony Historic District (Y-7, N-1, Abstained-0).

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

Board members voting no: Dr. Bucki

V. Discussion

The SRB approved of the proposed 2024 meeting schedule. The SRB discussed the possibility of holding special meetings to review properties proposed for demolition in Protection Act cases when the demolition delay expires before the next regular State Review Board meeting. SHPO staff noted that municipal demolition delays in Connecticut range from 15 to 180 days and the average is 60 days. The SRB agreed to hold special meetings via Microsoft Teams, for this purpose. Review of the National Register status of properties proposed for demolition, for which the demolition delay will not expire before the next regular SRB meeting, will be added to the next regular meeting agenda.

VI. New Business

No new business was discussed.

VII. SHPO Staff Report

Ms. Scofield announced that GIS specialist, Kevin Berger, began working at SHPO to manage the newly launched ConnCRIS system.

VIII. Adjournment

A motion was made by Mr. McMillan and Ms. Panjwani to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at approximately 11:20 a.m.