

TOWN OF BRISTOL, RHODE ISLAND

HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION



Historic District Commission Meeting Minutes

Thursday, December 4, 2025

at 6:00 PM

Town Hall - 10 Court Street, Bristol Rhode Island

Written comments may be submitted to the Historic District Commission via regular mail addressed to:

Historic District Commission, Bristol Town Hall, 10 Court Street,
Bristol RI 02809 or via email to ntoth@bristolri.gov

1. Pledge of Allegiance

The meeting was called to order at 6:00PM, and the Pledge of Allegiance was promptly recited afterwards.

In attendance: Lima, Allen, Millard, Church, and Page

Also in attendance: Town Solicitor Teitz, Williamson, and Toth

Absent: Ponder, Bergenholtz, and O'Loughlin

2. Meeting with Bristol Comprehensive Plan Consultant

1. Historic & Cultural Resources for Bristol Comprehensive Plan Update

Presentation by consultant for Bristol Comprehensive Plan Historic & Cultural Resources section to solicit input from the Bristol Historic District Commission.

Diane Williamson, Director of Community Development, and Allison Ring, Planning Consultant, present.

A discussion commenced between the Commission, Ms. Williamson, and Ms. Ring regarding the historic and cultural elements of the Town's Comprehensive Community Plan updates. Member Allen asked if the Planning Board had a specific section in the Comprehensive Plan or if they were overseeing this section. Ms. Williamson said this was one of several

required elements of the Plan. She stated that Planning would oversee the creation of the entire Plan and all of those elements as this was the specific element that contained a lot of information that would be relevant to the Commission's purview.

Ms. Ring was here to get the Commission input. Member Page asked how the actions were going to be tracked. Ms. Ring said the implementation program was a working document for communities. She said communities, at least annually, should be looking at it and the Planning Board was really responsible for implementing the Comprehensive Plan as far as doing status update check-ins with the responsible parties, etc. Chairperson Lima said regulatory and policy tools was a good idea and to have someone who's not in the historic district but feels their property should be, there should be a way for them to apply either to them or to the State to have their property included in the district. She said the other thing that's important is to repurpose the decommissioned historic school building and there should be committees or groups that should participate in it, and an expert should be brought in to help with that.

Member Church felt that the HDC should be added to the HCR31. Chairperson Lima said there should be some financial incentives for a lot of the people who live in historic homes. She stated there should be tax incentives or such for those homeowners as they've had to make lots of changes to those buildings to make them livable or up to code and, further, having to maintain the historic fabric of the home. Member Millard asked what was going to be offered to people outside of the district. Ms. Ring said there was going to be an opt-in program and tax incentives which would be for everyone as well. Chairperson Lima had a concern that if someone opted in and then sold the home, would the next person be able to opt-out and Ms. Ring said not without a zone change. Chairperson Lima said that it should be made clear in the Comprehensive Plan.

Member Millard asked what the Weypoyset Preserve Trust. Ms. Williamson said it was located on Narrows Run on the north side. After a development was proposed and the State flagged it and had the applicant do an investigation, they found evidence of pre-historic man. She said the Weypoyset Preserve Trust took over and it's a commission of people appointed by the Council to oversee the property. Chairperson Lima said there should be a workshop or tour for it.

Member Church asked about the status of the Brown University land and said it should be on the National Register. Ms. Williamson stated it was now owned by the Pokanoket Tribe and approximately 120 acres were purchased by the Town with grants from DEM and the US Forestry Service. Member Church asked if the waterfront area from recreation building that Brown built to Mt. Hope farmland was all Pokanoket land. Ms. Williamson said yes and the Town owned the land along Tower Street. She said the Pokanokets had areas that were more culturally significant. Member Church asked if the Town had any jurisdiction on any construction or anything like that the Pokanokets might do? Ms. Williamson said that the Pokanokets would have to pull permits as they were not sovereign like the Narragansett Tribe. Member Church asked if the area was open to the public and Ms. Williamson said no. Member Church asked what could be done to get the museum on the National Register. Ms. Williamson said they would have to talk to the Tribe and see if they would be interested in it.

Ms. Ring asked if there was any interest to expand the historic district or other districts in Town or are there specific properties they want to protect either zoning wise or for the National Register. Member Church said there was a new neighborhood that was a candidate for inclusion. Ms. Ring said it was identified in the resurvey. Chairperson Lima said although it would be wonderful to expand the district, there's enough negative backlash towards the Commission about why people need to come in front of HDC for projects and it would be very difficult to expand it.

Member Millard said maybe someone could go around to the classic candidates outside the district and approach the owners to ask them if they would be interested in joining the district. Member Allen said some houses along Wood Street are significant and should possibly be looked at, but politically the Town Council wasn't that interested in expanding it. Member Millard said if the history on certain properties could be discovered, it would be amazing. Ms. Ring said recognition verses regulation.

Ms. Ring asked the Commission what improvements could be made to make the process go smoother regarding the style guide. Member Allen said it would be great if the guidelines were specific to Bristol's historic district and were able to say what was allowed and not allowed. Chairperson Lima said specific illustrations would be helpful. Member Page said a list of what an applicant was expected to bring and that they should have most of their decisions made rather than doing

them one by one. Chairperson Lima said they didn't want to have to keep telling applicants to come back because they forgot to do things or forgot to bring materials or information with them. She stated since the Commission couldn't imagine what the applicant was thinking it would be helpful if an applicant could do something even if it's simply taking a picture of someone else's door that they liked to present as an example of what they're looking to use, as opposed to just writing things on an application. She said visual aids were better than just putting things in writing. Ms. Ring said that an applicant should use illustrations in the presentation.

Member Millard asked if there was something that could be set up at the library like reference materials as far as books on architecture and style books for applicants to use, as well as samples of things that have been allowed in the district. She said it would be a bit of work to do but she would be willing to work on it because it's important. Member Millard said if they could catch things that are missing before an applicant comes before the Commission, then the process could go smoother. Nick said that having a resource guide because part of the problem is getting the correct information from applicants. He said he would talk to the library about it as it would be very helpful as applicants don't know how to make their presentations.

Member Church asked Nick if he had conversations with the applicants about their applications and he said he tried to but most times it's just a submission online and if they're missing something he'll message them through the portal. Ms. Ring suggested a checklist for application materials. Attorney Teitz said that it has become difficult to communicate with applicants since they use portal for all permits. When they used to come in for an application, then someone could talk to them about it. He said one thing to think about is incorporating in the design guideline a list of materials that should be included in the application and possibly set up the portal where an applicant couldn't move on until they looked at it. Nick said there's been a problem with AI applications and had to explain to an applicant about a mistake on their submission showing a phantom stairway.

Member Church said it might be necessary to change some of the rules regarding the number of applications the Commission would hear in a month and to extend the length of days that an application can be out there until it's completed. Nick said thankfully the Commission hasn't had to approve an application by default. He's trying to improve the process,

but it's a constant battle. Ms. Williamson said that Arnold Robinson did a book about how to fill out an application and how to complete it; there was a video with Catherine Zipf, and Member Church did the brochures. Attorney Teitz asked Nick if he could add a link to the video on the portal.

Ms. Ring said the policy in the Comprehensive Plan ensures that the HDC maintains clear and well-defined design standards and an efficient review process that balanced preservation objectives with the practical needs of property owners. She said an action item or two can be incorporated to improve the process. Member Church suggested having a volunteer in the office 1 day a month to help applicants with the process. Nick said they could in theory. Chairperson Lima suggested using students from the historic preservation courses at Roger Williams, instead of someone who has a stake in the process. Nick said he would look into it.

Catherine Zipf suggested selecting the top 3 things that applicants were coming in for the most find good examples of that type of application, then ask the owner of that application permission to post it and then post it to the portal for new applicants to see. She cautioned the Commission that applicants shouldn't have any ex parte communications with members of the HDC. She volunteered to help with Member Church's suggestion of volunteering 1 day a month to help applicants. Attorney Teitz said it should not be done on the same Thursday as the meeting nights. Dr. Zipf suggested the Thursday before the deadline. Attorney Teitz suggested the second Thursday of the month well before the deadline.

Attorney Teitz suggested a staff report for the HDC that gives a synopsis of what people are looking for and the standards that apply. He said it should be a part of the application and what the Commission's comments are. He said it would be helpful to the applicants and the Commission. Ms. Williamson said they could get examples from other Towns of it so they can follow along. Nick said he would start putting something together.

Member Allen said there were too many kiosks around Town that were getting in bad shape and asked if they had been replaced. Ms. Williamson said they had been and had new photographed images. He said that the Commission did not want to see more in the Town. Ms. Ring said it was visual clutter. Nick suggested using QR codes on markers.

Ms. Williamson discussed HCR 22 - to remove barriers to preservation-compatible retrofits (e.g., height for elevated utilities, façade vent placement) under broader category of climate adaptation. She asked if it was currently a problem as far as the Commission not being in favor of elevating utilities or putting in vents. Nick said it was more of working with utility companies to make sure they were historically sensitive. Attorney Teitz said it was to minimize the visibility. Member Allen said the Commission has tried to keep people from putting gas meters in front of their homes but haven't been successful in some cases. Attorney Teitz said the Commission has been successful overall, but not 100%, but it's the law and when a batch is done, the Town has intervened with the gas company and said they need HDC's permission to do it. He stated that the front is the last option if nowhere else was possible.

3. Review of Previous Month's Meeting Minutes

3A. Review of minutes of the November 6, 2025 meeting.

A discussion commenced among the Commission members regarding the minutes of the November 6, 2025 meeting. Member Allen and Member Church had corrections. Member Church corrections were as follows: 6 pages in on the application #25-131 19 Byfield Street, "Allen: approve as presented/ page Church: continue it to December/page" they were memo notes and needed to be deleted. On the application #25-145 484 Thames, second full paragraph, 11 lines up from the bottom, it said, "Chairperson Lima as Member Church her thoughts" and it should read "asked" her thoughts. Member Allen's corrections were as follows: on application #25-126 for 1237 Hope Street, second full paragraph is said "were a clamshell" and it should say "was a clamshell" style door. Under application #25-139 for 79 Constitution Street, 4th page in for that application, second paragraph from bottom, it read, "having the applicant come" and it should read "come back". That was the end of the corrections. Chairperson Lima asked for a motion to accept the minutes.

Motion made by Church to accept the minutes of the November 6, 2025 minutes as corrected; Seconded by Allen.

Voting Yea: Page, Allen, Church, Lima, and Millard

4. Application Reviews

4A. 25-131: 19 Byfield St, Elena Bao

Discuss and act on relocation of porch stairs.

Dan Kusmano was present on behalf of applicant, Elena Bao.

A discussion commenced between Mr. Kusmano and the Commission. Mr. Kusmano presented on behalf of Ms. Bao with regard to asking for permission and approval to shift the stairs from coming off the porch to the side of the driveway and relocating them so the stairs will come off the rear of the porch towards the back yard and then connecting to the driveway that way. The homeowners have found if there are multiple cars in the driveway, a car will block the stairwell and shifting it makes it more accessible. He said they would be wood stairs painted white same as what was there with pipe handrails. Chairperson Lima asked which view rendering included in the packet was the best rendering and Mr. Kusmano said to review View 3. Member Church asked what the handrails materials were made of and he said they were going to be black metal pipe handrails which were similar to the ones that were currently on the home. Member Allen asked Mr. Kusmano what type of steppingstone materials were going to be utilized. Mr. Kusmano said it was going to be most likely blue stone which would connect the rear back patio and the driveway.

Member Millard asked Mr. Kusmano if the half-circle stairway at the back of the house was up to code. He said it should be as the steps were going to be repurposed. Member Millard said they were nice but in terms of stepping off the steps are supposed to be 36 x 36 as a landing. Mr. Kusmano didn't have the exact measurement of the steps, but he believed it was 3ft in diameter. He said they were repurposing an already existing historical aspect of the home. Member Millard asked if the steps were on the original house and Mr. Kusmano said they were.

Chairperson Lima asked if there was anyone in the audience who wanted to speak for or against the application. With no one coming forward, she asked for a motion to accept the application.

Motion made by Member Allen to accept application #25-131 for the side porch stairs as presented in View 3 in the application with wood stairs and black metal pipe handrails as well as the steppingstones as presented; Seconded by Member Church.

Voting Yea: Page, Allen, Church, Millard, and Lima

Opposed: None

Motion carries.

Secretary of Interior Standards: 9

Project Monitor: John Allen

4B. 25-139: 79 Constitution St, Ralph M DeFelice: Discuss and act on removal of bay window.

Nick Toth informed the Commission that the applicant requested a continuance to the January meeting for additional time and their inability to appear.

Chairperson Lima asked for a motion for continuance.

Allen/page

Motion made by Member Allen to continue application #25-139 to the January 2026 meeting; Seconded by Page.

Voting Yea: Allen, Page, Millard, Church, and Lima

Opposed: None

Motion carries.

4C. 25-144: 474 Thames St, Daniel Brooks

Discuss and act on design of replacement porch, location of exterior gas meter.

Daniel Brooks present.

A discussion commenced between the Commission and Daniel Brooks regarding the design of the replacement of the rear porch and the location of the gas meter. Mr. Brooks provided the product sheets and the rendering imagery of the rear deck in the new packet. He stated it was an AI rendering which was also submitted to the Building Department. He asked the Commission for their feedback on it. Mr. Brooks said the material is an Azek composite decking with composite railings with an aluminum inner framework and composite exterior. Member Allen clarified that the deck was not visible from the street. Member Church said the material was a vinyl material. Mr. Brooks said it was a PVC composite railing. Member Church stated she looked it up and it was shiny vinyl. Member Allen stated the Commission did not allow it in the

district. Member Church objected to the material. Mr. Brooks said all of the builders he knew would consider that a composite railing, not vinyl.

Attorney Teitz stated that the word "composite" just meant anything and could mean anything, but the key was whether it had a shiny surface. He said a lot of the composites such as Azek had a flat surface and could be painted which was the big difference. Attorney Teitz said the shiny surfaces for any vertical builds such as railings have not been allowed. He stated the Commission generally allowed the artificial flooring for decking particularly because it wasn't visible on the upper and due to other materials rotting otherwise.

Mr. Brooks said at the last Commission meeting he received advice about what was appropriate and the Commission suggested a railing system with wire, but he felt it was too modern. He said he used the Titan Pro Rail before as well as Trex railing and it was the same material. Member Church read the description of the Titan Pro railing in which it stated vinyl materials. Mr. Brooks stated that composite was not a natural product and that if the Commission looked up Trex railing, it might also state vinyl. He said that is what he's used in the past, but he would use whatever the Commission requested. Chairperson Lima stated the Commission has approved Azek, but has not heard of Titan Pro. She said that if Mr. Brooks had brought a sample of it for the Commission to look at, then they may have been able to consider it, but are unable to do so without it. She said that the Commission may have to specify Azek. Mr. Brooks stated he was fine with that. Mr. Brooks said he suggested Titan Pro only because he had used it before and it was stronger than Azek due to the aluminum interior. He also said he could use Timbertech. Member Allen stated the Commission has approved of Timbertech. Chairperson Lima said if Mr. Brooks wanted the approval now, then Azek or Timbertech would be the option, but if he wanted Titan Pro, he would have to bring a sample back to show the Commission. Mr. Brooks said he was fine with Azek or Timbertech.

Member Millard asked Mr. Brooks if the railing was pre-molded and if it came in sections. Mr. Brooks stated the railing had a profile that was molded, but the top and bottom rails were individual pieces, and the balusters were individual pieces that were to be inserted. Member Millard said that Azek was just like wood and could be painted. Mr. Brooks said with the right paint his product could be painted, or it could be purchased in certain colors, but he was fine with Trex, Azek, or Timbertech.

Member Allen asked Mr. Brooks if he wanted the Commission to give him approval based on one or the other or leave it up to the Project Monitor. Attorney Teitz said that the Commission should pick one. Mr. Brooks stated that since he was doing Trex decking, he would just do Trex railings and get it from the same supplier. Member Allen asked Mr. Brooks if he was using the metal bars for the rails. Mr. Brooks said it was the same composite materials for the vertical portions. Nick said Member Allen was referring to the aluminum core material. Member Allen said he was referring to the upright spindles and Mr. Brooks said he was always planning on using the same materials as the rest of the railing.

Motion made by Allen to approve application #25-144 for the installation of a rear deck and railing system at 474 Thames Street as presented with materials for the decking, railings, and posts to be Trex; Seconded by Page.

Voting Yea: Allen, Lima, Page, Millard, and Church

Opposed: None

Motion carries.

Secretary of Interior Standards: 9

Project Monitor: Chris Ponder

Mr. Brooks and the Commission then discussed the placement of the gas meter at 474 Thames. Mr. Brooks stated that he consulted with multiple heating companies regarding using either gas or electricity. He was meeting with one more person the following day. He said the natural gas meter was in a crawlspace under the house and the pipe was undersized to the gas company's specifications and extremely corroded. In order for the gas company to put in a new meter that would be up to code, there is a hardship due to the neighbor's house being 3 inches from his house, there's not enough clearance on that side to place the meter. He couldn't put it on the left side due to parking access for both 474 and 484 Thames. He included photos showing all sides of the house showing that the only option for a natural meter would be on the front in the planting bed area. Mr. Brooks said that the house to the left of 484 had one on the front due to a hardship, but there was also an evergreen covering it, so it wasn't visible. He said he would do the same so the meter would not be visible from the street. Mr. Brooks said he

would be happy to put plants there and there was a display for the storefront there as well that would cover it. He said the gas company would not put the meter back in the basement and they need to upsize the pipe.

Member Church asked Mr. Brooks which pipe was too small, and he said the pipe that supplies the gas from the street to the house. He said the gas company would only enlarge the pipe if the meter was on the outside of the house. Member Page stated the gas company could not put gas meters inside basements anymore according to code. Member Page asked Attorney Teitz, since the State he was originally from utility companies have to comply with the State laws, he asked if it was the same for Rhode Island. Attorney Teitz stated the law Rhode Island was that the utility companies were not exempt from the historic district and they had to come to Commission. He said the HDC has jurisdiction over it. Member Page said that in Arizona, they had to allow access and Mr. Brooks' choice is electric or if he wants gas, to locate the meter at the front of the house because of what the utility company wants, and in Arizona, it will have to be allowed because there was no other choice. Attorney Teitz said that degree of control over the utility did not exist in Rhode Island. Mr. Brooks said that upon his contacting the utility company and speaking with construction department for RI Energy, they said they needed a letter of approval from the HDC first.

Member Millard asked Mr. Brooks what he planned on covering the gas meter with and Mr. Brooks said since he was a landscaper, he preferred some softscape material since it was a 5ft deep planting bed. Attorney Teitz directed the Commission to look at page 147 which showed the planting bed area. Member Allen said although he preferred that the gas meter not be located at the front of the house, he understood the situation and thought Mr. Brooks' solution would be fine under the circumstances. Mr. Brooks understood the Commission's position on the matter and said that he was still undecided between gas or electric heat. Chairperson Lima told him to do his homework about it, and it would come down to a personal preference.

Chairperson Lima asked if there was anyone in the audience who wanted to speak for or against the project. With no one coming forward, she asked for a Member of the Commission to make a motion.

Motion made by Member Allen to approve application #25-144 for the positioning of a potential gas meter to be installed

on the front of house primarily due to the fact it is not feasible to have it located on the north or south sides of the house due to the closeness of the house and the driveway on the other side. The potential gas meter is to be located in the 5ft planting bed at 484 Thames which is to be concealed with evergreen planting; Seconded by Millard.

Voting Yea: Allen, Millard, Page, and Lima

Opposed: Church

Motion Carries: 4 to 1.

Secretary of Interior Standards: 9

Project Monitor: Chris Ponder

5. **Concept Review**
6. **Monitor Reports & Project Updates**
7. **HDC Coordinator Reports & Project Updates**
8. **HDC Coordinator Approvals**
9. **Other Business**

1. Approval of 2026 Calendar

A discussion among the Members of the Commission and Nick regarding the approval of the 2026 HDC calendar. Nick said the January meeting had been changed to Tuesday, January 6, 2026, as the previously listed date was when the Zoning Board met. Attorney Teitz added that the April meeting would be taking place on March 30, 2026, and the July meeting would be taking place on June 29, 2026. Chairperson Lima asked for a motion to adopt the 2026 calendar.

Motion made by Church to adopt the 2026 calendar; Seconded by Page

Voting Yea: Allen, Millard, Page, and Lima

Opposed: None

Motion Carries.

Nick then advised the Commission that Ray spoke with the owner of the fence on the corner of State and Thames Streets and the broken parts would be fixed. He said that RFP was

out to a select few contractors to try and get the standards and style guide fixed and finalized. He stated that at the January meeting he would have a draft staff report so the Commission could review it and customize it to what the Commission thinks would be most useful. Nick advised Chairperson Lima that he would include notes in the applications of previous/recent things that they had come before the Commission for just for reference. He said he would try to get stricter about applications with people.

Member Church asked if the Commission could generally discuss the State planning conference that Member Millard, Member Page, and herself attended. Attorney Teitz said it should be added to the agenda for discussion. Chairperson Lima asked if it should be added on for discussion or placed on next month's agenda. Attorney Teitz said it should be added to the agenda for next month as he had not reviewed it yet and would like the opportunity to do so. Chairperson Lima suggested that a special meeting be held to review the video. Member Page suggested that Rob Gagnetta meet with the Commission to discuss it. Chairperson Lima suggested a workshop and invite contractors or anyone else in Bristol as it would be helpful. Attorney Teitz suggested a public meeting and invite the Warren Historic District Commission.

With no other business to discuss, Member Allen made a motion to adjourn.

10. Adjourned at 7:36PM