



CITY OF PROVIDENCE
MAYOR BRETT P. SMILEY

MEMORANDUM

Date: September 12, 2023
To: City Plan Commission, Michael Gazdacko, Chairman
From: Jason Martin, Preservation Planner
Subject: **108-110 Waterman Street**

108-110 Waterman Street is recognized as the “Rufus Watermanⁱ House, 1877. Queen Anne; 2-½ stories; mansard; clapboard; double house-with-dormers and paired-gable central pavilion which includes 2-½ story bay windows flanking inset first and second story porches; symmetrical facade with some Queen Anne detailing and basement story commercial shops”ⁱⁱ. It is a contributing structure to the College Hill National Historic Landmarks District (CHNHLD), a Federal designation. Protection of Federally designated properties are limited to when public monies are involved in a direct physical endeavor. The property is not located within a City of Providence local historic district, which means that there is no regulation that prevents demolition of the structure.

The building has been aluminum-sided (1961)ⁱⁱⁱ and vinyl replacement windows have been installed. Alterations include storefronts at basement level with excavated patio which appear to date from 1971^{iv}. The current use is “Store & Six (6) Apartments”^v, with two apartments on each of the three upper floors. Building Inspection Cards show various apartment counts, ranging from 4-8, first noted in the available cards from the 1930s-present, as well as a doctor’s office created in 1944.^{vi} A review of the Providence City Directories confirms this pattern.^{vii}

106-110 Waterman Street was originally constructed as two, single-family residences at each address by Mr. Waterman in 1877. City directory records show Mr. Waterman living at #108 in 1878 and 1879^{viii}, but his obituary has him passing at his residence at 219 Benefit Street in 1896. The Waterman family is an extremely significant Rhode Island and Providence family whose lineage reaches back to the beginning of Roger Williams’ “lively experiment”. That being said this property is not Mr. Waterman’s primary residence at 219 Benefit Street (Rufus Waterman House, 1830, altered 1864, now the University Club), a singularly significant building within the CHNHLD; another family residence at 188 Benefit Street (Rufus Waterman House, 1863); still another at 57 Waterman Street (Waterman House, 1867); or many of the other buildings noted above that he is associated with and of which are more significant and some even singular in nature. As noted, 108-110 Waterman Street is listed as a contributing structure to the CHNHLD. The overall form of the building is still intact with many architectural details still present; however, the exterior has been modified with aluminum-siding and vinyl-windows. The front of the

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property has been compromised with an excavated area with commercial retail spaces constructed in the early 20th C. The building has a long history of use as apartments and stores, and while I have not been granted access to the interior of the building, my assumption is that many compromises have been made to the interior over the building's lifetime. While the form of the building is architecturally handsome, even with the modern siding and windows, architecturally or historically the building is not singular in nature.

As stated, the Federal designation does not provide protection for the demolition of the property. If there was Federal or State oversight, a review would have been undertaken by the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission (RIHPHC) under what is known as Section 106 review. Section 106 is the Historical Preservation section of the Environmental Protection Act. If that were the case, in a proposal such as this, the most likely outcome of that review would be a finding of "adverse effect" because of the loss of the contributing structure to the CHNHLD. The "remediation" in this case is typically a history of the property, elevation drawings, floorplans, exterior and interior photos are assembled into an archival package and submitted to the RIHPHC as part of the Rhode Island Historical Resources Archive and also to the City of Providence's Archives. This package of information is what the Providence Historic District Commission typically requests when it approves demolition proposals. It is my recommendation that the City Plan Commission (CPC) request that this be submitted by the applicant, as remediation for the adverse effect the demolition of the building will cause to the Built Environment section of the Comprehensive Plan. I would also recommend that this become standard procedure when and if buildings of similar designation are requested to be demolished through the CPC process.

ⁱ Rufus Waterman (1817-1896) is a direct descendent of Richard Waterman, whose "shared religious beliefs that conflicted with the leaders of the Salem colony they lived in, and was driven from Massachusetts soil... When Roger Williams bought the land that would be Providence from the Narragansett Native Americans in 1634, he gave some of the land to Waterman" (The Waterman Family – Grace Church Cemetery, <https://www.gracechurchcemeteryri.org/the-waterman-family>). Mr. Waterman was a businessman who engaged in the iron business of Mason & Waterman. In 1848 he retired to take a prominent role in the Providence Tool Company, (the company became the Rhode Island Tool Company and that building complex still stands at 146-148 West River Street, individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places), as well as many other commercial and manufacturing enterprises. Mr. Waterman also was an active participant of the Dorr War, serving as Quartermaster General on the side of the law and order party. After the new Constitution was adopted he was elected to the Legislature. Mr. Waterman was prominent in city affairs, working to straighten and widen Waterman Street and others streets. He originated the plan for Blackstone Boulevard and indispensable with seeing the plan carried through. He served as a Trustee of Swan Point Cemetery. He was instrumental in erecting many local buildings, among them the Providence Tool Company, the aforementioned Rhode Island Tool Company, the Elizabeth Building and Waterman Building on North Main Street and the original National Exchange Bank Building on Westminster Street. For 40 years he was trustee of several large estates (Rufus Waterman Obituary, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/21399560/rufus-waterman>).

ⁱⁱ College Hill National Historic Landmarks District Nomination, 11/10/70, amended 1976.

ⁱⁱⁱ Department of Building Inspection card, Permit No. 658, 06/20/61.

^{iv} Ibid, Permit No. 828, 08/28/73

^v Viewpoint Electronic File for property, "Current Use As of Aug 2014 (CO2014-3443)

^{vi} DBI cards, Permit Nos: 1024, 06/08/34 (4 apts.); 1, 01/03/44 (five apts. & doctor's office); 1899, 09/18/35 (5 apts.); 658, 06/20/61 (7 Apts.); 1086, 10/15/62 (8 Apts. & store); 1195, 04/20/79 (8 Apts. & retail store); 1975, 01/28/10 (8Apts. & store).

^{vii} Providence City Directories: various volumes, 1866-1945.

^{viii} Providence City Directories: 1878, 1879. The records are sometimes confusing as one of his three sons is named Rufus, and that son also had a son named Rufus.