

Eric Hertfelder
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To: Mr. John Shehan, Chair, Newport Historic District Commission
From: Eric Hertfelder
Date: 21 August 2013
Re: Breakers Visitor Center

I am writing to recommend approval of the Preservation Society of Newport County's (PSNC) current application for construction of a Visitor Center on the grounds of the Breakers and request that this correspondence be included in the record of the hearing scheduled for 27 August.

The Breakers is both an extremely significant historic property with a high degree of integrity and the single most visited historic site in Newport if not in the region. The PSNC has done an admirable job of balancing these factors, maintaining the property in a high state of repair as it has been placed in a new use so as to generate the income necessary to preserve the structure in perpetuity.

The proposed replacement for the current visitor center is a reasonable approach given contemporary standards and the high volume of visitation at the site, and it is worth noting that the PSNC has reduced both the size and visibility of the structure from the original proposal and changed its placement. In reviewing the various reports and comments associated with this project, I found myself in strong agreement with the easement review findings of the RI Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission (RIHPHC) as expressed in a Memorandum dated 12 June 2013 from Richard Greenwood, Deputy Director, and with the comments and findings of Charles A. Birnbaum, President of the Cultural Landscape Foundation, as expressed in a letter to Trudy Coxe dated 07 August 2013. Rather than recount the content of these documents they are attached for your reference.

In brief, I believe the replacement of the current visitor center with the proposed new visitor center following the recommendations of the RIHPHC's easement review will not adversely affect the significant historic features of the Breakers as documented in the National Historic Landmark designation for the property. The proposed new structure can be well screened by the existing trees and plantings so

as to not affect views from the mansion; the visual density of the plantings in the northwest quadrant of the property is in fact one of the character defining features of the property and will be preserved and enhanced as part of the project. Finally, it is worth noting that no irreversible action is being proposed, since no losses to existing historic fabric are being proposed, and in fact the project includes the rehabilitation of the vaulted roof of the unique underground boiler house.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.