

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received **JUL 28 1983**

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Vail-Leavitt Music Hall

and/or common

2. Location

street & number Peconic Avenue not for publication

city, town Riverhead vicinity of

state New York code 036 county Suffolk code 023

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture <input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial <input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational <input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> entertainment <input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	NA in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government <input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	NA being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial <input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military <input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Theodore Leavitt

street & number 29 W. Merritts Pond Road

city, town Riverhead vicinity of state New York 11901

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Suffolk County Clerk's Office

street & number County Center

city, town Riverhead state New York

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title None has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date federal state county local

depository for survey records

city, town state

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date NA
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Vail-Leavitt Music Hall is located in the small central business district of Riverhead, an unincorporated hamlet within the town of Riverhead, Suffolk County. The hamlet is situated near the mouth of the Peconic River where it empties into Flanders Bay at the juncture of Long Island's north and south forks. The business district is composed of two, three and four story brick and wood frame commercial structures dating from the turn of the century. The music hall's main facade (west) faces Peconic Avenue, a main thoroughfare, and adjoins a large parking area to the rear (east).

Built in 1881, the two and one-half story brick structure has a steep gable roof. Gauged brickwork and two round-arched windows decorate the gable end. Four very long double-hung sash windows (four over four) with stone sills and lintels line the second floor (auditorium area). The two first floor storefronts have simple metal cornices. The south-side storefront (right) consists of a central entrance to the theatre upstairs flanked by two plate-glass windows. Modern metal sheathing covers the storefront's original cast-iron piers and transoms. The northside storefront (left) has been modified, although original cast-iron piers exist under the modern sheathing.

A broad stairway inside the building's south storefront leads to the largely unchanged second floor auditorium. The music hall's auditorium has an open orchestra floor, a semi-circular balcony, and two theatre boxes with curved fronts on each side of the stage. The walls below the balcony as well as the stairwell are covered with vertical board sheathing. The auditorium has restrained Classically inspired decoration. The proscenium arch has decorative pilasters supporting a flat arch with rounded corners. The shallow stage has a brick rear wall. In the 1920s, the stage was lowered to the level of the auditorium floor and openings were made in the base, which is decorated with blind arcading. The semi-circular balcony has a paneled front, iron railing, and the original fixed seats. The theatre boxes have curved fronts with decorative cornices, handrails, and balusters. The auditorium has a decorative pressed metal ceiling.

The original decor of the auditorium was red, gold, light green and cream with gold leaf on the interior moldings. The interior of the music hall is now painted white but the original paint scheme is visible under the peeling paint. No alterations have been made to the interior of the theatre other than the lowering of the stage.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates 1881

Builder/Architect David F. Vail

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The historically significant Vail-Leavitt Music Hall recalls an important aspect in the late nineteenth century growth of downtown Riverhead. Built in 1881 as the Vail Music Hall, the now familiar local landmark opened as both a theatre and public meeting space. It is the oldest theatre in the Riverhead area and one of the few surviving music halls in Suffolk County. The building's relatively intact, two and one-half story brick facade with first floor storefronts is characteristic of Riverhead's late nineteenth century downtown business district. The commercial exterior conceals an architecturally distinctive, largely intact, second floor music hall which has restrained classically inspired decoration. During the early twentieth century, Thomas Edison conducted some of his first experiments with talking pictures at the music hall.

The Vail-Leavitt Music Hall looks much as it did when built in 1881 by David F. Vail. The music hall is architecturally significant as a largely intact, representative example of late nineteenth century small town theatre design. The music hall was hailed by the local paper as a "marked improvement over the old rookeries which now front on Bridge Street" (the latter referring to what is now Peconic Avenue). The auditorium was built on the second floor of the commercial structure, which featured a restaurant on the first floor. The focal point of the interior is the handsome auditorium with its classically inspired decoration. Notable features include the horseshoe-shaped balcony, ornate box seating, and decorative pressed metal ceiling. The polychrome interior with gold leaf was designed by J.W. Flack. While not as lavish as many of the large urban theatres of the period, the playhouse well demonstrates that stylish interiors could be found even in small town settings.

The first recorded performance in the music hall, noted in the Riverhead News of July 15, 1881, was called "Dime Entertainment," and was given by the ladies of the Congregational church on July Fourth. The program consisted of recitations, charades, and music. The first recorded professional production at the music hall was Bennett's Broadway Museum on October 13, 1882. Other professional plays presented from 1880 to 1900 included Uncle Tom's Cabin, Rip Van Winkle, and Black Diamond. Many local performers were featured in the amateur productions as well as many budding stars from the Long Island theatre circuit. One such performer was Shakespearean star Ian Maclaren who was presented on May 9, 1896 by the Harmonic Society. Maclaren climaxed his career playing Christ in Hollywood's Pilgrimage Play in the late 1930s. The first moving picture show at the music hall was the 1908 presentation of The Great Edison Show featuring the Harry K. Thaw trial for the shooting of Stanford White atop the old

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

Vail-Leavitt Music Hall, Riverhead

Continuation sheet Suffolk County, New York Item number 8

Page 2

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Madison Square Garden building. Later, in 1914, Thomas Edison conducted some of his first experiments with talking pictures at the music hall.

In 1908, Simon Leavitt took over the operation of the theatre and on May 1, 1909, he leased it to "city parties" who changed the name to the Lyceum. The theatre featured films and illustrated song slides on a nightly basis with vaudeville and traveling theatrical stock on the weekends and holidays. In the mid-1920s, the theatre was converted to a restaurant. The stage was lowered to ground level and two openings were made in its decorative base. By the early 1930s, the Lyceum closed due to competition with the palatial Capitol Theatre, built on Main Street in 1920.

Although stores were installed on the first floor of the structure in the mid-twentieth century, the theatre has remained vacant until the present. In the late 1970s the Vail-Leavitt Music Hall Committee of Riverhead Townscape, Incorporated was formed. The organization is dedicated to restoring the music hall as a performing arts center for eastern Long Island. The Vail-Leavitt Music Hall is an architecturally significant example of late nineteenth century theatre design on Long Island as well as a rare surviving building type in eastern Suffolk County, and an important reminder of Riverhead's prosperous nineteenth-century development.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Albany, New York. New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. Research File On Vail-Leavitt Music Hall.

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than one acre

Quadrangle name Riverhead

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A

1	8	6	9	6	8	6	0	4	5	3	1	8	9	0
Zone	Easting				Northing									

B

Zone	Easting				Northing									

C

D

E

F

G

H

Verbal boundary description and justification

The Vail-Leavitt Music Hall completely occupies its small, rectangular urban lot. Its dimensions are approximately fifty feet along Peconic Avenue and one hundred feet deep.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state NA code county NA code

state NA code county NA code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Austin O'Brien, Field Representative (see attached sheet)

organization NYS Div. for Historic Preservation date July 1983

street & number Empire State Plaza, Agency Bldg. 1 telephone (518) 474-0479

city or town Albany state New York 12238

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

Allen G. Casare

title Deputy Commissioner and Counsel

date

7/20/83

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Entered in the
National Register

date

8/25/83

for *Delores Byers*
Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Vail-Leavitt Music Hall, Riverhead

Continuation sheet Suffolk County, New York Item number 11

Page 2

Draft nomination prepared by: Mary Jo Dorko
Preservation Consultant
349 State Street
Albany, New York 12210



MATTITUCK HILLS

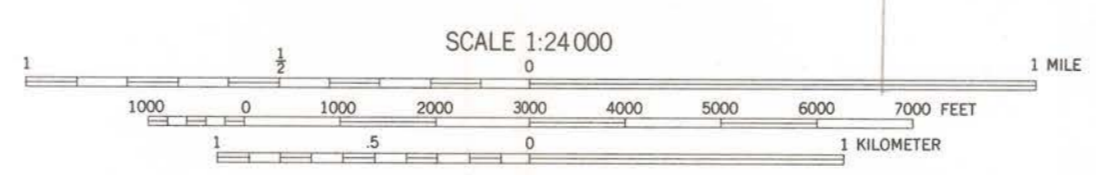


Vail-Leavitt Music Hall
Peconic Avenue, Riverhead
Suffolk County, New York
Quad: Riverhead
Zone: 18
Easting: 696860
Northing: 4531890

Prepared and published in 1981 by the New York State Department of Transportation, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration.
Map base from 1956 U.S. Geological Survey 7.5-minute quadrangle.
Map revisions made using 1980 aerial photography, construction plans, official records and other sources. Features revised include: highways and other transportation facilities; civil boundaries; recreation sites; hydrography; and buildings. Grey tint indicates intensely developed areas in which only landmark buildings are shown.
Revisions may not comply with National Map Accuracy Standards.
Correspondence concerning this and other maps of the Department of Transportation should be directed to: Map Information Unit, New York State Department of Transportation, State Campus, Albany, New York 12232.
1981 revisions by J. E. Farah



QUADRANGLE LOCATION



SCALE 1:24,000
Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum.
1000-meter ticks based on the New York Transverse Mercator grid.
Between 72° and 78° West Longitude, this grid is identical to Zone 18 of the Universal Transverse Mercator grid. Areas east of 72° and west of 78° are direct mathematical extensions of Zone 18.
10,000-foot ticks based on the New York Plane Coordinate grid, Long Island Zone.
Magnetic declination for 1981 is approximately 13 1/2° West

INDEX TO 1:50,000 (1"=800') MAP COVERAGE

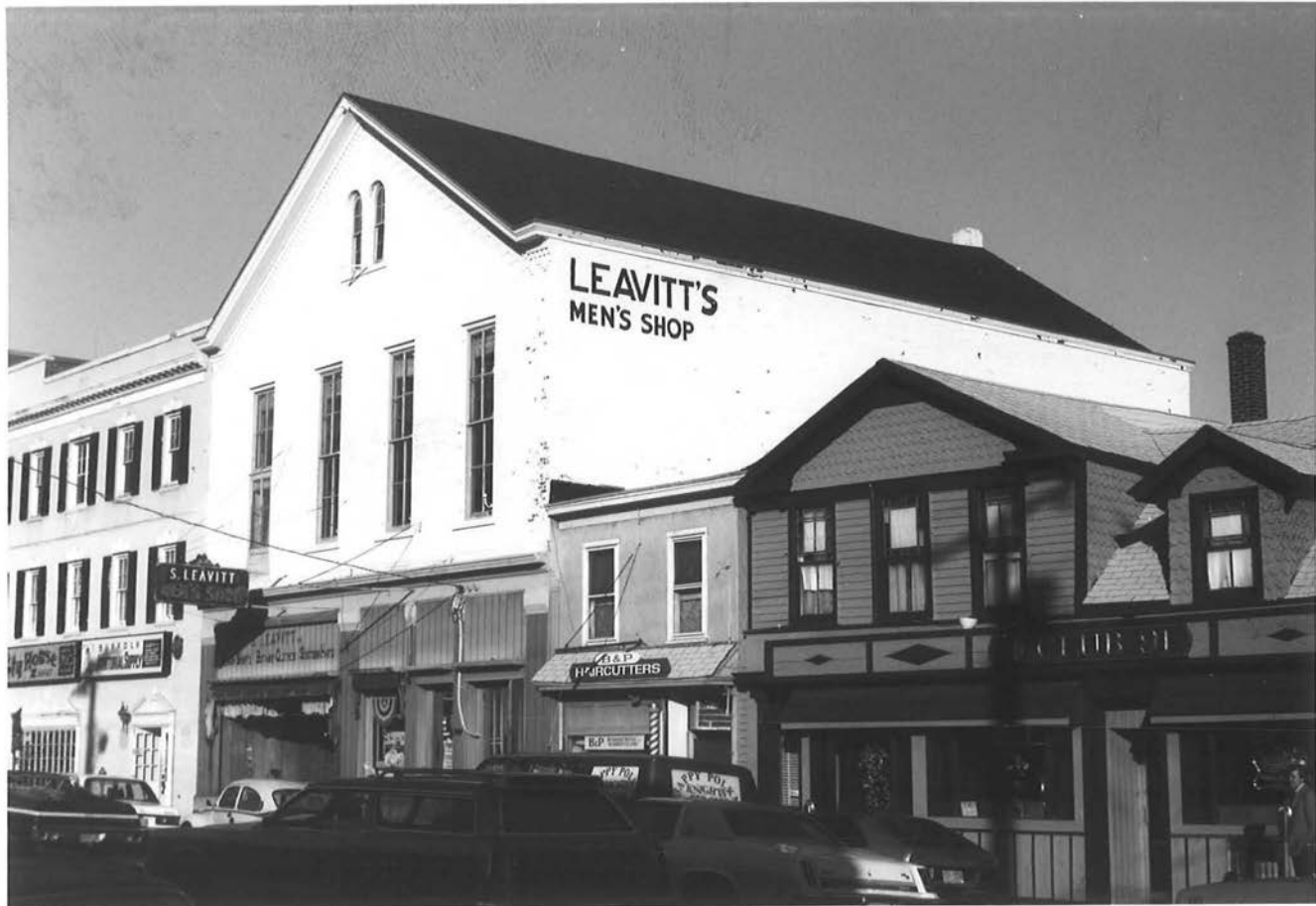
RIVERHEAD (north)	
RIVERHEAD (south)	

BOUNDARIES:

State	-----
County	-----
Town or City	-----
Incorporated Village	-----

ROADS:

Touring Route markers:	Divided highways and streets:
Interstate..... (7)	Wide mall.....
U. S. (2)	Narrow mall or barrier.....
State..... (3)	Undivided highways and streets:
County..... (4)	4 or more lanes.....
State Highway number and limit..... 8000 7	Less than 4 lanes.....
County road..... (7)	Vehicle track; trail.....
Interchange number... (8)	



Vail-Leavitt Music Hall
Peconic Avenue, Riverhead
Suffolk County, New York
Photo: A. O'Brien, Fall 1981
Neg: NYS Div. for Historic Preservation
View: Facade (west) and south elevation
#1 of 4

MUSIC HALL
CENTENNIAL
PARADE OF HITS

HELP US RESTORE IT /
BY 1991 VAIL LEAVITT
MUSIC HALL
GRAND OPENING

RIP
VAN
WALKER

Billie
Holiday
THE
PIVAFORE
1993

The
Two
Orphans
1995

ENOCH
ARDEN
1997

The
MIKADO
1997

Hazel
Kerke

DANITES

TEXAS
DURLE
JINGERS

The
Dial
PRINCE
NICOTINE
1994

CK
MOND
1992

MULDEN'S
PICNIC
1992

PECK'S
BAD
BOY

Have a
DEGAS
TALKING
PICTURES
1994

Vail-Leavitt Music Hall

Peconic Avenue, Riverhead

Suffolk County, New York

Photo: A. O'Brien, Fall 1981

Neg: NYS Div. for Historic Preservation

View: Stage area

#2 of 4



Vail-Leavitt Music Hall

Peconic Avenue, Riverhead

Suffolk County, New York

Photo: A. O'Brien, Fall 1981

Neg: NYS Div. for Historic Preservation

View: Balcony Area

#3 of 4



Vail-Leavitt Music Hall
Peconic Avenue, Riverhead
Suffolk County, New York
Photo: A. O'Brien, Fall 1981
Neg: NYS Div. for Historic
Preservation
View: Box Seats
#4 of 4

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Vail-Leavitt Music Hall
Suffolk County
NEW YORK

Working No. JUL 28 1983

Fed. Reg. Date: 2/7/84

Date Due: 8/25/83 - 9/1/83

Action: ACCEPT 8/25/83

RETURN

REJECT
Federal Agency: _____

Entered in the
National Register

- resubmission
- nomination by person or local government
- owner objection
- appeal

Substantive Review: sample request appeal NR decision

Reviewer's comments:

Recom./Criteria _____

Reviewer _____

Discipline _____

Date _____

_____ see continuation sheet

Nomination returned for: _____ technical corrections cited below
_____ substantive reasons discussed below

1. Name

2. Location

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
	Public Acquisition	Accessible	

4. Owner of Property

5. Location of Legal Description

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Has this property been determined eligible? yes no

7. Description

Condition

- excellent
- good
- fair
- deteriorated
- ruins
- unexposed

Check one

- unaltered
- altered

Check one

- original site
- moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

- summary paragraph
- completeness
- clarity
- alterations/integrity
- dates
- boundary selection

VAIL-LEAVITT MUSIC HALL

COUNCIL FOR THE VAIL-LEAVITT MUSIC HALL, INC.

A Performing Arts Center since 1881

P.O. Box 147, Riverhead, N.Y. 11901

Telephone 653-5167 or 727-4614

Harold Smith, Chair
Jean Hallock, Treasurer
Mary H. Smith, Secretary

21 November 1982:

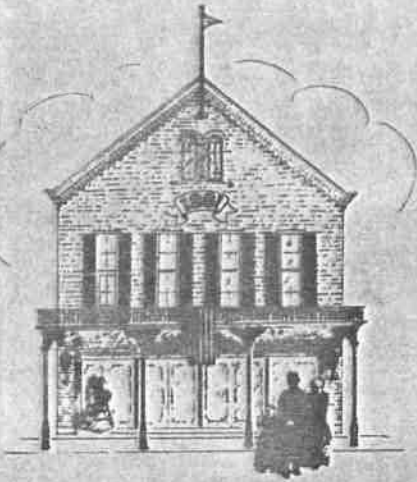
RECEIVED

NOV 26 1982

COMMISSIONER
ARTS & RECREATION

Handwritten signature/initials

*AWS
AFC
appears
affidavits*



Mr. Orin Lehman
State Historic Preservation Officer
Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau
Agency Building #1
Gov. Nelson A. Rockefeller Empire State Plaza
Albany, New York 12238

Dear Mr. Lehman:

In accordance with your letter bearing your signature and that of Ms. Ann Webster Smith, informing this Council that the Vail-Leavitt Music Hall will be considered by the Committee on the Registers for nomination to the National and State Registers of Historic Places, I wish to comment that we are elated that our 1881 Music Hall may soon be thus recognized. Furthermore, we believe that despite the current economic situation, such a listing will prompt many potential local and national corporations and foundations to aid in what we perceive as a most worthwhile project of historic and cultural benefit to our entire region.

So far as we have been able to ascertain, Music Hall is the only remaining upstairs opera house on Long Island. Furthermore, Music Hall appears to be Long Island's oldest theatre presently planned for operation as such.

Shortly after the arrival of your letter, we received word from the New York State Urban Development Corporation that that agency will finance a \$4,150 structural analysis of our 101-year-old building, and is retaining our architect, Donald A. Denis, to supervise the contractors. The analysis will provide for a study of the proposed renovation, an assessment of structural ramifications, and special recommendations to U. D. C. which can be used as a basis for estimating cost of construction. The Project Manager is Mr. Owen Masters of U. D. C.'s New York City office, in case you should wish more information.

Thank you again for your consideration of Music Hall, and that of Mr. Austin O'Brien and his staff. You are all most helpful in our mutual efforts to restore Riverhead's Music Hall as a leading cultural attraction and an historic point of interest in this part of Long Island.

Yours sincerely,

Handwritten signature: Harold Smith

Partially Supported by New York State Council on the Arts, by Suffolk County Office of Cultural Affairs, and by Private Grants

SUPPORT THE VAIL-LEAVITT MUSIC HALL RESTORATION

TOWN OF RIVERHEAD PLANNING BOARD
200 Howell Avenue
Riverhead, New York 11901-2596



MILES H. FAIRLEY, *Chairman*
ROBERT HODGE, *Secretary*
MAURIE SEMEL
JESSIE TOMLINSON
RICHARD LARSEN

December 3, 1982

Mr. Orin Lehman
State Historic Preservation Officer
Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau
Agency Building #1
Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller Empire State Plaza
Albany, NY 12238

RE: Vail-Leavitt Music Hall
Peconic Avenue
Riverhead
Suffolk County

*AWS
AREC
appro
action*

Dear Mr. Lehman:

This Board was very pleased to hear that the Vail-Leavitt Music Hall is being considered by the Committee on the Registers of the New York State Board for Historic Preservation for nomination to the National and State Registers of Historic Places. We wish to voice our strongest support on this matter and encourage the Committee to approve this nomination.

Very truly yours,

PLANNING BOARD

Miles H. Fairley
Miles H. Fairley,
Chairman

MHF:js