

# **ALVIN T SMITH HOUSE AND PROPERTY: REPORT TO BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF FRIENDS OF HISTORIC FOREST GROVE**

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Following the Spring 2020 Friends of Historic Forest Grove Board Retreat, the AT Smith Ad Hoc Committee was created under the direction of Mary Jo Morelli. The committee's directive is to develop a clear recommendation regarding the future of the AT Smith house. The original directive required the committee to make a recommendation to the Board by September 2020. However, the timing was changed due to the impact of the Coronavirus. The end of the calendar year 2020 was established as the goal for submission of a final report to the Board of Directors.

The process of developing a plan requires a candid assessment of both the past and the present in order to assure the future of the Smith House and property. Many perspectives contributed to this report and recommendations. Specific members with special knowledge were asked to participate but many others were interviewed for perspective, but no official tally was kept, nor was one necessary.

During the past 30 years, there were changes within the industry that have altered perspective and approach to what used to be called Historic Preservation. The meaning of the term historic preservation has been altered. However, for the sake of clarity, certain recurring terminology was retained throughout this report. The committee tried to address these changes in their discussions and final recommendations.

1. Preservation will retain and repair existing features and character.
2. Restoration will focus on the property in a certain time period.
3. Renovation is no longer used in the Secretary of the Interior's Guideline
4. Current terminology of Rehabilitation and Reconstruction would not retain the integrity of the Smith house and property.

If you are not familiar with the history of the AT Smith House while it has been in the care of FHFG, we recommend reading the timeline in the Appendix.

Members of the Ad Hoc Committee:

Mary Jo Morelli, chair

Terri Durfee Erskine, Kerry VanderZanden, Tom Beck, Amy Tracewell

ATS House & Property Committee (not listed above)

Marcus Hazelett, Gary Eddings, David Morelli, Kathy Mandis, Carol Taylor

## **II. GOAL**

### **A. The AT Smith House and Property shall:**

1. Retain the historic integrity as an educational heritage facility through a combined approach of preservation and restoration focusing on the years between 1854 – 1874 as the period of significance.
  - a. The house design, architecture and historical programming will most closely represent the period of significance.
  - b. Elements of that period remain and documentation exists to support a combined approach of both preservation and restoration.
2. Engage visitors and relay an understanding of the character and motivation of people during the period of significance utilizing living history and educational strategies.
3. Encourage visitors to explore a wide cross-section of perspectives of how, why and when historical events occurred on the West Tualatin Plains, prior to house construction.
4. Explore and incorporate the Native American habitation of Wapato Lake and West Tualatin Plains on the Smith property.
5. Investigate events that influenced development of the larger Forest Grove area to enhance our understanding of the history of Forest Grove.
6. Develop and maintain programming that is simple and functional to enhance the guest experience through authentic representations of the past with educational programming:
  - a. Signage
  - b. educational displays
  - c. demonstrations, guided tours, character portrayals

### **B. Friends of Historic Forest Grove shall support these goals:**

1. Commit to training in the critical area of Capital Campaign Fundraising
2. Identify current funding resources
3. Explore new and recurring funding opportunities.
4. Build awareness of the history of the house on its original location as a crossroads and advance local and county knowledge through regional networks.
5. Develop awareness of the evolving geographical and cultural networks of the pre-settlement, missionary, settlement eras.
6. Develop awareness of the interdependence of ethnographic groups.
7. Work with institutions to share knowledge and teaching opportunities. Possible resources are:
  - a. Oregon State University Archeology Department
  - b. Clatsop County Community College Vocational Skill Department – Historic Preservation and Restoration.
  - c. University of Oregon School of Architecture, Historic Preservation Program
  - d. Grand Ronde Cultural Center
  - e. Pacific University

- f. Oregon Historical Society
- g. Five Oaks Museum
- 8. Consider small educational buildings, such as the ones at Fernhill Wetlands, as funding becomes available to enhance the visitor experience.
- 9. Consider future development of a visitor center after structural preservation and restoration are complete.

### **III: PROCESS**

#### **A. Restoration Continuum - House and Grounds**

1. Improve and update landscaping and complete exterior repairs that will secure the house and allow removal of outer fencing.
2. Secure funding and complete foundation repairs and replace sill beam as needed.
3. Maintain Abigail's garden and expand and improve groomed areas for picnicking and casual visits.
4. Continue grounds cleanup, including improvement of orchard and maintain weed control.
5. Work with the City to improve Park land by contouring of soil and removal of logs east of our lot line.
6. Continue restoration of the house with a prioritized list which includes
  - a. south facade window and door
  - b. west exterior wall and south (former porch) area
  - c. Improve restroom facility with a vault style facility
  - d. improved water wash station for guests
  - e. door and window restoration
  - f. restore interior to historic period
7. Seek grants for the work outlined above.

#### **B. Establish and solidify partnerships**

1. Develop bequest campaign for estate gifts as well as major gifts from local philanthropists.
2. Enhance connections with school districts, Pacific University and other partners to educate students and the community about life as an early pioneer in Oregon.
3. Identify revenue streams from historical reenactments, potentially revitalize Founder's Day.

#### **C. Build an Endowment and Raise Capital for future growth**

1. to raise funds necessary to accomplish restoration.
2. Raise an endowment of \$1,000,000 which would allow an annual revenue of \$40,000 in part for ongoing maintenance.
3. When possible fund
  - a. paid part-time executive director,
  - b. professional bookkeeping,
  - c. advisors and consultants.

## Appendix: FHFG AT Smith House and Property Timeline

**A. 1991:** a newspaper article announced an administrative annexation of the house and some of the property into the Taylor Industrial Park on the southern edge of Forest Grove. After many meetings and advocacy from the Historic Preservation League of Oregon (now Restore Oregon), the plan for a Metro Garbage Transfer Station was redirected to the current B Street site and the developer returned the 2.2 acre site into Zurcher family control.

**B. 2001:** Following the death of several elders of the Zurcher family and dysfunction within the remaining family including a meth lab in the Smith house basement, the Zurcher Trust was placed under a State appointed legal Conservator. A phone call to FHFG stating that he was trying to locate the house for a fire department practice burn propelled FHFG into action and a purchase agreement for the house and 2.2 acres was eventually agreed upon.

**C. 2002 – 2004:** Formation of the Committee to Preserve the A T Smith Property, CPATSP, resulted.

1. Work began in earnest. Fundraising started and thousands of dollars in donations were received.
2. A private party came forward to lend the money for the purchase to move forward.

**D. 2005 – 2009:** CPATSP under overview by the FHFG board, raised funds, found the private lenders and received grants that culminated in a purchase agreement and a flurry of activity.

1. A Historic Structure Report (HSR), completed in August of 2007, evaluated the conditions at that time and provided a roadmap of recommendations for both the short term and long term. Referring back to the HSR, the work done since that time has supported the longevity of the structure.

2. Many grants, donations and fundraisers later, the debt was paid to lenders and FHFG gained title to the house and 2.2 acres.

3. A worn out committee was disbanded after all lingering grants were fulfilled.

**E. 2010–2012:** These were lean years for the project as an economic recession tightened access to grants and donations, but FHFG survived those years when many similar groups closed.

1. Many things on the 'to do' list were remaining.
2. Another phone call at the end of 2011 brought a new challenge and a dream come true when the Taylor Industrial Park developer offered to sell us 3.3 acres to the east.
3. That property would resolve a lingering difficulty; it would give FHFG direct access to Elm Street.

4. A purchase agreement was signed in April 2012 for the 3.3 acres with the first loan payment due in Dec. 2012. Non-secured loans were taken from FHFG membership to meet operational expenses and debts.

**F. 2013 –14:** With private lenders in place FHFG was once again raising money to pay debts and remain a viable organization.

1. One of FHFG's first actions was to obtain Property Tax Relief as a 503(c)3 organization.
2. During this time discussions began with the City of Forest Grove to expand their park system.
3. With no southern Forest Grove parks but a growing community, it was determined that if the Taylor Industrial Park C, C & R's were revised to include recreational use the City would consider purchasing the 3.3 acres. Filed with Washington County March 2013 #2013-17100.
4. Property Tax Exemption appeal made in favor of FHFG May 25, 2013. Refund estimated at \$6025.
5. In November FHFG received a grant of \$10,000 from Kinsman Fdtn cover loan and operational expenses.
6. This was accomplished after many months of negotiations! The adjacent 'east lawn' as we called it was transferred to City of Forest Grove ownership and all lenders were paid. December 2014 ended with a sigh and money in the bank once again.

**G. 2015 – 2017:** A renewed energy took over the board and the AT Smith Revival Committee was formed.

1. Designation as one of Oregon's Most Endangered Structures led to new relationships and grants.
2. The ATS Vision Committee was formed and a Capital Campaign Committee also began work.
3. Preservation architect [REDACTED] was hired and the resulting report for the property detailed an extensive rehabilitation of the Smith house. This would require extensive elimination of distinctive elements of the house which was at odds with the Board's preservation of the structure.
4. A Capital Campaign assessment done by consultant Katherine Crooker was completed with the result that before moving into a Capital Campaign there was work to be done internally within the organization and there needed to be an agreement on what would be done with the structure of the house.
5. Disagreement within the board over the proposed structural changes led to several board members and volunteers resigning.
6. In spite of the emotions, the word preserve and retaining the integrity of the house were paramount to the overall board. All board decisions hinged upon the educational mission of FHFG and transitioning the property as a tourist and event destination sited adjacent to a city park.

**H. 2018 – 2020:** Organizational re-structuring with updated bylaws, documented procedures and internal restructuring over this time consumed the energy of the FHFG board with the goal being to

1. Position FHFG to begin a Capital Campaign and
2. Implement a revised vision and goal for AT Smith House and Property.
3. Work with City of Forest Grove in park planning and development that maintained the view of Mt Hood and the Territorial road.
4. The approach favored throughout each phase has focused on retaining the structural integrity of the house and property.
5. The [REDACTED] Plan, while striving to maintain outward appearance, did not contribute to telling the broader history of the region.
6. Other plans have believed that the structure has its own story to tell, but have failed to focus on strategies for maintaining an authentic story of a cross-section of people.
7. The 2020 Plan as outlined, strives to retain that relevance through acceptable preservation methodology, while incorporating the best applications of modern “living history” practices. It will honor the history of the West Tualatin Plain and Forest Grove.
  
8. **December 2020:** It is essential to fulfill our obligation to the faith placed in FHFG by the Kinsman Foundation.
  1. The Kinsman Foundation insisted upon time extensions to a grant awarded in 2018.
  2. When matching grants were not received, Kinsman allowed an amendment to the original fumigation grant and instead we did a Wood Destroying Organism (WDO) evaluation and treatment.
  3. Repairs during the painting process were also approved to be paid from the Kinsman Fdtn grant.
  4. A stabilization plan by a structural engineer has been completed
  5. Foundation’s First completed the stabilization plan on Dec. 7, 2020 and approved by the City of Forest Grove.