



# FAIRFAX COUNTY PARK AUTHORITY

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# M E M O R A N D U M



**TO:** Chris Caperton, Laurel Hill Planning Coordinator  
Department of Planning and Zoning

**FROM:** Kirk Holley, Manager  
Special Projects Branch

**DATE:** November 28, 2007

**SUBJECT:** Comments on Laurel Hill House Preservation and Development Options  
Frazier Associates Historic Structures Report

A meeting of the Laurel Hill House Oversight Group was held on October 30 to discuss preliminary findings by Frazier Associates in their work to prepare a Historic Structures Report (HSR) for that house. In addition, a meeting was held on November 6 to expand the Park Authority's understanding of this work. In response to your request we have provided comments about the potential treatment and use of the structure.

## Overview and Background

The primary purpose of the HSR is to research, evaluate and document the historic background, documents, traditions of place and building fabric to determine a building's physical, architectural and use history. Existing conditions analysis is a key component in the treatment plan phase of the HSR. Both the use and the construction type of the building must be considered to evaluate reasonableness or rehabilitation and cost. A treatment plan should include realistic use options considering the building context, construction type classification and use classification. The latter two have specific definitions and requirements under the building code. Fairfax County follows the Commonwealth of Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC) which is founded in the International Building Code (IBC) and has three parts of which the first two are of particular importance in this instance:

- Part I: Virginia Construction Code  
<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpwes/publications/2003vcc.pdf>
- Part II: Virginia Rehabilitation Code  
<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpwes/publications/2003vrc.pdf>

The Fairfax County Park Authority has an historic preservation policy to to guides decision makers in the appropriate preservation practices and application of options based on preservation objectives of the project. We also rely on the guidelines established by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. These have been provided in Attachment 1 for reference.

### Laurel Hill House: Specific Comments

1. A linkage between the HSR and the HSR Treatment Plan must be made to the Laurel Hill House Gardens Cultural Landscape Report and Treatment Plan. The basic issue is that the 'period of significance' for the present cultural landscape, due to the extant garden complex, is the Lorton Progressive Era (ref. Lorton National Register: <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpz/laurelhill/natlregister/nrntext.pdf>) and, thus, what period of significance should the house represent (Colonial? Progressive Era? Other)? A discussion of having the house and cultural landscape (which includes hardscape features) from the same period of significance vs alternative periods of significance as well as the interpretive objectives of each warrants merit.
2. Terms such as 'Restoration,' 'Preservation,' 'Rehabilitation,' and 'Reconstruction' have different technical definitions and are not interchangeable. The decisions about how the structure is to be used and preserved impact which term of preservation should be applied. In this case the so-called option of 'Restoration of Original House' [Wm. Lindsay period of significance] appears to be the most appropriate context if the primary focus is to physically represent a "18<sup>th</sup> Virginia plantation of a person of modest means" thru the visual representation of the house from that period however it is unclear whether it would be a restoration, rehabilitation or reconstruction. It does not necessarily answer the question of most appropriate use or building construction. The Policy and Code considerations include:

#### **Policy**

- A. Generally, it is better to preserve than repair, better to repair than restore, better to restore than reconstruct.
- B. Usually, it is better to retain genuine old work of several periods than to arbitrarily "restore" the whole by new work to its aspect at a single period.

#### **Building Codes**

- A. What is the existing structure composed of? What are the materials? Do they need to be recreated? Are they flammable? What are the proposed loads?
- B. Will this be publicly accessible? Will it be used for meetings? Storage? A museum? Offices? Will it just be a landscape feature? Do we need to accommodate more than 50 people?
- C. Virginia USBC Parts I and II.

The Policy allows for some flexibility. It states:

“The above guidelines are not intended to be dogmatic and inflexible, but rather to provide the Park Authority a firm foundation for its own work. They are broad enough

that other points of view can be accommodated, but they are specific enough that the difference is clear between good and bad preservation.“

The Building Codes are less flexible. A decision to have public access (house museum for example) and not just a non publicly-accessible landscape structure (of a period of significance other than house) will trigger building code requirements that could destroy the historic house fabric and the very reason for the project. After all the structural modifications, MEP installs and additions, fire code requirements, ADA access, and so on, is it a ‘restoration’ when the building is of practically all new material with a few original pieces placed here and there? The USBC Part II Chapter 10 it reads:

**1001.2 Report.** The code official shall be permitted to require that an historic building undergoing repair, alteration or change of occupancy be investigated and evaluated by an RDP or other qualified person or agency as a condition of determining compliance with this code.

1001.2 suggest *some* leeway in code issues, but if you read the entire Part II document (13 pages) it is rather specific to code compliance.

### Other Options

We also recommend consideration of a 6<sup>th</sup> option under the **Proposed Treatment Options- ‘Selective Demolition to Foundations and Preserving Foundations [with the addition of an extensive interpretive treatment plan]’**. The model for this preservation and interpretive approach is Mount Air Cultural Resource Park. We believe this option is viable since the HSR clearly notes correctly “the house has deteriorated due to age and water infiltration and there has been a loss of historic fabric due to alterations...the 20<sup>th</sup> century alterations are extensive and given the loss of historic fabric...” We question the statement “the house has significant structural integrity to merit consideration for restoration... although the structure is not without faults.” It appears many portions of the house are structurally unsound and unstable and if placed in the context of modern building codes (USBC) would be considered structurally unsound warranting condemnation.

### Conclusion

It is our opinion that the existing Laurel Hill house structure is in very poor condition and renovation/restoration of its original configuration or some variation including more recent additions will be very costly. As options are considered they should list both the proposed building construction type as well as the proposed use type as defined by the USBC. An

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assembly use (Type A) or even a business use (Type B – which permits some public use) is likely to be in direct conflict with a proposed “restoration” of the original Lindsey House making it a very costly project and perhaps requiring construction that would not represent the original house in any way recognizable to authorities, such as the National Register for Historic Places. Public meeting options exist at the nearby South County Secondary School, the Laurel Hill Golf Course Club House, the Springhill Clubhouse and potentially at the proposed redeveloped ReUse Area. If building occupancy is an important criterion to justify renovation then residential use should be considered. A list of reasonable options for this project should include demolition and interpretation.

We appreciate the opportunity to review the preliminary HSR and look forward to continuing discussions about the future of the Laurel Hill House and Gardens.

Attachment: Fairfax County Park Authority Policy 205 Historic Preservation  
Appendix 12 National Trust for Historic Preservation Guidelines

cc: David Bowden, Director, Planning and Development Division  
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## **Policy 205 Historic Restoration**

Following guidelines established by the National Trust for Historic Preservation\* and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines\*, the Park Authority policy on historic restoration requires that treatment of cultural resources with structural integrity shall be performed according to the following philosophical principles:

- A. Generally, it is better to preserve than repair, better to repair than restore, better to restore than reconstruct.
- B. Usually, it is better to retain genuine old work of several periods than to arbitrarily "restore" the whole by new work to its aspect at a single period.
- C. Every reasonable care and expense is justified to approximate in new work the materials, methods and quality of old construction.
- D. Modern uses should be consistent with the preservation of the building's values.

\* See Appendix 15, Guidelines for Archaeological Investigations in Virginia, p. A-100; Appendix 16, Guidelines and Procedures for Historic Collections Management, p. A-117; and Appendix 14, Curatorial Care of Archaeological Objects, p. A-71.

## **Appendix 12 National Trust for Historic Preservation Guidelines**

In any attempt to reconcile these divergent claims and motives for preservation and restoration there must be an informed and experienced guide. The following make up a brief guide:

1. The restoration of old and historic buildings requires the professional knowledge and special skill of trained and competent architects, historians, archaeologists, landscape architects, museumologists and experienced craftsmen.
2. No final decision as to a course of restorative action should be taken until (a) reasonable efforts have been made to exhaust the archaeological and documentary evidence as to the form and gradual changes of the monument, and (b) efforts that have been made to secure the record of such evidence, by drawings, photographs, notes and transcripts should be kept, and originals or copies made available to students in appropriate central libraries and where possible, published. In no case should evidence offered by the structure itself be

destroyed or covered up until it has been fully recorded. Sample specimens of physical evidence should also be preserved. All changes proposed should be studied in drawing and specification form to ensure thorough communication between laymen, architect and craftsmen.

3. In the treatment of surviving old buildings it is generally better to preserve than repair, better to repair than to restore, better to restore than to reconstruct. It is also advisable, before initiating a project, to consider carefully the possibility that once begun it may lead to "creeping reconstruction." There is the possibility that repair may lead to restoration and thence to reconstruction. Reconstruction is frequently acceptable and advisable if the entire structure is not available; it is deplorable when a structure survives in its entirety.

4. It is ordinarily better to retain genuine old work of several periods rather than to arbitrarily "restore" the whole, by new work, to its aspect at a single period. This applies to work of periods later than those now admired, provided it represents a genuine creative effort, or is a part of the life's history of the building. In no case should our own artistic preferences or prejudices lead us to modify, on aesthetic grounds, work of a past period representing other tastes.

Truth is not only stranger than fiction, it is more varied and more interesting. However, it should be recognized that it is sometimes essential to remove later work in order to obtain evidence of the structure pertaining to an earlier and more important period. No surviving old work should be removed or rebuilt for structural reasons if any reasonable additional trouble and expense would suffice to preserve it.

5. Every reasonable additional care and expense is justified to approximate in new work, the materials, methods and quality of old construction. But new work should be permanently identified and great discretion should be used in simulating old materials with modern materials. If old materials from other buildings are used in a restoration, their source and use should be permanently recorded. The use in an appropriate manner of old materials and details of the period and character is commendable when those materials are otherwise doomed to loss or destruction and their use is thereby an act of preservation. In securing materials for restoration work there should be no demolition or removal of buildings where there is a reasonable prospect that they will remain intact or as historic ruins on their own site. Where missing features are to be replaced without sufficient evidence as to their own original form, careful study should be made of other surviving examples of the period and region and precedents found for the replacement.

6. The nature of preservation and restoration work is such that it generally involves more time than would be expected in new construction. Many of the most important problems are unsuspected until the fabric is opened up.

7. When for educational or preservation purposes it is deemed necessary for a building to be removed to another site, its restoration should be guided by sound restoration principles as outlined above.

8. Complete reconstruction for educational purposes should also follow the above principles, with the caveat that any but a reconstruction based on the most substantial of evidence is a sham.

9. When an historic building survives into modern times, fortunately in its original use, it is important to retain all its principle features with only minor modification for modern use. When an historic building ceases to be used for its original purpose other uses should be sought to perpetuate its life.

Only modern uses should be adopted which are consistent with the preservation of the building's outstanding values. In such cases, limited compromise with restoration standards may be justified, especially in the interior, in order to obtain such conveniences as are necessary to modern life.

Since our needs and capabilities are always expanding, important or interesting features that cannot be restored at the moment should be covered over and protected to await future treatment.

Only a limited number of historical buildings, and even exceptional buildings, are important enough to be preserved solely for exhibition. These buildings must be cared for and restored with the utmost fidelity to the highest professional restoration standards.

The above guidelines are not intended to be dogmatic and inflexible, but rather to provide the Authority a firm foundation for its own work. They are broad enough that other points of view can be accommodated, but they are specific enough that the difference is clear between good and bad preservation.

I see these guidelines as forming the underpinnings of one of the best and most admirable programs in the nation, and certainly in the metropolitan area. As the parklands themselves preserve and protect natural resources, so historic preservation protects manmade resources. By means of historic preservation, we can better maintain the cultural ecology of our community and help to create an environment that is a joy to live in. As this environment grows and changes its cultural ecology must be balanced. The evidences of our past must be preserved to explain and enrich both the past and the present.