

LAUREL HILL HOUSE STUDY KICK-OFF MEETING  
AUGUST 23, 2007  
9:00 A.M.  
LAUREL HILL SECURITY OFFICE, 8515 SILVERBROOK ROAD

MEETING NOTES

**WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS**

- Fairfax County Department of Planning & Zoning
- Frazier Associates
- Committee Members

Chris Caperton welcomed the group to the meeting and began the introductions. A list of the meeting attendees is included at the end of this document.

It was noted that residents of Spring Hill have been invited to participate (through Dale Johnson) and that one resident was interested but was unable to attend this meeting. The principal at South County Secondary School, Dale Rumberger, and Jeffrey Schneider, a social studies teacher have both been informed of the study. Bill Crosby at the Virginia Department of Historic Resources has been invited to participate but will be unable to attend meetings. Staff will keep VDHR informed and request comment on the study. It was also noted that a descendant of the Lindsay family (Marilou Smith Ninowsky) has been in touch with staff, and DPZ will ensure that this descendant stays informed as the study progresses.

History Commissioner Gretchen Bulova was unable to attend because of vacation plans but has confirmed her interest in participating.

**GENERAL SCOPE OF WORK AND DESCRIPTION OF STUDY**

- Architectural/Historic Structure Assessment and Strategies for Preservation, Interpretive History

Leanna Hush of DPZ introduced the handouts provided. These are now posted on the website:

1. List of the committee members,
2. Aerial photograph of the adaptive reuse site,
3. A sketch of the original house and information excerpted from *The Lindsays of America*,
4. A map of the site from the National Register nomination and related descriptions,
5. Photographs of the exterior of the Laurel Hill House, taken on 8/22/07.

The general concepts behind the scope of the project were discussed. The Laurel Hill House is listed on the National Register and was the home of Major William Lindsay,

who served in the Virginia Militia during the American Revolution. The house most recently (in the 1970s) served as a home for the Superintendent of the prison. The house has been vacant since that time.

Frazier Associates has been hired to prepare an Architectural and Historic Structure Assessment of the house and to develop four strategies for preservation and interpretation of the house. From those four options the committee will help to choose two for further analysis by Frazier Associates.

Frazier will provide a description of the house illustrated with plans, perform research on the history of the house and its significance, provide a sequence of construction, and recommend options for reuse.

As background, Leanna Hush briefly described the requirement that VDHR, the Lorton Heritage Society, and the Fairfax County Architectural Review Board review, per the Memorandum of Agreement, any undertakings related to structures. In addition, DPZ will release a Request for Proposal (RFP) for a Master Developer for the adaptive reuse site (former reformatory and penitentiary site) of which the Laurel Hill House is a part. It is envisioned that this study will provide information and recommendations to that upcoming process.

Bill Frazier provided a brief background about Frazier Associates and then provided general observations about the house after their first visit on Wednesday 8/22/07. The team will use rectified digital photography in their assessment of the house. Frazier will bring a structural engineer to the site in September to perform additional research. As part of the project Frazier will identify costs for replacement and reconstruction options.

These are initial observations that may change based on further research:

- Overall the structure is extremely deteriorated; the porch is not structurally sound and there are several places in the first floor with holes in the floor. The staircase to the second floor has partially collapsed and a ladder is needed to reach the second floor. If the house were to be taken back to the original structure it would require new materials due to the deterioration and lack of the existing materials.
- The majority of the additions to the house (right wing and back wing) appear to date to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and perhaps were done by Washington, D.C. lawyer Howe Totten, who kept the home as a second residence prior to its purchase by the Federal Government as part of the D.C. prison property.
- Portions of the skeleton structure of the original house exist as well as the original stone foundation. It was noted that these are salvageable.
- Within the original skeleton the doorways, windows, wall treatments, and chimneys, where present, all appear to be newer additions. Few if any original exterior features are present. The original stone chimneys were either demolished or replaced.
- Any future reuse of the house should perhaps focus on a particular period of significance; the late 18<sup>th</sup> century farmhouse, the early 20<sup>th</sup> century second home, or

the relationship of the house to the prison in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The committee can assist with input.

- Frazier noted that some original beams and support structures had newer support pieces attached as a result of termite or other deterioration. Frazier will need to examine the full extent of termite or insect damage.
- Two windows on the second floor appear to be a different style than the other windows in the house and may be original to the first farmhouse.

### **ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION**

A roundtable discussion was held to capture recommendations and ideas from the group for the house and site (Number 6 on the Agenda). The following was identified:

- Preservation and re-use - the grounds should tell a story
- Maintain the historic 18<sup>th</sup> century core – the farmhouse is a unique representation of an “ordinary” class family within Fairfax County (as compared to other historic plantation upper-class homes such as Mount Vernon, Woodlawn, etc.). It could represent the way of life for a particular time period (furnished modestly, period house museum)
- Adjacent Lindsay Cemetery:
  - Locate additional gravesites and confirm the veracity of the two marked graves
  - Put together the cemetery piece of the story for public use and historic interpretation
  - Concern about the existing road acting as a barrier/separation between the house and cemetery; need to have a comprehensive treatment for the site
  - Contact the DAR about any future work on the gravesites and to keep them informed of the study
- Concern about where parking and access will be located. Discussion about uniqueness of the driveway and entrance features to the site.
- Restore the adjacent gardens and make them part of the overall experience, do not isolate the house from the garden
- Use as an education piece for school children, beginning of larger tour, welcome center, visitor center
- Picnic areas, part of larger Laurel Hill Park, receptions in gardens and on site with house as backdrop
- Don't want to just see the foundation of the original house – want to see something substantial
- Possible re-use as a park employee residence
- Fairfax County Park Authority typically manages historic structures, the Board of Supervisors does not have the same mechanisms in place to maintain historic structures

- Committee should dialogue with the BOS because we are breaking new ground with the possible re-use
- Ramsey House in Alexandria is an example of what can be done – a visitor center
- Consider use of low-impact vehicles (golf carts) to traverse the area
- Consider archaeological resources for the larger area – perhaps dig a builder’s trench for further investigation. It should be noted that the scope of work for this project does not include provisions for cultural investigations of the site or carbon-dating of features within the house.
- Possible permanent exhibit of the progression of development of the house through photos and displays
- Maintain contact with Bill Crosby and VDHR staff
- Property is planned for public use (heritage resource area) and under control of the Board of Supervisors
- Focal point to adjacent adaptive reuse area
- Location just off of (permanent) cross-county trail location
- Consider Section 106 responsibilities if State or Federal funds are used
- Consider connections to George Washington as well as Scots-Irish history of the house

#### Other Comments

- A comment was made about the lack of funds spent on the house as recommended in the 2004 building survey prepared for the county. Applied Management Engineering, Inc. (AME) conducted visual inspections of all (approximately 90) Laurel Hill buildings and structures in March - June of 2004. The AME report recommended weatherization and stabilization efforts for the Laurel Hill House and estimated these costs to be \$59,000 in 2005 and \$29,000 in 2009. Some weatherization efforts took place in 2005, including patching a significant portion of the roof covering the original house structure. While the AME inventory identified a variety of house deficiencies, many of the proposed improvements to the house (e.g., replacing concrete foundation walls and replacing the porch) are more appropriate in the context of the future plans for the house, i.e., the current historic structure assessment and recommendations. See last bullet for near-term improvements.
- Several newspaper articles were mentioned related to the costs of historic preservation for Oak Hill, Salona and Mt. Gilead. Copies of these articles were provided to Frazier Associates.
- Questions related to the scope and inclusion of archaeological work at the site. Archaeological work is not included in the scope of work.

- ↪ The consultant noted some specific deterioration in the house due to one hole in the roof and other problems created by earlier water damage. DPZ staff will investigate and make near-term repairs as needed to allow safe access and to prevent further deterioration.

The group then briefly discussed the following roles and responsibilities, and the upcoming schedule.

### **ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES**

- ↪ County Staff – DPZ will manage the study, set agendas, take meeting notes, provide website updates, and include other county agencies, as needed.
- ↪ Consultants – The consultants can only provide findings to, and respond to questions from, the County. Please direct questions to County staff.
- ↪ Citizen / Staff Committee – Provide help and value by
  - Communicating desires, issues, and perspectives to the study
  - Reacting to and commenting on the study findings
  - Providing feedback on the options developed for future use of the house and property

### **SCHEDULE (TENTATIVE)**

- ↪ SEPTEMBER 2007
  - Frazier Associates continue work at site
  - Site Tour for Committee (**Note that this may not include the interior of the house due to safety concerns**)
- ↪ OCTOBER 2007
  - OCTOBER 24<sup>TH</sup> OR 25<sup>TH</sup>-COMMITTEE MEETING #2
  - Frazier Associates will present research and findings, and suggest strategies
  - Committee to provide feedback
  - Goal: Two options for further study
- ↪ NOVEMBER 2007
  - NOVEMBER 28<sup>TH</sup> OR 29<sup>TH</sup> – COMMITTEE MEETING #3
  - Frazier Associates will present detailed analysis on 2 options
  - Analysis will include construction costs, zoning information etc.
  - Goal: Committee feedback on the final two options
- ↪ FINAL REPORT TO DPZ AND COMMITTEE BY END OF 2007

Meeting adjourned at approximately 11:00 am.

**Meeting Attendees 8/23/07**

Chris Caperton, Laurel Hill Project Coordinator, Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ)

Linda Blank, Historic Preservation Planner, DPZ

Leanna Hush, Laurel Hill Planner, DPZ

Aimee Wells, Fairfax County Park Authority Cultural Resource Management and Protection Section

Bob Betsold, Fairfax County Park Authority

Thomas Howard, Fairfax County Board of Supervisors (Mount Vernon District office)

Irma Clifton, Lorton Heritage Society, Fairfax County History Commission

Neal McBride, Lorton Heritage Society, Laurel Hill Task Force, SRC

Kenena Spalding

Willie Evans, Jr., Lorton Heritage Society

Bill Frazier, Frazier Associates

Carter Green, Frazier Associates

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