



To: Park District of Oak Park, Illinois

Proposal for Pavilion – Auxiliary Event Space

Prepared by the Pleasant Home Foundation

June 4, 2009

Event Pavilion for Pleasant Home

Introduction & Background:

For nearly 20 years, the Pleasant Home Foundation has served as steward to historic Pleasant Home, overseeing over \$1 million in restoration thus far and leading efforts to name the site as a National Historic Landmark.

As a National Historic Landmark, the home is first and foremost a historic site of significant stature, welcoming visitors from around the world. The National Trust for Historic Preservation, the world's leading authority on preservation and historic sites, has recommended that historic homes look beyond tours as a means to support themselves, suggesting rental of the properties for appropriate events. This win-win situation allows a greater number of people to experience the site and brings much needed revenue to support the operations and maintenance of the house.

This has been the strategy of the Foundation. In our community and because it is publicly owned, the Foundation has encouraged a broad use of the home for community events, educational activities, and private gatherings. Income from the rental events provides much needed revenue, as much as one-half the operating costs of the Foundation.

This has resulted in wear and tear on the house that is now beginning to impact the fabric of the house. In an effort to both achieve the goals of keeping the house open and available, the feasibility of providing an auxiliary event space in the form of a semi-permanent tent has been investigated. The foundation is now seeking the approval of the Board of Trustees of the Park District of Oak Park to pursue this objective.

Over the past winter, the Park District and the community underwent a process to develop a Master Plan for Mills Park. A number of public meetings and focus groups meeting were held. The pavilion was part of the discussion and appears in the Master Plan approved by the Park District in December 2008. The Master Plan recognizes that Pleasant Home is a historic set-piece within the park and most people involved in the process were supportive of the idea of creating auxiliary space for the protection of the Home. A copy of the Mills Park Master Plan is attached.

How this would work – Public/Private Partnership:

A competitive request for proposals would be issued inviting vendors to donate a pavilion structure and provide all engineering, assembly, and maintenance. In exchange for this donation, the winner bidder would be the exclusive rental

equipment vendor for the Home. The Pleasant Home Foundation already know of one vendor who would be interested in such a partnership because that vendor approached the Foundation to suggest it.

The pavilion would be connected to the main house via the sun porch on the southwest side. The house would still be used for pre-function activities and the Foundation would continue to rent the facility per current rental guidelines. All tables, chairs and equipment normally used for rentals would be stored in the pavilion and taken out per the renters' requirements.

Financial Considerations:

Costs to Foundation:

There is no financial cost to the Foundation or the Park District of Oak Park. It would be an investment of the vendor with the expectation of return on the rental of equipment and accoutrements. Insurance coverage would be the same as if rentals were in the house. Repair of damages to pavilion would be incurred by the vendor.

Costs to Vendor:

The vendor will incur the financial investment to erect and maintain the pavilion structure, estimated (depending on design) to be \$100,000+. Therefore, an agreement that will extend over a set number of years is most beneficial, though initial discussions have not required a set time limit. The vendor will not incur the investment to then take down the structure after a season or one year.

Costs to renters:

There will be a per person charge to renters for use of the tent, tables and chairs. This is estimated to be \$10-\$20 per person; significantly less than a renter will incur by renting a tent, chairs and tables on their own (e.g. \$10 x 150 = \$1,500). Currently a tent will cost around \$10,000 - \$30,000 that may or may include tables and chairs.

PHF Rental Policies:

Pleasant Home Foundation expects to revise the rental conditions in response to having this new space. Use of the house itself would be decreased to only include smaller size events and those that do not require the use of heavy tables, chairs and equipment. At this time, it is not expected that PHF will increase rental rates solely on the basis of the pavilion.

Benefits to Foundation and Pleasant Home:

The Pavilion will provide space that is more flexible than the current space within the house now allows. A dance floor can be accommodated and the space can be climate controlled. No dancing is allowed in the house and it is not air-conditioned currently.

PHF estimates that it loses an average of 10 rentals (at \$2,000 each = \$20,000) each year due to capacity limitations at 150 people from rental tours alone. Telephone inquiries requiring space for 150+ or asking for dance space are around 30 per month. The renters find the current cost of renting a temporary tent for their event too high and move on to another venue, often not in Oak Park.

PHF estimates staff time to remain about the same for coordinating rentals. Though we expect they might increase, the amount of time required to work with renters will be minimized. Event supervision staff time will need to increase with an increase in rentals.

How this will look - Design/Site Plan:



Architecture/structure

- Tent will be comprised of an aluminum frame with vinyl sides; vinyl windows will be installed as part of the design.
- A diagram of the site and tent design will be drawn as part of planning. (Preliminary plans are attached)
- The sides will be secured completely around with stakes and adhered to the underside of the sub-floor, so as to be sealed.
- No concrete foundation will be constructed. Rather, the pavilion will be erected on pillars that will allow the adjacent trees' root structure to remain intact and will not restrict air or water penetration into the soil.
- A sub-floor system will be laid; with an outdoor carpet finish covering.
- Roof will be gabled for rain and snow run-off, though not the large "circus" tent gables due to the tree canopy.
- Heating and cooling systems run on a generator, drawing power from the exterior light pole behind the Home, will be used.
- Chandelier lighting will be used; other lighting needs to be determined.

- Access to the home will be through two marquees (covered arches) leading into the Breakfast Porch door and the Rear entry door.
- Optional parquet dance floor and/or band stage area can be included.
- No trees will be removed from the site and the pavilion tent will be erected within the current 50 foot lease line.

Safety/security

- Because the tent will be secured fully around, a minimum of two doors with panic bars will be installed at opposite ends of the tent. The door from the home into the pavilion will always be locked when not in use.
- Current Village codes for music restriction (off at 10:30 p.m.) and closure (fully closed and locked at 12 midnight) will remain.
- PHF has not experienced significant security issues at the Home or with tents in the past.

Maintenance

- Basic cleaning maintenance will be conducted by the event catering staff for each event, with the Foundation staff providing regular daily cleaning as in the Home.
- More pressing maintenance needs – tears, exterior cleaning, damages to flooring, etc., will be the responsibility of the vendor, though it has been said that very little maintenance is required.
- Roughly, 8 years is the expected maximum life of the tent in this climate.

Interior rental items

- Tables and chairs will be stored at one end and used for events; this will be included in charges to client.

Historic Preservation Commission Review:

- The Pavilion has been presented to the Oak Park Historic Preservation Commission who approved it in concept.
- Illinois Historic Preservation Agency has also reviewed and approved it in concept.

Village Codes:

- An initial meeting by the Foundation with the Village of Oak Park code officials has indicated that they do not have any major issues

with the installation of the semi-permanent structure. This will be followed up as the project progresses.

Precedents:

Our research has shown that across the nation historic homes are seeking means to generate general operating dollars (traditionally not available through grant/government monies). Most of them rent their facilities for special events. Many of them have offered the opportunity to erect tents on their site; some have erected semi-permanent structures; still others have postponed restoration on the main home to erect an auxiliary structure to generate funds for the main home (restoration and operation).

Locally, historic Danada House (the Dan and Ada Rice Home) in Wheaton, Illinois, owned by the DuPage County Forest Preserve, erected a semi-permanent tent for rentals. After years of great success, a permanent building was constructed on the property for events. Historic Haley House in Joliet also erected a semi-permanent tent on its site adjacent to the home for event rentals. Mayslake, the Peabody Estate, in Oak Brook has taken a similar approach.

Glessner House in Chicago, owned by the Glessner House Foundation and the City of Chicago, delayed restoration on the home to focus on restoring its Carriage House/Barn in order to facilitate rentals and generate income.

The public/private business relationship also has precedents within the Oak Park community. Cheney Mansion has a policy of recommending pre-selected caterers. Other rental facilities, such as Nineteenth Century Women's Club have exclusive arrangements with specific caterers.

Overall Advantages:

- Reduces wear and tear on the house, while keeping Home open
- Offers great respect for the National Historic Landmark status
- Expands rental possibilities
- Expands programming opportunities
- An asset to the community in terms of rental space – no one else in the area has this sort of extraordinary facility.
- PHF and PDOP able to use the pavilion *at no cost* for our own events
- Guests can see the pavilion (vs. viewing pictures for individual rental)
- Easier and faster for caterers to load in as furniture will already be there.
- Free advertising and promotion from vendor and caterers.
- Allows more than one rental of the Home at a time, if needed

- Music (disc jockey) and dance restrictions in the house can be lifted because they can take place in the pavilion; making the Home more appealing to renters
- Will decrease wear on the turf from temporary tent installation.
- Keeps rental equipment out of the Breakfast Porch (in great need of restoration) where currently it is temporarily stored.
- Easier on the client's pocketbook, making them more likely to rent.
- Attractive and makes an exciting, intriguing appearance around the Home ("things are happening there!")

Possible Disadvantages:

- Might distract from the west view of the home.
- Will put the Foundation – and our renters -- into a commitment with the vendor for all rental equipment.
- Will require additional housekeeping from Foundation.
- Area below the tent will require full restoration of grass after removal.

Summary

Oak Park is blessed to have such an architectural jewel in the heart of our community. The Farson family built the home in 1897 for entertaining. The Mills family knew the home was special and sold it to the Park District of Oak Park in 1939 with the call to be "in service to the community." Through the mid-20th century, the Park District used the home as a community center, senior center, teen dance hall and in service during the war, all the while trying to preserve its architectural history, but with extremely limited funds. Recognizing the significance of the site and following the preservation movement in America, the Park District formed the Pleasant Home Foundation in 1990. Today, operating on a budget of less than \$150,000 per year, the Foundation has secured grant funding on a local and state level, opened for community service, and welcomes more than 20,000 visitors to the home each year. The Foundation, in full support of the Park District and the Oak Park community, is keeping Pleasant Home alive into its third century.

*Respectfully submitted by the Pleasant Home Foundation
 Laura Thompson, Executive Director
 June 4th, 2009 Revised*

Attachments:

- A. FAQ's
- B. Site plan, sketches of Pavilion and photographs of similar structures
- C. Sketch plan & elevations for pavilion
- D. Mills Park Master Plan