



FREDERICK COUNTY GOVERNMENT

DIVISION OF PLANNING & PERMITTING

Livable Frederick Planning & Design Office

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Historic Preservation Commission
FROM: Amanda Whitmore, Historic Preservation Planner
DATE: March 20, 2025
RE: 2832 B Park Mills Road Economically Feasible Plan Discussion

Issue

Is there an economically feasible plan that preserves the structure either physically or through documentation that the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) and the property owner can agree to?

Background

The property owner applied to demolish the log cabin located at 2832B Park Mills Road. Per §1-23-8 of the Frederick County Code, Staff found the property to have historic significance and referred the property to the HPC to determine if the property had unusual historic value. At their March 5, 2025 meeting, the HPC unanimously found the property to have unusual historic value. Therefore, per §1-23-8, the HPC and property owner are to discuss a plan that is economically feasible for the property owner that may preserve the property from demolition or that preserves the property through documentation for future study.

Staff visited the cabin with the property owner to view the condition and discuss potential options. While the cabin felt and appeared solid with no obvious structural concerns, some areas with issues were noted. These areas were:

- water infiltration in the upstairs room due to the condition of the roof
- termite damage observed in several logs
- asphalt shingles covering the gable ends that may contain asbestos
- the daubing between the logs extends over the edges of the logs and in some instances completely covers the log, possibly trapping moisture
- a cement bench or block was installed the length of the facade of the building which may have damaged the logs behind it; and

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- the rear addition extends nearly the entire length of the rear of the building and may have compromised the original wall.

Staff discussed and shared documents with the property owner about the County Register of Historic Places designation process and the financial benefits associated with local designation. Staff also shared information about the County's Rural Historic Preservation grant program and the tax credits available both with the County and the State. The grant program and tax credits could be used to off-set several of the repairs necessary to preserve the structure.

Other challenges with the property are the size and configuration of the cabin. The interior of the original structure is small with ceiling height on the first floor less than 5' 11". The ceiling could be removed exposing the bottom of the upper story floor, but this would provide only a few additional inches. Upstairs offers more headroom. The interior has two small rooms on each level and there is no plumbing in the original portion of the cabin. A central chimney is part of the partition between the two rooms on both stories. The rear addition contains the kitchen and bathroom for the building. A bedroom is also located in the addition. If the front porch and rear addition were removed to bring the cabin back to its original form, a kitchen and bathroom could not be incorporated as the interior is too small. These factors severely limit the usability of the cabin without an addition.

The existing addition is of modest size with an eat-in kitchen, average size bathroom to fit a tub/shower combination, toilet, and small vanity, and an average size bedroom for the 1980s or 1990s era of construction. If a new addition was desired and the property owner designated the building to the County Register, they would be required to meet the County design guideline requirements for new additions. While traditional materials are not required, less expensive materials such as vinyl would not be permitted. These material costs for a new addition could be a significant expense that the property owner may not have with new construction not subject to the County's historic preservation design guidelines. Additionally, the grant and tax credit programs do not cover new construction.

Given these constraints, the Commission and property owner may want to discuss whether detailed documentation of the cabin prior to demolition would be sufficient. Documentation at this level would include measured drawings, photographs, and written documentation to the level of the Historic American Building Survey (HABS) which would be filed with the Maryland Historical Trust and National Park Service.

Additionally, the Commission and the property owner may also want to discuss material salvage of the building. Sensitively dismantling the structure, such as by hand or with limited mechanical equipment, in order to reuse logs or windows may be another alternative to a bulldozer demolition. The materials could be utilized by the property owner in the new construction or sold to a material salvaging company in the area.

The property owner noted the possibility of a historical group moving the structure. Moving a building from its original location is not ideal as it detracts from its historic integrity; however, is

a possibility if it saves it from demolition. Staff does not believe there is currently a local organization with the capacity to receive and maintain a historic building. At the property owner's request, Staff has reached out to Preservation Maryland to determine if there are regional organizations who may be interested and can maintain and interpret the historic structure. As of the writing of this report, Staff has not received a reply from Preservation Maryland.

In summary, the property is a good candidate for the County Register, which would provide an opportunity to apply for financial incentives. However, the property has some usability challenges. The interior is cramped with low ceilings and no plumbing in the original cabin, making it impractical without the existing rear addition that houses essential facilities. The cost of a new addition that complies with County historic preservation guidelines could be significant, as less expensive materials are not permitted and grants or tax credits do not cover new construction. Alternatives such as detailed documentation, salvaging materials for reuse, or relocation are other options to be discussed.

Recommendation

Staff recommends the Commission and property owner discuss these options and whether they are economically feasible for the property owner.