

Next step in Stream House repair: master plan

BY REBECCA KAUFMAN
Of Suburban News

OAKLAND – Months after appropriating \$13,800 of county and borough funds for emergency Stream House repairs, borough officials said it may still be a year before they have a firm plan detailing its permanent preservation – and whether, in fact, it is of such historical significance as to warrant it.

Monies from a county matching grant and a prior borough capital ordinance went toward installation of two sets of cables to maintain the structural integrity of the Stream House until a preservation plan could be drawn up, said Borough Administrator Richard Kunze.

“The hope was that cabling would stabilize it,” Councilman Frank DiPentima said. “After doing work five years ago, the building wasn’t sealed correctly and as a result, it was severely compromised from the weather.”

The borough did the work with the understanding that a plan for a permanent fix would be forthcoming.

After receiving proposals for the plan submitted by HJGA Consulting, Architecture & Historic Preservation in Montclair and L + C Design Consultants PA in Secaucus, borough officials say, it became apparent that significantly more money would be needed to proceed with repairs.



CHRIS PETERS/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

The crumbling exterior of the Stream House is awaiting grant money to create a preservation plan before repairs can begin.

HJGA’s proposal, dated May 16, 2007, estimated the creation of a preservation plan would cost \$71,150; an estimate from L + C, dated June 29, 2007, was for \$59,500.

To draw up a historic preservation plan, research must be done and all aspects of the building examined, said Margaret Hickey, a

historic preservation specialist at HJGA Consulting, Architecture & Historic Preservation.

“We look at the history of the building and site,” she said. “We do title research, look at the chronology of construction, and periods of significance based on occupants and events. We also look at the existing conditions and what needs

to be repaired.”

Hickey said at the end, the firm would produce a document, about 150 pages, detailing their recommendations, cost estimates and drawings.

The costs included monies allotted for historic research, documentation, field surveys, meetings, treatment recommendations and

report writing, among others.

The plan, Kunze said, will assess the historic significance of the property, its condition and make recommendations.

“In simple terms, they will provide us with a master plan for the Stream House,” Kunze said.

Last year, a \$30,000 grant was awarded to the borough for the creation of a historic preservation plan for the Van Allen House property, which includes both the Van Allen and Stream houses, DiPentima said.

When the borough became aware that the grant would not be sufficient to cover the costs, they applied for two additional ones – \$10,000 from the county and \$40,000 from the state.

The state planning grant, otherwise known as Historic Site Management under the Garden State Historic Preservation Trust Fund, would be a three-to-one matching grant, meaning the state would allocate \$40,000 and the borough would be responsible for one-third of it, approximately \$13,333.

The borough plans to pay its matching portion with funds officials hope to receive in the form of a second county grant.

“If we are unsuccessful in securing all of the grant funding we need, then we would need to fund the grant match out of our own local funds,” Kunze said.

Council President Pat Pignatelli

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said the council hasn't made a decision about whether to preserve it if the grants aren't awarded.

"We're trying to do what's right without having to spend borough money," he said.

The state funds are awarded on an annual basis, said Chris Donnelly, a representative from the state Department of Community Affairs.

"The final decision by the Trust Board on this round of grant funding will be made in the spring of 2009," Donnelly said. "Once the board has voted on funding, the legislature must approve of the grantees as must the governor."

Therefore, the borough must wait until they receive word.

"We can't do anything until we get the plan done according to the county," DiPentima said. "But we can't start the plan until we have adequate funds."

If both the state and county approve the funds, then the borough, with assistance from the county, will select which proposal to use as the basis of the Stream House's historic preservation.

"If Bergen County looks and has an issue with one of the consultant's qualifications, we will have to go with the higher cost," Kunze said. "The county has input in who ultimately gets chosen."

Officials from the county could not be reached for comment.

Members of the borough council continue to be torn about the importance of the Stream House.

"I think it's very important to restore the Van Allen House," DiPentima said. "The Stream House has a nostalgic appeal to the town. If we could use it for the town, it would be nice, but there's no parking and the stream underneath it makes use difficult."

The Van Allen house as built in 1740 and is well-known because Gen. George Washington stayed there from July 14-15, 1777, while he moved Continental troops from Morristown to Smith's Clove, N.Y. Additionally, the house was used as the Bergen County Court House from 1778-1779.

The Van Allen House is now home to the Oakland Historical Society.

The Stream House was built in 1902 and served as the office building for the dairy farm operations of Edward Day Page. The building's upper floor was meant to be used as living quarters, presumably for the farm manager.

The borough acquired both the Stream and Van Allen houses in the early 1960s.