

**BROOKSIDE FARM MUSEUM  
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES  
OCTOBER 25, 2023**

RECEIVED FOR RECORD  
EAST LYME, CT

2023 NOV -1 P 2:58

*Carroll Hillier*  
TOWN CLERK

**Present:** Robert Seifel. Chairman  
Maggi Prokop  
Cheri Meier  
Richard MacDonald  
William Follett

**Absent:** Wanda Stazick

**Also Present:** Donna Massung, President of the Friends  
Annah Perch. Curator  
Dan Cunningham, Ex-officio  
Monica Deffley

**I. CALL TO ORDER** Chairman Seifel called the October 25, 2023 Brookside Farm Museum Meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

**II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES.** Mr. Seifel asked for additions, deletions or corrections to the Brookside Farm Museum Regular Meeting Minutes of September 17, 2023.

**MOTION (1):** Cheri Meier moved to approve the September 17, 2023 Brookside Farm Museum Regular Meeting Minutes, as presented. Seconded by William Follett. (4-0) Unanimous.

**III. REPORTS**

a. Agenda Additions.

**MOTION (2):** Ms. Meier moved to add Reviewing the Rules and Job Description for commissioners and Friends of Brookside Farm Museum, under New Business, item e. Seconded by William Follett (4-0) Unanimous.

b. Public Delegations. Monica Deffley stated she recently moved to East Lyme and expressed interest in knowing about this Commission.

**Commission member Richard MacDonald joined the meeting.**

c. Ex-Officio. Mr. Cunningham reported the Referendum on purchasing land from the East Lyme Trust passed, and it authorizes the Board of Selectmen to enter into an agreement to purchase the land. We will have a title search, a closing and take title of the properties. We will place a conservation easement on that land.

He informed the Commission that the former Dispatch Center Complex signed an agreement with the Board of Education to allow it to use the building for storage. The Town will need to maintain that building.

Mr. Cunningham reported this will be the last meeting for him as Ex-officio of this Commission.

- d. Curator. (See attached report).

She was informed the following things are needed for the Collections Management Report: A Collections Management Policy; full light barriers; light meters, and examining items that may be de-assessed. This Report will help obtain grants. Ms. Perch has begun researching grants.

One of the Eagle Scouts would like to restore the sign to the trail. He will need to request permission from Parks and Recreation and the First Selectman.

Ms. Perch has been thinking about renovating the barn. She would like a floor above the present barn. She will follow-up with Yale. In 2019 the Thomas Lee House renovated its barn and she would like to ask how they fundraised for it. She will need stationery and stamps for fundraising.

- e. Chairman. Mr. Seifel reported the First Selectman has approved the Eagle Scout's project.
- f. Financial. Status Update. (See attached report)

The balance in the Brookside Farm Museum budget is \$16,940.00. The Selectmen allocated \$25,000 from the General Fund to cover the Curator's salary.

- 1. Presentation of Bills. No bills were presented.
  - 2. 2023-2024 Budget. There was no discussion on the 2023-2024 Brookside Farm Museum budget.
  - 3. Collections. There were no new collections.
- g. Correspondence. No new correspondence was received.

#### **IV. OLD BUSINESS**

- a. Property Maintenance
  - 1. General Maintenance Report. Ms. Perch reported the door on the corncrib has mold.
  - 2. Painting. There was no further discussion on painting.
- b. Museum Development. There was no discussion on museum development.
- c. Events.

October 21 from 1-3 p.m. Slightly Scary Stories and S'mores was planned to be held but was held on October 22 because it rained on October 21. The Commission was informed the guests enjoyed it.

December 10 from 1-3 p.m., a Holiday Open House will be held.

#### **V. NEW BUSINESS**

- a. Barn Rentals. Ms. Meier reported the barn will be closed at the end of this month.

Twenty-one doors were picked up by Past to Present Antiques. The sink was disposed of.

- b. Historical Properties Commission. Ms. Prokop reported the Thomas Lee House had its Flea Market on Memorial Day.
- c. Discussion with Teri Yuhas from the Agribusiness Committee. There was no further discussion on the Agribusiness Committee.
- d. Reviewing the Rules and Job Descriptions for Commissioners and the Friends of Brookside Farm Museum.

**MOTION (3): Ms. Meier moved to review the job descriptions of commissioners and the Friends of Brookside Farm Museum. Seconded by Ms. Prokop. (5-0) Unanimous.**

Ms. Massung reported the house will be decorated on November 15 and 16. High School students will help decorate on November 15 beginning at 10 a.m. On November 16 decorating will begin at 2 p.m.

#### **IV. ADJOURNMENT**

**MOTION (4): Ms. Meier moved to adjourn the October 25, 2023 Brookside Farm Museum Regular Meeting at 8:15 p.m. Seconded by Ms. Prokop. (5-0) Unanimous**

**Respectfully submitted,**

**Frances Ghersi, Recording Secretary**

Curators Report  
October 25, 2023

I received the Collections Management Report.

With the information in the Collections Management Report and the strategic plan, I began to research grants to support interpretive planning, and exhibits. I have started to prepare a plan to redo the interpretive plan for the site in keeping with an April deadline for a grant from CT Humanities.

I have also started to research the Christian Freeman newspaper, Amos Watson and how an exhibit might be built around it. As the only original archive found in the house as well as the funding emphasis everywhere on diversity, equity and inclusion, this would be a great fit for both preservation of the newspaper and an exhibit around it.

I wrote an application to become part of the Connecticut Collections portal for cataloging our collection.

I will be attending a virtual class on creating a homegrown national park. This initiative would take a good deal of collaboration with the other gardening groups in East Lyme and southeast Connecticut.

I began to catalog the collection in PastPerfect and will continue to do so there until if and when we receive permission to go into the Connecticut Collections portal.



## Brookside Farm Museum Commission

### Treasurers Report

October 25, 2023

I met with Kevin Gervais to familiarize myself with the budget and process.

#### YTD budget

- The high spend YTD relative to budget is because numbers were signed off prior to hiring our curator.
- The town has appropriated \$25k from a general fund to cover.
- With the allocation, spending through Oct 18 is in-line with expectations.

#### Several other details/questions from the meeting:

Property Management – Responsibility of Parks & Rec, paid via their budget. Any requests, issues, contact Jerry Lokken, 860.739.5828 x 341.

- Should we clarify what they are responsible for vs landscaping/maintenance from our funds?
- Spending from our budget for Building, Landscaping may need P&R approval (use of pesticides, ADA compliance, etc)

Grants – If BFM is awarded a grant, these funds will go to the town, earmarked for Brookside to be spent in accordance with the grant. We would have to present grant detail and the award to Selectmen and Finance Committee.

Spending – What is the process to approve curator spending (eg: board approval)

Painting - \$110k is budgeted for painting the house (dealing with lead, etc). Work performed by Public Works. Questions: Joe Bragaw c: 860.739.6931

Revenue – If we rent the barn or property, how do we report revenue to the town? Do we have other sources of revenue?

Friends of BFM – Understand how they function in relation to the commission and contribute the museum,

- Do they fund in a way that should be included in the budget?
- Do they provide an annual report to the commission?

Bill Follett

# Collections Assessment Grant Site Visit Report

## Brookside Farm Museum



33 Society Road, East Lyme, CT 06320

**Site Representatives in Attendance:**

Annah Perch and Cheri Meier

**Site Visit:** August 2023

**Report Submitted:** September 2023

**Assessor:** Karen DePauw

**Summary:**

The Collections Assessment Grant is a program managed by Conservation ConneCTion and is supported through a partnership between the Connecticut Heritage Foundation at the Connecticut State Library and Connecticut Humanities (CTH), with funding provided by the Connecticut State Department of Economic and Community Development/Connecticut Office of the Arts (COA) from the Connecticut State Legislature. On August 2, 2023, a collections site visit was provided to the Brookside Farm Museum thanks to this grant.

The Brookside Farm Museum (BFM) is located in East Lyme, CT. It is a joint venture of the Smith-Harris House Commission and the Friends of Smith-Harris House. The mission of these organizations is to:

work in tandem with each other to position the Avery, Smith, and Harris families in the historical framework and cultural knowledge of East Lyme. This includes the development of continued research into the family's history and demonstrating relevance to the lives of East Lyme residents today through educational programs provided for the community.

The collections of BFM are located primarily in the farmhouse with a few agricultural items stored in a small outbuilding and outside on the grounds. Most of these spaces were toured during the site visit, however, the inside of the small outbuilding was not accessible. The farmhouse functions as the primary exhibit space, storage space, and office space. There is storage in the attic, a few closets in the main portion of the house, and one room that strictly serve as storage spaces. There is no HVAC for the house. There is a window AC unit in the office space on the second floor and fans and dehumidifiers are utilized in the attic and basement to try and regulate the temperature and humidity as much as possible. Most windows in the house are fitted with traditional wooden blinds.

BFM documents the collection using index cards and PastPerfect. There is currently no system for labeling objects and tracking locations. BFM has several museum-quality storage materials but needs to prioritize housing items with the supplies.

The site visit brought to light many complex issues regarding how the museum wishes to move forward. There is a strategic plan but it did not sound as though the staff, volunteers, or board were very familiar with it or invested in it. One major struggle appears to be reconciling the space they have, an old farmhouse, with what they might want to be. Currently, the museum is functioning as a haphazard house museum with each room representing various decades and families without a continual story. The main interest appears to be the story of farming and agriculture, but these are not presented in the space. The first step of the institution is to determine whether their current mission and direction are still in line with the needs they identify. BFM needs to also discuss whether the house itself is a major driver of the story or simply the building in which their story is told. During the visit the concept of utilizing the collection as an education/teaching collection, rather than as a permanent historic collection, was discussed. While these discussions are taking place, it is still important to move forward with caring for the collection in alignment with museum best practices and standards to the best of their ability. If the organization chooses to maintain a permanent historic collection, the below recommendations should be heeded.

**General Observations:**

BFM is currently struggling to determine how its potential offerings fit within the community needs. In the meantime, the BFM has a permanent historic collection that requires care. Even if the



collection focus shifts, it will still be important to document the collection in order to move forward with any deaccessioning, change of collection focus, or continued care of a historic collection. The BFM needs to first take time to understand the strategic plan, create a Collection Management Policy based on that plan, and determine fully whether the historic collection is owned by the Friends of Brookside Farm Museum or the town's Historic Commission. Knowing this last piece could greatly shift the conversation about the collection and who makes the call for what should be done in the future.

Regardless of ownership, the BFM should continue to inventory and catalogue the collection so they know what they have and what documentation they have to go along with it. There are opportunities for the storage space that is available to be made more conducive to storage. Many of these are outlined in more detail below.

### **Recommendations:**

Most of these recommendations can be undertaken with a lower-level of financial input and can be done simultaneously. These are split into priorities based on the Eisenhower Matrix (an example and description of which are linked under "General Resources.") These recommendations fall under two of the four Eisenhower priority levels: Urgent and Important (do soon), and Less Urgent but Important (schedule for the future, after the first list is under control).

#### Urgent and Important

- Review Strategic Plan and create a Collections Management Policy. Be sure to include sections on deaccession and disposal. Have governing body approve CMP.
- Create full light barriers by completely covering windows. This can be done using light-blocking curtains or room darkening roller shades. These will allow the windows to still be visually accessible from the outside without allowing harmful ultraviolet rays in from the sunlight. Regardless of what window covering is chosen, all window coverings should be kept down or drawn during non-open hours to limit light exposure.



Blinds should always be closed when the museum is closed.

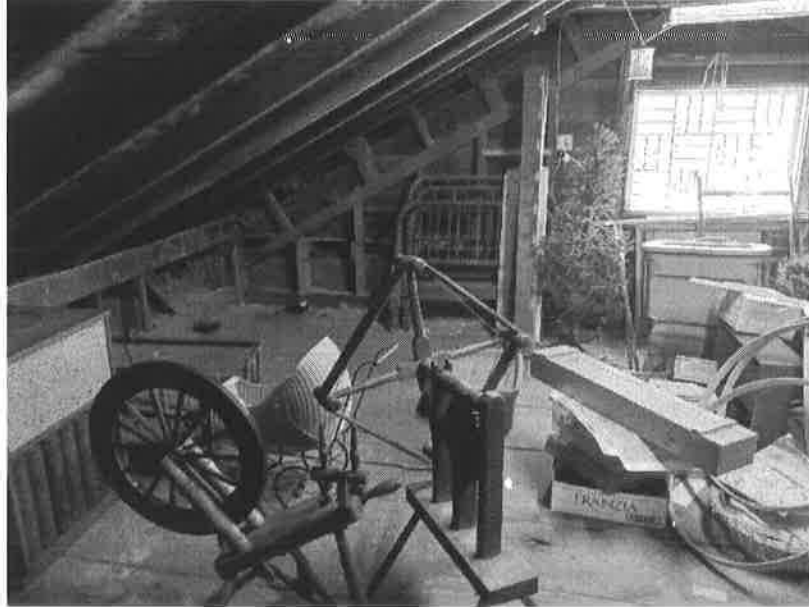
- Explore options for purchase of dataloggers and light meter to monitor the environment of all rooms and storage spaces for one year. Doing so will allow for a better understanding of the current environment. This can help determine what kind of attention each area needs to improve the environment, and/or may offer insight to guide what type of collection items would not be harmed in each environment. For example, storing glassware or earthenware that is highly susceptible to breakage from handling but less so to environmental issues. Consider looking into the Preservation Assistance Grants for Smaller Institutions (linked in Resources), which have a record of providing funds for this type of study.
- Continue to work on the collections inventory and cataloguing to uncover what items are in the space, the stories they tell, and whether they should remain in the museum collection based on the new CMP.
- As the collections inventory is undertaken, take special care to identify items with provenance to the family, the house, and even the broader area. This information will be of assistance during discussions about how to proceed with interpretation of the space by helping identify what might help tell the story and what might be better suited to another organization.
- Box small items on shelves to create more storage space.



Current storage space with additional room available if items were boxed appropriately.

- Create a plan to transfer collections information from index cards to a system capable of being backed up. This could be more fully utilizing PastPerfect (which was indicated to already have been purchased) or a spreadsheet. If creating a spreadsheet, consider naming fields in line with the names of fields in collections management systems to make for an easier transition if migrating to one is a potential future project.

- Use CMP to evaluate items currently stored in the attic to help determine what should be kept and catalogued and what should be potentially deaccessioned. Make clear delineations between collection items stored in the space and items that are merely being stored for museum use (such as decorations, children's costumes, etc).



One portion of the attic storage showing a combination of museum items and collection items.

- Rehouse stored items into available museum-quality storage, beginning with the most susceptible to environmental deterioration (generally textiles, paper, and photographs).



Closet full of museum storage supplies.

- Look at all spaces available for object storage and evaluate if they are being used to the best of their ability. Remedying poor space use can help ensure that a larger number of items can be stored in better conditions. Although a closet in the main portion of the house may not be environmentally perfect, it may be better than the attic.



Closet space currently being underutilized on the second floor of the house.

Less Urgent but Important

- Reevaluate how all spaces in the house are currently used. At the time the only areas with air conditioning (and therefore summertime temperature control) are in the office portion that houses a kitchen, office, and large landing. Consider adding storage to the kitchen area and landing in order to store temperature-sensitive items.



Landing within air conditioned section of the house.

- Examine items for potential deaccession and begin the process following the CMP, best practices, and the Connecticut Museum Property Law.
- Create a list of all documents and areas that contain collection accession records (can use attached template). If possible, place these records in one area. Identify any large holes in these records. Make sure to maintain current records for any items that come into the collection. Utilize Temporary Receipts, Deeds of Gift, Inventories, Accession Logs, and Collections Management Systems (digital or analogue depending on needs) to ensure future record keeping.
- Evaluate the stories currently told by the items on display. Consider if these stories fully encompass the desired mission of BFM. At the moment, the spaces are disjointed from an early 19<sup>th</sup> century kitchen to a late 19<sup>th</sup> century bedroom, there is no connection and flow presented by the spaces.



The kitchen is currently set up as an “early kitchen,” while other rooms in the house are set up with an eye to various portions of the Victorian era.

- Evaluate outside collection items to determine their needs. If they are items of high importance, consider creating a plan for future protection from at least some of the elements. The first step to accomplish this might be a simple roof structure to offer protection from direct rain and snow.



Large agricultural equipment is currently displayed unprotected outdoors.

- Inventory the items in the red outbuilding and consider if any of these items need to move to a better storage situation inside the main house.



Access to the inside of the red outbuilding was not possible during the visit.

- Create a plan to deal with the Smith-Harris Archaeological Dig case in the rental barn. The barn is often used for events that do not include museum personnel in a building with no temperature or humidity regulation. Make a conscious choice if BFM is comfortable having these items susceptible to environmental fluctuations.



Display of archaeological artifacts from 1998 on permanent display in the rental space.

## Suggested Resources

### **General Resources**

Connecticut League of History Organizations:

<https://clho.org/info-resource>

Connecticut Museum Property Law, Title 11 Chapter 194:

[https://www.cga.ct.gov/current/pub/chap\\_194.htm](https://www.cga.ct.gov/current/pub/chap_194.htm)

Connecting to Collections Care: <https://connectingtocollections.org/>

Eisenhower Matrix: <https://www.eisenhower.me/eisenhower-matrix/>

Indiana Historical Society Local History Services Department:

general resources- <https://indianahistory.org/across-indiana/local-history-services/online-resources/>

Timely Tips videos- <https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PL-xVwN6Ke-aitgbbwU95rWwEfBrBizpNg>

National Endowment for the Humanities Preservation Assistance Grants for Small Institutions:

<https://www.neh.gov/grants/preservation/preservation-assistance-grants-smaller-institutions>

Texas Historical Commission Museum Services: <https://www.thc.texas.gov/preserve/projects-and-programs/museum-services>

### **Resources Specific to Recommendations**

*Active Collections* by Elizabeth Wood, Rainey Tisdale, and Trevor Jones

*A Deaccession Reader* edited by Stephen E. Weil

Collections Management Sample Policy, created by Indiana Historical Society: attached

dPlan by Northeast Document Conservation Center: <https://www.nedcc.org/free-resources/disaster-assistance/dplan-artsready>

*Financial Fundamentals for Historic House Museums* by Rebekah Beaulieu

*Reimagining Historic House Museums: New Approaches and Proven Solutions* by Kenneth C. Turino and Max A. Van Balgooy

*Storytelling in Museums* edited by Adina Langer

Timely Tips video about storage materials: <https://youtu.be/3z0ZOYE81HY>