

Bayview Cultural & Historic Preservation Proposal

“It has been said that, at its best, preservation engages the past in a conversation with the present over a mutual concern for the future.” -William Murtagh, first keeper of the National Register of Historic Places

The Town of Bayview and its residents have been provided the opportunity to begin preserving our very unique history. As several surrounding communities have shown us, successful historic preservation takes the will of a few dedicated people and the support of their community.

I use the words “our history” deliberately, with no intended offense, knowing I just moved here a few years ago. I use it to honor the possibility we all have been given to become a small part of a much larger picture. Since moving here I have been humbled to sit and listen to generations of stories as the words of elders awaken the timbers of a building or the spirit of the land - even the land on which my family and I now call home. When a story is shared, we come together and are part of the same moment. The past becomes our present. We have the chance to build on these intimate moments and bring a common bond to our community.

My hope is to create a cultural heritage center (hereafter Center) for the Town of Bayview with the mission of preserving and sharing the unique history of the Town – including but not limited to the history of quarrying, railroad, farming, immigration, natural resources, and recreation – through exhibits, archives, and activities. The Center would be open to the public for limited posted hours but would focus strongly on community activities and education. Integration of programs into the area school systems would be a goal.

About a year ago the Town Board was presented with Paul Johnson’s request to preserve two historic buildings, the Paymaster Building and the Town of Houghton Train Depot, before they were razed. The money to move and preserve the Paymaster Building was generously provided by the Town Board through the Town budget. Costs to move and restore the Depot, however, have proven to be more than the Town can or, in my opinion, should extend.

Rather than ask the Town for any money, I am working with the Bayfield County Historical Society to possibly begin a Bayview chapter. My proposal has been met with excitement. There are currently eleven chapters in Bayfield County. The Bayview chapter would be the tax deductible entity that would fundraise, apply for grants, and provide volunteer labor to cover the costs of potential projects as well as operation and maintenance of the facility.

But the Center needs a place to call home. This brings me to working in partnership with the Town Board. After much research I have requested the Town Board allow the cultural heritage center to be located on Town owned land.

Several towns have done just this - Town of Port Wing, Cornucopia (Town of Bell), and the Village of Mason to name a few. Speaking with area preservationists I have concluded doing this alleviates several obstacles – availability of affordable insurance for the public use of land and buildings

being the most important. Since the November Town Board meeting, our Town Clerk has discussed insurance with the Town's insurance provider. The cost is minimal and could be reimbursed by the Center. This would be at the Town's discretion.

The Town Board has been very careful to make open and deliberate decisions. The Town Board has expressed their keen interest in providing residents and taxpayers an opportunity to voice their opinion about the proposal to use town owned land in this fashion, including non-resident land owners. Not including the year+ of work and discussions at Town Board meetings led by Paul Johnson, the following is timeline of events:

- **October Town Board Meeting:** Introduction and general discussion of the proposal with the Town Board.
- **November Town Board Meeting:** Further discuss the project and possible sites for the Center. Approve a timeline or manner in which the Town Board is most comfortable bringing this proposal to the public and to a decision.
- **December Town Board Meeting:** Town Board reviewed town owned parcels of land and which parcel or parcels may be most appropriate. Only three parcels, currently owned by the Town, are big enough and zoned appropriately for the project: the Town Hall parcel (10 acres), Houghton Falls Road parcel (20 acres), and Bayview Park parcel (16.57 acres). For several reasons - including compatibility with existing land use, facilities, existing high traffic, zoning, & setbacks - the Bayview Park parcel was chosen to present to the public. Town Board reviewed draft of postcard notifying residents of the project proposal and public hearing.
- **January Public Hearing:** Have this as an agenda item to discuss.
- **January Town Board Meeting:** Town Board Decision for the proposal.

If locating the Center on Town owned land is approved by the Town Board, the next step is the formal creation of the Bayview Chapter of the Bayfield County Historical Society so a Board can make decisions and receive tax deductible donations for projects and operation. This entity would work closely with the Town to assure projects are in keeping with Town standards and interests.

The first project, and the reason for an expedited timeline, is to move the old Town of Houghton Train Depot building originally constructed in or about 1885. The building would be moved to the approved town parcel of land. The Depot Building, a +/-15'x20' structure is currently located on a private parcel of land on Bodin Rd (not far from where it was originally constructed). The structure will have to be carefully assessed by an expert to assure structural integrity for the move and use thereafter. If it passes, addition(s) will need to be removed prior to moving (structure was used as a residence for many years). An estimate for the move by an expert in the field (moving historic buildings) has already been obtained. Bids for the cost of repairs & renovations will be sought. While it is the primary objecting to save the old Depot, rebuilding a replica may be considered if the existing structure can't be saved. As stated earlier, the Town will not bear the cost of moving the building or operating the Center, only for allowing it to be placed on Town land.

The Center will be looking for donations and volunteer labor to keep the project moving. During the project, there will be classes and presentations on various subjects. These can be held at the Bayview Park pavilion or where appropriate until the Depot is completed. The Center will also be accepting donations of artifacts, historic photos, as well as gathering and/or recording historic data and stories from residents, and building an inventory for future use in the Depot building.

The focus of the Center is our community. The primary intent is to provide learning opportunities and a place to gather for our residents and land owners. I hope the Center will be a place for families to share their stories before they are forgotten. Events will also be open to area visitors and tourists as we celebrate our diverse history.

Respectfully,

Jennifer Croonborg-Murphy

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“Examine each question in terms of what is ethically and aesthetically right, as well as what is economically expedient. A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”

— Aldo Leopold