




December 3, 2004

**MEMORANDUM**

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

FROM: Gwen Wright, Historic Preservation Supervisor   
Countywide Planning Division

VIA: Jeffrey L. Zyontz, Chief  
Countywide Planning Division

Bill Mooney, Chief  
Park Enterprise Division

SUBJECT: Kensington Cabin Partnership with Town of Kensington

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**STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Enter into a partnership with the Town of Kensington for operation of the Kensington Cabin, including a ten year lease on the site and a one-time grant for up-front renovation costs.

**PROJECT BACKGROUND**

The Kensington Cabin is a historically significant Park property. It was built circa 1934 and may, in fact, be one of the earliest structures in the Montgomery County Parks system (see Attachment 1 – a 1934 newspaper article). It has not yet been listed on the *Locational Atlas and Index of Historic Sites* or the *Montgomery County Master Plan for Historic Preservation*; however, staff feels that it is a very important resource and would merit official historic designation in the future.

The Cabin is a one-room structure and functioned as a community meeting place within Kensington Cabin Local Park until 1992, when it was closed down and boarded up. The reason for closing it was that it needed capital improvements and maintenance, but there were not sufficient funds in the Park Department's budget to do this work. Since then, the small building has remained vacant and boarded up in this local park.

Since 2001, the Town of Kensington has expressed an interest in entering into a partnership with MNCPPC to renovate the Kensington Cabin and to operate it as a resource for the local community. In October 2003, the Mayor of Kensington – Kitty L. Raufaste – sent a letter to Chairman Berlage indicating the Town’s interest in moving forward with the partnership and submitting a formal proposal for use and management of the building. The Town would like the Board’s approval of the partnership concept and would like the Board to agree to enter into a ten year lease for the property with the Town.

**PROPOSAL**

The Town of Kensington – a local municipal government – wishes to use and manage the Kensington Cabin (10000 Kensington Parkway) as a historic and recreational resource for the surrounding communities. The Town is proposing to work with surrounding communities and MNCPPC to undertake necessary capital improvements. In addition, the Town will develop and implement programs for the Cabin, assuming rights and responsibilities commensurate with the use and management of the facility. See full proposal, which is included as Attachment 2. Please note that aspects of the proposal have not been updated since it was submitted: for, example, the proposal references a MNCPPC contribution of \$50,000; however, the agreed upon amount is now \$88,000.

Partnership:

Under the proposed partnership, the Town would assume responsibilities for overseeing the renovation of the Cabin (utilizing a one-time grant from MNCPPC). The Town would then assume management responsibilities for the facility, including:

- rental administration,
- permitting of the adjacent basketball courts,
- payment of utilities,
- all upkeep, maintenance and repair of the interior facilities,
- future exterior and interior capital improvements under \$10,000 per project,
- trash collection,
- termite treatment and inspections,
- maintenance of an alarm system,
- planting of flowers and maintenance of landscaping in the area immediately surrounding the cabin (approximately 50 feet around the building – see Attachment 3 for a map),
- compliance with Park standards regarding the removal of offensive graffiti; all offensive graffiti must be removed within 24 hours of notification, and
- provision of liability insurance.

MNCPPC would continue to:

- maintain the remainder of the park and the lighting surrounding and leading to the Cabin,
- provide snow removal from the paved pull off on Everette Street up to the front door of the Cabin and clear access to the cabin from Kensington Parkway across the footbridge to the front door of the Cabin. According to the Department’s Snow Plan both items will be scheduled on a priority two (2) status or 48 hours after a snow event, and
- handle future exterior and interior capital improvements in excess of \$10,000 per project.

## Use of Cabin:

The Town proposes to use the Kensington Cabin to host a variety of programs of public benefit consistent with the Cabin's original use in the 1930s as a community center. The Town's proposed use of the Kensington Cabin would be multi-functional:

- summer camps and recreational programs for children
- adult classes
- meeting space for community groups
- event space for lectures and workshops, etc.
- historic structure

These events will make the Cabin available to the public on a regular basis.

The Town has extensive experience in managing Town-owned properties and making those properties available for community events. They anticipate similar arrangements for the Kensington Cabin property. Currently, the Town Hall accommodates a number of community activities that would be better suited to the Cabin and the surrounding parkland. Community groups potentially interested in use of the property include: the Rock Creek Hills Citizens Association, the Women's Club of Kensington, the Women's Community Club of Kensington, and the Kensington Historical Society.

Based on current information, the Town feels that the following usage figures are reasonable estimates:

### *Community group meetings:*

- Garden Club – once per month
- Widows Group – once per month
- Women's Club – once per month
- Historical Society – once per month

### *Community/Adult classes:*

- Yoga – once per week on Saturdays
- Pilates – three classes per week

### *Children's camps and/or classes:*

- Kiddie Ballet – three classes per week
- Kuman Math and Reading – three classes per week, including Saturday

*Special programs* – approximately six events of this type per year

Additional uses may be more frequent, depending on the season of the year, and may include county summer recreation programs. The primary goal for the Kensington Cabin is to have the community participate and feel involved in the use of the property.

In terms of parking and access to the site, no additional on-site parking would be provided. It is

anticipated that most of the people using the Kensington Cabin would be from the surrounding community. They would either walk to the cabin or park on the street.

Finally, to avoid usage conflicts, Park staff have suggested that the Town of Kensington also take over scheduling and permitting of the basketball courts that are closest to the cabin. They have not suggested that the Town take over maintenance of the basketball courts or utility expenses associated with the basketball courts. The Town is willing to take on the scheduling and permitting of the basketball courts.

#### Capital Improvements:

A variety of capital improvements need to be made to make the Kensington Cabin usable for the programs described in the proposal. The Town of Kensington has enlisted the assistance of an architect and a contractor, who both live in the Town, to develop plans for renovation of the Cabin and a budget for capital improvements. Both of these professionals have extensive experience in the renovation of historic properties and a long track-record of successful practice in Montgomery County.

In addition, the Park Central Maintenance Division has inspected the Kensington Cabin and has provided estimates for repair to the sewer line to the cabin and for basic repairs to the building. See email from Al Astorga (Attachment 4).

The total cost of capital improvements estimated by the Town of Kensington is \$87,560 and the scope of work is described in Attachment 5. The scope includes repair of the sewer line leading to the building (estimated by Central Maintenance Division staff as costing \$38,000), installation of a new ADA accessible ramp and entry, installation of a new ADA accessible bathroom, installation of a sprinkler system, electrical, plumbing and HVAC repairs, window repairs, and new carpet or vinyl flooring inside the cabin. The Town anticipates using volunteers for additional tasks such as interior painting, landscaping immediately around the cabin (approximately 50 feet around the building), cleaning, etc. In addition, the Town anticipates that all architectural services and construction management services will continue to be donated by Town residents.

The Town of Kensington believes that completion of the scope of work described in Attachment 5 will enable them to obtain a Certificate of Occupancy for the building. Based on this information, they are requesting a one-time grant of \$88,000 to undertake the up-front renovation necessary to open the Kensington Cabin. The funds for this grant could come from a Historic Preservation Special Revenue Fund and there is \$88,000 earmarked in this fund for the project. Any upfront renovation costs above and beyond the \$88,000 would be the responsibility of the Town.

#### Operating Budget:

The Town plans to meet the operating expenses involved in a variety of ways: income from the rental operation of the cabin, grants, and special fund-raisers. A proposed annual budget is included below:

***Expenses***

Clerical support (Town Hall staff)	2,000
Maintenance and cleaning	2,000
Utilities	4,800
Security System (regular maintenance)	500
Liability Insurance	500
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9,800</b>

***Income***

In-kind contribution of clerical support	2,000
Rentals	7,000
Special Events (6/yr @\$75)	450
Fundraisers	350
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9,800</b>

**STAFF DISCUSSION/ISSUES FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

Staff strongly supports the partnership proposed by the Town of Kensington as the best way to get the Kensington Cabin repaired and usable as soon as possible. It is the best way to fulfill the goal of making the property available to the public.

The proposal outlined above is substantially the same as the current successful partnership that MNCPPC has with the Montgomery County Historical Society for operation of the Waters House in Germantown.

If the Board supports the Town of Kensington's partnership proposal, there are a number of issues which will need to be resolved in the immediate future:

1. An agreement will need to be signed to lease the property to the Town of Kensington for ten years, with potential for renewal for another ten years. A draft of a possible lease agreement, based on the lease agreement for the Waters House, has been developed.
2. A Memorandum of Understanding to provide the one-time renovation funds (\$88,000) will need to be signed. A draft of a possible MOU, based on the MOU for the Waters House, has been developed.

A concern that has been raised by the Central Maintenance Division is the potential for needing to make capital improvements to the Kensington Cabin in the future. Currently, the Kensington Cabin is not included in the Central Maintenance Division's budget to receive any repairs or capital improvements. Unfortunately, this is also true of all other public-private partnership properties (such as the Waters House, Hyattstown Mill, the Rickman Horse Farm Park, Meadowbrook Stables, etc.). The partnership agreements for these properties have typically required that the private partners take over regular maintenance and minor repairs, but have not required that they undertake all future major capital improvements. This is a global problem within the Park system, which the Board may need to address in the future.

Recognizing the legitimacy of the Central Maintenance Division's concerns, additional negotiations took place with the Town of Kensington, and they have been asked to accept responsibility for future exterior and interior capital improvements to the Kensington Cabin under \$10,000 per project. This would still require MNCPPC to take responsibility for future capital improvements over \$10,000 per project. The Town will provide additional comments on this aspect of the partnership at the Board's meeting.

Of course, MNCPPC is currently responsible for all capital improvements, repairs, maintenance, utility expenses, etc. Therefore, the partnership with the Town of Kensington would relieve MNCPPC of much of the current financial responsibility.

### **CONCLUSION**

The Kensington Cabin has been vacant for a number of years. Its current condition is a detriment to the Town and to MNCPPC. It can and should be an important community resource which will not only provide much-needed space for community events and gatherings, but will also serve to remind all the citizens of Montgomery County of the history of our park system and of Kensington. The proposed partnership will benefit the citizens of Montgomery County.

The Town has submitted a reasonable and well thought-out partnership proposal, demonstrating an understanding of work needed to get the cabin open and a viable operating budget.

Staff recommends that the Planning Board support this proposal and direct staff to work out the issues noted above to achieve implementation of the partnership.