October 3, 2022

Scituate Historical Society

CPA Funding Request

Cudworth House

**Brief Description of Project:**

Cudworth House is one of Scituate’s most ancient and recognizable buildings. Its enormous central fireplace and parts of its stone foundation go back to 1680, the days of Scituate’s early settlement. The fire-damaged original structure was rebuilt in 1797, enlarging the home and changing the roofline to the familiar gambrel shape seen today. In the early 1800s, eleven Cudworths lived in the house – 4 adults and 7 children! A century later, the Town of Scituate purchased the house and surrounding property in order to construct the former Gates high school. In 1917, the Town turned the house over to the newly formed Scituate Historical Society for use as their headquarters. In 1930, the Scituate Historical Society relocated an historic c.1850 barn to the property and later re-created a colonial-era animal pound there. Also located on the site is the old well and sweep. Today, Society headquarters are located at the Schoolhouse at 43 Cudworth Rd, however, the Cudworth House & Barn property continues to serve as a historic homestead museum - open to the public several times a year, as well as to hundreds of Scituate schoolchildren each spring.

Going into this summer, the Historical Society had planned a major update of the exhibits and interpretative displays at Cudworth. Over the years, Cudworth House had become home to a variety of furniture and artifact donations. Plans had been made last season for our archivist, our design coordinator, and textile/furniture experts to sort through the collections at Cudworth and identify and catalogue the valuable pieces for display. At this time, the building was also to be evaluated for periodic review of maintenance needs, electrical and utility updates.

When we entered the house in June, however, it was immediately evident that the house had a serious problem – the inaccessible crawl space of the house had become infested by a den of skunks. The odor had permeated everything. Walls, textiles, and furniture were all saturated with the odor. We immediately contacted a disaster cleanup contractor to conduct an initial assessment and cleanup. Their recommendation was that the contents be removed to a Pod where they could eventually be treated with ozone to neutralize the odor. As to the fabric of the building itself, it would be necessary to remove all soft goods (curtains, wallpaper, etc.) and then seal all hard surfaces.

Because Cudworth House is a town-owned property, the Society has been working with the Town Administrator and the Finance Director to accomplish these steps. We are currently working on these projects and will soon be working with a stone mason to restore the historic foundation. Since it is a dry laid field stone foundation well over 300 years old, many of the stones have been displaced. Restoring the foundation is structurally important and will correct instances where the stones actually channel water into the house. A bonus is that we can close up the gaps that allowed the skunks to enter the crawl space. We will also add a system to ventilate the crawl space to alleviate the dampness inherent in shallow enclosed spaces. The minimal electrical system is being evaluated for safety. The existing HVAC

**Brief Description of Project** (cont’d)

system is being extended into the loft area so that the entire house will be maintained at a proper temperature to prevent buildup of mold and mildew.

As the Society addresses **(1.) restoration of the house’s physical plant**, it is also our intention to concurrently address **(2.) the presentation, display and interpretation of the property’s artifacts for the public**. We will be installing new exhibits highlighting significant historical artifacts being identified and catalogued during the cleanup of the house – in addition to displaying outstanding pieces currently maintained in the Archives facility at the Schoolhouse. The rare 300+ year old barn loom is being restored, reassembled by a colonial loom expert, and will be featured in a newly developed display space. Restoration of the artifacts contaminated by the skunks will be completed.

Finally, the Historic Society proposes **(3) exterior site work improvements to re-establish appropriate and pleasing access to Cudworth House and to the Cudworth Barn for individuals and families.** The paved driveways to Gates School were removed during the construction of the Senior Center. With the driveways gone, these important historic properties are now isolated and cut-off from the public. Presently there is no way to get to the buildings except by traversing an uneven dirt and grass field. The Society would like to construct walkways from the parking area to the house and to the barn and also one connecting the house and barn. These planned walkways and steps will make the site more visitor-friendly, encouraging walkers, joggers, and all visitors to enjoy a park- like setting of the Cudworth “Homestead”. As part of this site work, the Society also proposes moving the historic well to a more secure location. During the Senior Center construction, the well ended up right at the edge of the Recreation Department parking area. It’s only a matter of time until the well is damaged.

**Summarize how this request benefits the Town of Scituate and meets the goals of the Community Preservation Act**

This project fulfills two goals of the CPA.

First, it allows the Scituate Historical Society to take significant steps to preserve a historically significant town-owned property and its contents.

The Society will undertake restoration of the foundation. It is a dry laid field stone foundation. Over the years, stones have become displaced leaving the structure vulnerable to water infiltration and settling. The Society will also assess and upgrade the minimal electrical system to ensure its safety. Additionally, a ventilation system will be installed to control moisture in the inaccessible crawl space.

The project will also take steps to conserve the many significant artifacts we have identified at Cudworth House and develop new displays, enhancing the viewing and interpretative experience of the public.

Second, the Society would like to take steps to re-integrate the house and barn into the site of the Senior Center/Recreation Department.

The Senior Center project removed all of the drives that used to give the public access to Cudworth House. We propose to construct a system of walkways which will connect the recreation parking lot to the house and the barn. This will offer year-round opportunity for the public to explore a park-like setting.