

PERSPECTIVE

By Bill Laidlaw
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Legislative Services Commission Study

The study conducted by the Legislative Service Commission (LSC) concerning incentives for Ohio Historical Society sites to become self-managed has been a very constructive exercise so far. At the beginning of January, LSC published its report to the Legislature that focused on 20 sites that could possibly be managed by a local support group. Publishing the list of 20 sites and making them widely available throughout our network has led to a number of productive discussions with friends groups around the state. Some of those are still in progress and represent real possibilities for the self-management and independence of various sites, while others have resulted in confirmation that the sites should remain firmly within the network and be managed on a continuing basis by the Ohio Historical Society.

For the Society, the most beneficial result was that the exercise focused on the significance of partnerships and the importance of collaboration around these historical sites. The Society has a strong ongoing stewardship responsibility for all of our sites. If any site is to become independent and managed by a local group, that can only happen if the local group is well-organized, has a lot of passion for managing the site, is capable of doing so on a year-to-year basis and has a long-term plan that will lead to a sustainable financial future for that site. At the same time, the study has shone a light on the importance of partnership and collaboration. It has helped us stimulate local interest in some sites where it had only been modestly discernable in the past. It also has helped some local groups rally around a site, generate more friends and begin to create a plan for long-term, ongoing financial support.

The state is looking into financial support mechanisms that include tax incentives, capital support and funds with which to create an endowment fund for operating purposes. All of these alternatives are worth exploring and each support alternative may apply differently on a site-by-site basis.

As is clear from our recent experience in transferring Glendower, a 19th-century Lebanon home, to the Warren County Historical Society, subsequent transfers to local management that take place will require a significant amount of time and some allocation of resources. No sites will become independent or be managed by local groups without public hearings. In many cases, some capital expenditures will be needed to repair sites in order to get them ready for independent groups to take over the management.

So, it's fair to say, the conversations are just beginning. Recent discussions among the Society staff have been very constructive I feel very confident it will lead to positive results. It's very comforting to know that both we and the friends groups at the sites take very seriously the long-term stewardship responsibility of these sites. That is, and will continue to be, a very important tenant of our value system.

As always, you may send your comments to me at the Ohio Historical Society,
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