

Hottenstein Mansion Farm Site Proposal

Hottenstein Reunion Committee

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Challenge

The Hottenstein Mansion, a property of the Preservation Trust of Berks County, is a significant historic site considered the finest eighteenth century Pennsylvania-German Georgian-style farmhouse built in America. Across four generations of Hottenstein expansion, seven farms and a one room schoolhouse rose from a cluster of contiguous properties assembled by Jacob Hottenstein who settled in this location the 1720s. For nearly 300 years this area of Hottenstein settlement has survived surrounded by cultivated fields, providing homes for many Hottenstein generations who have provided for and maintained the farming heritage of this region. At the core of these family farmsteads stands the Hottenstein Mansion, a property of national historic significance due to its high style Georgian design and Pennsylvania German elements and craftsmanship.

A proposal to create Valley Logistics Park, a large warehouse project that will convert most of the open fields near the mansion to an industrial land use, along with the necessary road widenings, historic building demolitions, and traffic improvements on Route 222, will significantly reduce the architectural and agricultural context of the mansion. A plan to mitigate the impact and threats on the Hottenstein Mansion is the subject of this report.

Vision

Should the warehouse project obtain all needed approvals, the least effected view of the Hottenstein mansion will be the east side and rear as seen while driving towards Kutztown on Route 222 south. This view of the property can remain largely as it looks now with the mansion and outbuildings surrounded on two sides by active farm fields. The donation of a minimum of ten tillable acres, as well as land to build an event parking lot, would ensure this property would meet the legal definition of a farm in Pennsylvania. A zoning change needs to be made to agriculture for the entire property to have the zoning consistent with the use of the land.

The tract of farmland will serve as a frame for the mansion and outbuildings and with the establishment of hedgerows around these fields, and a row of street trees along Route 222, that frame will grow to separate the Hottenstein Farm from the new industrial land uses. On the west side of the property closest to the development landscaping and fencing will be needed to secure and buffer the mansion property from light, sound, vibration, and air pollution. This landscaping would help to screen the warehouses while providing the strongest agricultural contextual frame possible, for the public to see and appreciate this landmark farmhouse, in an area that is all-

encompassing of the area from Route 222 north, to and inclusive of the unnamed tributary of the Saucony Creek, which flows a few hundred yards behind the mansion parallel to Route 222, and its associated creek environs.

The Hottenstein Mansion Farm Site Proposal includes important improvements including an event parking lot, a pathway from that parking lot to the mansion, extensive landscaping and buffering on the west side closest to the development, a new Hottenstein Road entrance, a possible driveway relocation, and placement of a relocated wagon house to protect the mansion from vehicle impact that can be added in carefully, to not adversely impact the best views of the property, while meeting the new conditions and needs of changing land use on the former fields. This proposal is accompanied with a schematic diagram showing the respective locations of the described site improvements. The siting of these improvements will provide for an ongoing visual and experiential relationship to the agricultural heritage of the Hottenstein Mansion.

Landscape Architect Needed

The transformation of the Hottenstein property to be a historic farm site is complicated and needs to be managed by a skilled landscape architect with expertise in historic site preservation and restoration. While engineering and site work can be carried out by the developer, the hiring of a historic landscape architect to oversee the creation of a plan that meets the goals of the Trust and the Reunion Committee will be important in monitoring and facilitating the plan implementation.

Event Parking Lot

To make the event parking lot less visible, the ideal location is between the mansion lot, the roundabout, and the new event entrance driveway placed off the relocated Hottenstein Road, in combination with aggressive landscaping designed to cut the sight and sound of the trucks entering and leaving the warehouses, fencing, and a gate to provide security to the site. With the moving of Hottenstein Road away from the mansion, a larger area will be available in this location to tuck in the event parking lot. The lot could encroach onto the portion of the mansion lot bordering the vacated section of Hottenstein Road.

The event lot will require grading and drainage engineering. Parking lot space sizing should be ten feet wide by twenty feet long to increase ease of backing in and out and to accommodate large vehicles. A cut limestone walkway could connect the new parking area to the side of the summer kitchen where an iron gate will open to offer mansion access to parkers at the west kitchen wing side door. Lighting at ground level for the steps, one or more pole lights for the parking area, and possibly a security light(s) are needed in case any event occurs past sun set.

Handicapped parking can be located on the existing driveway. During an event, elderly and handicapped guests should park in the house driveway at the existing garage so the affected passengers can get very close to the east kitchen wing side door safely and on a flat grade. Assigning handicapped cars to the mansion driveway can reduce the number of parking spaces needed in the event lot by 4-6. Fifty parking spots, in the new lot and the handicapped spots closer to the mansion is the number needed for events.

Roundabout/Hottenstein Road Screening, and Security

The greatest impact on the mansion property is the light, sound, and emissions from the entrance turn into the warehouse project from 222 to Hottenstein Road. The most intensive and densest landscaping used here will shield the mansion property as best as possible. Integration of the guest parking with this landscaping will minimize the visual impact of a parking area. The west perimeter of the new lands is closest to the around the clock warehouse activity. For security, a wooden fence of historic design should span the border along the new Hottenstein Road from Route 222 to the northwestern corner of the property. The design can be determined later in consultation with all stakeholders. A gate to close off the event parking lot can open manually unless this drive becomes the only way to access the property, then an electric gate will be needed for security.

Driveway Scenarios

A final plan for access to the site awaits PennDOT completion of a final design for improvements to Route 222. Here are the three possibilities that might occur:

1. If existing driveway remains it needs paving for snow removal. The event lot will need its own entrance road and security gate, but the two lanes into the site, from the event entrance and the existing driveway will not need to connect so as to protect site security.
2. If the existing driveway closed, but Charles Wessner's drive remains open, construct a paved driveway from the existing mansion lot, along 222, towards the corner of the new property to provide 222 access closer to the Wessner's drive, but on Trust property as granted by PennDot.
3. If there is no access from 222, all vehicles would need to enter the property by the new Hottenstein Road, and a lane would be needed to connect the event parking lot area to the existing driveway and garage.

To protect the intact farm fields from this site work and maintain the agricultural integrity, any connecting road between the event lot and the existing mansion lot should be along the back lot line of the existing small mansion tract, and along the edge of the fields. Such a route would follow the property line east, then turn into the backyard and connect with the current driveway. One benefit of this approach is the

handicap access would be an extension of the normal entrance procedure. Cutting through the back yard will require the removal of an abandoned underground fuel oil tank, installed to power a furnace to heat a greenhouse, since removed. The new road network on site will need appropriate landscaping.

222 Street Trees, Hedgerow Plantings, and Fencing

There is a section of remnant hedgerow left along the field boundary with Haldeman Ford – let that section serve as a model for reestablishing field hedgerows along the north rear field boundary with the warehouse project, and along the east side boundary with Haldeman and Wesner. The hedgerow approach can also be used to influence the western side plantings of the property with the development. Across the 222 boundary in front of the mansion, a picket fence will be installed with a gate across from the front door. A fence that appears in a 1890s photo has been reproduced around the domestic outbuildings on site and will serve as the model. A row of street trees along 222 and in front of the mansion, species to be determined by research, would provide security from errant vehicles. Fencing along the west side by Hottenstein Road adds greater security.

Wagon House

Gaining agricultural acreage will allow the Hottenstein Mansion to become the Hottenstein Farm. There is a need for a large outbuilding to help facilitate farm operations, reunions, and other special events. Currently the wagon house/corn crib across 222 from the Mansion is slated for demolition. We propose moving the building across the road and siting it near the extant parking lot of the mansion and placing it to help protect the mansion from being struck by errant vehicles. A relocated wagon house would serve as a sound, sight, and vehicle block – it would look like it belongs there. We request the developer to move and restore the building. The wagon house could hold farm machinery to work the ten acres, as well as seed, fertilizers, and equipment needed for farming. During the reunions tables and chairs in the wagon house could put the meal under a roof in the shade and provide storage for equipment needed when large groups gather. The wagon house would need a new foundation and exterior restoration by the developer. Electricity needs to be run underground to the wagon house.

Cider Mill

The cider mill is an eighteenth-century timber frame building. The roof is good, but not of a historically correct material. The exterior is covered in asbestos shingles that need mitigation and removal. The developer can remediate the asbestos and restore the exterior appearance. Upon removal of the asbestos the building can be studied to determine how the exterior ought to be restored. The east gable wall was

removed to install a garage door making this elevation a challenge to restore. Electricity needs to be run underground to the cider mill.

Salvage Opportunities

On the side of the weathered wood stable siding across from the twin Hottenstein Houses is a hand painted tobacco advertisement that we should remove, conserve, and hang on the side of the wagon house. The two datestones on the stone houses need to be integrated into the mansion site. The cut stones from the 1835 Hottenstein farmhouse façade might be used for pathways. Other opportunities to utilize fabric from all buildings being removed by the developer may be identified as a site plan gets created. A Blue Highway of History sign from the PHMC is needed for the mansion, as is signage to direct visitors to and through the site.

Farm Operation Agreement

A way to pay for the maintenance and preservation of the added acreage, structures, and buildings needs discussion. Ideally, upon completion, the developer will have completed all aspects of the site work and restoration of the cider mill and wagon house in consultation with the Trust and the Reunion Committee. Since the farmland can be rented, a modest income can be created to apply to the costs of maintaining the new property. Because the Trust is a 501C3 non-profit organization, a full tax exemption should be sought for the farmland. The amount of taxes the developer will be covering is so large that the associated small reduction in taxes should be accommodated. The tax savings would boost the annual income to be used to maintain the property and would provide the basis of establishing a maintenance fund using the rental income. The tenant and reunion committee, on behalf of the Trust, can manage the added property in providing for and maintaining the agricultural viewshed.