

Historic House Closedown Checklist

Introduction. This Historic House Closedown Checklist was developed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation as a quick tool for organizations to use when considering the future of a historic site that has been open to the public. The intent is to provide a summary of the considerations that an organization may need to assess before, during and after making a decision to close a historic house. In all cases, consultation with qualified legal, accounting and site professionals is strongly encouraged as the organization considers the future of a historic house.

I. Site Assessment

A. Finances

1. Endowment
Restricted/Board Designated
2. Operating Budget
 - a. Revenue Sources (additional untapped sources/ future projections)
 - b. Expenses (adequate or resulting in deferred maintenance)
3. Debt

B. Organizational

1. Type of Organization
 - a. Nonprofit/Incorporated
Status – filings updated, tax returns filed etc.
 - b. State or Local Agency
 - c. Unincorporated
2. Relationships with other Organizations (leases, partnerships, costewardship arrangements)
3. Mission/Strategic Plan/Vision Statement
 - Current mission
 - Relevance to Site
 - Site's Relevance to Mission
 - Site's fit with other Sites owned by the Same Organization
4. Membership
 - Growing/Static
5. Staffing Adequacy
 - Volunteer/Professional

Job descriptions

- C. Board Strength
 - 1. Vacancies
 - 2. Rotating/development of new leadership
 - 3. Representation
 - a. from community as a whole
 - b. diversity
 - c. skill sets
 - d. financial capacity
- D. Programming/Interpretation
 - 1. Visitation
 - 2. Diversity of Programming
 - 3. Ability to attract different/new audiences
 - 4. Evaluation Process/Capacity/Commitment
- E. Collections and Collections Care
 - 1. Public Value and Appropriateness to the Site
 - 2. Condition
 - 3. Adequacy of Level of Care and Space
 - 4. Policies – including de-accessioning policy and process
- F. Preservation
 - 1. Significance of Site
 - 2. Condition of site
 - a. Deferred Maintenance
 - b. Capital Needs
 - c. Landscape Assessment
 - d. Adjacent Property/Natural/Conservation Significance
- G. Community/State/National Interest
- H. Documentation
 - 1. Organizational documents for operating entity
 - 2. Deeds/Wills for Real Estate
 - 3. Grant Agreements or other funding documents
 - 4. Deeds of Gift and other Collections documents
 - 5. Restrictions such as easements or covenants

II. Assessment of Options (occurs concurrently with I and III)

- A. Strengthen/Continue Operations
- B. Mothball/Stabilize
- C. Transfer to Another Institution/Keep Open to the Public
 - Consider interest of other qualified capable organizations (public process)
- D. Close to the Public but Retain Site for Different Purpose
 - 1. Appropriateness of Purpose
 - 2. Financial sustainability
- E. Close to the Public/Transfer the Site to Private Ownership

1. Transfer the Collections (sale/transfer to another public institution)/ (sale to public)
2. Transfer the Real Estate (sale/transfer to another public institution)/ (sale to public)
3. Transfer of remaining funds (endowments, proceeds)

III. Legal and Ethical Considerations

- A. Gather information about legal status of assets
 1. Is real estate restricted or held in trust
 2. Are objects in the collection restricted or held in trust
 3. Are funds restricted or held in trust
- B. Legal Standards
 1. What will state/local law require in the disposition of assets?
 - a. Cy pres
 - b. Public Trust
 - c. Unrestricted
 2. What Process is Required?
 - a. Approval by court
 - b. Approval by state corporations commission/Attorney General
- C. What do applicable ethical standards require for the organization in treatment of assets?
 1. AAM
 2. AASLH
 3. LTA
- D. Development of Protections for Assets that Should be Protected
 1. Transfer to organizations with shared/related mission
 - a. Museum collections to other museums
 - b. Real Estate to be kept open to the public
 - c. Transfer for other related purposes, such as land conservation
 2. Consideration of Easements/Protective Covenants for Significant Real Estate
 3. Appropriate Disposition of Financial Assets/Proceeds
 - a. Expenses of Close-down/Transfer
 - b. Easement endowment
 - c. Other Mission Driven Purposes
 - d. Other Public Purposes (other organization)

IV. Transparency and Consultation

- A. Consultation with relevant preservation and other public institutions, political leaders and donors/family members
 1. State Historic Preservation Office

2. Statewide Preservation Organization
 3. Local Preservation Organization
 4. State/Regional Museum Association (if exists)
 5. Other state/local museums
 6. National Trust Regional Office
 7. Political Leaders
 - a. Mayor
 - b. Councilmember (local representatives)
 - c. State representative
 - d. Federal Representative
 8. Donors and Family Members
- B. Development of public process to determine appropriate future/disposition
1. Consideration of RFP process (i.e. Robert E. Lee Boyhood Home)
 2. Transfer to specified organization – who needs to know/approve?
- C. Public Relations
1. Consideration of Potential Reactions or negative publicity
 2. Consultation with entities that may potentially object
 3. Development of Press Strategy
 - a. Announcement
 - b. Prepared statement in response to potential questions
 - c. Designation of Point Person

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