

Preservation Proposal: Westbrook Historical Society

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Part One: General Background

The Westbrook Historical Society is located squarely in the Westbrook Town Green.

The museum, which used to house the original Westbrook Library, is roughly the size of a small house. The building hosts a collection of artifacts from the area, including artifacts from historic Westbrook families as well as Native American arrowheads or spears found in the area. The historical society strives to “acquire, preserve and display documents, relics and records relating to the history of Westbrook” (Hollister, 2013). The items in the collect include clothing and writings from the early families of Westbrook.

Town residents can gain membership and attend monthly meetings held in the building.

The group strives to preserve the history of Westbrook and encourage an interest in learning about the history of the town.

Part Two: Disaster Possibilities and Vulnerabilities

In the case of a disaster, Westbrook is most likely in danger of flooding, from hurricanes or large rainstorms. In the recent years, looking at events like Hurricane Sandy, Hurricane Irene or smaller tropical storms, it is not unlikely that a storm could cause damage to both the building and the artifacts inside. The Historical Society has many valuable items the need to be preserved in the case of one of these dangerous storms. There have been many major storms over the last few years, so the historical society needs a plan in place to protect the valuable artifacts inside the building.

Located on the town green, the historical building presents vulnerabilities some serious hazards. After calling the Historical Building, I was connected with Catherine

Doane (Vice President of the Historical Society). When asked about the societies preparedness for emergencies, Doane could not recall a specific plan. Don Izzo, Doane explained, was formerly in charge of emergency preparedness and the town owns the property that the building sits on. Loren Baker, Westbrook Facilities Manager, is in charge of the property, but could not be reached for comment due to recent hospitalization. As it stands, there is no known emergency plan for the building in the case of another devastating storm like the town had seen in the past few years.

The Town Green is located within a dangerous flood zone, so the possibility of water damage is a real threat. Water damage could be devastating to the paper artifacts held in the building. Another huge threat is the area itself. Several trees are situated around the green, some large enough to cause damage to windows if a strong enough wind unearthed them. Past experiences with hurricanes shows that trees can easily be pulled out of the ground with a mix of high winds and heavily saturated soil. These trees could break a window, exposing the artifacts inside to the elements. The location of the building on the town green leaves it exposed on all sides. The building has a lot of glass windows, but is primarily brick otherwise.

Part Three: Project Statement and Description

The Historic Artifact Relocation Project would be to put a plan in place so that in the case of a flood or hurricane, so that the Historic Society can keep the artifacts safe.

The purpose of the project would be to put a plan in place so that the Society

would be able to know what to do when an emergency situation hits to protect the one of a kind pieces in the historical building.

The town wide procedure dictates that in the case of the emergency, the schools are the primary shelters for people who do not have anywhere to go if they need to be evacuated. In the case of flooding, people living near the shoreline need to go find higher ground. The easiest method is to move the artifacts from their current location to somewhere that the artifacts would be safer. A few possibilities exist, but the best possibility would be to find somewhere in one of the local schools to house the objects.

For timing reasons, the best place to put the artifacts would be in the Daisy Ingraham Elementary School. The school is located nearby, but is also located uphill. The school keeps the materials safe from the resources and can also be under careful surveillance during the course of the emergency situation. The best building in the school would be the computer lab. In the layout of the school, the elementary computer lab has no windows and can also be kept separate from people if it needs to be. In the case of long-term storage, there is enough space to keep the museum pieces separated from the school children if for any reason the museum still needs time to rebuild after a disaster event.

Part Four: Resources

The project would require volunteers and members of the historical society to be able to quickly establish when the artifacts would need to be moved (in coordination with the disaster response authority in Westbrook). When a storm hits that is projected to be disastrous, the members of the society can take the artifacts to the school.

The volunteers would be able to quickly move the artifacts from their current location to the proposed safer location for them. Costs should be low, perhaps as limited as providing packing materials for the various artifacts as well as training in the proper procedure for packaging. One of the historical society members could be appointed to be head of preservation. The facility has an archivist, so they could receive training in the proper methods of keeping artifacts safe when transporting objects.

Timeline

The point of this program is to quickly move the items to a safer location. Ideally, the actual relocation process should be done as quickly as possible. Members can share the duties of packaging and moving the items to keep them preserved. The program would need to be quickly implemented in order to keep the artifacts safe. Training a member of the staff to properly package the items could be done over the course of a few days.

In a week or less, the program could be finalized and ready to be put into action the moment that a storm with enough power hits.

Bibliography

- 1) Hollister, M. (2013, Nov 01). *Westbrook Historical Society*. Retrieved from <http://westbrookhistory.org/site/>
- 2) Doane, C. (2013, Dec 01). Westbrook Historical Society Vice President.
Phone interview.