

Nov 4, 2021

Charlevoix Board of County Commissioners

Attention Chris Christensen, Chairman

CC: Robert Draves, Vice Chairman

Robert J. Jess

Ronald L. Reinhardt

Shirley Roloff

Scott Hankins - Beaver Island District Commissioner



Dear Commissioners,

The Beaver Island Historical Society would like to address our interest/concern in regard to the Lighthouse proper. We recognize that the issue at hand covers more than just the Lighthouse buildings.

In 2018, the Beaver Island Historical Society supported Charlevoix County and Networks Northwest in purchasing the Beaver Head Lighthouse because preserving the Islands cultural landscape advances the Beaver Island Historical Society mission of *Preserving and sharing the unique history of Beaver Island and the Archipelago.*

The Beaver Head lighthouse is the third oldest lighthouse on Lake Michigan, built in 1851 during Strang's era, operated well into the 1950s, and helped countless ships navigate the treacherous waters of Lake Michigan. The Beaver Head Lighthouse (South Light) is accessible by land, is an aesthetically and historically significant property listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is an important part of local, regional, and national history. Given the historical nature of the lighthouse property, it is valued as a regional recreational asset with cultural significance.

Below are restatements of our pledge and the actions of the Historical Society activities to demonstrate our commitment and the volunteer resources available to assist and sustain ongoing efforts to preserve the Beaver Head Lighthouse.

★ To assist with general maintenance with the Lighthouse and Foghorn property

2019:

- Flowers
- Painted the Barn
- First exterior floor of assistant keeper's quarters

2020:

- Procured a custom-made exterior door to tower (\$5,000) and installed
- Replaced tower vestibule floor
- Cleaned interior of the building
- Hauled rubbish to the transfer station
- Repaired both porches

2021:

- Repaired the porch skirting and painted
- Repaired broken windows
- Installed interpretive signage

OVERALL, approximately 700 volunteer hours since 2019 totaling \$15,400 in-kind labor.

- ★ To be a public liaison to convey progress and concerns to the community and partners.
 - The Society has facilitated Zoom calls with both partners and volunteers and have advocated on behalf of the community and partnership during conflicts assuring our community your work was still progressing as promised.
 - Oddly, this past year visiting commissioners have not reached out to the Historical Society when visiting the lighthouse to learn more about community efforts to maintain the property.
 - We need to have better communication with the commissioners to keep the partnership moving forward.

- ★ To participate in all planning and grant writing efforts associated with the Lighthouse and Foghorn property
 - We set aside time to meet with the Capital Planner to convey our vision in May 2021.
 - We have potential resources to advance the restoration on hold because we have not been presented a capital plan.
 - We need direction to carry out this task. **Approving a Capital Plan is ESSENTIAL!**

- ★ To assist with the State Historic Preservation Office's (SHPO) requirements of the historical easement property, including the opening of the lighthouse keeper's quarters and tower a minimum of ten (10) days a year.
 - Our Volunteers have opened the tower for approximately 150 days the last 3 years. At the end of the season, returning to close the tower.
 - The Historical Society has participated in meetings when requested and worked silently in the background fulfilling research requests for SHPO.

- ★ To be the fiduciary agent on behalf of the entire property for all donations and grants necessitating a 501(c)(3) designation.
 - Since 2019 the society has received small private donations totalling about \$5,000. The funds have been used to purchase paint, lumber, miscellaneous maintenance supplies and will soon cover the cost of a custom built screen door for the tower door. We have not issued any campaign letters to actively raise funds but are willing to launch a campaign for public support once a Capital Plan is implemented and goals are defined. **Approving a Capital Plan is ESSENTIAL!**

Beaver Island provides a unique quality and pace of life not found on the "mainland." Our Master Plan identifies the important role the lighthouse plays for community health, development, and economy. We recognized in our Master Plan:

- A need to grow the local economy by capitalizing on tourism opportunities, expanding recreation into the shoulder season, and leveraging existing capital to grow businesses.
- Inventory historic structures in disrepair and identify priorities for reuse and preservation including the Beaver Head Lighthouse and fog signal building located at the south end of the Island.
- Protect and preserve the lighthouse at the south end of the Island.

- Honor the Island's use by Native Americans and other groups through interpretative, bilingual signage along paths and trails.

In 2016, many Islanders voiced concerns for the preservation and care of the Beaver Island Lighthouse at the south end of the Island during the Master Planning process. Stating, "The lighthouse's fate is once again uncertain." Many Islanders emphasized the importance of maintaining the lighthouse while lamenting the loss of the school program. The Island has an opportunity to secure the public's access to and care for the lighthouse itself, while the campus may be repurposed into something new.

Five years later, we find ourselves with the same concerns. Please don't let Beaver Island down. Continue to honor your commitments, let us work together to continue to procure grants, donations and volunteers to preserve the Lighthouse property. Please join us as leaders to do the right thing. Our successes or failures impact Beaver Islands cultural landscape, maritime history for the Great Lakes region, our tourism economy, and the future of our island.

It is our recommendation a capital plan be approved for the lighthouse proper and move forward.

Sincerely,

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