

MASTER PLAN



STEPHEN & HARRIET MYERS RESIDENCE
Albany, New York

prepared by: **STEPHEN TILLY, Architect** Dobbs Ferry NY

Acknowledgments

The National Trust for Historic Preservation Johanna Favrot Fund for Historic Preservation

Members of and Contributors to the Underground Railroad History Project of the Capital Region

Cover: Tie Rod End at 194 Livingston

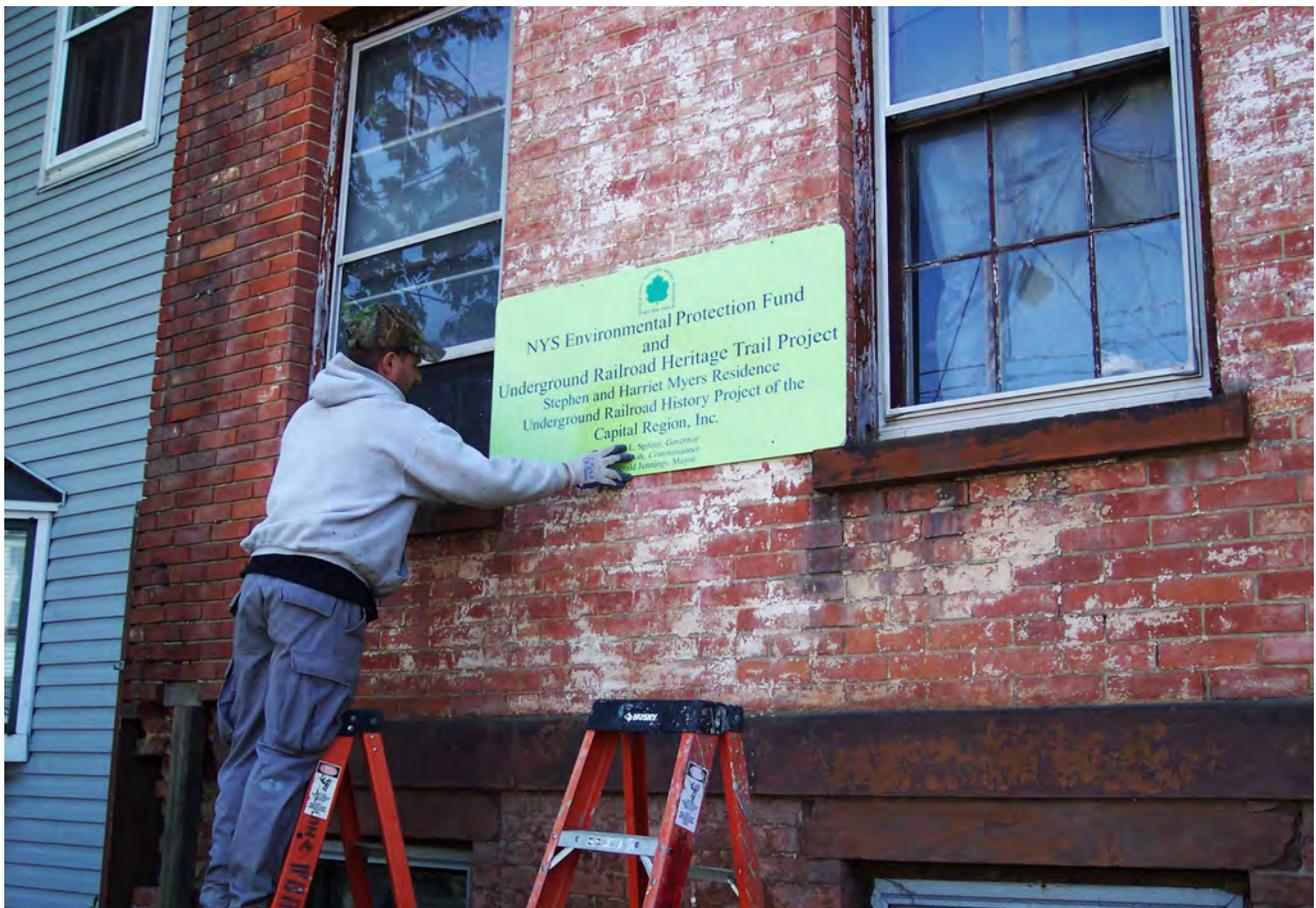
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This document is the work of Stephen Tilly, Architect and is intended for Board Members and stakeholders of URHPCR. It offers an analysis of the physical capacity of the Myers Residence, a preliminary outline of code constraints, a menu of general, prototype use options, a sampling of actions taken by others in the preservation community to make their properties sustainable and a review of institution-building measures necessary to support and maintain the vitality of demanding historic real estate. This is a preliminary feasibility report to provide a field of choices for use in the preparation for a strategic plan to be undertaken by URHPCR.

1 Introduction

Contemplating visions for the future life of the Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence is exhilarating. Restored, the building will be a treasured symbol of anti-slavery activism in the capital region. Putting it back in service to the human rights principles espoused by the Myers will be a defining achievement for the Underground Railroad History Project of the Capital Region (URHPCR).

This Master Plan to guide planning for 194 Livingston and the adjoining property at 196 covers a general approach to the resuscitation of the building, analysis of potential public and private spaces and their capacities, zoning and building code constraints, some program alternatives and possible contributions from the Myers house to the community. Since the building is in desperate need of further work, it is essential to advance steps to secure its future before widening the study to consider options for the assembled land parcels owned by the URHPCR.



2 Historic Preservation and Sustainability

The listing of the Stephen and Harriet Myers House on the National Register of Historic Places and public funding sources mandate best preservation practices in the rehabilitation of the building. Recommended measures are discussed in the 2009 *Historic Structure Report* prepared for the Underground Railroad History Project by Stephen Tilly Architect. See Chapter 6, *Recommendations for a Phased Restoration Plan*. Construction should be governed by documents prepared by a qualified preservation architect and executed by contractors experienced in working on National Register buildings.



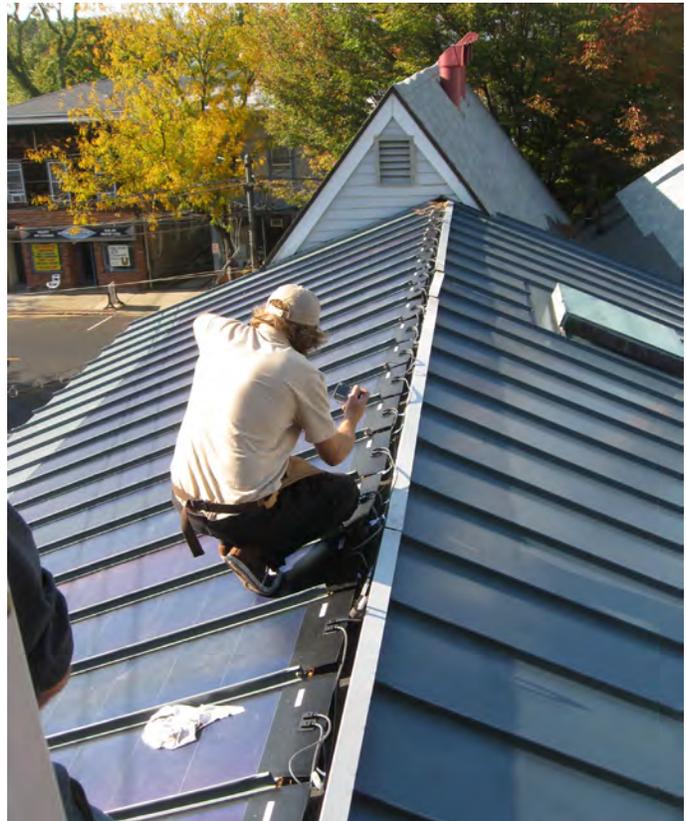
Room proportions and restored millwork convey the character of the Myers' surroundings.



sustainability

Re-using an existing building is environmentally responsible. Integrating energy conserving measures into all aspects of the rehabilitation process ensures its sustainability for the future. Chapter 6 of the *Historic Structure Report* p. 93 provides a checklist of system-wide sustainable practices. Common sense weatherization strategies such as weather-stripping windows can both serve the building and be part of a teaching program for the community at large. The roof facing the back yard may be a candidate for building integrated solar panels which can reduce utility bills.

All phases of rehabilitation should incorporate appropriate green features. If an annex is constructed in the rear to provide reception space, accessible entry and restrooms, that addition can demonstrate sustainable practices by providing its own power, hot water and by employing composting toilets.



South facing roofs like that at the Myers House on the left and the building on the right (photo-voltaic installation in progress) are candidates for solar collectors to heat hot water or generate electricity.

3 Building Capacity

Program: “A statement prepared by or for an owner, with or without an architect’s assistance, setting forth the conditions and objectives for a building project including its general purpose and detailed requirements, such as a complete listing of the rooms required, their sizes, special facilities *etc.*” Cyril Harris: *Dictionary of Architecture and Construction*.

The definition above describes the tool used by an architect to understand clients’ requirements for a new building. In architectural parlance, “programming” addresses generic types of activities and uses, not content specifics. For an existing historic building, programming is an exploration of what generic types of uses can fit into pre-determined spaces. For the Myers House, our investigation starts with architectural programming—code, dimension and adjacency analysis—and moves on to a non-quantifiable exploration of “content” types of programming using URHPCR memos, visioning documents and conversations from 2005 on and offering further thoughts of our own. Guided by Jaquetta Haley, Ph.D, historian and museum consultant of Haley Research, and drawing on our experience with management and interpretation of public historic sites, we will suggest parameters for evaluation of the alternatives.

Myers House Alternatives: spatial analysis

If the Myers House is to be a truly public facility, at least in part, it will require barrier-free accessibility. The Americans with Disability Act spells out improvements required for “public accommodations”, and the New York State Building Code contains similar accessibility requirements meeting national standards. There is some relief for historic sites, but the change of occupancy from residential to those projected in this plan invokes a series of requirements spelled out in the Building Code Analysis in the appendices. The real driver for accessibility improvements, however, will be to ensure the URHPCR has created a guest-friendly facility to make programming available to the widest possible audience. A tangible fringe benefit is that such a facility will be more attractive to private and public donors.

Assuming that they can be made accessible (see Annex, Section 6), the basement and parlor floors, at least, will be the public parts of the house. Below, we illustrate alternatives we believe are consistent with the historic character of the property. In all cases, historic partitions, windows and trim surviving from the period of significance should be restored and maintained. A Building Code Review (Appendix B) follows these scenarios. It presents in some detail the code particulars that apply to the property.

These scaled diagrams illustrate general potential categories of use possible given space and code limitations, not specific instances of use, which will be determined by the URHPCR (see Appendix A). Some diagrams show specific furniture arrangements for illustration purposes; in practice there will be more flexibility. However, comfortable row to row spacing, and safe (and wheelchair negotiable) pathways around seating groups should be maintained, so the diagrams give a good estimation of total numbers of people who can fit into the spaces. If a scenario is not a permanent installation, additional space should be found to store folding or stackable chairs, tables, exhibit panels and supplies.

Infrastructure

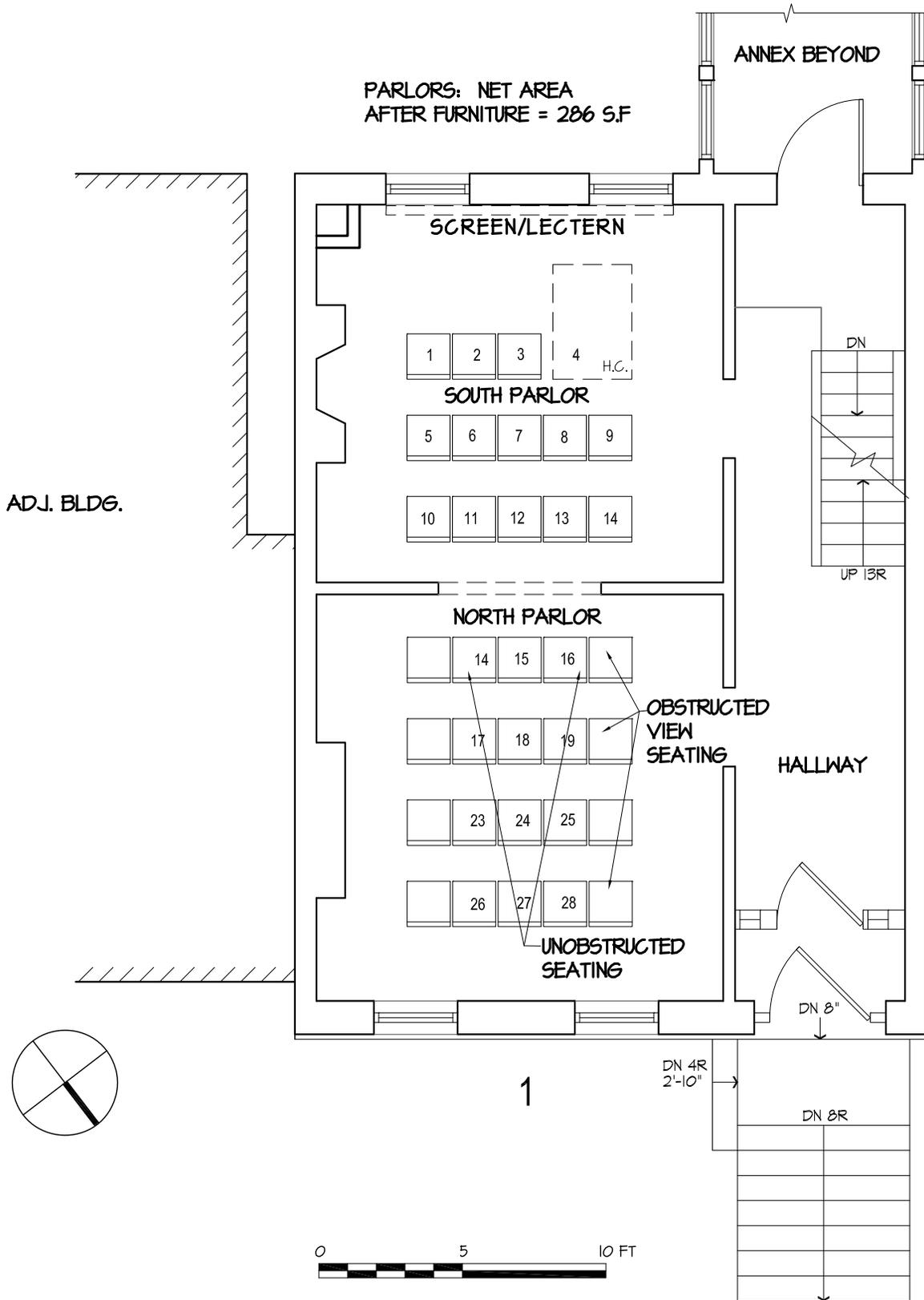
All of the potential categories of use will require new and upgraded services to the building and through the building: wiring for power, data, safety and security; water lines and waste lines; double check valve, pumps and piping for a sprinkler system; and an energy efficient heating, ventilating and air-conditioning system.

Building Envelope

Similarly, all the likely possible categories of use will require significant upgrades to the building shell, not simply for structural purposes but also to reduce the environmental footprint and carrying costs of the structure, and to create a healthy interior atmosphere. It will require skill and inventiveness to balance those goals with the requirement of maintaining the site's historic integrity. Doors, windows, insulation, roofing assemblies and interior finishes will have to meet dual or triple standards. Given the absence of furnishings and fine interior finishes, this site presents an especially good opportunity to demonstrate that it is possible to be historically correct and have an exceptionally small carbon footprint.

Scenario 1: lecture

Loose seating, arranged in rows facing a presentation at the back of the South Parlor. For full visibility from the North Parlor, rows are only 3 seats wide. Room for a single wheel chair is reserved at the front of the audience (#4). For events not requiring full view, 8 additional seats with limited visual access are shown. Exit paths must be 36 inches wide so the number of potential standee locations is limited to perhaps six or seven. Places with acceptable views of a presentation at the south end of the two parlors are **27 plus one wheelchair**.



PARLORS: NET AREA
AFTER FURNITURE = 286 S.F.

ANNEX BEYOND

SCREEN/LECTERN

1 2 3 4 H.C.

SOUTH PARLOR

5 6 7 8 9

10 11 12 13 14

NORTH PARLOR

14 15 16

17 18 19

23 24 25

26 27 28

OBSTRUCTED
VIEW
SEATING

UNOBSTRUCTED
SEATING

HALLWAY

DN

UP 13R

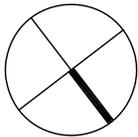
DN 8"

DN 4R
2'-10"

DN 8R

1

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Project:
MYERS RESIDENCE
MASTER PLAN

Title: PARLOR (FIRST) FLOOR LECTURE USE

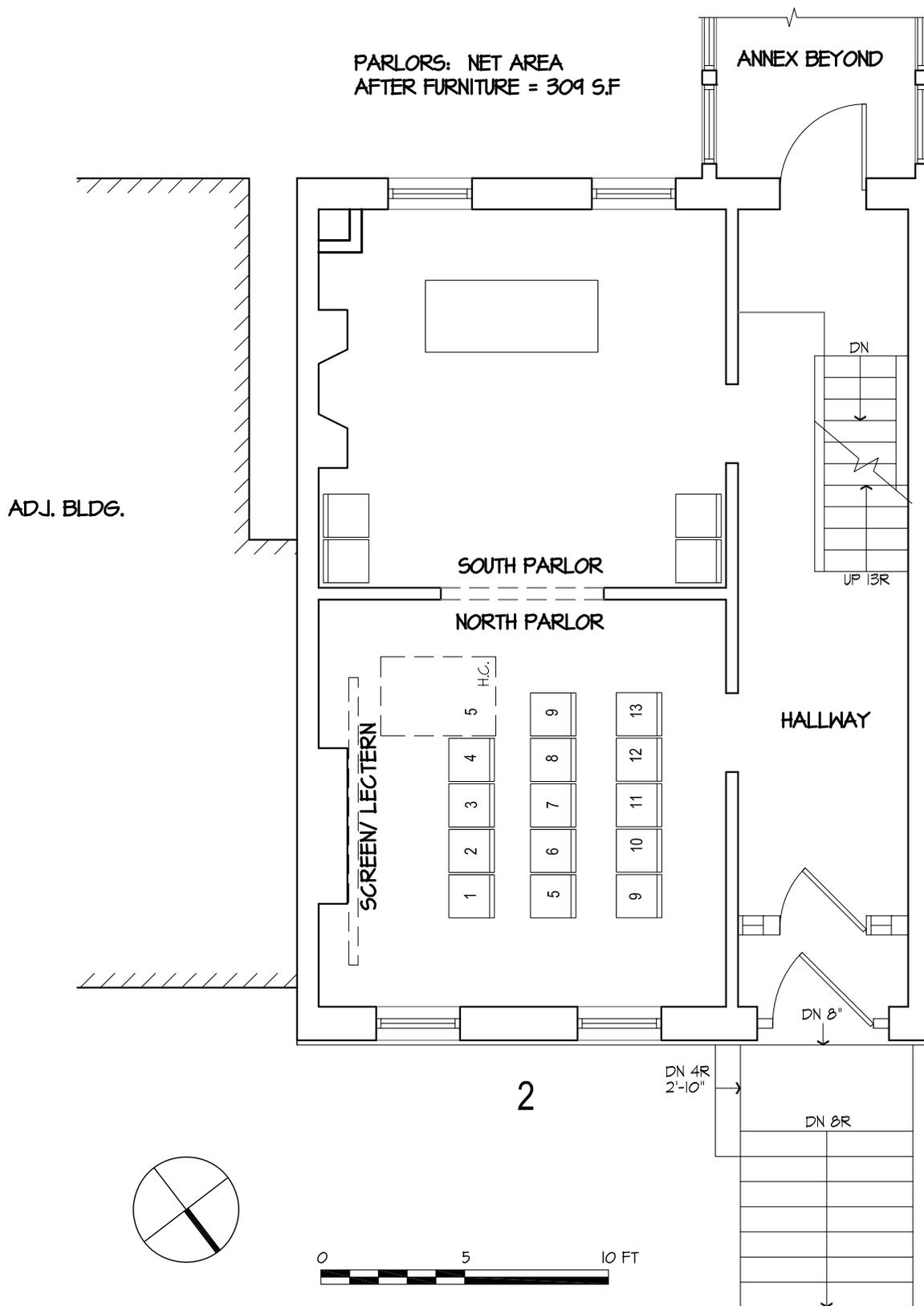
Scale: 3/16" = 1' - 0" Date: October 1, 2011

Drawing no.:
Scenario

1

Scenario 2: small lecture and reception

Loose seating, arranged in rows facing the hearth in the North Parlor. The presentation takes place in the North Parlor. One space for a wheelchair at the front of the audience (5), three rows of regular seating. The total number of seating places is **12 plus one wheelchair**. The South Parlor is shown with open floor area with a refreshment or literature table and some seating at the perimeter. Assuming the furniture shown and using the Building Code stipulation of 5 square feet minimum per person, it could accommodate about 16 standees cocktail-party fashion—appropriate for a refreshment break and networking. The room could have displays or wall panels that might reduce the walkable square footage somewhat but still preserve its function as a gathering space.



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Title: PARLOR FLOOR SMALL LECTURE USE
WITH LITERATURE TABLE

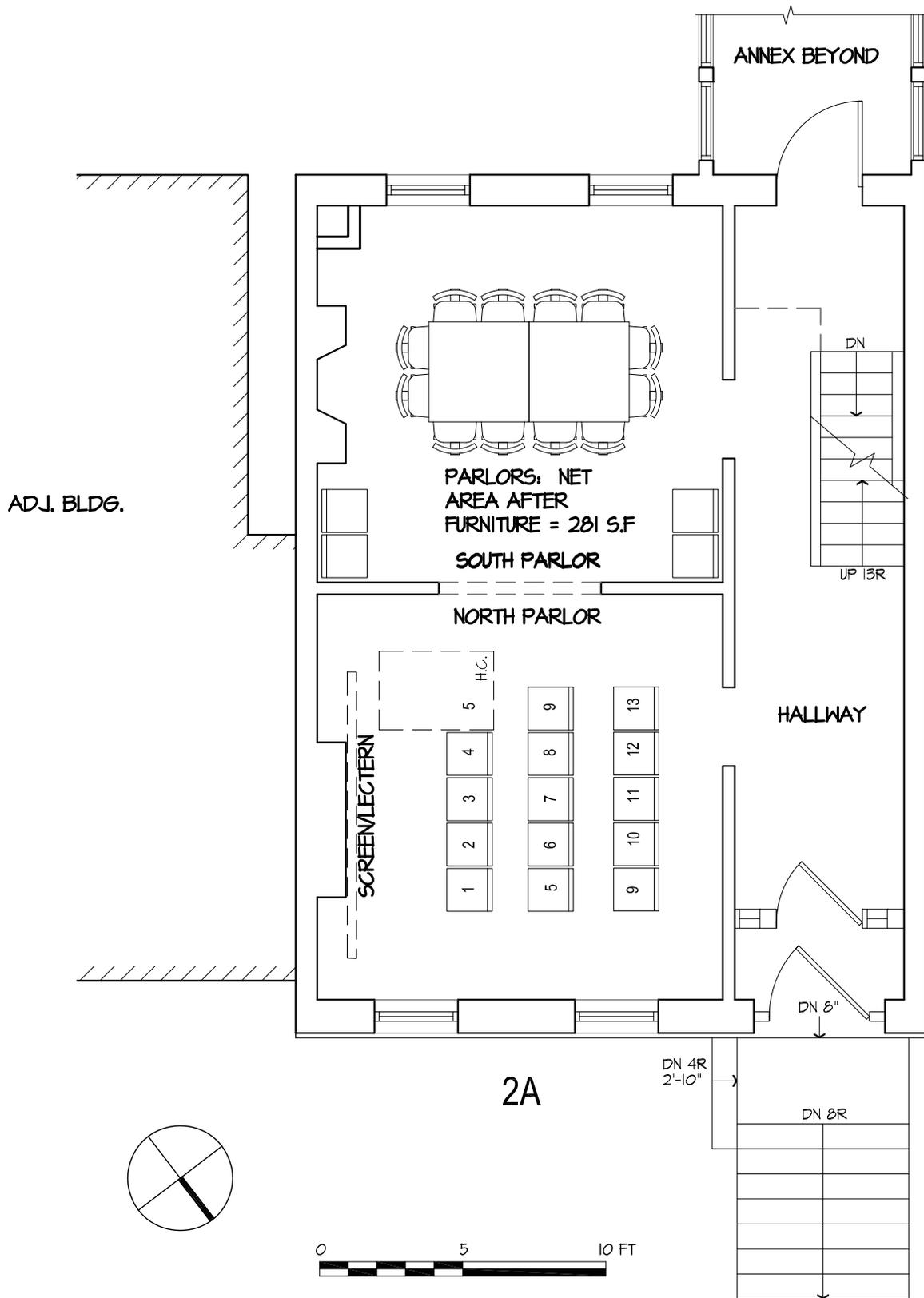
Scale: 3/16" = 1' - 0" Date: October 1, 2011

Drawing no.:
Scenario

2

Scenario 2A: small lecture and seminar

This arrangement illustrates the addition of a seminar or board room table **seating 12** in the South Parlor to the previous arrangement that illustrated loose seating in the North Parlor with **12 places plus one wheel chair** spot for a presentation.



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Title: PARLOR FLOOR SMALL LECTURE USE
 WITH CONFERENCE TABLE

Scale: 3/16" = 1' - 0" Date: October 1, 2011

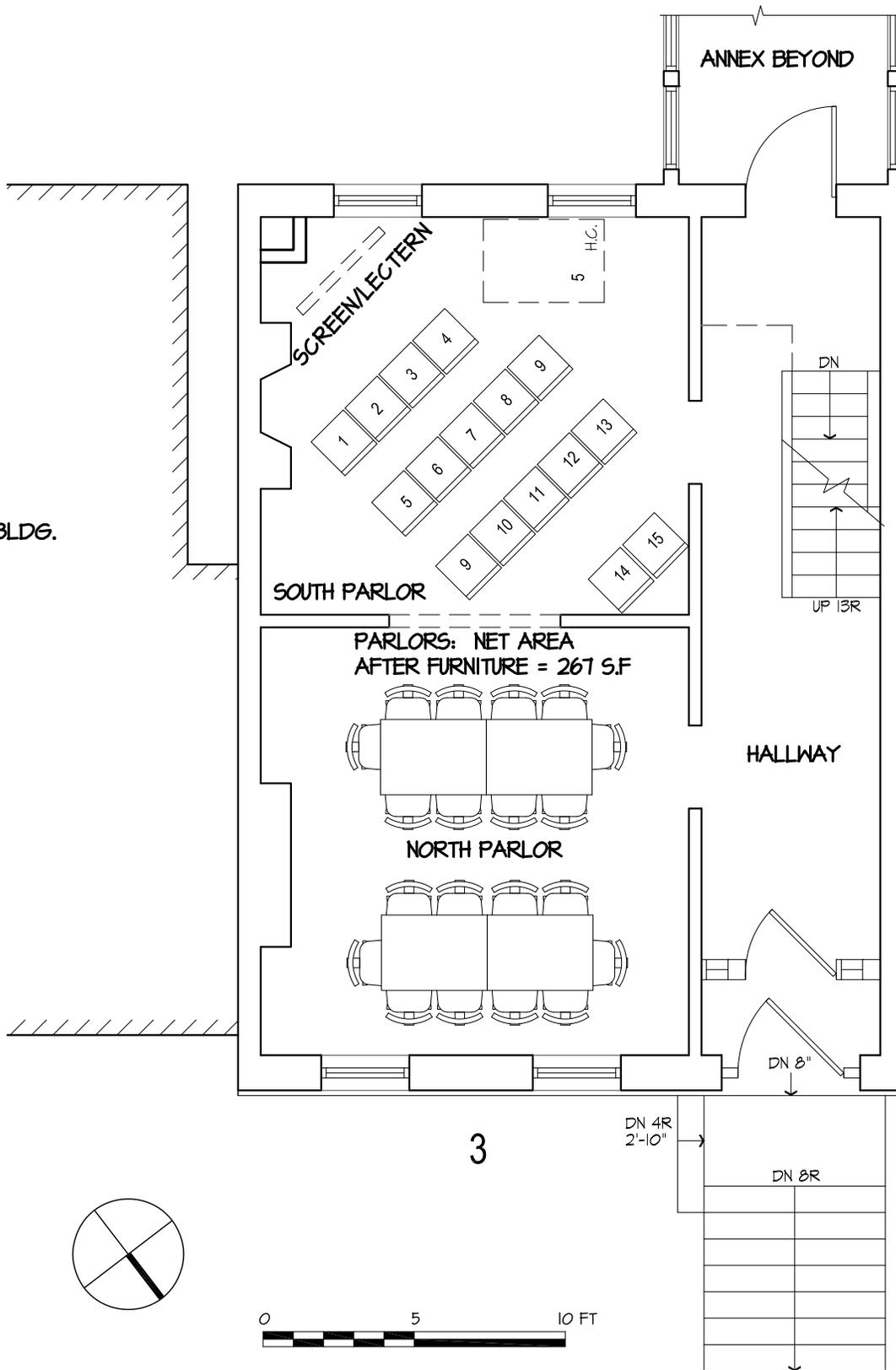
Drawing no.:
 Scenario

2A

Scenario 3: project space(s).

The North Parlor is furnished with work tables for projects involving writing, drawing or crafts which may relate to the discussion or materials in the South Parlor. The diagram shows full size furniture and is a very cozy fit for **20 people at tables**. School-age children could use smaller furniture so the numbers of people served could increase slightly or the work areas could be more generous. The South Parlor holds either exhibits and interactive displays or an arrangement of loose seating (presentation lay-out illustrated) with room for **14 seated plus one wheelchair**. (#5) Alternatively, it could hold tables and chairs—an extension of the North Parlor use that is illustrated.

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Project:
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Title: PARLOR FLOOR SMALL LECTURE USE
 WITH WORK TABLES

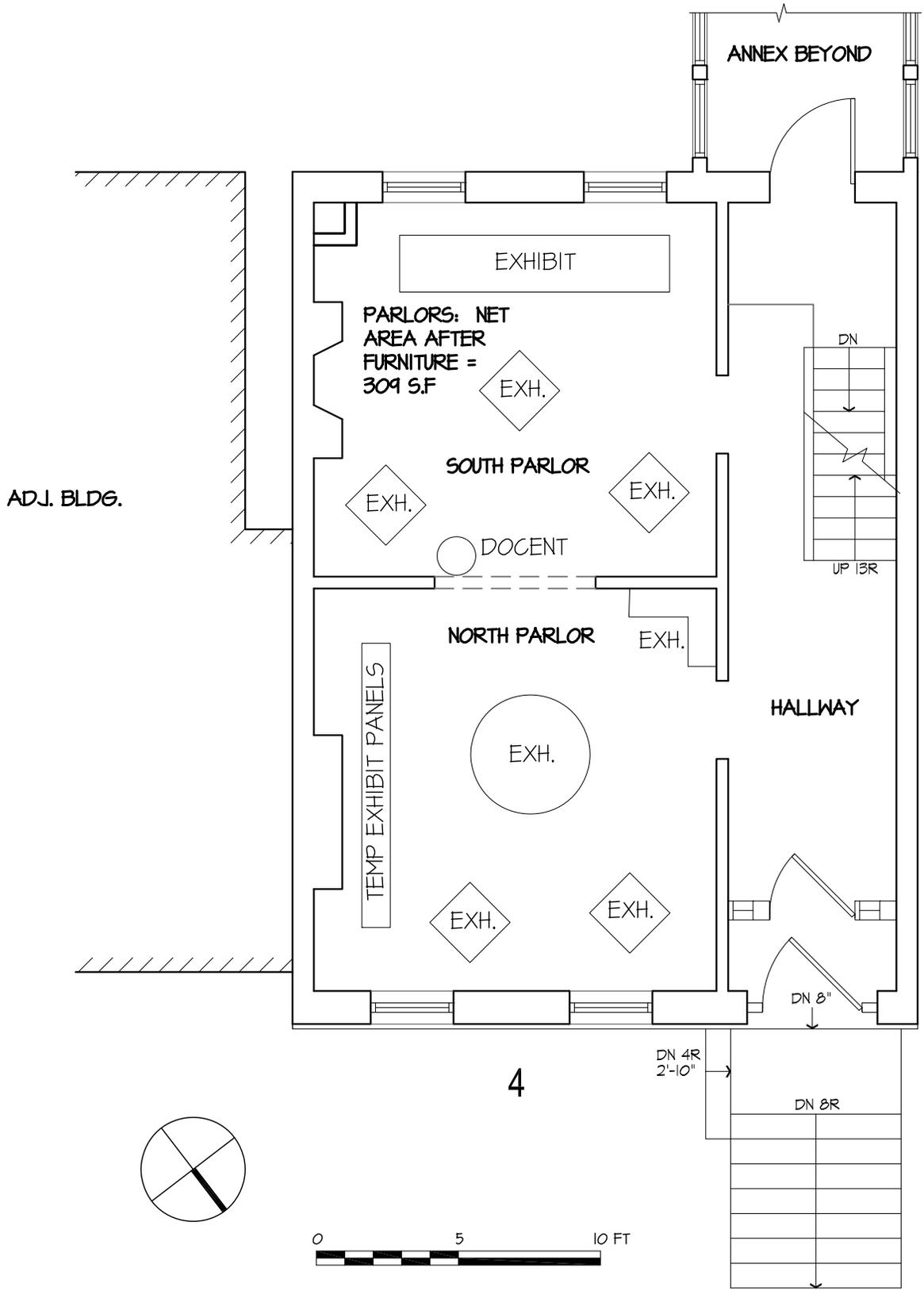
Scale: 3/16" = 1' - 0" Date: October 1, 2011

Drawing no.:
 Scenario

3

Scenario 4: exhibition spaces

South and North Parlors are devoted to exhibits. Using the exhibit layout shown, there is **cozy walking/viewing room for about 35 people**. Stool or chair for docent sits at the opening between the two rooms.



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Project:
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 MASTER PLAN

Title: PARLOR FLOOR EXHIBIT USE

Drawing no.:
 Scenario

Scale: 3/16" = 1' - 0" Date: October 1, 2011

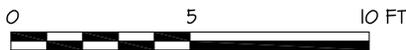
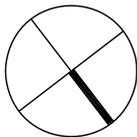
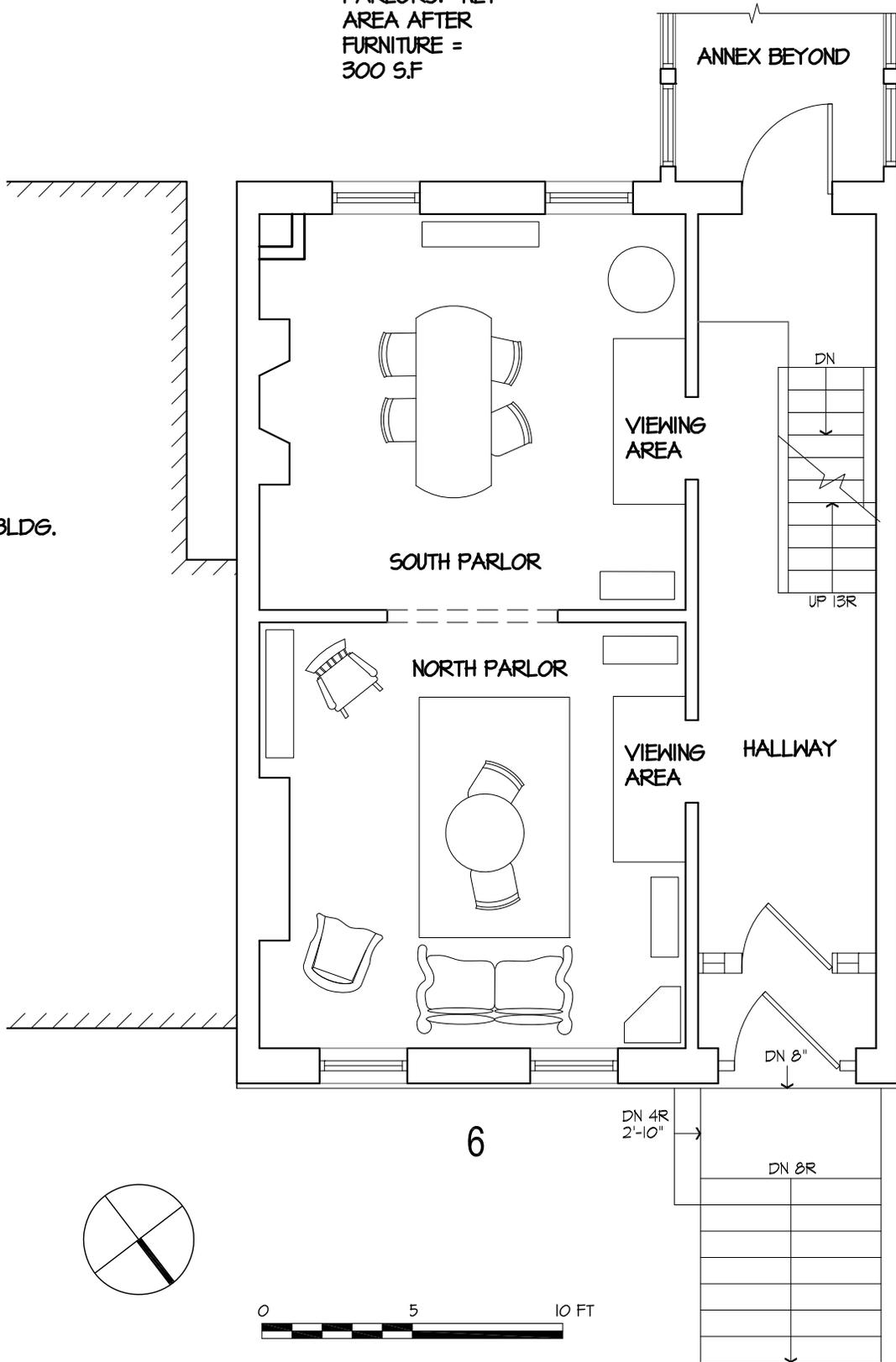
4

Scenario 5: House Museum

The parlors are furnished and accessorized as they might have been in 1855. Visitors gather with interpreter/docent in safe areas by the doorways to hear about life in Arbor Hill. **7 to 10 people might cluster** to view the rooms and hear the stories—fewer if a wheelchair visitor is attending. With reproduction furniture, visitors may be able to “occupy” the spaces and even use the furniture, without the potential for loss or damage to valuable original collections. Docents in period costumes can tell the story.

PARLORS: NET
AREA AFTER
FURNITURE =
300 S.F.

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Project:
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MASTER PLAN

Title: PARLOR FLOOR HOUSE
MUSEUM USE

Scale: 3/16" = 1' - 0" Date: October 1, 2011

Drawing no.:
Scenario

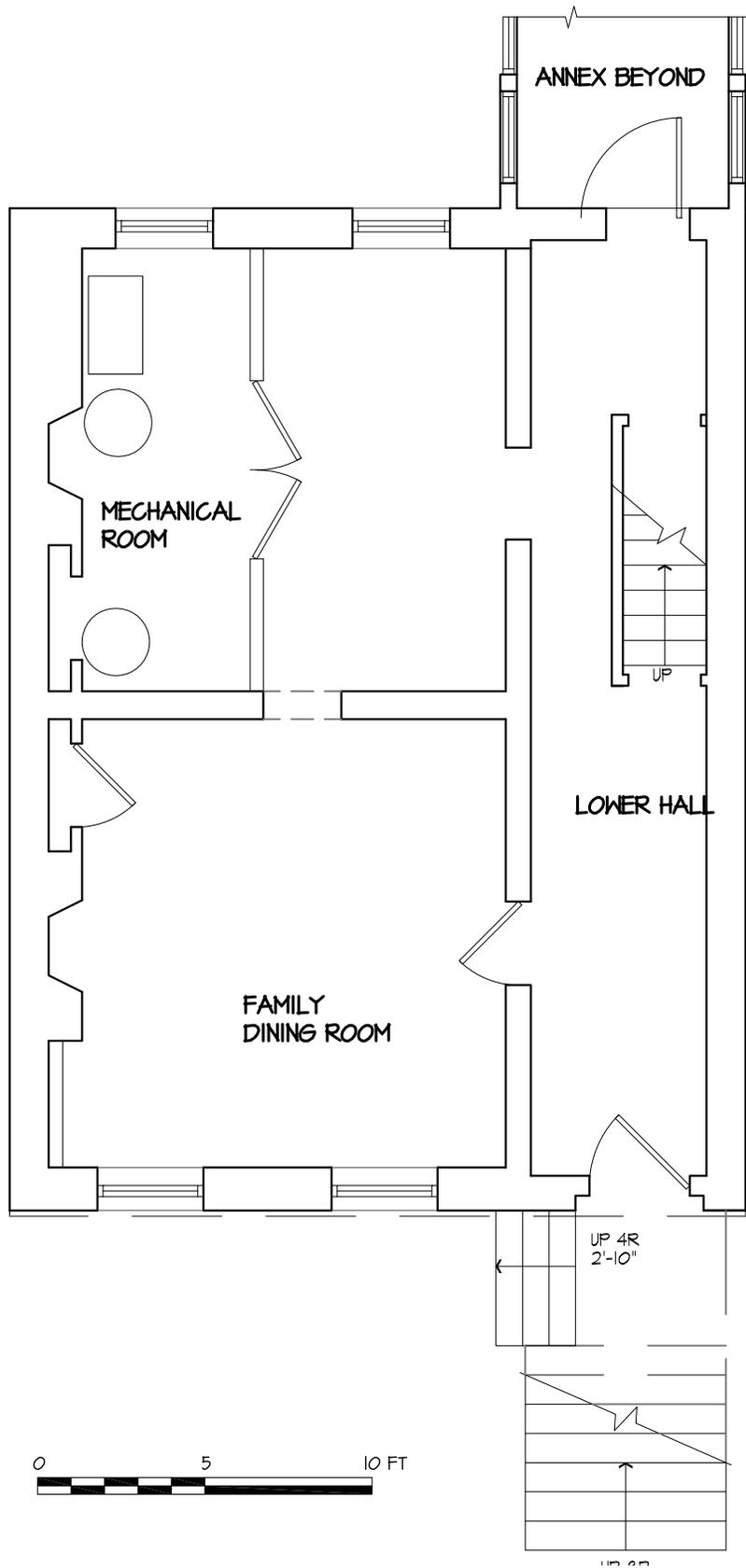
5

Basement

Historic uses for the two rooms in the basement were family dining room and kitchen. For all scenarios illustrated here, a mechanical room for heating/cooling equipment is inserted in part of the back room. The balance might accommodate a kitchenette, shelves for interpretive materials and general storage. Access to the basement from Livingston Avenue may be useful for deliveries, though the steps down from street level are steep.

The front room can be a classroom, workroom, study room, library space, exhibit space or eating area for visitors with bag-lunches. A small staff office could be housed there. For all uses, wall murals depicting typical mid-nineteenth century kitchen and dining accommodations can illustrate what the Myers might have experienced.

Alternatively, consistent with Scenario 5, “House Museum”, the front family dining room could be furnished and accessorized as it might have been in 1855. With a docent present explaining 19th century living patterns, and protecting the collection, visitors might walk through the front room. No more than **6 to 8 people** could be there at one time.



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Project:
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 MASTER PLAN

Title: BASEMENT

Scale: 3/16" = 1' - 0" Date: October 1, 2011

Drawing no.:
 BASEMENT

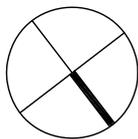
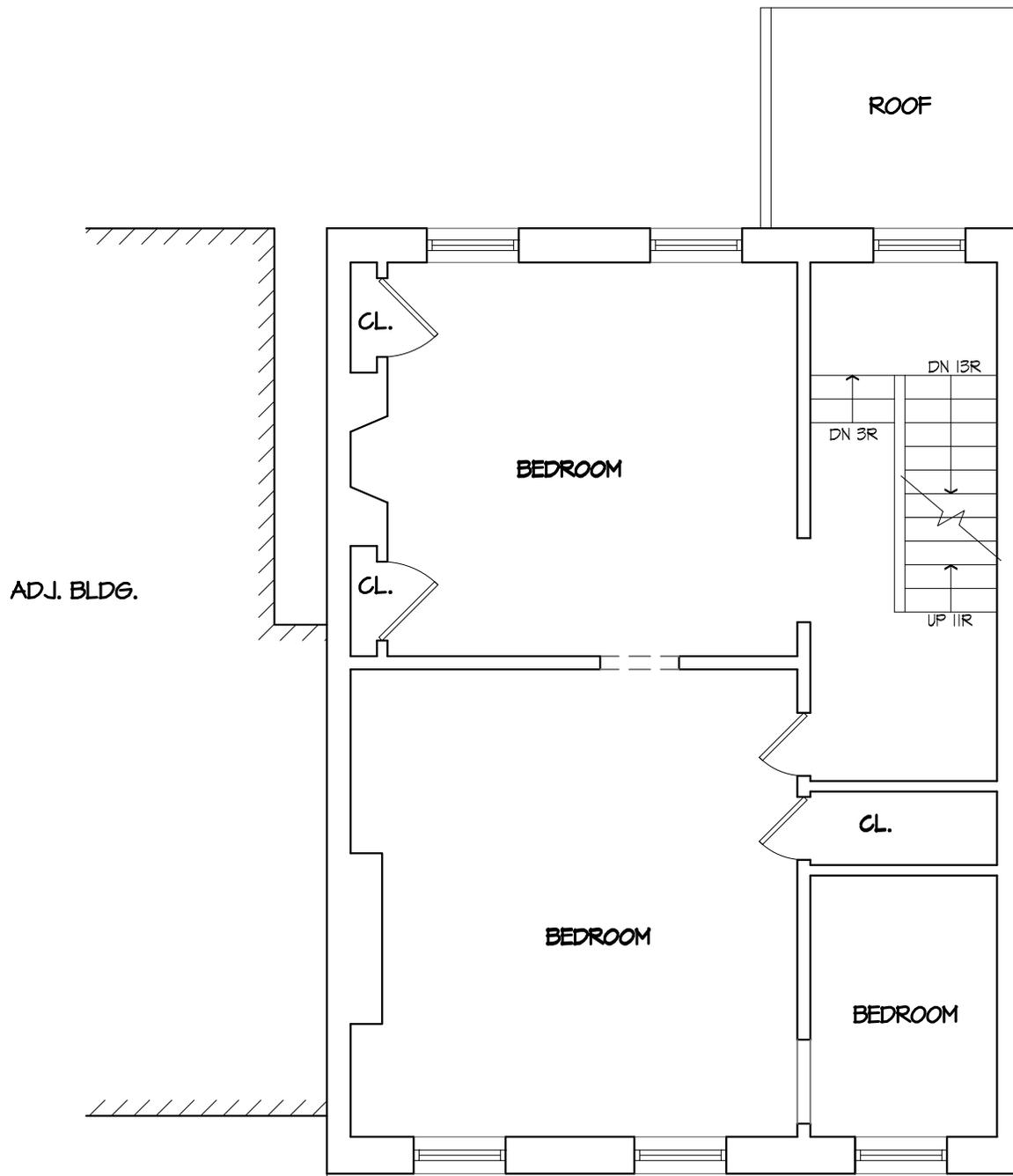
Second and third floors

Financial limits and reviews for required historic approvals are likely to limit elevator access to serve only the basement and parlor levels, which means the second and third floors are unlikely to be available for use by the general public. As a result, there will be less people-pressure on these rooms. Whatever uses are selected, partitions, doorways, windows, moldings, trim, banisters and hardware known to date from the Myers residency should be retained and rehabilitated if they are salvageable. A record of this process can be part of the restoration story told to the public.

We do not have evidence of major re-workings of partitions at these levels, with the exception of some short partitions in the third floor bathroom. The plan should therefore be retained, unless physical or documentary evidence turns up to the contrary.

Second floor

The second floor can be the lower level of a generous apartment with kitchen and bath on the third floor. Or, the second floor could be converted into a studio apartment with careful (and reversible) partition construction, placing kitchen and bathroom in the rear room under the third floor existing plumbing. Alternatively, the second floor is appropriate for an office, as long as staff is willing to travel to the Annex for lavatory facilities. Water—for hand-washing/coffee-making—might be supplied in the south (rear) room, with a small counter and sink at the south wall between the windows.



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Project:
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 MASTER PLAN

Title: SECOND FLOOR PLAN

Scale: 3/16" = 1' - 0" Date: October 1, 2011

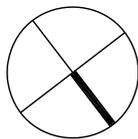
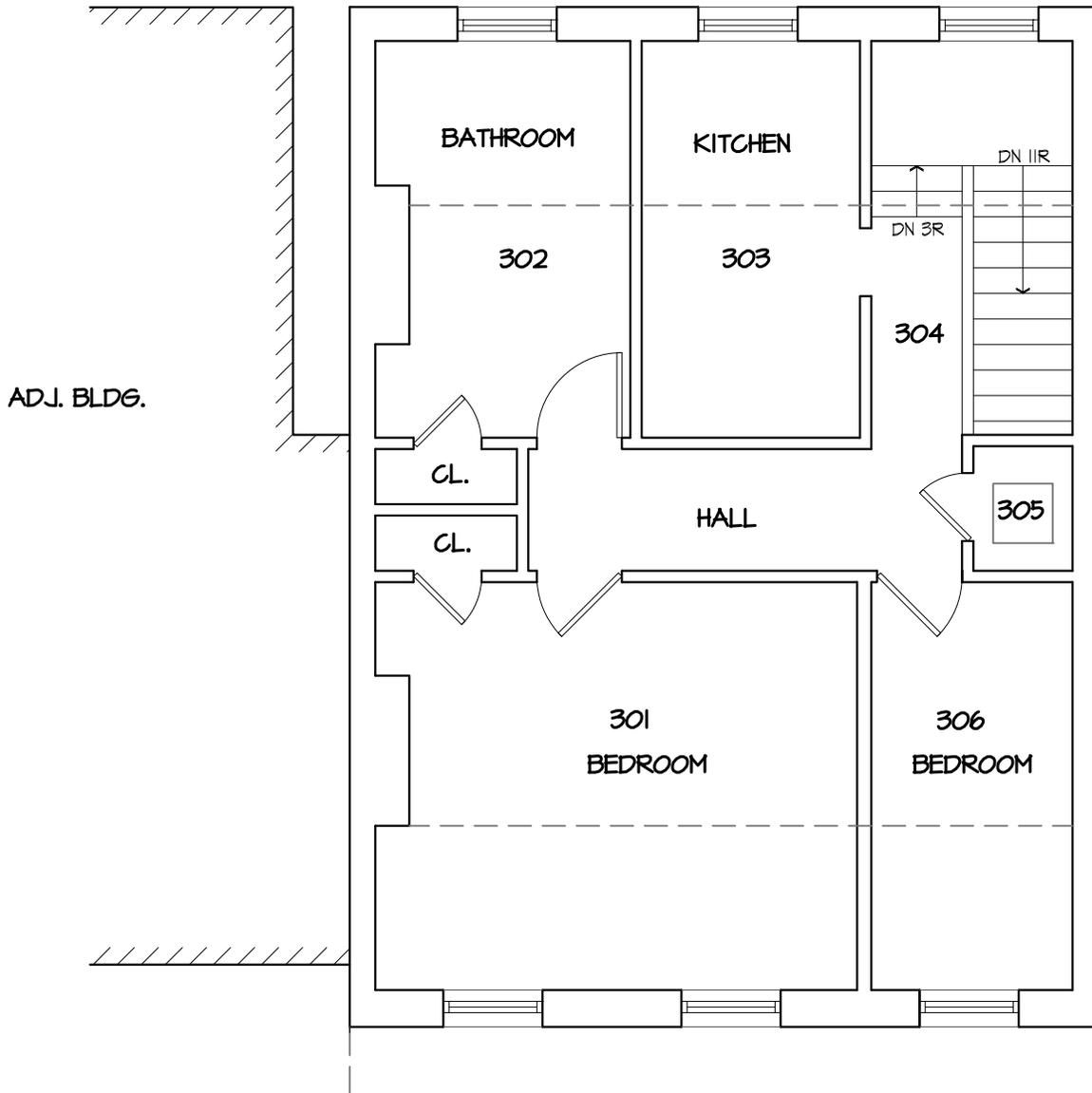
Drawing no.:
 FLOOR
 2



Surviving historic banister at top of staircase.

Third floor

The rooms on the third floor lend themselves to a variety of “back-of-the house” or supporting uses. This layout is consistent with office use, with provision of a simple bathroom and perhaps an office pantry with refrigerator and microwave. Combined with the second floor, this would provide substantial office space. It could also be returned to residential use, as a comfortable one or two bedroom apartment, if code compliant cooking facilities are provided.



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Project:
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 MASTER PLAN

Title: THIRD FLOOR PLAN

Scale: 3/16" = 1' - 0" Date: October 1, 2011

Drawing no.:
 FLOOR

3



1
MYERS RESIDENCE
LONGITUDINAL SECTION
 SCALE: 3/16" = 1'-0"

STEPHEN TILLY, Architect 22 Elm Street Dobbs Ferry, New York 10522 Tel: (914) 693-8898 Fax: (914) 693-4235	Project: Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence 194 Livingston Avenue Albany, New York	Title: EXISTING CONDITIONS DRAWING LONGITUDINAL SECTION Scale: 3/16" = 1'-0" Date: MAY 23, 07 Drawn by: MH	Drawing no.: A-301
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Section looking west through the Myers Residence; front steps and street facade on right.

4 Annex and Lift

A code compliant ramp for accessibility to the parlor floor would be *at least* 84 feet long. The existing house is 32 feet long. So a lift or elevator will have to provide access if public uses are planned in the building. A new structure at the rear of 194 Livingston can house code-required features difficult or impossible to accommodate in the historic building. At a minimum these would include:

- An accessible foyer with introductory interpretation materials to welcome the public so that handicapped visitors are greeted in the same place and manner as the general public
- A lift serving the basement and parlor floors
- Handicapped restrooms for each gender.

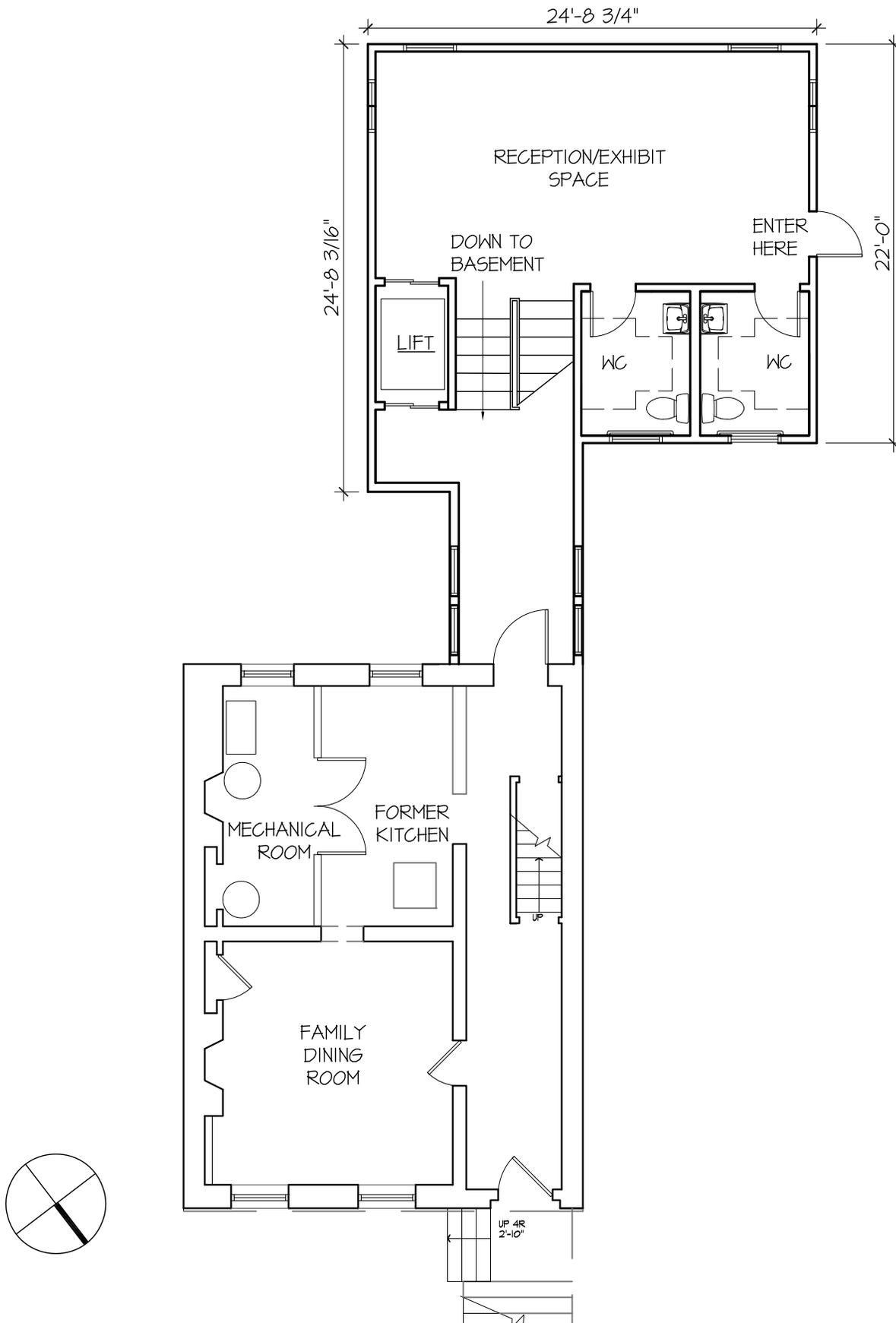
With the proper separation and egress installation, this annex could be staffed and open when the house is closed. It could be the launching point and home base for walking tours and use of the grounds, with rest rooms available to visitors. A slender hall, a “hyphen”, connects the annex to the building, keeping the two masses distinct and allowing light into the south rooms of the historic house.

The illustrations (following pages) are diagrams provided to show spatial requirements for the necessary features. They are not developed architectural plans.

URHPCR has envisioned a new educational building. The annex can become a connector to a larger building further back on the site, should zoning allow and funds and services expand. As services expand through this larger facility there will be more impact on the site and neighborhood. Parking will be a concern at even the lowest utilization level, but it will be a bigger concern as use intensifies.

Future planning should include a study of the cost, feasibility and appearance of alternatives for creating barrier free access to portions of the Myers Residence. Those alternatives include a tower that would provide access to all four major levels, but that option, in addition to being more expensive, would probably face a difficult review process from the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and other funders of historic properties. They must consider the visible impact of all proposed improvements on the historic resource, the building, which is visible from many sides and not just from the front. The side and rear accessibility and visibility are the very circumstances that make the lift itself feasible.

A shorter lift enclosure would also face scrutiny but stand a better chance of approval, since the bulk of the building would still be visible in its original form. It would also be less expensive because of the reduced size, and because of increased costs of a full four stop elevator as opposed to a smaller lift.



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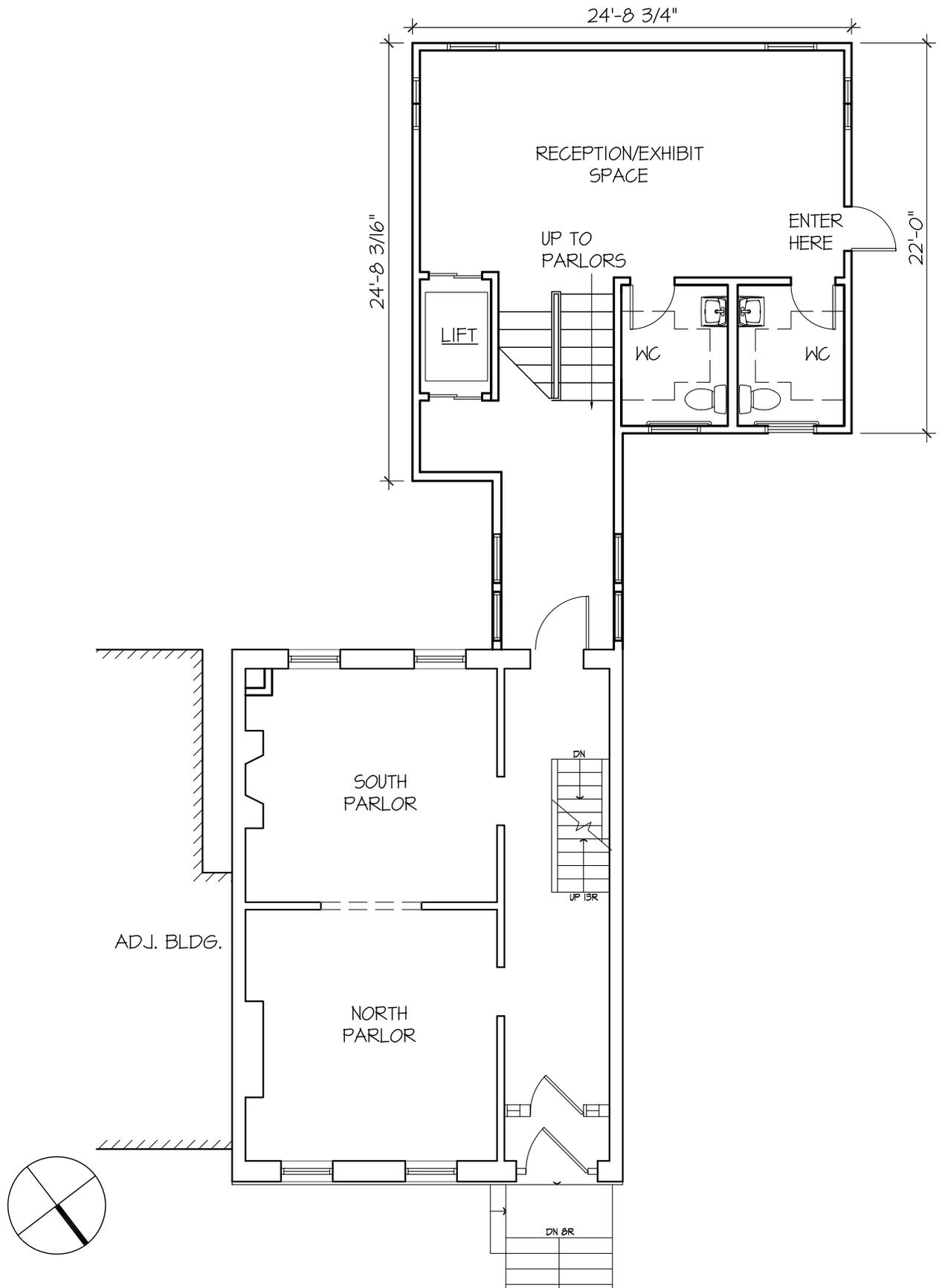
Project:
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Title: BASEMENT SHOWING
 ACCESS THROUGH ANNEX

Drawing no.:

B1

Scale: 1/8" = 1' - 0" Date: October 1, 2011



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Project:
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 MASTER PLAN

Title: PARLOR FLOOR SHOWING
 ACCESS THROUGH ANNEX

Drawing no.:

P1

Scale: 1/8" = 1' - 0" Date: October 1, 2011

5 Zoning Constraints: Parking

The only use for which the site itself can provide adequate parking is one or two family residential units, which require two and three spaces respectively. Different uses contemplated for the house have different parking requirements (e-code Article XIX, Section 375-185, table 3). For most combinations of uses, it is likely that *at least* 4 parking spaces plus one handicapped space will be required. Public assembly use of the parlor floor alone would require 3 spaces at a minimum. Additional spaces would be required for supporting uses on other floors. An expanse of parking reduces the appealing green space and residential character of the properties, so we have tried to minimize parking and drive areas as much as possible.

On the assumption that a first phase of development of the property will be limited to the combined 194 and 196 parcels, we have diagramed three parking alternatives for those two parcels. Given the presence nearby of additional URHPCR properties, there may be other ways to manage parking, including time-share with the Metropolitan Baptist Church with parking across Third Street. The current plan does not allocate parking to those other properties.

Since codes and regulations periodically evolve, the assumptions in this plan must be confirmed with direct information from Albany's Code Compliance Officials. Unless proposed uses are limited to "as-of-right" residential, special municipal land use reviews will be required to obtain permits. Non-profit, charitable uses *are* permitted in residential zones by Special Permit. Special Permit reviews typically focus on neighborhood impacts resulting from the secondary effects of the use such as traffic, parking and noise, as well as the character of the use itself. Site plan approval for the institution to inhabit the Myers Residence will call for discussions with the City to learn the particulars of their requirements and get relief from some of the regulations.

Each of the three options illustrated does not meet parking code requirements in some respect.

A: For properties with more than 4 parking spaces, a 10 foot buffer between parking and the lot line of a neighboring dwelling is required (section 375-180). The arrangement illustrated (Site Plan A) with 6 spaces infringes on the 10 foot buffer and would require a variance. A line of only 4 spaces at this distance from the property line would be allowed. This option requires parallel parking—a challenge for some drivers. We illustrate a one way drive that continues out through the property to exit on Third Street. E-code section 375-189 appears to prohibit this kind of through traffic. An alternate to this would be a U-shape drive swinging to the west behind a parcel not currently owned by URHPCR and back out on Livingston through a lot owned by URHPCR.



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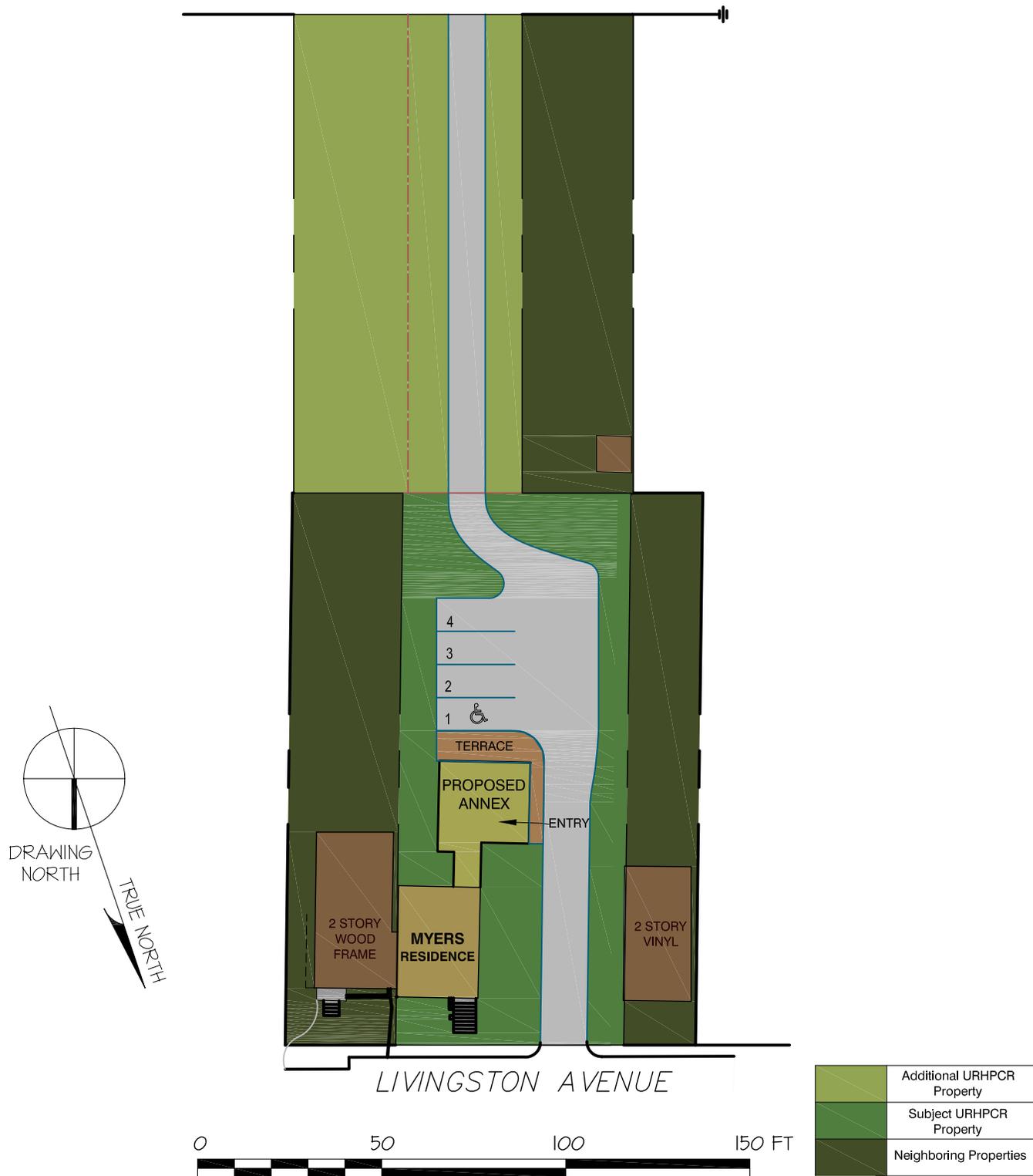
Title: SITE AND PARKING PLAN WITH
 FUTURE ANNEX OPTION

Scale: 1/40" = 1' - 0" Date: October 1, 2011

Drawing no.:
 SITE PLAN

A

B. Using the parking dimensions (e-code 375-177), our parking/turning area extends about 2 feet into the buffer area. It, too, has a one-way drive that might exit to Third or U-turn around a property not currently owned by URHPCR to empty on Livingston. This option could be designed without the drive-through by providing a back out area for the rear space.



	Additional URHPCR Property
	Subject URHPCR Property
	Neighboring Properties

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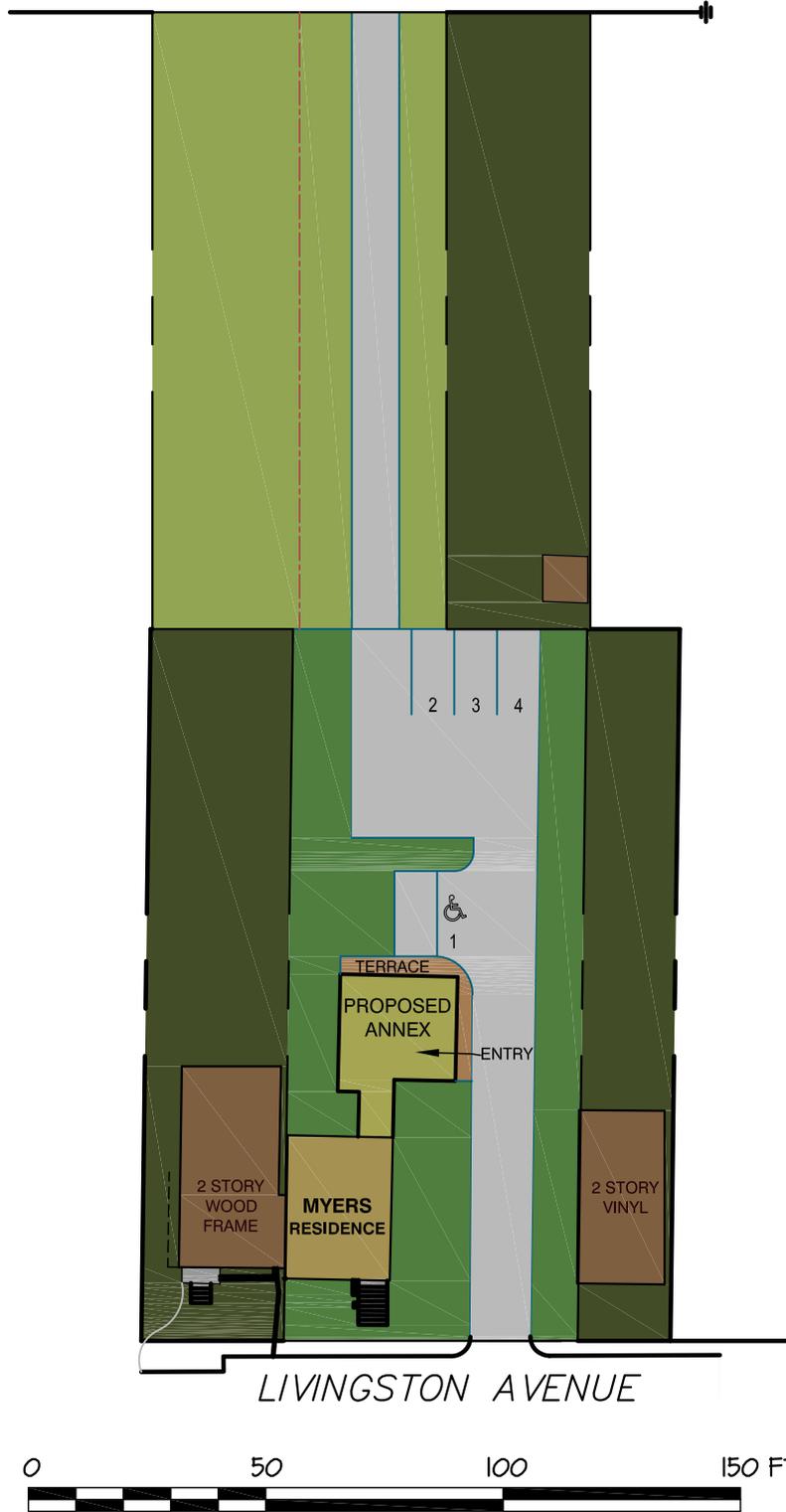
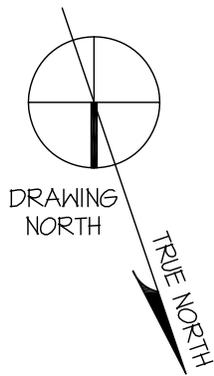
Title: SITE AND PARKING PLAN WITH
FUTURE ANNEX OPTION

Scale: 1/40" = 1' - 0" Date: October 1, 2011

Drawing no.:
SITE PLAN

B

C. This option does not infringe on the required 10 foot buffer on the side yards. It crosses the 10 foot line in the portion of the back yard that abuts one property not in URHPCR ownership.



	Additional URHPCR Property
	Subject URHPCR Property
	Neighboring Properties

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 MASTER PLAN

Title: SITE AND PARKING PLAN WITH
 FUTURE ANNEX OPTION

Scale: 1/40" = 1' - 0" Date: October 1, 2011

Drawing no.:
 SITE PLAN

C

Building Code Summary and Recommendations

(See Appendix B for full Building Code Review)

For master planning purposes, we have undertaken a preliminary review of code requirements. For this review we have made some assumptions about proposed uses, and we will try to highlight the implications of the various alternate use scenarios presented in the Master Plan. Once the precise nature of proposed uses has been determined, a more detailed and conclusive review of code requirements should be undertaken.

To provide the greatest leeway in the building code for a variety of future uses and safety for occupants, we recommend that a sprinkler system be installed in the building.

Our summary is as follows:

- The building is changing its occupancy, from residential, the most recent use, to a new mix of uses that may include assembly on the basement and parlor floors and business (house museum/offices) or residential on the upper floors. A change of occupancy brings with it the requirement for existing and historic buildings to more completely meet building code provisions than if existing uses were being continued.
- If a sprinkler system is installed, Building Code requirements for fire safety (other than number of exits or capacity) triggered by alterations or change of occupancy would be waived (see Compliance Requirements, Sprinkler Option for Fire Safety). For example, a stairway enclosure would not be required (see Compliance Requirements, Sprinkler Option for Fire Safety).
- For scenarios where an assembly use is proposed for the parlor floor an automatic sprinkler system is required throughout the building due to the assembly use (symposiums, receptions, classes, lectures). Otherwise, the building height would be limited to three stories for any of these uses. (see Compliance Requirements, Building Height).
- The maximum building height for the assembly use is 2 stories, if sprinklered. A two-hour fire separation is required between the part of the building containing assembly uses (likely the basement and parlor first floor) and the upper floors. (The fire separation might be waived by the Building Official due to the sprinkler system, as discussed in the full Building Code Analysis in the Appendix: Compliance Requirements, Sprinkler Option for Fire Safety)
- Under all use scenarios, the occupant load of the assembly space should be limited to 50 occupants to avoid the requirement for two exits. If not limited to 50, the front door would become a required exit, meaning the door swing would need to be reversed to swing out, and it would have to be fitted with panic hardware. (see Compliance Requirements, Means of Egress).
- Structural requirements vary with uses. For assembly use on the lower levels, 100 pounds per square foot loading must be accounted for by the framing on the parlor floor and the basement floor assembly. Reinforcement of the parlor floor framing will have to be undertaken from the basement level, presumably by adding additional engineered lumber.
- Non-assembly uses proposed for the upper levels, such as office space or residential uses must carry 50 pounds per square foot loading, which should be possible with some minimal reinforcement of the existing floor joists.

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Partnerships Keep the Place Alive

Exploring possible program content and use options will rely on URHPCR's cultural and organizational partnerships. Partnerships already in place include Sage Colleges, College of St. Rose, Black Dimensions in Art, Albany District Chapter of the Links, National Park Service Network to Freedom, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, Albany Heritage Area Visitor Center, Albany County Convention and Visitors Bureau, Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor, Mighty Waters Initiative, Partnership for Albany Stories. Additional partnerships are shared with many scholars in and beyond the Hudson Valley, and with a developing consortium of New York State Underground Railroad sites that are part of the Underground Railroad Heritage Trail. Collaboration conversations have been opened with apprenticeship programs based in the Capital Region.

As soon as 194 can be occupied, it should come alive with activity. Regular use will help keep the building safe and secure. Regular use will allow for ongoing program implementation with the result that more and more people will think of it as an attractive venue or destination. Sustainance of a vibrant site that encourages repeat visitation will call upon the creative entrepreneurial energies of URHPCR's board and staff in collaboration with volunteers and partners.

Continued development of partnerships will enhance and expand programmatic offerings and strengthen the infrastructure that will sustain a restored Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence.

A list of partnership benefits includes:

- Sharing of costs
- Sharing of a sense of ownership
- Extension of outreach and influence of URHPCR to people in other circles
- Less pressure on the core group to invent new attention-getting attractions
- Opportunity to serve the community in ways beyond the skills of the core group
- Direct money stream from rental (one form of sharing the site)

The risks can be the following:

- Deterioration of the property due to inappropriate activity, over-use or negligence
- Diluting the message - obscuring the interpretation of the Myers Residence with extraneous activity
- Unwieldy and possibly unpleasant schedule conflicts when needs of host group and partners change
- Storage shortfall



7 Possible Uses of the Myers Residence

Combining notes from URHPCR programming sessions with our own speculations, we have started a list of potential uses of the **public areas**. Some are focused on the Myers/Underground Railroad Story; some move toward community service.

- Celebrations—gatherings to mark historic moments and/or to raise money
- Meetings of Arbor Hill community groups
- Visiting school children
- Curriculum development and teacher training
- Scholar seminars
- Children’s story hours
- Elder hostel study
- Book, history discussion groups
- Boy or girl scout activities
- Tutoring
- ESOL
- Citizenship training
- Voter registration
- Training: hands-on workshops for crafts, music, art, writing, computer literacy *etc.*
- Training: indoor teaching component of garden, construction, preservation, weatherization training
- Historic House Museum



A partial list of uses for the **upper floors** might include:

- Offices
- Exhibit preparation and storage area
- Housing for staff
- Housing for “in residence” scholar or artist
- Rental housing

Flexibility as a Strategy for Success.

Classic historic house museums are struggling for survival, forced to be inventive, and in some cases resorting to desperate measures to stay alive. For some, like the National Trust Site Lyndhurst, the asset of a furnished home is also an impediment. Rooms are “don’t touch” collections, and additional space has to be found for changing exhibits, participatory programs and celebratory events—features a site needs to invite second visits and build loyalty.

Keeping the Myers Residence without period furniture will allow precious flexibility. The URHPCR will do best if it can travel light and avoid the burden of collections to maintain. Particulars of the history can still be provided. For example, wall-sized murals depicting 1855 period rooms, interactive digital exhibits and reproductions of a few typical furniture pieces of the era will give presenters a good launching point for stories of the Myers at home, day to day.

Collecting materials for a “trunk show”—Myers broadsides, clothing (say, of a Hudson ship steward), dishes, books, toys, tools, pictures etc.—that are likely to have been familiar to the Myers family allows the home story to be told either at 194 Livingston or on the road, at schools, churches, retirement homes and community centers. And the trunk can be stowed away to make room for other programs.

Since it is likely that only basement and parlor floors can be made accessible to the public (with the completion of a capital project that includes a lift), the **second and third floors** are available for more limited uses. Light office would be a possibility, using the word light literally, given the floor loading limitations of the building. A paid or volunteer staff person could do clerical work on an upper floor when not performing the caretaker function of opening the building, being present during public visitation and closing the building. Use of the upper floors for office would save rental elsewhere and

could maintain a welcoming and protective presence in the building during working hours. Upper floors might be rented to a thoroughly vetted enterprise or individual. This would provide a modest income stream for the organization and establish an ongoing human presence at the facility.

Board notes suggest that URHPCR has considered sponsoring college and graduate level scholarship. An option for the upper floors is scholar or artist-in-residence. From our remote location, we cannot assess whether 194 Livingston is convenient to significant archives for scholars doing research and whether the location is presently perceived as safe and inviting.

If this “in residence” option seems to be feasible, there are many modes to choose from. Residency can range from short stays (say, for the duration of a conference) to several months or half a year. A scholar might pay a modest rent for his/her residency, the URHPCR might undertake fundraising to establish a “Myers Scholar” program subsidizing at least the scholar’s housing, or with a more robust campaign, the URHPCR might offer housing and a study stipend.

The scholar-in-residence option invites partnerships with universities and might attract support from far beyond the Capital region. URHPCR would need personnel to coordinate this initiative, but might be able to share staff with a local university. A Myers Scholar selection panel of distinguished academics would need to be convened and either paid honoraria or agree to donate their time. A similar structure would apply to an artist (poet, musician)-in residence.

We see several benefits for the property.

- Residency in the upper floor(s) still allows for independent programming in the public areas—as much or as little as the core group can muster
- The output of the persons-in-residence reinforces and advertises the vitality of the site while reducing pressure on the core group perpetually to invent new attractions
- A carefully-conceived program will yield significant contributions to scholarship, literature (or art) in areas important to Stephen and Harriet Myers
- A condition of residency might be participation in community outreach—again enriching URHPCR contributions to the neighborhood

Problems with residency programs include

- Residents damaging the property
- The costs of monitoring, maintaining and housekeeping in the facility
- The politics of selection
- The burden of fundraising

Following is a sampling of leads to “in-residence” programs. They should help start a search:

1. <http://washingtonart.com/beltway/resid1.html>--The Beltway Poetry Quarterly offers an overview of types of programs and listings by state.
2. <http://www.woodstockguild.org/artist-in-residence>-- Residencies in an artists’ colony in Woodstock, NY.
3. <http://www.jamesmerrillhouse.org>--Residency in the late poet’s house with a community outreach component. This nationally recognized program is volunteer-run and has a comparable scale to the Myers situation.

Museum Professional Assessment

For a more systematic, informed analysis of potential uses of the public spaces, we have consulted Jacquetta Haley, PhD, of Haley Research and Consulting. Ms. Haley's understanding of the mechanics of historic house presentation and her painstaking, research-based construction of appropriate interpretations have assisted historic sites in our region and beyond. As Board Chair, she has guided the Greater Hudson Heritage Network, an organization serving historic sites. Here, she provides us with the pros and cons of three prototypical directions for use of the public areas in the Myers Residence. Ms. Haley would be an excellent resource as URHPCR plots its future course. Locally, Liselle LaFrance at Historic Cherry Hill would have valuable insights on presenting history in the Albany area.

POSSIBLE USES OF MYERS RESIDENCE: PUBLIC SPACES

HISTORIC HOUSE MUSEUM

Advantages:

- Traditional acknowledgement of importance of significant historical figures
- Create space dedicated to story of Stephen & Harriet Myers & family in mid-19th century context
- Opportunity to create mid-19th century African-American interiors
- Programming opportunities for 4th grade local history school curriculum
- Focus on Albany's role in the Underground Railroad
- Marketing opportunities to African-American community
- Marketing opportunities with other historic homes in Albany area, especially Cherry Hill with its well documented African-American residents who worked as waiters, cooks, etc. including working summers in major tourist hotels in the Saratoga area.
- Tell story of opportunities available to African-American residents of mid-19th century Albany as well as restrictions that they encountered on a daily basis
- Once interiors are installed, relatively little wear and tear on spaces or furnishings as rooms are viewed rather than inhabited.

Disadvantages:

- Would be a generic interiors presentation: weakest of the historic house forms — no "real" furnishings with Myers association, no firm documentation relating to Myers furnishings, taste etc. Lack of authenticity would be evident to visitors. Among the first questions from visitors "did this belong to Stephen & Harriet?" "Is this how Stephen & Harriet Myers decorated their house?" "How do you know that Stephen & Harriet Myers liked 'this' or 'that'?"
- No collections: would have to acquire/conservate all furnishings which would not have an association with Stephen & Harriet Myers
- Because visitors would focus on the mid-19th century objects displayed in each space, the tour emphasis would be on Stephen & Harriet Myers in mid-19th century Albany, not implications of Stephen & Harriet Myers for the 21st century Albany. In a historic house tour, the visual stimuli of the objects on display generally trumps the auditory message of the guide.

- Passive rather than dynamic presentation
- Limited tour size to 7 to 10 people — look in from side hall
- Security issue with collections, especially small objects if people allowed in rooms
- Multiple tours require staffing both in basement and main floor
- Limited incentive for return visitation: “I’ve already seen the Myers house.”

EXHIBITION/GALLERY SPACES:

Advantages:

- Combines mid-19th century ambiance of restored house interiors with 21st century technologies to tell stories
- Tell 19th century story of Stephen & Harriet Myers & Underground Railroad in permanent exhibitions: Can be told on the walls, through interactive screens, in one gallery or different aspects throughout public areas
- Mix of permanent installations with changing exhibitions
- Changing exhibitions bring 19th century concerns of Stephen & Harriet Myers into 21st century — equality, self-sufficiency, citizenship, voter rights, self-improvement, journalism & the communication of ideas, resistance to authority, etc.
- Opportunities to integrate exhibition themes into area schools’ curriculum to encourage multiple visits by students
- Opportunities for dynamic interchange with visitors rather than passive viewing
- Variety of formats available depending on topics selected for exhibitions — photographic displays, hands-on, video screens, interactive programs, objects displayed in suitable cases, etc.
- Encourage repeat visitation by programming changing exhibits
- Depending on exhibitions, security issues may be minimized with electronic surveillance [cameras] rather than staff in all spaces.
- Allows for larger visitation than historic house museum: c. 35 people at a time in North & South Parlors, approximately half that in the basement front room. Conceivably handle tours up to 50 people at a time [one bus load]
- Can handle class-size visitation from school groups; presumes they sit on floor rather than in chairs for their orientation, discussions, etc.

Disadvantages:

- House treated as shell for other activities rather than as major focus of experience
- Lack of in-house collection as basis for exhibition
- If borrow artifacts or primary source documentation from other institutions as key elements of changing exhibitions may face significant requirements relating to light levels, relative humidity, temperatures, etc. in galleries.
- Investment of staff/volunteer time to develop and install new exhibits in a timely manner
- Investment of staff/volunteer time to continually market changing exhibits to Albany audience and beyond.
- Changing exhibitions introduce levels of wear and tear that must be addressed to keep spaces

looking fresh

- Janitorial role critical to daily upkeep
- Level of technical skill needed by staff/volunteers may be significant depending on types of exhibition hardware and software developed for galleries
- Implications for load-bearing capacity of floors in North and South parlors must be investigated

LECTURE/MEETING/WORKSHOP SPACES:

Advantages:

- Combines mid-19th century ambiance of restored house interiors with 21st century technologies to tell stories
- Spaces available for use of variety of stakeholders in community: small lectures, workshops, discussion groups, book/poetry readings, board meetings, citizenship education, Arbor Hill improvement groups, etc
- Opportunity for Underground Railroad History Project of the Capital Region to develop lecture series on issues important to Stephen & Harriet Myers with focus on their implications for 21st century Albanians.
- Space rentals a source of income
- Opportunity to promote Myers House as a community center/ hub of activity for Arbor Hill area
- Individuals/groups that utilize the spaces will be responsible for the expense of promoting the Myers House for their programs
- Accommodate 12 to 36 people, including one wheel chair, depending on function and layout [in North & South Parlors]
- Minimal security issues

Disadvantages:

- Significant investment staff/volunteer time in setup and take down of chairs, tables, equipment, etc. to fulfill needs of various stakeholders using the spaces.
- Set up and take down of chairs, tables, etc for different users will result in breakage. Replacement costs must be factored into annual budgets.
- Story of Stephen & Harriet Myers and Underground Railroad could be marginalized as groups with diverse interests/needs utilize spaces.
- Significant levels of wear and tear on the structure that must be addressed to keep spaces looking fresh
- Implications for load-bearing capacity of floors in North and South parlors must be investigated .

8

Staffing—the scarce and expensive resource

The physical attributes of 194 Livingston and the potential of other lots assembled by URHPCR permit certain kinds of programming and cannot support others. Staffing (and its cost) is another crucial factor determining programming—how most economically to use available staff and volunteers.

Stewardship of an historic property such as the Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence requires staffing positions that include an executive director, a fund development officer, a communications director, a curator, an interpretation organizer, a museum educator / curriculum coordinator, a volunteer director, a facilities manager, and a development director/grantwriter. While many non-profits are challenged to muster such a team, and sometimes one person wears more than one “hat”, success depends upon the way the organization manages to address the issues implied by these job titles. This suggests a thorough look at the staffing implications of program alternatives and physical arrangement options.

URHPCR has identified some staffing questions:

Facility management:

- How to recruit local residents to do basic grounds maintenance rather than relying on the same old volunteers
- How to identify (and fund) a coordinator for volunteer activities
- How to build loyalty to increase the *volunteer* base or
- How to provide wages attractive enough to establish a dependable workforce
- How to identify ongoing property management tasks (basic gardening, carpentry, home maintenance, masonry restoration) that can be used to train local workers in employable skills.

As soon as a non-profit has real estate to maintain, demands on organizational muscle increase enormously. We assume that the properties will evolve over time. URHPCR will not have the funding to commission designs and improve all its holdings at once. So to deal with the staffing needs associated with an evolving property, the organization should have one or more trainers—responsible persons who can sustain relationships in the near community and understand the vagaries of maintaining an old building and outlying properties within a changing context. All future program plans should anticipate a facility management component: daily heating cycles, sidewalk snow-clearing, smoke alarm testing, routine repairs and grounds maintenance, to touch on a sampling. This kind of work is best handled by one or more responsible employees. A couple of passionately devoted volunteers might serve this function. The property will need coverage seven days a week, twenty four hours a day.

Education is another programming thread that URHPCR has considered for the property—placing the building at the core of a campaign to teach African-American proactive contributions to the abolition movement and social change.

This effort would call for a curriculum coordinator, someone who would reach out to area schools to engage teachers in workshops and promote field trips. It would require subsidies—to pay for the coordinator and to support the time and travel of teachers attending. It would be necessary to learn how much local public and private schools could contribute to this program and whether ongoing commitment can be expected. Apart from its obvious virtues in advancing the mission of the URHPCR, this initiative has several practical advantages:

- Teacher workshops and scheduled class visits put relatively little stress on the property
- Unlike museums open all day, scheduled events require fewer hours from docents or security staff—whoever the responsible person is who opens the building, stays during the program and closes at completion. Set-up and clean-up are predictable, limited chores.
- Materials produced for this effort can be published in print or on the web—multiplying the impact of the work.
- Batches of students usually come in larger numbers than smaller tours and walk-ins and are included in the visitor count, which is a metric that is important for potential funding sources.

Risks include:

- Unpredictable requests from participating schools
- Erratic funding, year to year, from participating schools
- Pressure to refresh materials for continuing teacher participation and limited funding and/or personnel to do so

Public presentations within 194 Livingston have to be small because of the available space. By code, the maximum numbers of people seated to hear a talk, dramatization or music hover around 36. If the parlor floor were to be used as a gallery, the maximum number of guests at any one time would be 50. The time-limited presentations would call for fewer hours of staff coverage. The gallery use would take more staff time since open hours need to be generous and normally extend over several days each week.

- Coverage for these differing uses may be shared with the presenting partner(s)
- Building security and maintenance still rests with the core group

Diagrams of space use shown in Section 3 suggest capacities for a variety of scenarios. Each may have a different staffing requirement. URHPCR should do an exhaustive assessment of staff requirements for each scenario and program direction before final selection.

9

Role in the Community

The Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence can play a significant role in the regeneration of the Arbor Hill neighborhood. Many Board visioning ideas are consistent with Arbor Hill Plan goals. The Executive Summary of the Arbor Hill Neighborhood Plan describes the goals of the Arbor Hill Neighborhood Advisory Committee. “The committee wants Arbor Hill to become a community where people with a wide range of incomes want to live. This means meeting crucial needs for assured safety and security, leveraging the unique culture and heritage of the neighborhood, growing economic development and employment opportunities, and increasing incentives for long-term homeownership and high-quality rental housing.” (Executive Summary, p. 1) As URHPCR selects options for the building and extends planning to the parcels of open space it owns, programming threads that further reinforce the Arbor Hill Plan will emerge. The actual physical repair and occupancy of the building, URHPCR themes of education and training, programming to serve sophisticated American history scholars, local residents and entry level workers; and celebration of the Myers’ leadership at a critical time in the national struggle all contribute to the revitalization of the neighborhood. Dealing with the outlying parcels in a next phase of URHPCR master planning can suggest ways to “put the ARBOR back in Arbor Hill.” (Chapter IV, p. 15 of the Arbor Hill Neighborhood Plan)

10 Celebrate the Process



Volunteer engagement and the heroics and skilled trade workmanship contributing to the stabilization and restoration of the house can add a layer to any historic house presentation; interpretation of this theme could start in the basement and continue up the floors.

“Truth Windows” to underlying structure or an original wall can help explain the process.



EXAMPLES of TRUTH WINDOWS TO THE PAST

Left: A “window” in the new interior wall in this nineteenth century building highlights the work of masons who built the Old Croton Aqueduct.

Right: Glass covers an opening in the lower wainscoting of this historic observatory room, showing a charred wall surface that documents an early 20th century fire.



11

Next Steps

At this writing, STA has prepared drawings for the stabilization of the failed masonry of the gable ends, and work should be done in the 2011-2012 building season.

For its part, URHPCR should save and sequester masonry fragments, bricks, and wood pieces that have come loose from the building, but remove dirt and fallen crumbled plaster fragments. Volunteer access must be limited and carefully managed until the building can be safely navigated. Passageways to exits must remain unencumbered. While the emergency stabilization program was effective and the heating system appears to be working as intended, the site is little more than a “virtual building”—a priceless resource for future plans—but not currently a place for people, activity and storage. Door closures and the temporary protection should be inspected weekly and secured and renewed periodically as required. Prompt repairs will protect the building and telegraph attentive ownership to passersby. Building envelope maintenance should be ongoing for this volunteer task force until and through the next construction phase. These individuals may be the core group that carries over to oversee building maintenance after construction. All old buildings need attention, forever.

Next Building Campaign

“Recommendations for a Phased Restoration Plan” in the February 5, 2009 Historic Structure Report, p. 92 et seq., prepared by STA lays out steps for building rehabilitation:

- *Phase One: Stabilization, Shoring and Material Testing and Investigation.* Stabilization and shoring have been done. Material testing and investigation are incomplete.
- *Phase Two: Masonry Reconstruction, New Framing and Exterior Envelope Restoration.* Work underway on the gable ends is an emergency start on masonry reconstruction. Mortar analysis (material testing) for the portions of wall in play will be included in this work.
- *Phase Three: Building Systems*
- *Phase Four: Interior Restoration*



The front hall will continue to be the primary ingress and egress point for volunteers and guests.

Funding

URHPCR has raised approximately \$650,000 towards the restoration process. Funds have been received from The Bender Foundation, Environmental Protection Fund, 1772 Foundation, National Trust for Historic Preservations Johanna Favrot Fund for Preservation, M&T Charitable Foundation, Albany District Chapter of the Links, Citizen's Bank, Heritage New York, Community Capital Assistance Fund, National Network to Freedom of the National Park Service, Preservation League of New York State, Golub Foundation, City Club, National Heritage Trust, the Albany County Legislature and member contributions. Most of the monies are designated to capital improvements on the Residence. \$10,000 from the Bender Foundation is designated for repairs to the rear of the building. \$400,000 in two EPF grants are to be used for restoration; and \$50,000 from the Community Capital Assistance Fund is targeted to the repair and restoration of "wood members".

A parallel stream of funding for staff positions to manage these projects and support "soft" costs for consultants would be welcome and important, and it is one focus of URHPCR's ongoing fundraising efforts. Continued fundraising and expansion of funding streams will also provide matching funds and augment grant support for the completion of Phase Two, and fuel Phases Three and Four.

Programming Decisions

We recommend planning sessions with a consultant to zero in on doable, fundable uses (program) for the building. An inspiring vision grounded in vigorous practical analysis places URHPCR in a strong position for support. The rationale for the Annex is tied to many of the uses described here, and can be part of an appeal for completion of the building for public use.



*Symbol of a green future for URHPCR lands?
Comfrey-with the common name “knitbone” for its healing properties-
growing in the 194 Livingston back yard.*

Master Plan/Concept Site Plan

The next piece of planning work beyond the building will be an overall master plan/concept site plan for all URHPCR parcels. Prerequisites for that planning instrument will be title reports on all parcels showing easements and encumbrances, if any, and a topographic survey at one foot contour intervals documenting trees with trunks over 6” diameter measured at 4 ½ feet above grade and showing site structures and surviving foundations of missing buildings if any. The topographic survey should diagram infrastructure such as utility lines, sewer and water lines and storm drains. This completed document will be the base plan for discussions with URHPCR stakeholders and potential partners about wishes for the properties, neighborhood patterns that should be understood when thinking ahead, and discussion of further land acquisition if any. This ground work will set the table for a Master Plan/Concept Site Plan that when completed will provide a framework for grant applications. Appendix C is a copy of a query STA sent to Paul and Mary Liz Stewart of URHPCR when the master plan for all the properties was originally discussed. It suggests scenarios to consider looking ahead and their response.

Partners

As mentioned earlier, contemplation of possible partnerships should be deep, imaginative and unceasing. The URHPCR mission, as we understand it, has room for a wide range of fertile alliances of great benefit to you and to the community. Connections beyond the circle of natural alliances will broaden the base.

12 Appendices

A. Living History Re-enactment: a URHPCR Program

Building on the general use options presented earlier, and in particular Scenario 1, the public lecture or performance, URHPCR has prepared the following detailed interpretive scenario for a Living History Re-enactment.

Background

The Myers Residence is a RESIDENCE, not a House, because it was not owned by Stephen and Haniet Myers. It was owned by John Johnson. The repeated use of the term Residence is important because it conveys a status and uniqueness, a special quality, to the Residence, that it is a place with an important history and message and with a relevance for us today.

The Myers Residence should provide an EXPERIENCE of being in a place where history happened. Unlike so many other historic sites, this one is a site of African American history, uniquely not the home of a slave but the home of free people who were advocates for justice, risking life, honor, and fortune for the cause of human freedom. This is a site whose residents were documented Underground Railroad activists; and it is a building which is documented as an Underground Railroad site, which means it is a recorded site of refuge for freedom seekers. The Vigilance Committee met here; decisions about the Underground Railroad were made here. This is the only identified building in New York State of leading African American abolitionists that is still standing on its original footprint. This is a site of conscience, meaning a site where the focus of the struggle between slavery and freedom was sharply delineated.

What do we want to see happen here? Through a living museum format we want visitors to experience what happened at the Myers Residence, to understand the meaning of what happened here, and to understand the relevance to us today of what happened here. Re-enactment scenarios would often combine interactive discussions with their audiences, could be played out during the day or in the evening. Such visitor experiences could conclude with a debriefing, initially in the first floor parlor, but eventually in the Interpretive Center.

Possible Living History Re-enactment scenarios at Main Floor and Basement:

1. Harriet Myers will greet visitors, welcome them into the front parlor of her home, and offer them some tea. She will engage in conversation with her visitors, inviting them to tell her who they are, what they do in their lives, asking what she can do for them. She will catch them up on the latest news having to do with the escape on the Pearl, the fighting in Kansas, John Brown's activities in Kansas, the annexation of Texas, the passage of the second Federal Fugitive Slave Law, and President Fillmore. Thomas Elkins arrives, continuing this conversation with the visitors.

2. Harriet engages in the dialogue mentioned above, when two freedom seekers with an infant arrive and Harriet engages them in a conversation to ascertain their needs. Then Harriet engages the visitors in providing for the needs of the freedom seekers. The freedom seekers would take time to share their stories with the visitors, using this conversation time tell their own stories that would challenge the stereotypic notion of 'slaves' and the 'slave experience'.

3. Thomas Elkins could arrive and engage visitors in conversation about contemporary medical practices, the challenges he faced in obtaining a medical education, and what kind of medical services he provides to freedom seekers. He could ask visitors how they treat a particular illness.

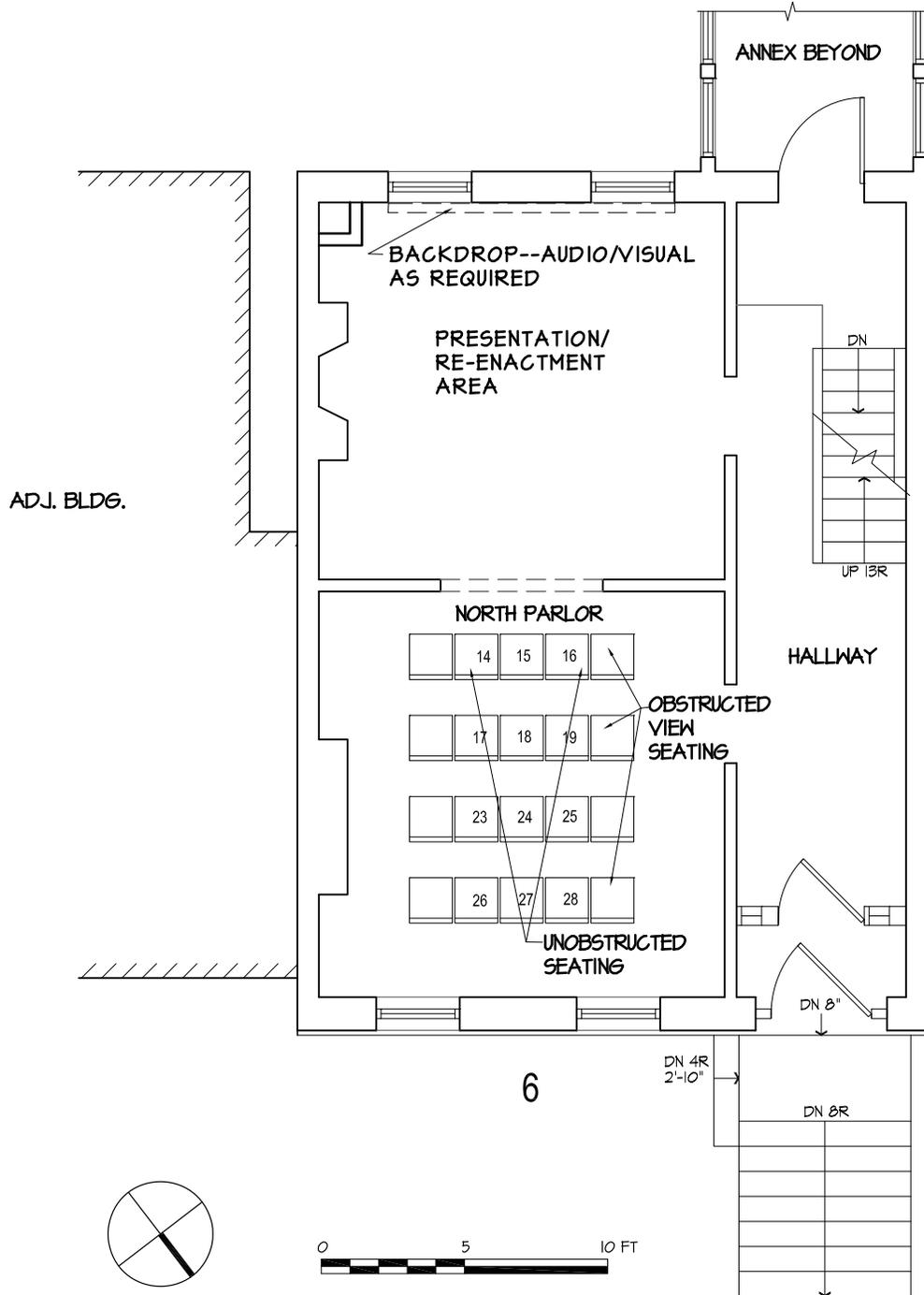
4. Later on, Harriet could invite visitors to the kitchen to show them her state of the art kitchen, conversing with them about food preparation or preservation issues. Perhaps she could even invite visitors to help her make something. Of course, visitors would be invited to join her in the basement dining area for a small bite of something she had previously prepared. She would make up little food bags for visitors to take with them as they continue on their freedom journey.

Other possible events or discussions:

1. A review of the galleys for selected newspapers, or join in a conversation about newspaper articles.
2. Work for African Americans in 19th century Albany
3. Education for African Americans in 19th century Albany
4. Albany Vigilance Committee meetings
5. Any number of legal issues
6. Court cases - Jerry Rescue, Boston situation
7. Any number of abolition activities - liberty conventions, Whig politics, formation of the Republican party, the Kansas issue, Mexico, fugitive slave laws, self help, moral uplift, the conflict between Myers and Torrey, the conflict between the Northern Star Association and the Vigilance Committee.

Additional Living History Re-enactment scenarios that could be held at the upper floors (subject to solving requirements for physical or virtual access):

1. Freedom Seekers could be escorted upstairs by Harriet, with visitors following and helping Harriet prepare the beds, get the closet in order, retrieve some clothing item or bedding, or a book to read to the young ones.
2. Harriet knows that some Freedom Seekers will be arriving, so she engages visitors in simple cleaning tasks upstairs. She calls upon her children to enlist the aid of visitors to be on the lookout for the arriving guests, (Freedom Seekers need to be referred to as guests), and to obtain items needed from another location in the house.
3. Using the second floor room on the south side, invite visitors to spend time in this sitting/reading room, reading and discussing newspaper content and/or David Walker's Appeal, or any number of speeches contained in newspaper publications, with Stephen Myers, Thomas Elkins or any other abolitionist, or a Freedom Seeker who would be in the room also reading.
4. In addition to these scenarios, the upstairs spaces could hold camp-ins, story circles, a lecture series, a book club, an urban and rural orienteering lecture with application in the neighborhood, interactive singing, or a 19th century party with a fiddler like Solomon Northup.



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Project:
 MYERS RESIDENCE
 MASTER PLAN

Title: LIVING HISTORY
 PRESENTATION

Scale: 3/16" = 1' - 0" Date: OCTOBER 1, 2011

Drawing no.:
 Scenario

6

B. Building Code Review

Project: Stephen and Harriet Myers House, Albany, New York
Applicable Code: *Existing Building Code of New York State (2010)* and other codes referenced in paragraph 101.2 therein.
Acronyms: *BC – Building Code of New York State (2010)*
EBC – Existing Building Code of New York State (2010)
ECC – Energy Conservation Construction Code of New York State (2010)

Summary and Recommendations

For master planning purposes, we have undertaken a preliminary review of code requirements. For this review we have made some assumptions about proposed uses, and we will try to highlight the implications of the various alternate use scenarios presented in the Master Plan. Once the precise nature of proposed uses has been determined, and in the course of planning a construction program, a more detailed and conclusive review of code requirements should be undertaken.

To provide the greatest leeway in the building code for a variety of future uses and safety for occupants, we recommend that a sprinkler system be installed in the building.

Our summary is as follows:

- The building occupancy would be changing from residential, the most recent use, to a new mix of uses that may include assembly on the basement and parlor floors. Historic house museums are regulated as a Business (B) occupancy (1101.3 EBC). Residential is an optional occupancy on the upper floors. A change of occupancy brings with it the requirement for existing and historic buildings to more completely meet building code provisions than if existing uses were being continued.
- If a sprinkler system is installed, Building Code requirements for fire safety (other than number of exits or capacity) triggered by alterations or change of occupancy would be waived (see Compliance Requirements, Sprinkler Option for Fire Safety). For example, a stairway enclosure would not be required (see Compliance Requirements, Sprinkler Option for Fire Safety).
- For scenarios where an assembly use is proposed for the parlor floor an automatic sprinkler system is required throughout the building due to the assembly use (symposiums, receptions, classes, lectures). Otherwise, the building height would be limited to three stories for any of these uses. (see Compliance Requirements, Building Height).
- The maximum building height for the assembly use is 2 stories, if sprinklered. A two-hour fire separation is required between the part of the building containing assembly uses (likely the basement floor and parlor floor) and the upper floors. (The fire separation might be waived by the Building Official due to the sprinkler system, as discussed in Compliance Requirements, Sprinkler Option for Fire Safety)
- Under all use scenarios, the occupant load of the assembly space should be limited to 50 occupants to avoid the requirement for two exits. If not limited to 50, the front door would become a required exit, meaning the door swing would need to be reversed to swing out, and it would have to be fitted with panic hardware. (see Compliance Requirements, Means of Egress).

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Historic Status: National Register Listed Project.

Building Area: 3410 sq.ft. (existing gross) 2722 sq.ft. net/net (interior minus partitions)

Building Height: 36 ft- 2 ¾ “; 3 stories plus an attic above a basement.

Construction Type: Type III-B (masonry bearing wall and wood frame spanning members)

Use and Occupancy (most recent): Group R-3 (two dwelling units); non-separated (BC 302.1).

Optional Uses and Occupancies (proposed Group A, House Museum): Group B (museum), Group B (office).

Occupant load: For egress purposes, **assuming no furniture**, the following occupant loads apply (BC 1004.1.2):

Space	Net Area	Use	Area/Occ.	Occ. Load
North Parlor and South Parlor	355 sq.ft.	A-3 (chairs)	7 sf	50
North Parlor and South Parlor	355 sq.ft.	A-3 (standing)	5 sf	70

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Hazard Categories for Change of Occupancy (EBC 912)

	R-3 to A-3	R-3 to B
Life Safety & Exits (EBC 912.4.1 & 912.4.2)	Higher	Equal
Heights & Areas (EBC 912.5.1 & 912.5.2)	Higher	Equal
Exposure of Exterior Walls (EBC 912.6.2)	Equal	Equal

Compliance Requirements

Energy Code: Historic buildings are exempt (ECC 101.4.2 from EBC 101.3), although additions shall conform as they relate to new construction (ECC 101.4.3).

Seismic Compliance: Not applicable to this building (EBC 103.3 from EBC 1106.3).

Building Area (for Change of Occupancy of Historic Buildings): May exceed BC maximum by 20% (EBC 1105.2; BC Table 503). Therefore, the maximum building area (considering non-separated uses) is the smallest of the following:

Group A-3: 6,000 sq.ft. x 1.2 = 7,200 sq.ft.

Group B: 9,000 sq.ft. x 1.2 = 10,800 sq.ft.

Group R-3: Unlimited

Building Height: Because the first floor is greater than 6 feet above grade, the Myers House is a 4 story building (BC 202-Definitions). Because the change of use from R-3 to A-3 is a change to a higher hazard category for Heights and Areas, the height limits of the BC apply (EBC 912.4.1). The unadjusted height limit for occupancy Group A-3 is 65 ft. and 3 stories. If a sprinkler system is installed throughout the building, the maximum height may be increased to 85 feet and 4 stories (BC 504.2).

Building Height: House Museum: The construction classification of the Myers House is III-A, so that A Historic House Museum *could* be evaluated as occupancy Group B (EBC 1101.3), but the building height of the Myers House **exceeds** the 3 story limit for such a classification.



C. SITE DATA FOR ZONING CODE COMPLIANCE

OWNER: **Underground Railroad History Project**
 BUILDING ADDRESS: 194 Livingston Avenue

SURVEY BY: Hershberg & Hershberg
 SURVEY DATE: 9/22/08
 MUNICIPALITY: ALBANY NY

ZONING DISTRICT: **R-2A**

PRESENTLY CONFORMING: Yes *No *NON-PROFIT PERMITTED WITH SPECIAL PERMIT

VOLUME: L.2782 P.62 SHEET: 7A BLOCK: LOT/PARCEL TAX MAP #65.74-1-2

NOTE: PROPOSED AREAS NOTED INCLUDE ANNEX ILLUSTRATED ON SITE PLAN

RESTRICTIONS	REQUIRED	EXISTING	PROPOSED
Use:	1 OR 2 FAMILY	RESIDENTIAL	NON-PROFIT*

MINIMUM LOT SIZE:

WIDTH: ONE-FAMILY	40 FEET	61.95 FEET (2 PARCELS)	61.95 FEET (2 PARCELS)
WIDTH: TWO FAMILY	50 FEET	61.95 FEET	61.95 FEET
DEPTH: ONE & TWO FAMILY	100 FEET	150 FEET	150 FEET
FRONTAGE:	NOT TREATED	61.95 FEET	61.95 FEET
AREA: ONE FAMILY	4000 SF	9292.50 SF	9292.50 SF
AREA: TWO FAMILY	5000 SF	9292.50 SF	9292.50 SF

MAXIMUM LOT COVERAGE

PRINCIPAL BUILDING (%)	NA (%)	7.7 %	14 %
INCL. ACCESSORY BLDGS (%)	35 %	7.7 %	14 %

PRINCIPAL BUILDING SETBACK

DIMENSIONS

FRONT:	20 FEET	12.68 FEET	12.68 FEET
SIDE (MINIMUM):	5 FEET	.2 FEET	.2 FEET
SIDE (TOTAL):	16 FEET	10 FEET	10 FEET
REAR:	25 FEET	99.62 FEET	72 FEET

PRINCIPAL BUILDING

FOOTPRINT:		715 SF	1305 SF
TOTAL FLOOR AREA:		3410 SF	4008 SF
MAXIMUM HEIGHT:	35 FEET	36'-5"	36'-5"
NUMBER OF STORIES:	2 1/2	4	4

ACCESSORY BUILDINGS SETBACK (AS NOTED FOR NON-DWELLING USES):

DIMENSIONS

FRONT:	20 FEET	NA	
SIDE:	4 FEET	NA	
REAR:	4 FEET	NA	

ACCESSORY BUILDING (AS NOTED FOR NON-DWELLING USES):

FOOTPRINT:	NOT SEPARATELY LIMITED	NA	
TOTAL FLOOR AREA:	NOT SEPARATELY LIMITED	NA	
NO. OF BEDROOMS:	NA	NA	
NO. OF BATHROOMS:	NA	NA	
MAXIMUM HEIGHT:	16 FEET	NA	
NUMBER OF STORIES:	NA	NA	

WALLS & FENCES

SET BACK:	FRONT NONE SIDE NONE		
MAXIMUM HEIGHT:	FRONT 4 FEET SIDE 6 FEET		

OPEN SPACE RATIO	NA		
PARKING	1 FAMILY 2 SPACES 2 FAMILY 3 SPACES		
OFF STREET LOADING	NA		

RELEVANT DEFINITIONS:

STORY

That portion of a building included between the surface of any floor and the surface of the floor next above it; if there is no floor above it, then the space between the floor and the ceiling next above it.

(1)

STORY, HALF

— A partial story under a gable, hip or gambrel roof, the wall plates of which on at least two opposite exterior walls are not more than four feet above the floor of such story; provided, however, that any partial story used for residence purposes, other than for a janitor or caretaker and his family, shall be deemed a “full story.”

(2)

STORY, FIRST

— The lowest story or the ground story of any building, the floor of which is not more than 12 inches below the average contact ground level at the exterior walls of the building; except that any basement or cellar used for residence purposes, other than for a janitor or caretaker and his family, shall be deemed the “first story.”

Stairway Enclosure: Historic Buildings undergoing alteration or change of occupancy are required to have exit enclosure construction (not fire rated) with tight fitting doors to limit the spread of smoke (*EBC 1103.6*). This can be omitted for an existing stair that serves only one adjacent floor (*EBC 1103.6 Exception*). (The Sprinkler Option for Fire Safety discussed below could waive this).

Sprinkler Option for Fire Safety: Historic Buildings undergoing alterations or change of occupancy may use a sprinkler system in lieu of fire safety construction requirements of the BC (*EBC 1103.2 and EBC 1103.12.1*).

Means of Egress:

Business use (occupancy change to equal hazard category):

- Existing opening and corridor widths are approved if the egress capacity required by the BC is provided (*EBC 1105.6*).
- Must have egress capacity meeting or exceeding the BC (*EBC 912.4.3 from EBC 1105.1*).
- Must have lighting conforming to the BC (*EBC 805.2 from EBC 912.4.2 from EBC 1105.1*).
- Must have exit signs conforming to the BC (*EBC 805.3 from EBC 912.4.2 from EBC 1105.1*).
- Newly constructed means of egress shall comply with BC except for tread and riser dimensions where stair pitch cannot be reduced because of existing construction (*EBC 912.4.2 Exception from EBC 1105.1*).
- The building may have only one exit if the occupant load of the assembly spaces do not exceed 50 (*EBC 705.3.1.1.2 for Group B, from EBC 805.1 from EBC 912.4.2 from EBC 1105.1*).

Assembly use (occupancy change to higher hazard category):

- Must conform to the BC Chapter 10 (*EBC 912.4.1 from EBC 1105.1*), except:
 - Existing stairway widths are acceptable if exit capacity is adequate for occupant load (*EBC 1105.6*).
 - Existing front doors are not required to swing in the direction of exit travel if approved by the Building Official and if other approved exits having adequate capacity are provided (*EBC 1105.7*).
 - Existing lath and plaster corridor walls or ½” gypsum board are permitted (*EBC 912.4.1 Exception 4*) in lieu of wall construction required by BC.
 - Existing corridor doors *in buildings protected throughout with an approved automatic sprinkler system* are permitted if they resist smoke, are tight fitting, and are not louvered (*EBC 705.5.1 Exception 3 from EBC 912.4.1 Exception 5*).
 - Other corridor openings other than to the exterior, such as windows, grilles, and sashes must be sealed (*EBC 705.5.3 from EBC 912.4.1 Exception 5*).
- The 32 inch minimum width of egress doors (BC 1008.1.1) is waived if there is sufficient width and height for a person and the exit capacity is adequate for the occupant load (*EBC 1105.6*). For example, the exit capacity of doors in a sprinklered building is 0.15 inches/person (BC Table 1005.1), so a 30-inch wide door would have

- an exit capacity of 200 persons.
- The exterior egress door from the accessible entrance (assumed to be in the rear) is required to have panic hardware or fire exit hardware (BC 1008.1.9). It must also swing in the direction of egress travel (BC 1008.1.2) and have an exterior landing (BC 1008.1.4).
- Exit signs must be provided (BC 1011.1) but alternative exit signs may be provided with building official's approval if conforming signs would damage the historic character (*EBC 1103.11*).
- Only one exit is required from the basement floor and first floor assembly spaces if the capacity of the spaces are limited to 50 occupants (BC 1014.1). (If the capacity is not limited to 50, the front door can be used as the required second exit if it is reversed to swing out and is fitted with panic hardware.)

Accessible Means of Egress: Not required in existing buildings (*EBC 605.1 Exception 2 from EBC 1104.1*)

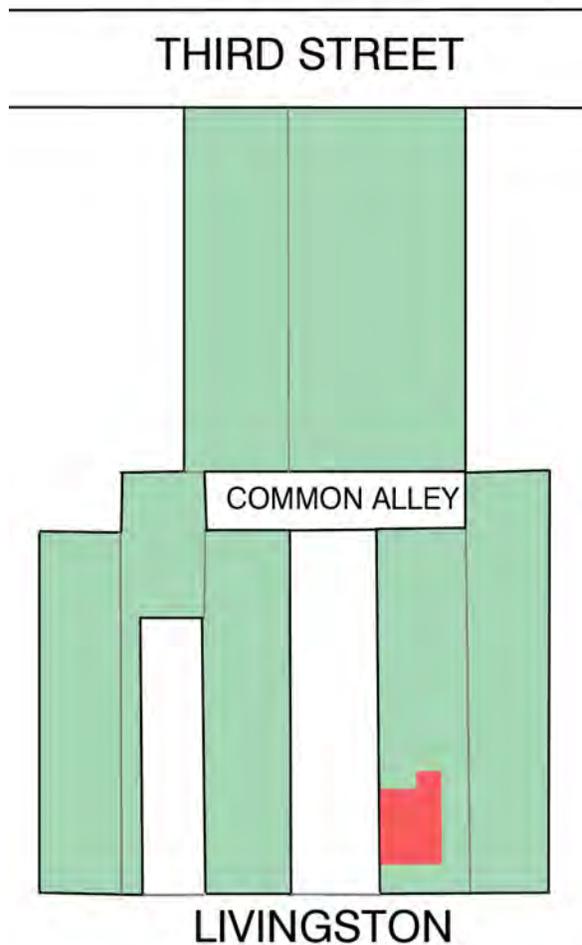
For a change of occupancy the following accessibility requirements apply to the maximum extent technically feasible (*EBC 912.8 from EBC 1105.15*):

- There must be at least one accessible building entrance and an accessible route to the interior spaces (*EBC 912.8.1&2*).
- Signage must comply with BC 1110 (*EBC 912.8.3*).
- Accessible parking must be provided (*EBC 912.8.4*).
- Accessible route must be provided from parking to accessible entrance (*EBC 912.8.6*).
- Where the change of occupancy includes alterations, the requirements for Prototype A also apply (*EBC 912.8*).

If compliance for accessible routes, ramps, entrances or toilet facilities would compromise historic significance, alternative requirements can be applied (*EBC 1104.1.1-4 and EBC 1105.15*):

- At least one site arrival point shall be accessible (*EBC 1104.1.1*).
- An accessible route to public spaces on the first floor shall be provided (*EBC 1104.1.2*).
- At least one main entrance shall be accessible or other provisions made (*EBC 1104.1.3*).
- If toilets are provided, at least one unisex facility should be accessible (*EBC 1104.1.4*).
- A 1:8 ramp is permitted for a maximum rise of 3 inches and a 1:10 ramp is permitted for a maximum rise of 6 inches (*EBC 308.8.5*).

Stairs and railings: Existing conditions are permitted to remain at all stairs and rails (*EBC 1105.11, Exception*).



*map of assembled
URHPCR properties*

D: Assembled URHPCR Properties—Preliminary Questions

The following is an STA Memo to Paul and Mary Liz Stewart in discussions about a full master plan of all properties with speculations on the kinds of consultant support that might be required for each alternative. This was STA’s first look at the property potential.

September 1,2009

These thoughts precede our work on the Master Plan, and that effort will no doubt inform what is described below. However, it’s useful to speculate on alternatives for the future historic park so you can aim your funding requests with some degree of specificity. The character of the park should of course tie in to your ultimate interpretation plan and will be influenced by the level of staffing you can maintain. I’m outlining below four (of many) alternatives for park development and an outline list of tasks involved.

1. Contemporary landscape: *Assess available land, learn about programming intentions and develop plan providing “neutral” green open space, trees and planting beds, paved areas, seating, pathways and lighting for a variety of general uses.
Consultant: Landscape designer/architect.*

2. Contemporary sustainable food landscape: Assess available land for drainage, soil quality and toxicity, shade and wind patterns. Develop a plan providing “neutral” open space and pathways to accommodate gatherings. Devote a larger portion of land to soil-enriched, fenced urban gardens. Gardens could be for education with children, food for food pantries, demonstration of plants grown in the period of significance of house and/or combinations of these and other themes.
Consultant: Landscape designer/architect, urban garden expert, historian/curriculum planner if garden theme is educational.

3. Landscape interpretation keyed to period of significance: Myers residence 1855-58. Besides general assessment of present condition of the parcels, this would involve research on the neighbors in 1855-58—the types of housing, the occupations, economic status, ethnic identities of the folks nearby. The park could tell stories of racial co-existence, immigration history, Albany’s economy etc. Neighbors who shared the Myers’ interests and contributed to emancipation could be highlighted. Planning for this approach would call for further historical research of property ownership and archaeology to discover remnants from these earlier occupancies. (Privy excavations are especially revealing.) While still providing “neutral” spaces for public activities and passive enjoyment, the final park would tell about the context in which Stephen and Harriet Myers were living and working.
Consultant: Historian, archaeologist, interpretation planner, landscape designer/architect.

4. Landscape interpretation following the evolution of the neighborhood in relation to social issues. Starting with the Myers family, who lived in the parcels you own who helped advance the Myers’ cause(s)? Are there interim residents (to the present day) in the neighborhood who had roles in Black churches, housing desegregation, civil rights campaigns, school reform etc. whose stories would be part of a continuum of change? The final park would rely less on archaeology and more on intense research on sequence of ownership and tenancies to discover “players” in the struggle for change. Like the others, the park would have “neutral” places to accommodate public activities and passive enjoyment.
Consultant: historian, interpretation planner, landscape designer/architect.

At this point, my ideas are highly speculative and not well-informed. Reading the Historic Structure Report, I can see that the neighborhood was varied and dynamic, and that the Myers were involved in many issues. If research could reveal particulars about their neighbors—either mid-19th century or looking forward to the present day—the public spaces you are planning could display the historic richness of this neighborhood. The approaches suggested above by no means exhaust possible alternatives for the site. They do imply the kinds of study—services of consultants with various specialties—that are likely to be involved. In all cases, a landscape designer/architect puts the pieces together, but richness may come from historians and archaeologists to discover and frame the provenance of this historic site. Given the National Register status of the Myers residence, any disturbance of the soil might trigger a rudimentary archaeological review, though this requirement might be limited to the 194 parcel only. Funding for projects beyond the building footprint that involve site disturbance may also trigger archaeological investigations.

Elizabeth Martin

