



Lathrop House Project

Dear Sylvania Resident:

Your Sylvania City Council believes it is important to keep you informed about issues of importance to our community. Our regular newsletter, the Country Journal, will continue to be sent. However, we feel that the Lathrop property issue merits special communication due to its complexity and the very active involvement that City Council has had. We encourage you to check out the City of Sylvania website, www.cityofsylvania.com for lots of information and public records of our actions. As always, we value your opinions.

Keith Haddad
President, Sylvania City Council

Demolish or preserve?

St. Joseph Church is a vital and valued member of our community. We believe that the Lathrop House property is a local and national historic site. While we agree that there are no contemporaneous records which announced in the 1850's that fugitive slaves were harbored there, we are satisfied that the better part of the argument, especially long standing oral traditions and not too distant writings, persuades us that the Lathrop House and the ravine do indeed have historical value which should be preserved. Quite simply, we believe that both the Church interest in expansion and our interest in his-

torical preservation can be accomplished. We have negotiated in good faith to meet that goal.

We continue to work toward a mutually agreeable compromise, and very recently have offered to St. Joseph Parish to reduce the amount of the property to be taken, and to share with the Parish both the front of the property and the ravine area in the back. We have also proposed to enhance the parking lot to the north of the house. St. Joseph has told us that the house must be moved, or that the City must pay it \$5 million for the three parcels it had earlier acquired. We hope that there can be some compromise

reached on this issue, and are committed to continue to work toward that goal.

Let us address some confusion with regard to prior discussions regarding the sale of the Lathrop House property. In Spring, 2001, Mrs. Marie Vogt, the owner of the home, offered to sell it to the City for \$750,000. Several factors led us to decline her offer. We already had a historical village. We considered the costs and difficulty of moving it to that location. We determined that the cost of the property, plus the additional expenses for renovation, preservation and operation of the home as an historical landmark, exceeded sound financial management.

A group of concerned citizens then approached City Council to see if there were other options for preserving the home. The City worked with at least two private individuals who were interested in purchasing the Lathrop House, and preserving it in the community. They intended to restore the home for use as a bed and breakfast and for educational tours. The City was prepared to commit \$175,000 to purchase the ravine acreage of the property to add it to Harroun Park. In August, 2001, a written offer was submitted by a private individual to Mrs. Vogt. At that same time, we understood that St. Joseph Parish had submitted

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an offer, but those negotiations were conducted privately without input or advice from the City. We were not afforded any opportunity to purchase the house at the price St. Joseph's paid.

On October 31, 2001, St. Joseph's closed on its purchase of the Lathrop House and property for \$350,000. Immediately thereafter, on November 1st, St. Joseph Church applied for a demolition permit, and the following Sunday publicly confirmed its intention to clear the site. On November 2, 2001, Mayor Stough and Councilwoman Scheidel met with Father Wurzel and other Church representatives to ask that the house be preserved, and alternatives other than demolition be explored. Father Wurzel indicated that the Church would prefer to demolish the house, but committed to us that he would allow time for others to determine if the house could be moved to another location.

On November 5, 2001 the Zoning Department issued a demolition permit. This is a standard procedure which does not, and did not, require City Council action. Based upon the review of the municipal code, it was determined that there was no basis to refuse to issue a permit. Demolition permits do not have an expiration date. (See the demolition permit on the website) However, when City Council learned that Monday that a demolition permit had been issued, it immediately passed a unanimous resolution calling for the preservation of the Lathrop House and asking St. Joseph Church to hold off demolition and consider other alternatives. (See Resolution No. 28-2001 on the website)

Now that the City has initiated the eminent domain proceeding, after offering the Parish \$400,000 for the the Lathrop House and property, the City has revoked the demolition permit.

Shortly after the Council meeting on November 5, 2001, St. Joseph's proposed that certain land could be exchanged which would permit relocation of the house to a different site near the northeast corner of the parking lot. These discussions were deferred while fund-raising efforts to accomplish a move were undertaken, with the expectation that a timetable for relocation would be established. ■

Land Trade Negotiations

Detailed proposals were regularly exchanged with the Church beginning in October, 2002, outlining various terms and conditions under which a land swap and relocation might be accomplished. The City offered to trade lots fronting on Main Street with St. Joseph's offering footage on the north and east edges of the current Parish parking lot. It is important to note that a long standing parking lot agreement between the City and St. Joseph's allows parking for St. Joseph's, TARTA and Harroun Park on jointly-owned land. At this time, the City pointed out a strip of land bordering the Lathrop house near the parking lot, that is owned by the City of

Sylvania. All these ownership issues were part of the negotiations. No agreement was reached with St. Joseph's regarding the land trade because it was determined that the lots that fronted Main Street were more valuable than the land offered by the Parish.

In December, 2002, St. Joseph indicated that it was imposing a deadline of March 31, 2003 to relocate the house. It stated that this deadline was imposed because of the impending expiration of the demolition permit. Our Law Director confirmed in writing that there was no such expiration deadline. We hoped that good faith negotiations would continue. On March 7, 2003, the administration submitted one addi-

City works with concerned citizens and Metroparks

The City in the ensuing months worked diligently with a local citizens group (Friends of the Lathrop House) which was interested in preserving the house and finding an entity that would take over restoration and operation of the house. On March 4, 2002, Sylvania City Council unanimously passed Ordinance No. 23-2002 authorizing the expenditure of up to \$50,000 to assist in the cost of relocating and preserving the Lathrop House. This ordinance was passed as a result of a request by the Friends of the Lathrop House. (See Ordinance 23-2002 on the website) However, on March 18, 2002, Sylvania City Council unanimously adopted Resolution No. 8-2002 calling for the preservation of the Lathrop House on its present site. (See Resolution 8-2002 on

the website)

In May, 2002, Mayor Stough announced the formation of a Blue Ribbon Committee to study preservation uses and funding sources for the house. On July 17, the Metroparks adopted Resolution 44-02, reciting that the Lathrop House had been documented to have sheltered runaway slaves as part of the Underground Railroad, and authorized an agreement with the City of Sylvania to relocate and renovate the Lathrop House, and to conduct public programs related to the historical residence. (See Metroparks Resolution No. 44-02 on the website) Given their excellent record on historical preservation, the City was and remains pleased with this commitment. It adopted Resolution No. 16-2002 to enter into that agreement with the

Metroparks. (See Resolution No. 16-2002 on the website) Friends of the Lathrop House reported that the necessary funds, including the contribution from the City of Sylvania, had been committed to move the house, and that the Toledo Metroparks was excited about the opportunity to renovate and operate the house.

Once the City learned that funds for relocation were available, and that the Metroparks was willing to renovate and operate the house, we began a search for a suitable site. Several alternatives were considered, but rejected. It was then that negotiations began in earnest with the Parish. ■

continued from "Land Trade Negotiations"

tional land swap proposal to the Church. For the first time, the City also offered to buy the property. Each proposal was expressly conditioned upon Council enacting the necessary legislation to approve either proposal.

St. Joseph's Church responded to a City of Sylvania proposal, on March 12, 2003, but it did not "unconditionally accept" the City's proposal as has often been asserted. Rather, it insisted that the relocation now be completed by May 31, 2003, and required not only the City, but the Friends of the Lathrop House and the Metroparks to approve the agreement. It said nothing about extending the demolition deadline of March 31, 2003

At a council meeting on March 17th, no action was taken to accept St. Joseph's

counterproposal, and for the first time publicly, discussion centered on the resort to eminent domain to protect the house from immediate demolition. St. Joseph officials made it known that without a signed agreement by March 31, 2003 the house would be demolished on April 1, 2003. The City met with Father Wurzel early on March 26th asking him to extend the Church established deadline of March 31st or at least to agree not to demolish the house while talks continued. The request was denied. The Mayor, at the request of City Council then submitted an offer to purchase the property, which was rejected. Later that day, City Council voted unanimously for eminent domain as the only timely solution to prevent the Lathrop House from being demolished and to protect the

property rights of the City. (See Resolution 10-2003 on the website). On March 28, 2003, after the Church had rejected the City offer to

purchase the property at more than its fair market value, the eminent domain lawsuit was filed. ■





Eminent domain to aid preservation and to preserve access to Harroun Park

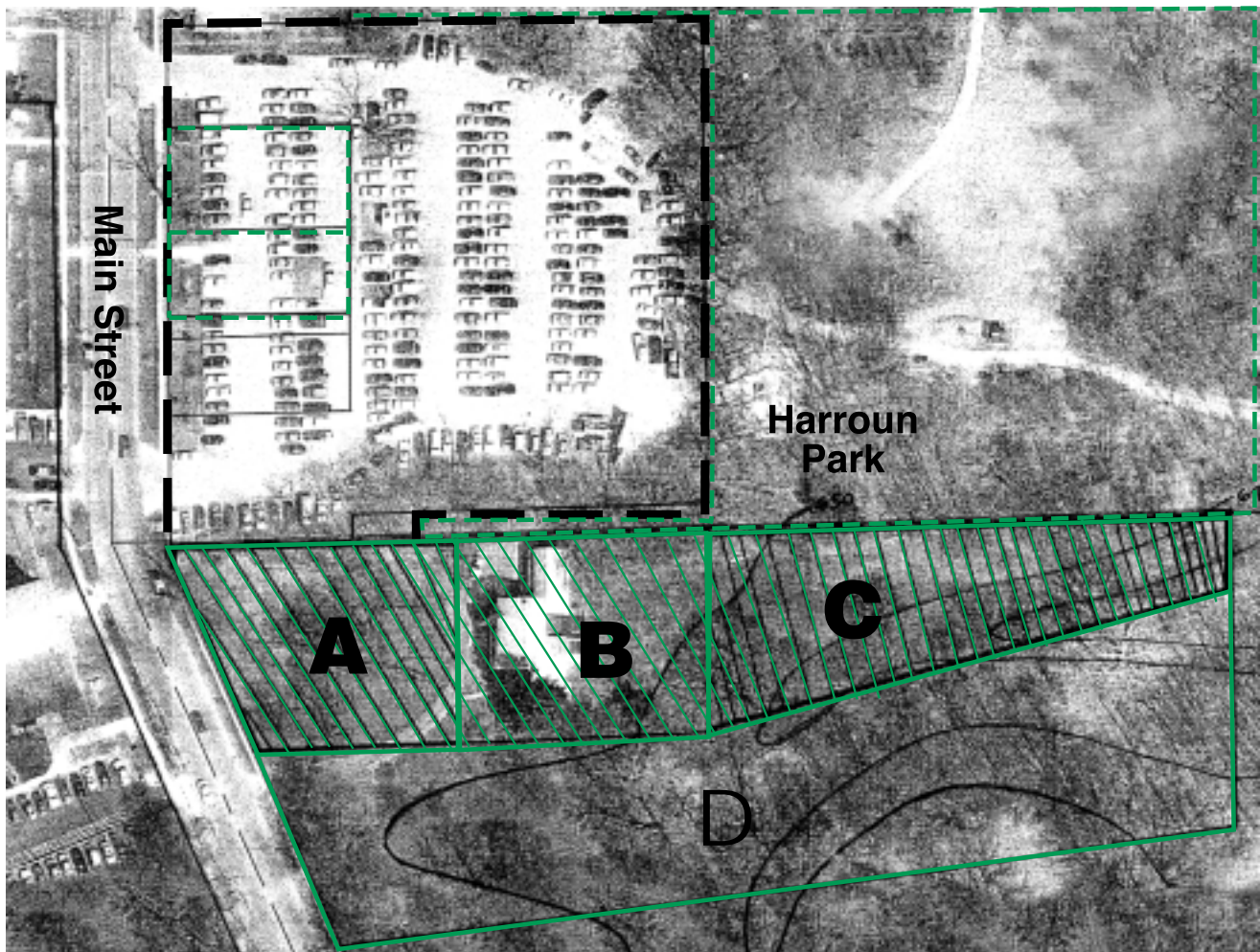
Eminent domain is a legal procedure available to any charter municipality to acquire property for public use. Once the authority of the governmental agency and the issue of public use are determined, a jury is selected to determine the fair market

value of the property, which is then paid to the Parish. The City has already deposited the sum of \$400,000 to acquire the property. The funds will be paid to the Church when title to the property is transferred.

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- A - Front Yard
- B - Lathrop House
- C - Back Yard
- D - Lathrop Ravine

-  Eminent Domain Property
-  Jointly Owned Property
-  Settlement Proposal
-  City Owned Property



continued from "Eminent domain. . ."

City Council determined that the eminent domain procedure would do two things: 1) ensure that the City would have access to and parking for Harroun Park. A recent expansion drawing by St. Joseph has proposed a new church sanctuary on the present parking lot in front of Harroun Park. 2) prevent the immediate demolition of Lathrop House by St. Joseph's Church so that the City could settle property issues with the Church;

It has never been the intention of City Council to prevent St. Joseph's Church from expansion or creating a master plan.

The case is now in the Lucas County Court of Common Pleas. The City of Sylvania has made proposals to St. Joseph representatives to try to settle this issue in an amicable manner prior to the start of the trial. So far, Church officials have declined any settlement which would allow the house to remain on the site where it has rested for the past 168 years. We still hope for a positive resolution.

In recent settlement discussions, the City has indi-

Parking lot agreement at Harroun Park

Eminent domain procedures were necessary to ensure that citizens would have access to Sylvania's Harroun Park. Currently the parking lot is jointly owned with St. Joseph Church through a 25-year agreement that began in 1989.

The City maintains the parking lot for use by St. Joseph's school and church, TARTA riders and those who visit Harroun Park. The City maintains the lot by paving it, removing snow, general

upkeep and lighting. During our negotiations, St. Joseph's informed the City that it had no intention of renewing the parking lot agreement with the City thereby denying Sylvania residents access to its own Harroun Park or for TARTA use. Through eminent domain we can ensure that the City will have the necessary property for parking and access to Harroun Park. ■

ated that it is willing to reduce substantially that part of the Lathrop property subject to eminent domain, and to share with the Church both the area in front of the house, as well as the green space in the rear of the property. The City has suggested that it would be imprudent to completely destroy the ravine area, and has asked the Church to consider that proposal. The Church has made it very clear that it is unwilling to negotiate any settlement that results in the Lathrop House staying where it is, especially if that settlement also includes preserving intact the ravine. The map on the center panel illustrates the City's offer. Parcels A, B, C, and D constitute the entire Lathrop property. The City has offered to limit its eminent domain acquisition to Parcels A, B, and C. Parcel A is the front yard, and Parcel C is the back yard, including the ravine area. Parcel B shows where the house sits. The City has offered to share use on both Parcel A and C, and to cover the costs of landscaping. ■

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"The preservation of this national treasure that is in your community is an awesome responsibility. Abolitionists had the courage to stand in the gap and do the right thing-that is the history of the Underground Railroad, common sense to right the wrong. The Underground Railroad represents the darkest of times, the brightest of lights."

J. Kenneth Blackwell
Ohio Secretary of State
May 22, 2002

Why save Lathrop House?

- The house was built in 1835 and has been home to many of our area's leading citizens, with prominent members of the Briggs, Lathrop, Crandall, Fallis, Bischoff and Vogt families contributing to the history of the house and our community.
- The National Trust for Historic Preservation recognizes the Lathrop House as having a significant place in city, state, and national history. The site is also named as one of the Ohio Preservation Alliance's ten most endangered historic sites. The Lathrop House is also recognized as a stop on the Underground Railroad by the Friends of Freedom Society/Ohio Underground Railroad Association.
- The Historical Society of Northwestern Ohio Bulletin of October, 1939 in an article titled "The Underground Railroad Again" documented the site as an underground railway "station" after researchers visited the house and saw "the concealed room...with beds still in it". (See Bulletin article on the website).
- The Lathrop family harbored runaway slaves in the residence. An outside stairway and door were discovered during a Fall, 2002 archeological dig. These stairs led to a cellar where the concealed room sheltered slaves on their way to Canada. The stairs were hidden for decades under a concrete slab back porch.
- The State of Ohio 1870 census shows only one African American family living in Sylvania, on the Lathrop property, just four years after the end of the Civil War.
- Area school children, including St. Joseph's students, toured the house as part of their social studies curriculum on the Underground Railroad. The Underground Railroad was a loosely organized system that helped thousands of fugitive slaves escape to freedom in Canada. ■

Why preserve the house on its original site?

- To save the Lathrop House is to tell only half the story—that of the heroic abolitionist activities of the family who lived there. The fugitive slaves story is told in the path from the ravine to the house, the actual path that was traveled to reach safety. That trail was blazed with courage, soaked with blood, and walked with the firm conviction that all men are created equal. The ground itself contains just as much history as the house that sits upon it.
- Moving the house destroys its historical integrity. Grants are more likely to be given for those projects remaining on their original sites.
- The path from the Harroun Barn, near Flower Hospital, leads directly to the Lathrop House. This trail is believed to be the only one of its kind in Ohio where two stations connected by a geographic path (the ravine) still exist in their original locations.
- To protect the structural integrity of the foundation of the house which may be damaged if moved. ■

What about the costs for preservation?

The City is in very sound financial shape. We are moving forward on our capital projects. Existing funds, resulting from prudent fiscal management of the city, would be used for the Lathrop House project. The City does not intend to restore or operate the house but rather partner with the Toledo Area Metroparks to do so.

No tax increase

There will be no tax increase to pay for this project, which is estimated to cost far less than if the City had purchased the home from the private owner at the original asking price. ■

“We would like to lend our strong support towards efforts to save this important property, keeping it on its original site if at all possible. If that can be accomplished we have Preservation Services Fund grants available to local non-profits and governments to aid planning for long term preservation and interpretation. We were also recently awarded a grant from the Ford Foundation to identify and aid the preservation of sites related to African American Heritage, with intent to link those sites together with our Associated Sites program for marketing and stewardship purposes. We stand ready to discuss with you any and all options that may be available to help you meet the goal of preserving this priceless property.”

*Royce A. Yeater, AIA
Midwest Director,
National Trust for Historic Preservation
April 4, 2003*



City Of Sylvania
CITY COUNCIL

CONTACT US ONLINE AT:

www.cityofsylvania.com

WE VALUE YOUR OPINIONS

We have made public record documents available for you to easily access via the website. We hope this newsletter and the website will help answer any questions you have. As always our City Council meetings and minutes are open and matters of public record. We will continue to work diligently for the best result for all citizens. Feel free to contact us by email or phone, city.clerk@sev.org, 419-885-8931.

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