

TOWN COUNCIL



STAFF REPORT

Projects and Watershed Resilience Department

MEETING DATE:	January 10, 2023
PROJECT:	Sarah Riley Hooks Cottage (76 Bridge Street) Update
PROJECT MANAGERS:	Kimberly Washok-Jones, Director of Projects and Watershed Resilience Glen Umberger, Historic Preservationist

REQUEST:

Staff requests Town Council review the attached *Viability of Preservation Assessment*, dated December 21, 2022 (Attachment 2), and provide direction regarding the future of the Sarah Riley Hooks Cottage and grounds.

BACKGROUND:

The Sarah Riley Hooks Cottage (Cottage), located at no. 76 Bridge Street, was designated by Town Council as a Contributing Resource to the Old Town Bluffton Historic District in 2008 at the time that the local historic district was created. As such, the structure “adds to the historic associations, architectural qualities, or archaeological values that relate to the documented significance of the Old Town Bluffton Historic District.”¹ The property is also within the boundaries of the Bluffton Historic District, listed in the National Register of Historic Places on June 21, 1996, though it is a noncontributing resource within that district.

The property was purchased by the Town of Bluffton on December 28, 2020. Security fencing was immediately installed around the structure to prevent potential trespass and vandalism. The property has been maintained by Public Services since the acquisition. With the approval of the FY 2023 Consolidated Budget, Town Council approved funding within the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) to begin preliminary planning for the property and assess the potential use of the structure.

With Council input during 2022 Strategic Planning, Town Staff developed a survey for potential uses of the Cottage and grounds which was distributed at the Historic Arts & Seafood Festival in October 2022 and is still actively posted on Town social media sites. As of January 3, 2023, over 300 responses have been received. Top uses for the Cottage include an “Ancillary Park Use/Restrooms/Classroom” or “Museum/Interpretive Center” (Figure 3). Top public facilities that were considered “Extremely Important” for the Cottage grounds included “Flexible Use/Open Lawn” and “Boardwalk Access to Huger Cove” (Figure 4). These findings corroborate Council’s discussion and guidance during Strategic Planning.

¹ See “Contributing Resource,” *Unified Development Ordinance*, as amended June 14, 2022, Defined Terms § 9.2.

Do you live within Town of Bluffton municipal limits?

318 responses

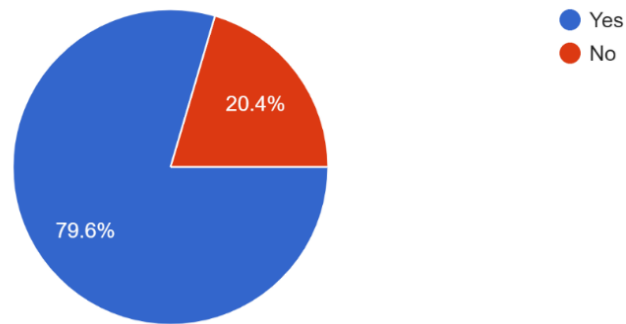


Figure 1. Percentage of Respondents that were Town of Bluffton residents or not.

If you do not live within Town of Bluffton municipal limits, do you own property or a business within Town of Bluffton municipal limits?

150 responses

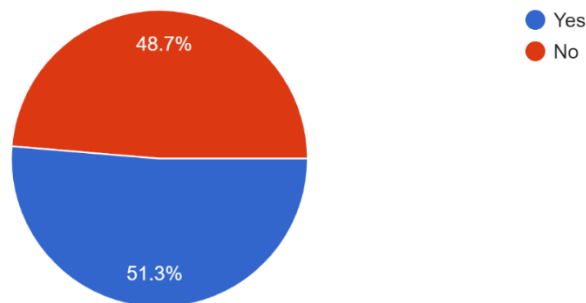


Figure 2. Percentage of respondents that were Bluffton business owners.

How should the Sarah Riley Hooks Cottage be used in the future? Check all that apply.

318 responses

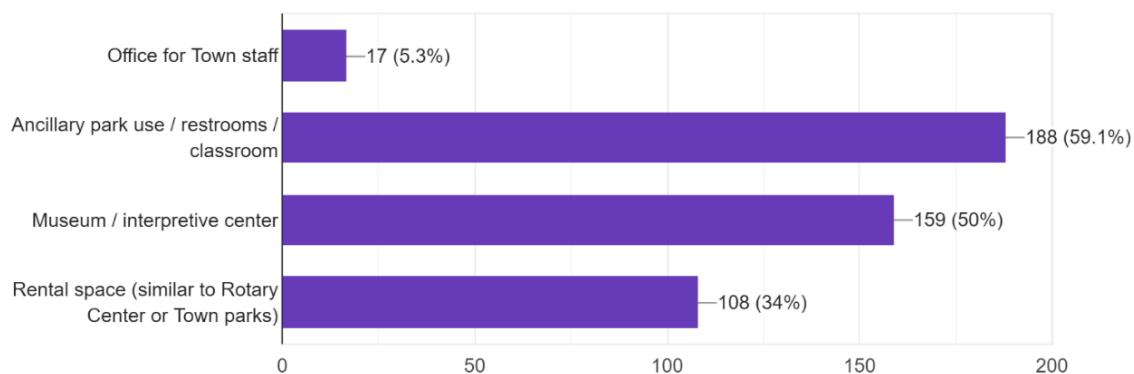


Figure 3. Potential Uses for Sarah Riley Hooks Cottage.

What public facilities should be considered on the remainder of the undeveloped property? For each of the facilities listed below, please indicate whether you feel i...f facilities, somewhat important or not at all important.

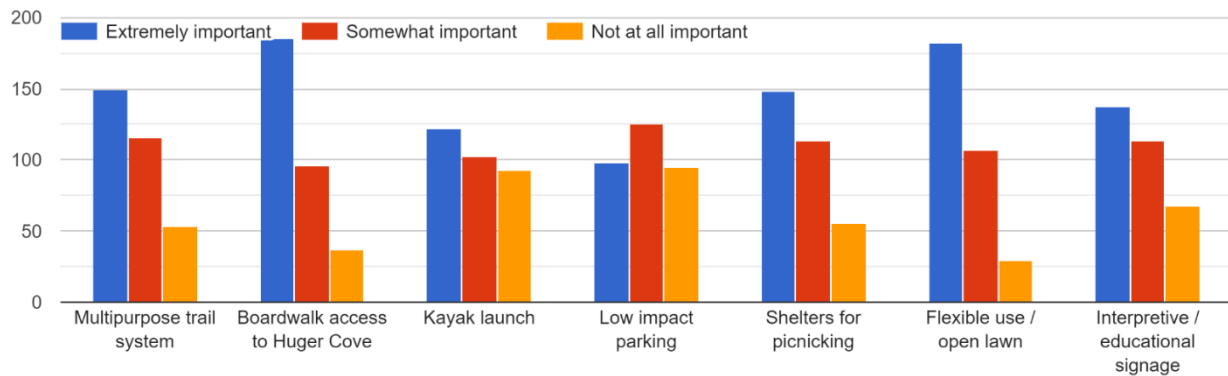


Figure 4. Potential Uses or Facilities for the Sarah Riley Hooks Cottage grounds.

Throughout 2022, Town Staff has conducted periodic exterior inspections to monitor conditions of the property. On April 20, 2022, Town Staff was informed that the roof appeared to have “fallen in,” conducted a site inspection and noted a hole in the roof along the western side of the structure at the chimney. Staff’s recommendation was to repair the roof at least temporarily by the installation of a tarp, which was completed at that time. A larger roof tarp was installed in June 2022. On September 23, 2022, Town Staff noted new damage to the structure’s exterior on the western elevation near the chimney and documented the damage. Town Staff completed subsequent periodic site inspections to monitor this damage and recommended that the Town undertake a mothballing procedure to properly stabilize the entire structure while a decision is made for future use of the property based on the public survey. These procedures are outlined by the National Park Service, in *Preservation Brief 31, Mothballing Historic Buildings* (Attachment 3) which includes steps for Documentation, Stabilization, and Mothballing. Town Staff recommended that a conditions assessment of the building (step 2) be performed since there are no documents that suggested that an historic building assessment was made at the time the Town purchased the property. After consultation with the Town’s Historic Preservationist, CIP contracted with Meadors Inc. to assess the condition of the structure and the potential for rehabilitation and an on-site conditions assessment was completed on December 5, 2022. The resulting report is now being presented to Town Council for review, discussion, and a request by Staff for further direction.

NEXT STEPS:

To be determined based on direction provided by Town Council.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Presentation
2. *Sarah Riley Hooks Cottage, 76 Bridge Street, Viability of Preservation Assessment*, Meadors, Inc. (December 21, 2022).
3. *Preservation Brief 31: Mothballing Historic Buildings*, Sharon C. Park, U.S. Department of the Interior, Cultural Resources, Heritage Preservation Services (September 1993).