



Executive Briefing

To: Cottage City Commission

From: John Hoatson, Town Manager

Date: September 1, 2026

Subject: DHCD and Maryland Historical Trust Review of 3813 Cottage Terrace

The 3813 Cottage Terrace, Commission-authorized packet has been fully submitted to the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). That submission begins DHCD's research and project-development process and triggers the full historical review by the Maryland Historical Trust (MHT). MHT's cursory review has already identified preservation issues that materially affect the Town's original demolition and community-center concepts. Based on the preliminary findings and current DHCD guidance, the most practical path is to amend the grant request so the Town can obtain a feasibility study and architectural and engineering services to rehabilitate the existing house.

This next phase would develop reliable costs, design requirements, and reuse options without committing the Town to construction or a final use. All final decisions would return to the Commission after the required studies and public process are complete.

Consistent with the Commission's authorization, the Town completed and submitted the full DHCD packet for 3813 Cottage Terrace. As part of that submission, staff photographed the property and provided supporting documentation of Town ownership. The complete packet gives DHCD the information needed to begin project research and development and gives MHT the materials needed to conduct its formal historical review.

MHT's initial review indicates that the property is located within the Cottage City Historic District. MHT also identified the property as being within the Bladensburg Civil War Historic District. Certain site-specific historic-resource information is treated as confidential so that sensitive locations are not subjected to unauthorized digging, removal, or disturbance.

These findings are preliminary and will be developed through the full review. At this stage, however, MHT has advised that work on the property would need to respect the historic character of the area. The exterior design and facade would need to remain compatible with the period in which the home was built and with surrounding homes. The interior could be brought to modern standards, including electrical, building-system, safety, accessibility, and functional improvements, subject to the final scope and applicable review.

The preliminary review makes demolition an impractical course for the Town. Demolition would require detailed study of the house, a formal public process, additional preservation review, and mitigation for the loss of a historic resource. That mitigation could require the Town to support a separate preservation project in Cottage City or elsewhere in Maryland, with attention focused on the surrounding four-town area. The additional time, review, and expense make demolition neither reliable nor financially sensible for the Town.

For the same reason, replacing the house with a modern-style community center is not a viable concept for this site. Any new work would have to honor the historic setting. This does not necessarily prevent the property from serving a future public or community purpose, but it means that any such use would need to be achieved through a historically compatible rehabilitation or design approach rather than a contemporary replacement structure.

DHCD has advised that the Town may amend the application as part of the ongoing review process. The recommended amendment would request funding for a feasibility study and architectural and engineering services. That work would determine the building's condition, identify the improvements required to return it to service, establish a realistic rehabilitation cost, and develop design options that preserve the exterior historic character while allowing the interior to meet modern standards.

According to current DHCD guidance, the study and design phase can be grant-funded at no cost to the Town. This approach advances two public objectives at the same time: it protects the historic appearance and character identified by MHT, and it supports the housing and neighborhood-revitalization goals of DHCD and the State's current housing initiatives.

The study and review process would include extensive public participation. MHT, DHCD, relevant preservation organizations, the community, and other reviewing parties would have opportunities to participate as the project is developed. The Commission would receive continuing briefings throughout the process. Proceeding with the amended request would authorize further study only; it would not authorize rehabilitation, construction, sale, or a final use of the property. The Commission would retain those decisions.

This is expected to be a process of at least two fiscal years. The near-term objective is to secure funding and complete the feasibility, architectural, engineering, and historical-review work. If the Commission later elects to proceed, physical rehabilitation would more likely occur in Fiscal Year 2028 or Fiscal Year 2029, subject to the study results, available funding, required approvals, public review, and a subsequent Commission decision.

The recommended next step is to amend the DHCD application so the Town can preserve the funding opportunity and obtain the professional information necessary for an informed decision. This approach avoids committing Town funds, recognizes the historic constraints identified in MHT's preliminary review, and keeps every final policy and property decision with the Commission.