

FLOWER HILL FOUNDATION

Historic Garage Restoration & Rehabilitation

Project Narrative

Introduction

As a first step to revitalizing the grounds of the Flower Hill Foundation homestead, the foundation has pursued the 2023 City of Austin Heritage Preservation Grant for the restoration of the 1920s historic garage structure at the north-eastern section of the property. The grant funding shall provide for the historic restoration and repurposing of the structure into a multi-use space appealing to visitors, the local community, and the general public, consistent with the tourism requirements of the grant.

The restored structure shall accommodate the functions of the foundation such as exhibitions, gatherings, and be available for use by the community members and private events. In this manner, with a new stream of visitors, the foundation shall introduce the Smoot Family history to the public and create a welcoming space with great potential for growth and accessibility.

While the Smoot family home is the primary and most significant structure on the site, it is in need of significant interior restoration work and structural foundation stabilization. This required restoration work would exceed the funding limits of the Heritage Preservation Grant. As such, the garage restoration was most appropriate for grant submission. The foundation is in the process of soliciting separate grant funding for the work on the residence.

Garage Restoration

The garage restoration work intends to maximize preservation and viable use. The exterior envelope of the structure shall be thoroughly restored. Where historic material remains it shall be preserved and rehabilitated. Where historic material is no longer present or repairable it shall be rebuilt per the original historic condition.

Description of Work

- Repair and restore original brick walls and foundations.
- Repair and stabilize the roof structure.
- Remove the existing asphalt shingle roof and replace with a cedar shake roof as was original.
- Insulate the roof and install a finished ceiling to allow for the space to be conditioned in the future. This is removable and reversible.
- Replace a non-repairable single wood door and wood frame in kind.
- Remove the existing garage sliding doors and replace with a new folding door to allow for a usable conditioned space. Mount original wood doors at interior walls as historic elements for exhibit.
- Restore original limestone pony walls outside of the garage.
- Restore grounds outside of garage to create a usable event space.

Garage Door Replacement Strategy

With heavy consideration, the owners and design team are proposing to demount the garage doors and repurpose them as decorative elements within the garage structure. All parts shall be saved and stored intact, should the owner wish to reinstall them.

From the beginning, the owner had envisioned the garage to be converted into an event space as this would serve to welcome the public and provide a sustainable use. A pair of new bi-fold doors and a restored, insulated roof were scoped to create an insulated and sealed envelope which can later be conditioned.

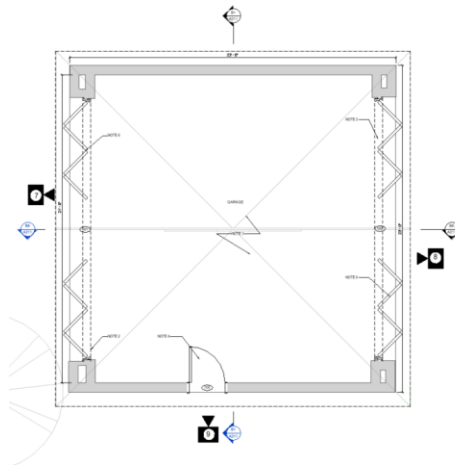


Figure 1: Proposed layout with bi-fold doors.

As an event space, the garage needed to be flexible in its function, operability and provide ease of control. The garage doors in their existing condition would only limit how the garage can be used.

The garage doors were also examined by a contractor knowledgeable in wood repair, and it was deemed irreparable and recommended for replacement. The decision to salvage the doors came after several alternatives were explored:

1. *No change (Keeping the doors as-is on a sliding track in their original place)* – was determined undesirable. The doors are currently on a sliding track thereby limiting the total width of the opening to the width of one of the sliding wood doors. This reduces the natural light in the garage by 50%, circulation, and the ability to fully connect the interior space with the exterior.

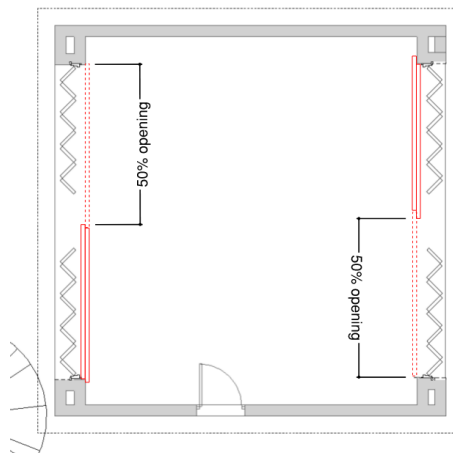


Figure 2: No change

As a potential event space, being able to maximize the natural light and exterior connection was an important consideration for the owner. In its grant application, the foundation identified the Tudor Cottage at Pease Park as a precedent project with similar objectives. Since its renovation the cottage has served as a successful event space, wisely integrating the interior and exterior.



Figure 3: Tudor Cottage at Pease Park



Figure 4: Garage existing condition

2. *Keeping the doors in their original place but opening on a hinge (not track)* – was determined impractical. While a hinged opening allows for maximum light and opening into the garage, the door swing would require nearly the entire footprint of space to open and close. As an event space, hinge doors would not be feasible as it would obstruct and limit the available floor space. Furthermore, an intensive structural support would be required to open and close the large 9'-0" x 8'-0" garage doors on a hinge.

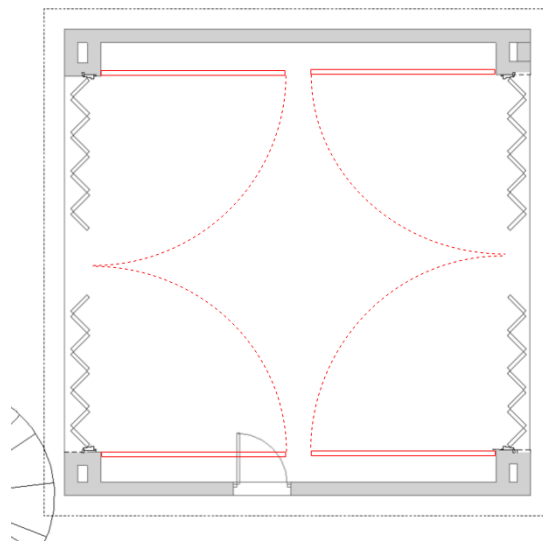


Figure 5: Hinge

3. *Keeping the doors in their original place but opening on an inward up-swing* – was determined unsuitable with the door height at 8'-0". When the doors swing open, the height of the doors would create a low ceiling height and obstruct the interior views to the roof structure, which shall remain vaulted.

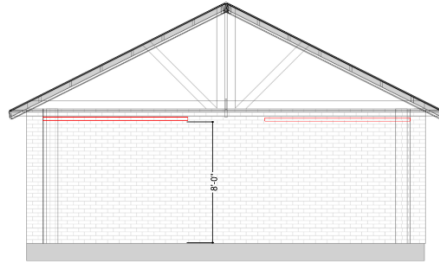


Figure 6: In-Swing

4. *Keeping the doors in their original place but opening on an outward up-swing* – was determined unfeasible. The outward swing would conflict with the new bi-fold doors, and even if the garage doors were relocated closer to the exterior perimeter, the door would be exposed to weathering and inevitable deterioration. The reason the location of the new bi-fold doors was placed closer to the exterior perimeter than the garage doors was to protect them from further weathering.

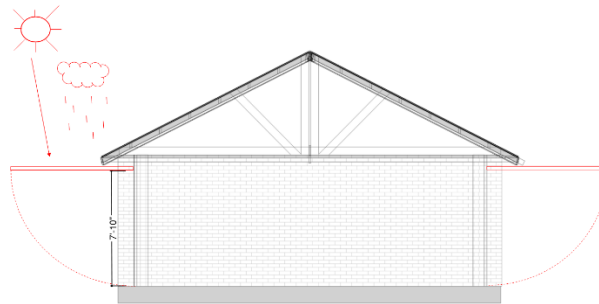


Figure 7: Out-swing

While the removal of the garage doors may raise questions about changing one of the character defining elements of the garage structure, it is important to note that the garage structure was a replacement to where a horse stable once stood. The Smoot Family were practical and altered their property to suit their current family needs as was evident by a series of additions of the house, and over their 105 year occupancy, their approach to upkeep was to husband materials and supplies. “[H]ardly anything was done away without first being repurposed”¹. Therefore, in the spirit of the Smoot Family tradition, the garage doors will be salvaged so that they can be upcycled and repurposed.

¹ Flower Hill Foundation (2016). *The Homestead*. Retrieved from Flower Hill Foundation: <http://www.flowerhillfoundation.org/the-homestead>