

SALISBURY HOUSE FOUNDATION

Presentation to Iowa Senate Appropriation Committee
Transportation, Infrastructure and Capitals Appropriations Subcommittee
by J. Eric Smith, Executive Director
March 10, 2015

“There is nothing else equal to Salisbury House in Iowa, and indeed in the Midwest.”
– National Trust for Historic Preservation (1992)

Executive Summary of Request:

- The Salisbury House Foundation (SHF) respectfully requests a \$1.0 million State appropriation paid over the next two fiscal years to complete essential infrastructure work on this important cultural heritage site and valuable tourism asset.

Background and Introduction:

- Salisbury House was built between 1923 and 1928 by Carl Weeks, a Linn County native who launched an international cosmetics empire based in Des Moines.
- The property features a 42-room estate with 16th Century architectural features, plus nine acres of woodlands and gardens, and internationally significant collections.
- Owned and operated since 1998 as a historic house museum by Salisbury House Foundation, a 501(c)3 founded in 1993 to preserve the property for public use, and to ensure that the collections remain in Iowa in perpetuity.

Significance of the Property to Iowa (Highlights):

- Placed on National Register of Historic Places (1966).
- Designated “a national treasure” by National Trust for Historic Preservation (1992).
- “Iowa’s Building of the Decade, 1920-1929,” American Institute of Architects (2004).
- Recognized as an Iowa Arts Council Cultural Leadership Partner (2008).
- Founding host site of Iowa Humanities Festival with University of Iowa (2012).
- Site chosen for ceremonial signing of new Iowa Historic Credit legislation (2014).

Funding History:

- SHF received \$600,000 per year in State appropriations in 1998, 1999 and 2000 toward initial acquisition and urgent stabilization work on the property.
- House, grounds and collections were purchased in 1998 for \$4,000,000.
- Significant capital projects completed since that time include:
 - Roof restoration: ~\$1,000,000
 - Masonry and windows: ~\$1,600,000
 - HVAC and other mechanicals: ~\$1,200,000
 - Demolition of non-historic elements and abatement: ~\$1,400,000
- SHF applied for and received ~\$1,000,000 in historic tax credits split between 2012 and 2013; funds have been board restricted and invested until 2017 to repay capital construction debt financed through City of Windsor Heights bond authority in 2007.
- SHF has received ~\$12,000 in annual support via Iowa Arts Council’s Cultural Leadership Partners program, and occasional project support through Department of Cultural Affairs, Iowa Tourism or State Historic Preservation Office initiatives.

Funding Present and Future:

- Current annual operating budget is ~\$880,000, with eight full-time, five part-time, and ~100 volunteers supporting ~20,000 annual visitors.
- Operations have been self-sufficient for the past two fiscal years, with expenses cut significantly and additional earned, fund-raised, and grant revenues secured.
- SHF is in the quiet phase of a \$6,000,000 capital campaign to complete final infrastructure work, build an endowment, secure long-term program sponsorships, and eliminate debt, thereby create “reason for return” for Central Iowa residents, while increasing tourism draw on a State, regional and national basis.

Statement of Need for State Appropriation:

- While the historic and educational elements of the House, collections, and gardens are highly visible and readily marketed to certain philanthropic sectors, the “bones” of the property are failing and undercutting other site and program improvements.
- Municipal support for SHF comes via Bravo of Greater Des Moines, which is exceptionally beneficial for operating funds, though the ~\$25,000 every other year cap on Bravo capital grants make it difficult to secure significant building funds from municipalities, which then limits ability to apply for and secure Federal support.
- The State demonstrated its belief in the importance of Salisbury House by playing a key role in the acquisition and early site stabilization of the property. Seventeen years later, SHF respectfully requests that the State provide another infrastructure appropriation to complete crucial deferred and emergent maintenance projects.

Elements Included in This Appropriation Request:

- \$400,000 to restore all roadways, walkways, curbs, drains and gutters to historic and code appropriate levels, including leveling the central courtyard cobbles for ADA compliance and potential use for a seasonal café to create earned revenue;
- \$200,000 for slab and stone restoration work on and around south patio and east terrace; there are major cracking and subsidence issues on some of the most heavily trafficked surfaces on the grounds, creating safety hazards and ADA concerns; water penetration also puts planned exhibition space below the patio at risk;
- \$150,000 to complete lower level interior infrastructure renovations, including new restrooms to make the House code compliant for public programs, providing modern lighting upgrades, and making the lower level spaces fully ADA accessible;
- \$100,000 to modernize fire, environmental, power distribution, and security systems; current equipment has aged beyond serviceability and warranty, and circuitry does not support modern loads, creating risk and associated liability;
- \$100,000 for outdoor lighting and security systems; parking lot and grounds safety is currently marginal after hours, and enhanced external security would allow SHF to use grounds more effectively and eliminate “attractive nuisance” for neighborhood.
- \$50,000 for professional forestry work to conserve and protect the oak savannah that defines the Salisbury property and surrounding neighborhood; SHF has been forced to remove five signature trees in recent years, and others are at risk.

For More Information:

- J. Eric Smith, SHF Executive Director: (515) 274-1777, jesmith@salisburyhouse.org, 4025 Tonawanda Drive, Des Moines, Iowa, 50312.