

The Historic Ambassador House & Heritage Gardens, Inc. 2008 Destination Hamilton County Grant Narrative

1. Overview:

The Historic Ambassador House & Heritage Gardens, Inc., is a non-profit organization charged with the renovation, operations, maintenance, and marketing of a historic home owned by the town of Fishers. The 176 year- old home located in Heritage Park, 106th & Eller Road, is on the national and state historic registers. An all-volunteer board of directors, and a part time Executive Director manage the organization. The Ambassador House will highlight the Victorian era and should be renovated by the end of 2007. The 1½-acre public space and heirloom gardens outside the home will be partially installed in the spring of 2008. When complete, the home and gardens will not only serve as a cultural and educational center and museum to Fishers history, it will serve as a prime rental venue for public and private functions.

Relationship with the town of Fishers

The town of Fishers provided a one million dollar bond to finance restoration of the house & preliminary installation of the gardens, but the bond does not cover all that is needed to make the house viable tourism destination. An estimated additional \$90,000 is needed to complete the showcase gardens, and critical elements are required to make the property rentable and event ready. Rental of the property will provide the income needed to pay off the bond and provide programs. In essence, the house is a shell with a partial garden, waiting to be completed so it can begin generating income to sustain itself.

Becoming a Cultural/Tourism Venue

When the house is complete, the non-profit board charged with operating the facility is facing a critical moment in its history. It must take the organization into its next public, income-producing stage. Specifically, the organization on a limited budget must:

- Raise funds to complete the gardens
- Furnish the house with period items
- Begin developing museum and public programs
- Purchase display cases and museum furnishings to showcase collections
- Purchase event rental furnishings to drive earned income
- Develop a fundraising plan in order to build local support and membership
- Develop a marketing/advertising plan
- Develop a business and operational plan as the organization moves into this new line of work

The board must create a clear vision for the future, with a strategic plan that will develop the project into tourism as well as a cultural and educational venue. There is no other financial appropriation from the town to support any of these needs, as the town's fiscal philosophy supports primarily parks and infrastructure development; and supports only indirectly organizations in the cultural and heritage fields.

Grant Request/Plan of action

The Historic Ambassador House & Heritage Gardens, Inc is requesting funding for a three-part grant:

Total Request - \$73,000

(1) **Capacity building grant** - Total \$30,000

Contract with professional consultant in fundraising and organizational effectiveness to create:

- **A Strategic plan** - goals: engage the board and staff to create informed projections about community and tourism needs; clarify mission and goals to meet those needs, and create a sustainable income producing historic venue; create a business plan targeting spending, shape programs and events in one, three and five year plans.
- **Board development** – increase board base and engagement; increase community participation to create stakeholders in the project.
- **Fundraising plan/marketing plan** – establishment of short /long term objectives to create income to sustain the project in conjunction with the creation of a marketing plan that takes the project from initial start up into the future. Create one, three and five year marketing plans targeting tourism. Create a membership base and an annual giving program that: invites prospects to make initial gifts, encourages donors to repeat gifts, and helps donors to see the need to increase their gifts.

Timeline – December 2007 – select /contract organizational/fundraising consultant, January 2008 – begin work with consultant on strategic plan, board development and fundraising/marketing plan, February 2008 - board development plan complete, March 2008 - strategic plan complete, launch major portion of fundraising campaign, new board members added, Ongoing – monthly work with consultant on strategy, training, and fundraising through end of 2008.

(2) **Start-up staff funding** \$18,000 – part time sales manager hours to cover 40 rentable weeks, to help plan and coordinate events, work with dedicated caterers, mail information, book rentals and handle contracts and provide set up supervision. It is hoped that subsequent funding to support this position will be generated through sales revenues. **Timeline** –interview/hire by beginning of second quarter 2008.

(3) **Furnishings** \$25,000 is estimated to allow immediate use of the house and gardens, for programs, educational and fundraising events and to allow the space to be immediately rentable and become sustainable. **Timeline** – January 2008, purchase all items upon receipt of funds to allow for programs, space rental and income generation.

(1) Retractable awning for partial covering of terraced patio @ \$10,000

(1) 20' x 50' Frame tent for terraced patio area with sides @ \$8,000

(8) 6' Round tables for outside terraced patio area @ \$90 each \$720

(64) White wooden chairs for outside terrace patio area @ \$26 each \$1,664

(5) 6' round tables for interior space

@ \$90 each \$540

(40) Interior chairs @ \$27 each \$1080

(6) Rectangular 4" x 8" tables @ \$125 each \$750

(3) 3' x 8' buffet tables @ \$125 each \$375

Drop screen 84" 4:3 @ \$129

Video projector @ \$750

Video cart @ \$50

White board 2' x 3' @ \$35

Blackout curtains for window & door @ \$300

2. Business Plan:

Situational Analysis: Strengths: As a new arts/cultural/historic product, The Ambassador House & Heritage Gardens will draw tourists to Hamilton County and serve the local community. There is a history of public support, past fundraising success, grants received and volunteer interest. (Hamilton County Master Gardeners) (*Media interest in the house and gardens) The location is accessible within a wooded 33-acre passive park overlooking the White River allowing future river oriented and trail events. Being close to Conner Prairie, Coxhall Gardens, shopping, hotels, restaurants, golf, etc., makes tours/packages viable. The rentable space is flexible with a total capacity of 500 (covered by tents/awnings). *History of public support-past success with fundraising *Approved by HCMGA's since 1996 as project for volunteer hours in education /gardening. * Project worthy of grants by The Humanities Council, The Legacy Fund and Hamilton County Convention and Visitors Bureau (HCCVB). *Flexible garden layout for small, medium or large events.with historic and Ag tourism.

Weaknesses: Fundraising efforts - The all-volunteer board had been focused primarily upon construction funding/ planning the physical structure of facilities/grounds around potential usage. Now that the construction phase is near completion, the need is critical for professional expertise to help create a viable plan for long-term success as revenue generating, operating facility. There is a need for additional stakeholders, community partners, and increased awareness. The town of Fishers financial policy does not commit any ongoing support to sustain operations of the house, gardens, museum, staffing or programs beyond renovation and installation.

Opportunities: Adds a needed venue for arts/cultural and educational activities and a wedding/reunion/meeting product to a fast growing community. The community desires family-focused community programs and this project will add educational and entertainment options. The Victorian theme of the house and its' Austria-Hungary connections lends potential as an additional Sister City. The population of Fishers is aging- 46% increase of householders 65⁺ looking for additional arts and leisure activities beyond youth sports.

Threats * Competition from Conner Prairie, Coxhall Gardens, activities designed for families and from local wedding venues, i.e., Oakhill Mansion.

Key goals – & Measurable Outcomes

Overall measurable outcomes include: creation of new partnerships within the community, increased arts exposure and new educational outreach opportunities.

Success =

- Selection/contract of professional consultant in fundraising /organizational effectiveness to guide the project as an operating historic facility with arts/cultural/educational/museum programs and rentable income producing space.
- Creation of an objective strategic plan focused based on community assessment to jumpstart this new venture. Prioritized incremental tasks leading to increased community awareness, beginning a base of stakeholders to facilitate: operations, education, programs, museum and rental income, leading to sustainability.
- The addition of engaged new board members with expertise and community connections. The creation of a revitalized invested board, moving the project forward according to the mission/strategic plan.

- Creation of a sustainable yet flexible strategic plan addressing tourism/community needs.
- Creation of business plan detailing programs, events, and related budget in one, three and five year plans.
- Immediate purchase of rental furnishings, and rental of indoor/outdoor space for income production.
- Hiring of part time sales manager to cover management/coordination of rentable space.

General Market Analysis *Target – Local families, empty nest active adults 45+, college graduates, married, annual incomes of \$75,000 + statewide and outside the state interested in history, gardening, scenic beauty, art, music, cultural events, summer traveler. (Fishers median income for a household is \$75,638, 64.7% are married, 44.5% have bachelors degree, *Target - Families with school age children wanting cultural, entertainment and – educational programs about /Fishers/ history attending Hamilton Southeastern Schools (46.3% of Fishers have children under age of 18 living with them) *Target -Young adults 2018+ - persons (needing a venue for weddings/receptions)– entire metropolitan Indianapolis area including suburbs and out of state. Fishers population = 54% age 18 – 24, 44.8% age 25-44)

Marketing overview – overview of advertising and promotional activity.

Target wedding/reunion, leisure and group meeting audience. Develop educational historical/gardening programs aimed at families, scouts, schools and clubs to fit entertainment and historic trip profiles. Invite community organizations to host educational programs by providing their expertise to the public. Continue collaboration with HCMGA’s. Develop website, with links to Indiana State Tourism, HCCVB, historical societies, and travel destination sites. Create quarterly printed, and e- newsletter. Distribute brochures at and in: Chamber of Commerce, welcome/realtor packets, and retirement homes/mature communities. Develop promotional, tourism and seasonal event packages with Coxhall Gardens, Conner Prairie, and hotels, and related partners. Advertise in local publications targeting bridal guides and outdoor living/gardening editions. Collaborate on events with Sister Cities, Chamber of Commerce, Tri Kappa etc. Work closely with HCCVB to develop facility into a significant destination for local, state and out of state visitors specifically targeting Illinois, Ohio and Michigan.

In-kind or match support committed to date for this project. \$7,300 total. \$4,800 generated from rental income produced in 1st half of 2008, and \$2,500 from a dedicated donor.

General financial projections for the next five years:

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|----------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Income | 2008 \$308,850 | 2009 \$311,350 | 2010 \$342,485 | 2011 \$376,734 | 2012 \$414,410 |
| Expense | \$308,324 | \$268,800 | \$295,684 | \$325,249 | \$357,774 |

Sustainability – Grant funds provide fundraising/strategic and marketing plans allowing immediate focus on meeting public needs, income generation and sustainability. Funding will allow the space to be minimally furnished, staffed and available immediately for public/private events and rental, driving earned income. Operating revenue from programs, fees, facility rental, vendor contracts, fundraising, and donor base will provide sustainability of the project, and repayment of the municipal bond.

List of key personnel or committee members who will be closely involved in the project.

Board members: Fritz Kreutzinger, Wes Bucher, Michael Quinn, Jeff Wilson, Marty Bagot, Mike Mattingly, Karen Bohn, Steve Garrett, April Hensley, Tina Howard, Joe Latty, Pam Newell, Advisors: Dr. Arden Pletzer, Bruce Bittner, Carol Ann Schweikert, Jeff Gatewood, Judy Levine, JoAnn Fox and Nina Horton. **Town of Fishers coordinating**

group: Jeff Heiking, Engineering/Public Works Director, Gary Pruitt, Parks Director, Jacobs Pannicke Architects; Patricia Jacobs, D. Scott Bordenet, Site Civil Engineer, Leland Sellers, Landscape Architect, HCMGA's, community volunteers. Consultants (TBD): professional organizational/fundraising, Historic Landmarks, leadership and not-for-profit. Secondary partners will be companies contracted to provide catering and event related services.

-----3. Economic and intrinsic impact this project will have on Hamilton County tourism.

The Ambassador House & Heritage Gardens fits the agritourism and arts & culture categories of the state tourism initiative. Hamilton County tourism statistics state that entertainment, Conner Prairie, weddings, family reunions and gatherings are key destination drivers for visiting Hamilton County and this new product adds depth to the draw. A wedding with 200 guests, ½ estimated to be from out of town for two days adds \$12,844.00 to the local economy. In town guests add \$12,066.00. One wedding adds \$24,950.00 to the economy. It is projected that in the first year, 20+ weddings and rehearsal dinners will be hosted adding \$500,000 in economic impact for weddings alone. Four events are planned in 2008 to introduce the facility to the public and include a community-planting event in the gardens, an ice cream social, Austrian/German heritage event and donor recognition event. In late 2008 a black tie Viennese ball is scheduled. Hotels, wedding, catering, party rental, retailers and associated businesses will be the primary beneficiaries from the addition of this venue. As the planning evolves, additional cultural, educational, museum, historic and gardening events will be added building economic revenues for the community and most importantly community pride.

A complement to existing tourism related projects and Hamilton County cultural offerings. The project will become an integral part of growing tourism in Hamilton County. As an attraction for out of county and state visitors, it compliments the historic, gardening, educational, event and museum offerings of Conner Prairie, and adds a much needed new physical space for hosting Fishers cultural and arts activities. The project adds an additional niche to the offerings of Hamilton County within the smaller group/meeting market. By enriching the offerings of Hamilton County, the Ambassador House and Heritage Gardens will encourage visitors to stay longer in the community. The opportunity for marketing garden, historical and county wide culturally themed tours now becomes possible.

The Historic Ambassador House & Heritage Gardens improves the image of Hamilton County, making it more attractive to visitors. It enhances the quality of life for Hamilton County residents in general by creating a beautiful historic and restful sanctuary within the suburban landscape. Nature lovers and gardeners alike will enjoy the ambiance created by the graceful Victorian home while tracing Fishers' history. Arts cultural and civic organizations will be able to use the house and gardens as a performance, exhibition and meeting place. As an educational venue, The Ambassador House will help to tell the story of Fishers, from its pioneers and Ambassador through today's history makers. It preserves a remnant of our local heritage within a urbanized landscape.

Potential business growth/expansion created by this project. Overall Businesses directly relating to wedding/reunion/ meetings will experience growth, and packages targeting these markets will be developed including auxiliary businesses such as, dday spas, golf courses, retailers, restaurants, artisans, booksellers, musicians, etc.

Estimated

nNumber of jobs created (retained). Jobs will be part-time or contracted out of necessity until the operating budget and /revenues allow expansion. An average of five jobs are estimated to be created based on similar historic/garden venues: of each job. Executive Director, Development Director, Sales Manager, Clerical, and Facilities/ Internshipsgrounds Manager. Internships on landscaping, historical research, fundraising, marketing,– and technology support informatics & will be developed. Supporting businesses with contracts tied to the facilities i.e. caterers, and party rental, will benefit. **Potential wages associated with the jobs.** -\$76,00093,500 – initial wages directly associated.
initially
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4. Narrative to explain how proposed project will expand Hamilton County's tourism .

The Ambassador House & Heritage Gardens expands upon upon existing county tourism products focused on history, and gardening, art, music, and learning experiences. The Ambassador House and Heritage Gardens will become a destination for those seeking a special venue with historic ambiance and charm for intimate gatherings, weddings and reunions and will draw persons from outside the county to spend additional dollars in Hamilton County. When marketed as an attraction product with complimentary packages including hotels, restaurants, golf courses, spas, the Carmel Arts District and the antiques district in Noblesville, it will entice visitors to stay overnight and spend additional dollars.

Packages targeted at the wedding market also will be developed, including wedding fairs and style shows.

Because the Ambassador House and Heritage Gardens will be open to the public as a museum and for educational, community and cultural events, and have rentable space both inside and outside for private events, dollars will be added to Hamilton County businesses. Caterers, photographers, hotels, bed & breakfasts, wedding planners, florists, nurseries, spas, landscapes architects, retailers, restaurants, coffee shops, artists, craftspersons, bakeries, booksellers, musicians, antiques dealers and gas stations will benefit economically from the addition of this venue.

How project will attract visitors living outside Hamilton County and Indiana to the area.

By adding to the existing number of gardens in the area, a garden tour/Motor coach /driving historic and garden tours may be planned and /promoted both inside and outside the state of Indiana. Themed regional events will be developed. Because the project will include Pprograms enhancing the arts including collaboration including fairs, plein air paint outs in the gardens, and musicians,concerts will draw visitors from outside the countythose events may also be published. As the It is hoped that these events will become seasonal fixtures. In addition because the home is onhome is on the National and State Historic Registers, it the site will bewill attract tourism for its history programs, museum exhibits and home to architecture. Educational programs and programs for school age groups will encourage tourists to visit an additional venue in conjunction with Conner Prairie. Weddings /events utilizing rental of the property will attract visitors to the area. The setting within a 33 acre wooded park allows future expansion of events and the potential for festivals themed to the heritage of the property.

Description of what this project brings to Hamilton County that is different than existing projects in Central Indiana. The Ambassador House & Heritage Gardens is a unique rarity within central Indiana with its world and local historic ties, Greek Revival architecture, Victorian theme, park setting, verdant heirloom garden surroundings, flexible rentable space, museum of Fishers history, and educational/cultural programs and events. The house and its lushly planted gardens, with plantings of old heirloom roses, vegetables, and perennials and will become an attraction for those seeking a special venue with historic character and charm for intimate gatherings, weddings and reunions and for entertaining out of town guests. The house and gardens will also be available for rental for private functions such as weddings, parties and reunions. Local persons seeking an intimate venue for smaller functions with plentiful historic ambiance and garden splendor will find rental of the site the perfect setting for entertaining out of town guests. A web site will be developed to promote programs and facilities with the potential of linking to existing Hamilton County tourism sites.

A description of what this project will bring to Hamilton County that is different than existing projects in central Indiana

There is nothing quite like the Ambassador House in central Indiana.

Tourism opportunities that may be developed. The Ambassador House & Heritage Gardens fit within the agricultural tourism and arts and cultural initiatives driven by the state, by adding an additional venue and destination within those categories for the region. Persons who wish to enjoy a quiet beautiful refuge with programs for smaller more intimate groups in a historic setting will find the amenities perfect. The Ambassador House and Heritage Gardens will become a destination with its programs of interest to those with leisure time and an interest in history, the arts, and gardening. Collaborative efforts in conjunction with themed tourism activities may also be planned, i.e. museum events/exhibits with Viennese court dresses and artifacts of Mrs. Harris on loan from the Indianapolis Museum of Art on display at Ambassador House. The location within a passive park along the White River gives the site the added potential of a future tie-ins to river oriented events and events connected by trails. Consider a future historic or garden themed “Heritage River & Garden Tour” following the White River south beginning at Kowteewi for its 150 but soon to be 300 acre prairie, followed by Potters Bridge, Conner Prairie and then the Ambassador House & Heritage Gardens. By adding a historic venue with Victorian based heritage gardens, those persons wishing to experience a gardening tour, and an additional historic venue may now do so within Hamilton County and spend their tourism dollars here. The new Coxhall gardens along with Conner Prairie and its gardens compliment the Ambassador House & Heritage Gardens by focusing upon different niches, eras and types of gardening. Three gardens to visit within a 30-minute drive make a viable one or two day tour possible. Imagine also a romantic “starlight garden tour” progressive dinner, themed to gardening. Daylight savings time makes it possible. Begin the tour at the Ambassador House on the terrace garden patio with candlelit tables and members of the Fishers Chamber orchestra playing Viennese Waltz music while enjoying drinks and hors-de-oeuvres and a private tour of the house. Progress to Conner Prairie for a main course within the Conner House or Persimmons and end at Coxhall Gardens with dessert under the stars and dancing.



A New Cultural Tourism Center for Fishers

ⁱ May 28, 2004 press release Town of Fishers – “Fishers’ Population Growth Changes Town’s Diversity Landscape”, p. 2



Photos show the structure of the surrounding 1 1/2 Heritage Gardens to be planted soon. Brick walkways lead to garden rooms. The rentable sunken terraced garden adjoins an indoor meeting room. The graded area in the foreground of the lower photo is designed for a 40' x80' tent. Additional public restrooms designed to compliment the architecture will be installed just outside the gardens close to the tent area.