

# Elkins Historic Landmarks Commission

**Management Plan for the Darden House Complex,**  
including the Darden House, Carriage House and Garden  
(incorporating plans for renovation and adaptive reuse)  
**October 2009**

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ELKINS  
HISTORIC LANDMARKS  
COMMISSION

## Introduction and Current Situation

The Darden House Complex in downtown Elkins consists of three distinct assets on two city lots, including the Darden House, located at 421 Davis Avenue, a Garden Lot adjacent and south of the house, and a Carriage House located to the west of the Garden Lot. All of these properties are owned by the City of Elkins. The Elkins Historic Landmarks Commission (EHLC) has undertaken the management and restoration of the complex on behalf of the City and provides these services at no charge as specified in its lease agreement. The City provides quarterly funding to EHLC, which it uses to maintain the Darden House and fulfill its preservation mission for the community.

Currently the Darden House is being used for office space by three non-profit local organizations and for meeting space by additional non-profit groups. The Garden is maintained by the City and the EHLC, and is used by the public for rest and recreation. The Carriage House is currently empty and available for rehab or alternative use.

The Darden complex is a unique and important asset to the City of Elkins and the community's downtown initiatives. It is our goal to blend its uses with the goals and objectives of the ON-TRAC program as well as the established mandates for preservation and education of the EHLC. This plan suggests how EHLC will work closely with the City, its residents, organizations, and local businesses to integrate our shared visions of the future and past of Elkins as we continue to restore and manage the Darden House Complex.



## Vision, Mission, and Goals

### ***Vision:***

The vision for the Darden House complex is to create a center for preservation in Elkins by -

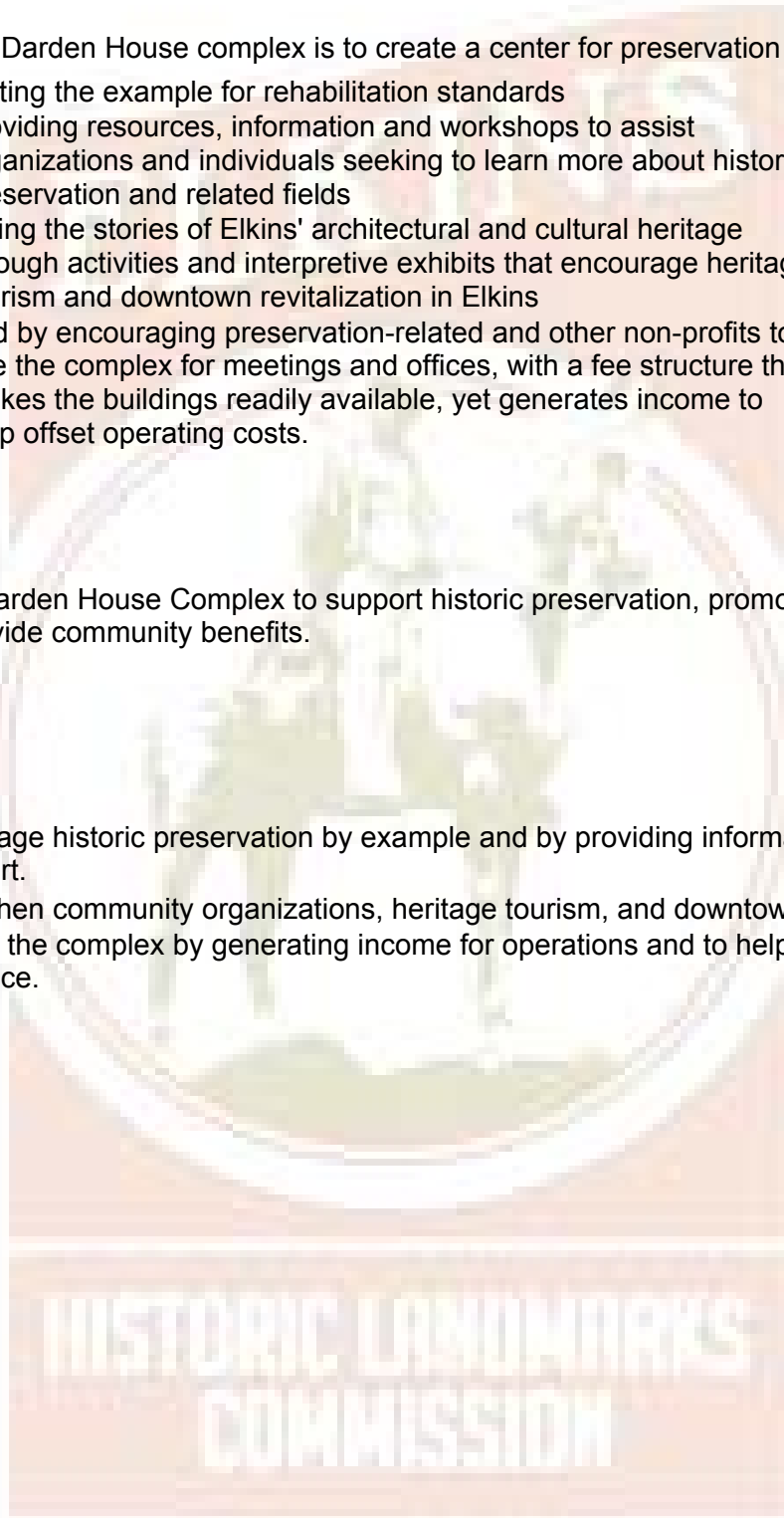
- setting the example for rehabilitation standards
- providing resources, information and workshops to assist organizations and individuals seeking to learn more about historic preservation and related fields
- telling the stories of Elkins' architectural and cultural heritage through activities and interpretive exhibits that encourage heritage tourism and downtown revitalization in Elkins
- and by encouraging preservation-related and other non-profits to use the complex for meetings and offices, with a fee structure that makes the buildings readily available, yet generates income to help offset operating costs.

### ***Mission:***

To manage the Darden House Complex to support historic preservation, promote Elkins' heritage, and provide community benefits.

### ***Goals:***

- To encourage historic preservation by example and by providing information, resources and support.
- To strengthen community organizations, heritage tourism, and downtown revitalization.
- To sustain the complex by generating income for operations and to help with maintenance.



## Background

Built in 1904, the Darden House at 421 Davis Avenue is a prime example of late-Victorian architecture. The Queen Anne style house features wrap-around porches, a second floor balcony, and a third floor tower. Brick makes up much of the lower exterior walls, with the exception of slated gables and upper walls. A fish-scale design was used in the slate roof to cap the house, which has since been replaced with faux slate with a similar design. The interior incorporates lavish woodwork, hardwood floors, and transom lights above most doors. Beautiful original stained glass windows are prominent at the front of the house.

Ralph Darden came to Elkins in the early 1890s, and soon became a prominent area businessman. The Darden Company, established in 1894, was the premier supplier of grain, flour, coal, and building supplies in Elkins. Darden built several area buildings, including the Darden building in what was then known as the Darden Block, which presently houses Beander's, a coal yard on Railroad Avenue, and the Elkins Milling Company/Darden Mill building. He was also involved in the Elkins Trust Company, West Virginia Eastern Telephone Company, and the Elkins Cash Grocery Company.

The Darden House was in continuous use as a residential dwelling until the late 1980s, when its last residential owner began negotiations with the City to sell the building along with the house next door, which occupied the lot now known as the Darden Garden. The City, with the support of the EHLC, area residents, and organizations determined that the Darden House should be saved, and began work on rehabilitating the structure.

EHLC succeeded in rallying support for the Darden House over the succeeding years. Grants from the state were obtained for replacing the roof in 1995, and repointing the brickwork in 2001. Fundraisers, City, and volunteer support have been utilized to finish the remainder of the rehabilitation during the intervening years.

## Planning Process

The EHLC is currently working in cooperation with area residents and businesses to determine the best uses for the Darden House Complex. We have formed a working committee composed of EHLC members and interested citizens to seek out and develop ideas that will use the structure in an efficient and useful way for the betterment of the community, and in keeping with the efforts of the ON TRAC program currently being developed in the downtown area.

A public meeting was held on June 24 to brainstorm vision and potential uses for the complex. Highlights of the input included finding uses for the building that would contribute to preservation of historic properties, promote the heritage of the community, provide for active public use of the complex, and contribute to heritage tourism and revitalization of the downtown. The notes from that meeting are attached.

## Proposed Darden Complex Uses and Services

The Elkins Historic Landmarks Commission sees the Darden House Complex as the center for historic preservation for the City of Elkins. The preservation of the buildings sets an example of good preservation practice. Working in cooperation with the State Historic Preservation Office, EHLC has already ensured that the Darden House stands as a significant and attractive contributor to the Elkins Downtown Historic District. In addition, the uses of the building will support preservation, revitalization, and community organizations. The Garden and Carriage House provide opportunities for community public use and heritage tourism, while contributing to the sustainability of the Complex.

Current and planned services and uses:

1. Office space for community groups, with priority given to current tenants and preservation- and community-development-related organizations.
2. Meeting space for community groups, with priority given to current tenants and to preservation- and community-development-related organizations.
3. Lease of the Carriage House for a purpose contributing to a heritage attraction for the downtown, which may include carriage ride venue, demonstrations or other tourism uses, exhibits, and/or events.
4. Use of the Garden for public gatherings and events

Plans for development (1 – 3 years)

- Creation of a preservation resource center providing books, information, archive and technical assistance on preservation, heritage, and non-profit management, located in the first floor public space of the Darden House.
- Repair and rehabilitation to bring the buildings to preservation standards and sound maintenance.
- Development of a public interpretive venue that helps tell the story of Elkins' architectural history with artifacts drawn from the existing EHLC collection of artifacts and archival photos. To complement preservation resource center.
- Upgrade of facilities (especially kitchen) to encourage use of the building for community functions and events.
- Holding events at the Darden Complex to showcase the work on the building, and to raise awareness about preservation in the community.

Long-term vision includes adding public uses for the facility that support awareness of Elkins' heritage and contribute to tourism and revitalization for downtown.

## Lease Policies and Marketing

EHLC is currently conducting research and developing an analysis of the market and needs for office space, meeting space, and other services that could be provided by the Darden Complex.

Preliminary findings suggest that potential non-profit tenants would benefit from a space that includes shared resources, such as a wireless internet service, to keep organizational costs low, as well as a dependable, convenient meeting space at an affordable rate. Based on this research, current policies and services are under review and a rate structure is in development to allow EHLC to better market the facility.

Lease and usage rates and policies will be instituted with the intent that services be available for reasonable rates to encourage and support non-profit uses, while generating funds to help support the expense of the buildings.

Once policies and improvements are in place, the complex can begin to be marketed for new tenants, meetings and public use. A marketing plan will be implemented that addresses using the building, combined with branding and promotion for the Landmarks Commission, and educational and public outreach related to preservation.

### **Physical Needs of the Property**

**The Darden House** is currently in decent repair, the exception being the front porch, exterior window casings, and some water penetration in the basement. The top priority is repair of the porch. The EHLC has received a Division of Culture and History Development Grant, and an award of \$10,000 from the City of Elkins towards match for the grant, to repair the porch and porch roof, and the bidding process for the contract on that work is underway.

Estimates for the window restoration are being solicited, and we are determining the scope of work necessary in the basement for moisture mitigation. These and additional rehabilitation needs are being assessed and prioritized, and will be completed in phases with the most urgent work planned for the next year. An ongoing maintenance plan with periodic inspections will be instituted. Preliminary assessment of current rehabilitation and maintenance needs for the Darden House are:

**Interior:** All three floors are sound and are maintained and kept heated and clean. Some cosmetic remodeling may be done to make the asset more functional based on anticipated use(s).

**Front Porch Stabilization, Repair and porch roof:** Currently we are finalizing a contract to begin the scope of work outlined in the SHPO Development Grant application submitted and awarded this Spring. Forecasted completion date late Fall 2009.

**Gutter Repair:** Gutters on the front porch will be repaired as part of the porch project. Other gutters should be inspected and downspouts replaced/repared so as to diffuse rainwater away from building. It may be necessary to install French drains or diffusers to move water away from building. This can be better assessed once the downtown stormwater/sewer separation project has been completed.

**Basement Drainage:** Drainage from the street and surrounding grades is entering the basement. Problem is being exacerbated by misdirected gutter run-off. Hopefully the City drainage improvements now under way may help the situation. Water table at this location also seems fairly high. Combination of sump pump, water sealing foundation, and redirecting ground water may suffice to mitigate the issue. The exterior basement door is also a factor as it is set below grade level and has deteriorated.

**Windows:** Window casings are in need of minor structural repair, scraping and painting. Addition of historically appropriate storm windows would be appropriate.

**Stained Glass:** The stained glass windows in the front are bowing and need to be stabilized. This will likely involve removing and re-leading the windows.

**Handicap Ramp:** In generally good condition. In need of scraping and painting.

**Miscellaneous Exterior Wood:** In general need of scraping and painting. Mostly sound.

**Proposed upgrades** to make the Darden House more functional include installation of a catering kitchen, including appliances and sink with hot water, and upgrade of the bathroom. EHLC is also investigating the feasibility of providing some shared services such as internet access and copier that would increase the value of office rental space for prospective users.

**The Carriage House** appears to be fundamentally sound; however, an expert inspection is needed prior to usage. Two original bays are plumb and dry with some masonry work needed. The third bay later addition is a poor state of repair.

**Roof:** Trusses and rafters need to be inspected. Roofing material near end of life cycle

**Exterior Brick:** Needs re-pointing. Some sagging over the wood window lintels is apparent and may need to be separately addressed.

**Interior Structures:** To be inspected to address any structural concerns. The building is not “finished” and has no heat or utilities.

**Third Bay:** The roof structure is badly compromised on the third bay. Options for this addition are to rebuild the roof, stabilize the wall as an open space, or remove the addition altogether. This decision will be based on structural integrity, proposed reuse for the section if saved, and comparative cost.

The opportunities for adaptive reuse of the Carriage Are are many. One possible immediate use may be to lease it as a carriage storage and staging area for a local carriage business to service the downtown area, Depot, and American Mountain Theater patrons. Other future uses may include a downtown interpretive venue for local architecture, crafts, or trades, such as an artisan workshop and demonstration area, and/or as an event venue area.

**Garden** - Portions of the garden area were developed as a “children’s garden” in partnership with the YMCA; however the Y’s involvement has lapsed. Hedges and flora are currently undergoing trimming and weeding to maintain proper composition and to keep plant life away from building. This will offer a more pleasant public experience in the garden, help preserve wood components of building, and block insect intrusion into the structure. Additional community partners to help maintain and develop the garden should be solicited.

**Financial Analysis:**

Currently (as demonstrated by 08-09 fiscal year actual financial report) income from the Darden House rentals only covers about 1/3 of the annual cost of operating and maintaining the building. The balance of income not spent during this fiscal year is reserved for the EHLC share of grant match for the porch and other urgent rehabilitation needs for the Darden House. EHLC is spending very little on ongoing operations toward the mission of the organization, thus restricting the potential impact of the organization.

The projected budget proposed here is based on the assumption that over a period of 2 to 3 years, EHLC can increase the usage of the Darden Complex, and increase income available to sustain the building. We will also institute an annual maintenance and repair budget to try to avoid unexpected and unbudgeted large outlays such as that needed for the porch repair. EHLC will then be able to use a portion of its budget from the City, while also expanding its programming and fundraising activities, to have a working budget for developing preservation-related educational activities to further its mission on behalf of the City of Elkins.

<b>Actual 08-09</b>	<b>Expenses</b>		<b>Income</b>
<b>Darden Complex:</b>			
Utilities & insurance cost	\$ 3,927.60	City of Elkins	\$ 8,625.00
Housekeeping	\$ 478.21	Rental income	\$ 2,520.00
Repairs & maintenance	\$ 2,314.99		
Reserved for Darden rehab 09-10	\$ 4,900.00		
Darden subtotal	\$11,620.80	Darden subtotal:	\$11,145.00
<b>EHLC Operations and educational mission:</b>			
EHLC operations	\$ 411.15	Fundraising/sales	\$ 914.00
Total expenses	\$12,031.95	Total income	\$12,059.00
<b>Projected Budget – after 2 yrs transition</b>			
	<b>Expenses</b>		<b>Income</b>
<b>Darden Complex:</b>			
Utilities & insurance cost	\$ 4,500.00	City of Elkins	\$ 5,000.00
Housekeeping & maintenance	\$ 500.00	Darden income	
Repairs (annual budget for	\$ 5,000.00	leases	\$ 3,000.00
Rehab & improvements)		events/meets	\$ 2,000.00
Darden subtotal	\$10,000.00	Darden subtotal	\$10,000.00
<b>EHLC Operations and educational mission:</b>			
Office / operating	\$ 1,000.00	City of Elkins	\$ 3,750.00
Preservation programming	\$ 6,000.00	Earned income	\$ 1,250.00
		Donations	\$ 2,000.00
Total expenses	\$17,000.00	Total income	\$17,000.00

## Next Steps

Complete front porch restoration project – late Fall 2009.

Develop policies for leasing meeting and event space – Fall 2009.

Work with Americorps program to staff office and create resource room – Fall 2009.

Add central services, such as wireless internet, to improve marketability – Early 2010.

Identify priorities and funding sources for building restoration – Early 2010.

Work plan to address:

- Third floor office space
- Repair of leaded windows
- Window weatherization
- Catering kitchen
- Bathroom upgrades

Market office space to preservation groups and other non-profits. Lease all available office space – 2010/2011

Conduct adaptive re-use assessment for Carriage House – 2010.

Develop plan for maintaining and improving garden – Spring 2010.

Develop plan for exhibits and interpretive projects - 2010

