

## Historic Resource LCHIP Project Proposal

1. **Project name**     The Pearl of Portsmouth Phase I
2. **Applicant**         Portsmouth Black Heritage Trail, Inc.
3. **Key Contact person** Valerie Cunningham, President
4. **Address** (address to which all LCHIP correspondence will be mailed)  
Valerie Cunningham  
369 Greenland Road  
Portsmouth, NH 03801

5. **Phone** 1-603-431-2768   6. **Fax** \_\_\_\_\_ [none] \_\_\_\_\_

7. **Email** PBHTrail@aol.com

8. **Type of Project** (Please check appropriate box(es).)

- Acquisition of Historic Property           [Phase I: perpetual easement]
- Rehabilitation or Restoration of Historic Property
- Historic Resource project with a Natural Resource element (Please be sure to describe in #9 below.)
- Historic Resource project with a Cultural Resource value (Please be sure to describe in #9 below and complete the Cultural Resource Description. The Checklist should be attached as Attachment #1)
- Planning Study

9. **Brief summary of project** (Describe what you are seeking to accomplish with LCHIP funds. Please limit your response to space below.)

The Portsmouth Black Heritage Trail serves as an umbrella for several community organizations with interest in preservation of African-American historic sites in the city, including the ad hoc Friends of the Pearl. LCHIP funds will help accomplish Phase 1 of a three-phase plan. Phase I includes (1) emergency repairs to the 1868 belfry of the former People's Baptist Church (now 'The Pearl') and other high-priority rehabilitation measures; (2) a preservation easement from The Pearl's private owner to the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance [NHPA] with all needed professional services and endowment funds to protect it in perpetuity; (3) study and costing of Phase 2 needs and of eventual Phase 3 sale of the protected property to a non-profit organization. Phase 2 seeks an elevator for ADA access, rebuilding a long-lost spire for stewardship lease as a cell-tower, and structural repairs to sills and undergirding. Phase 3 envisions sale to a non-profit owner for public use as an African-American cultural center and /or community function hall.

10. **Estimated Total Project Cost (TPC)** \$ 320,000

11. **Amount requested from LCHIP** \$ 160,000

12. **Estimated match, amount and source(s)**

<b>Amount \$</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Secured?</b>
\$ 80,000	PBHT/Friends of Pearl Fundraising	not yet
\$ 24,000	parking lot rental donation JSA	yes
\$ 30,000	value of easement donation: M. Britton [may be substantially higher in lost value]	yes
\$ 10,000	construction materials donations / design services for cell-tower, elevator	no
\$ 14,000	time / services donation Friends of the Pearl , PBHT, SAACCA, etc	yes
\$ 2,000	HSR & stabilization; NTHP, M. Britton and Portsmouth Advocates	yes

13. **Any donated Match property?** If “Yes”, please describe in the space below the size, characteristics and location of the property.

A year's rental agreement donated from JSA Architects, for after-hours use of the firm's parking lot across Hanover St. This will include the storage and restoration of the belfry on several parking spaces over the estimated three-month project. Night-only parking at the nearby Portsmouth High-Hanover parking lot cost \$60/month per space; day and night rental is \$90 / month. The donation of match property represents 40 spaces x 12 months x \$60 = \$24,000, exclusive of the 3 months full-time ( 6 x 3 x \$90 = 1620).

An estimated \$10,000 (but not yet committed) of construction materials at cost from suppliers will also lower restoration costs as matched donations.

The most significant property donation is also the hardest to value. Margaret Britton's donation of an easement that covers diminution of value based on her desire to preserve the remaining open volume of the sanctuary space. An estimated \$10-15,000 of legal, tax accounting and real estate appraisal services are needed to value this donation and structure the sale and/or donation.

14. **Required Materials.** You must be able to check off both boxes below for your project proposal to be evaluated for funding.

- x A Determination of Eligibility (DOE) has been completed for the resource and will be approved by the NH Division of Historical Resources by December 14, 2001. Include as Attachment #2.
  
- x If the project is a rehabilitation, restoration, renovation or preservation of a historic structure, and has a total project cost of \$50,000 or more, a Guidelines for Preservation, Historic Structures Report prepared by a preservation professional, or equivalent must be attached as Attachment #3.

**15. Description of Resource.** Please check the appropriate boxes and provide documentation for item(s) checked, as Attachment #4.

- The resource is a designated National Historic Landmark
- The resource is on the National Register of Historic Places
- The resource is in a local historic district
- The resource is a community defining structure which has value to the community and can demonstrate broad-based support. (Please describe in the space below)

The Pearl of Portsmouth is the only historic African-American church structure in the state of New Hampshire. Built in 1868 as a Freewill Baptist Church and sold to the black People's Baptist Church in 1915, it served the seacoast African-American community until c.1970 when the congregation reorganized and sold the building. Remodeled as a restaurant in 1984 it failed and was purchased by its current owner who serves as spiritual advisor to the Unity congregation and operates the former sanctuary as a function hall for a wide range of weddings, community forums and non-profit meetings. An ad hoc Friends of the Pearl steering committee has representatives from PBHT, the neighborhood, Portsmouth's Arts Build Community project, the Seacoast African-American Cultural Center Assoc. as well as the Boston University Preservation Studies Program. The Friends worked with Portsmouth Advocates for a grant from the National Trust For Historic Preservation that funded the condition survey by Preservation Timber Framing, Inc. [PTF Inc.] and contactor Aaron Sturgis to develop the attached priority plan. The Boston University Preservation Studies MA Program assisted the evaluation, later prepared the Determination of Eligibility for review by the NHDHR and will donate the National Register nomination to the project.

- Resource is a model for Smart Growth. Please describe in the space below.
- Resource is a model for or a unique approach to protection. Please describe in the space below.

A site on Portsmouth's Black Heritage Trail (PBHT), physical restoration of its belfry and exterior will provide a public benefit without direct ownership. Unresolved legal, accounting, and tax issues require exceptional funding for this first-ever New Hampshire commercial / non-profit easement project. This project constitutes a unique approach for the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance, the qualified preservation easement holding organization, and the local preservation community. The Friends' 3-phase plan envisions the building being sold within 5 years to a non-profit owner, perhaps the Seacoast African American Cultural Center Association, and this stewardship plan seeks to find sufficient income to maintain the structure without destructive redevelopment. It presently contains three dwelling units, a stained-glass studio, and a function hall. The income does not allow for more substantial improvements. Restoring the spire for a cell-tower would add another income stream and elevator access would permit greater access to the second story sanctuary / function hall. Like a land trust, the easement will protect the building whether or not it remains in private ownership or is sold to a non-profit owner.

- Project contains a Natural Resource element. If "Yes" please describe that resource including its size, location, and attributes.

**16. Key Criteria.** Please check the appropriate item(s) under each criterion and briefly detail each checked item in the space provided.

§ Planning

- o Project is an outgrowth of a community planning process
- o Project is consistent with a local master plan or equivalent
- x Project is part of an organization's initiative to conserve target resources

The Portsmouth Black Heritage Trail (PBHT) identified the Pearl as one of two dozen historic sites in Portsmouth and its president and others have worked for two years with its owner and Friends of the Pearl to bring together needs of neighborhood residents, arts and preservation organizations, and stewardship possibilities toward the preservation of this unique historic and cultural resource.

§ Community Support

- x Project has "community" partners ("community" can mean organizations, please be sure to list all partners)
- o Project has been endorsed by local officials or at town meeting
- x Project has received private donations

The Friends of the Pearl, an unincorporated ad hoc group, includes representatives from the Islington-Creek Neighborhood Assoc., Portsmouth Black Heritage Trail [PBHT], Boston University Preservation Program, Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, and representative of the Seacoast African American Cultural Center Association [SACCA]. It will be the fundraising, preservation, and program committee of the PBHT, working closely with members of the Greater Portsmouth Community Foundation and private donors who helped PBHT create its interpretive program and create an endowment. The next partner is the NH Preservation Alliance [NHPA], with whom we have discussed the project for a year, which will hold a perpetual preservation easement. The National Trust for Historic Preservation gave Portsmouth Advocates a \$1000 Preservation Services Fund grant to study the physical needs and funding opportunities to preserve the site reflected in this proposal.

§ Stewardship

- o An endowment or dedicated stewardship has been established
- x Interest holder has a proven track record for stewardship
- x Has adopted the principles of the *LTA's Standards and Practices*
- x A contingency plan has been developed for the resource

While the PBHT has an endowment, this project budget includes separate funds \$15,000 to endow the monitoring of the easement by NHPA, which has a proven track record and has adopted the *LTA's Standards*. While the Friends' 3-phase plan envisions eventual transfer of ownership to a self-sustaining non-profit like SAACCA or the Unity Church within five years, it is the NHPA easement that protects key features from too-intensive development. Income for sustained maintenance and operation comes from 3 or 4 rental units, the function hall business, and the potential of restoration of the 1868 spire for a cell phone tower (and

monthly income). Thus, continued or new private ownership under improved income-producing conditions and the easement are the best contingency plan if future non-profit ownership fails to materialize.

### § Financial Need

- Project has explored other sources of funds
- Project has secured funds from various sources
- Project requires LCHIP funds to move forward

The National Trust for Historic Preservation gave a Preservation Services Fund grant of \$1000 to Portsmouth Advocates for the Conditions Survey and structural planning. It was matched by the owner, Margaret Britton, who gave \$1000 for the emergency stabilization of the threatened belfry. These is the only direct funding besides the owner's initial investment.

The Friends of the Pearl have met twice with Peter Lamb of the GPCF to begin to chart fundraising and identify donors in the local community. In addition, The PBHT has discussed the project with Fleet Banks as a potential donor.

Because the easement is the central preservation mechanism, LCHIP funds are needed to allow the restoration of the belfry to a condition that can be maintained and protected. No firm idea of the value of that easement can be made until appraisers can determine the comparative values, tax lawyers assess the treatment for an owner with minimal income, and the PBHT raise funds. Appraisal for tax purposes can only be done within 60 days of actual donation of the easement under IRS rules. LCHIP will serve as a challenge grant and legitimate the legal tools for buildings more normally associated with land trusts.

**17. Additional Criteria.** Please check the appropriate item(s) under each criterion and briefly detail each checked item in the space provided.

### § Imminence of Threat

- An application for demolition of the resource is pending
- A sale on the property is pending
- Use of the resource is marginal (seasonal, underused, inaccessible)
- A structural evaluation shows the structural integrity is compromised or at risk

The year-long comprehensive building analysis and the resulting three-part plan provided cost estimates for restoration and conservation. At highest risk is the 1868 belfry and remnant spire. Long-term delayed maintenance by former owners has allowed water penetration to damage the structural elements of this tower. Failure in the mortice and tenons has left the tower unstable. Despite temporary stabilization in the belfry during 2000 by PTF, Inc., the extent of damage requires removal and repair within the next year. The tower must be removed by crane and set on the ground for efficient and cost effective repair. All architectural elements removed will be saved and replacement work done to Secretary of Interior Standards.

As staging must be used for safe access to the roof and tower, necessary repairs to the roof, gutters along the Hanover St. side wall, and clapboard repair and painting of the two street facades are also planned in Phase I. These repairs are most cost efficient and provide the

basis for broad PBHT fundraising. Phase II repairs will encompass new sills on the south side and undergirding, an elevator, exterior repairs including windows, and final painting and gutters.

§ Meets multiple LCHIP objectives

- x Project includes a natural or cultural resource element

The Pearl of Portsmouth is a unique community cultural resource, the only black historic church in New Hampshire. On the commercial edge of one of the few remaining working class neighborhoods of Portsmouth, it is located between the Public Library and Pontine Movement Theatre down McDonough Street. It faces a new nearby park created by Art Rocks under the Portsmouth Arts Builds Community project.

As a function hall it already serves a broad audience as a free or inexpensive venue for a wide range of personal, family and community activities. Because of its historic association, the New Hampshire NAACP held the state's Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration here and, like the PBHT, has used it for events before and since. Ms. Britton offers it for donations to local community groups, Portsmouth Advocates held its 2000 annual meeting here, and the Friends of the Pearl had a special conference on Preservation Easements here in April 2001.

§ Capacity to Implement Project through to Completion

- x Applicant has demonstrated capacity in the form of committed volunteers or paid staff to implement the project
- x Applicant can demonstrate the availability of financial resources to implement the project
- x Applicant teams with other governmental or non-governmental organizations to assist with project implementation as needed

The Greater Piscataqua Community Foundation [GPCF] was the vehicle for a diversity grant from the Lila Wallace Readers Digest Foundation. Under that grant the PBHT developed its resource book, designed a Black Heritage Trail and its self-guiding brochure, and began fundraising for two dozen metal markers. It has raised \$38,000

of \$50,000 for those markers and established a \$10,000 endowment in the GPCF.

In terms of the rehabilitation, contractor Aaron Surgis has a region-wide track record for performance and quality. He has completed several phased projects for the New Hampshire Society of Colonial Dames at the 1764 Moffatt-Ladd House in Portsmouth, has restored several churches in Buxton, Gorham, No. Waterboro, New Gloucester (Shaker), and Kennebunk, Maine, and the spire of St. Mary's Church, Rollinsford, NH, and four spires in Vermont. He has been active in the NH Barn program and done restoration work on a dozen buildings in northern New England on the National Register of Historic Places.

§ Project Cooperation exists between or among municipalities



**1. Please check the appropriate items below:**

- Community farm (actively farmed)
- Community farm (not currently farmed)
- Property is scenic, as viewed from a public road, access point, trail, water body or waterway, or protects the view from a scenic area.
- Property is an exemplary structure that supports community cultural activities.
- Property is an exemplary resource with especially distinctive features having historical, cultural or geological significance.
- Loss of the property would diminish the community's ability to define its history and heritage.
- Property is the last or one of the last remaining examples of its type in the community.
- Has a value that is appreciated by a cross-section of the community.

**2. Please describe in the space below, the value of the resource to the community.**

The People's Baptist Church was the first and, until the mid-1940s, the only church owned by an African-American congregation in New Hampshire. It is one of only three historic black church in New England. Purchased in 1915 from the Freewill Baptists, for whom the structure was built in 1857 and enlarged in 1868, it was called an ornament to the city. The Portsmouth Black Heritage Trail has designated it one its sites, and it is eligible for the National Register both for its association with African Americans in New Hampshire and for the building's architectural significance as a fine vernacular example of a church in the Italianate style, employing a locally unique acorn drop used in its exterior ornament.

It served Portsmouth's African-American congregation and the larger seacoast black community until the 1970s. For several years after 1916 a multi-racial New Year's service was held at the Pearl Street church to honor Abraham Lincoln and the Emancipation Proclamation. An annual Portsmouth tradition since 1882, its continuing importance to the African-American community was seen in 1958, when the local chapter of the National Association of Colored People (NAACP) received its charter there at that year's Emancipation Day celebration. For fifty years the church served many African-American charitable, social and political activities until the congregation was reorganized in the 1970s and the building was sold.

Delayed maintenance, from the poverty of both the African American congregation and its later owners, has created a threat to the survival of the belfry tower and the poor physical condition of the whole building. The first preservation effort, a conversion to a French restaurant in 1984, failed in the real estate crisis of the early 1990s. Despite its current mixed-use the income does not yet provide for adequate funds for its restoration.

Yet under Margaret Britton, minister of the Unity church that meets here Sundays, the sanctuary has become an active community resource. Besides providing income as a function hall for weddings and social events, it is made available for little or no cost for musical events and a wide range of community meetings. When the New Hampshire legislature made Martin Luther King a state holiday, the NAACP celebrated passage of the state's first MLK Day here. The Portsmouth Black Heritage Trail and Portsmouth Advocates have met here, and neighborhood groups like Portsmouth Art Builds Community (funded by the Lila Wallace Readers Digest Foundation through the Greater Piscataqua Community Foundation) which designed a nearby park, has met here and is represented on the Friends of the Pearl.

The Pearl exists outside Portsmouth's Historic District in a mixed commercial and residential working-class neighborhood and is threatened by lack of protection beyond a 60-day demolition delay mechanism. Only an easement and funds to enforce it on future owners can protect this building and what remains of its historic interior from gut rehab and subdivision into multiple units.