



**Parks, Recreation
and Historic Preservation**

ANDREW M. CUOMO
Governor

ERIK KULLESEID
Commissioner

**AGENCY DECISION
AND
STATEMENT OF FINDINGS**

Adoption of a Master Plan for Johnson Hall State Historic Site

The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation has prepared and released a Final Master Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), dated November 25, 2020, for Johnson Hall State Historic Site.

By the authority vested in me in State Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation Law, I do hereby adopt the Final Master Plan for Johnson Hall State Historic Site.

My decision is based on the attached Findings Statement and the content of the FEIS, which have been prepared according to the provisions of Part 617, the regulations implementing Article 8 of Environmental Conservation Law - the State Environmental Quality Review Act.

Erik Kulleseid
Commissioner
NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and
Historic Preservation

11/25/20

Date

State Environmental Quality Review FINDINGS STATEMENT Johnson Hall State Historic Site

October 27, 2020

SEQR CLASSIFICATION: TYPE I
Under 6NYCRR Part 617 of the implementing regulations pertaining to Article 8 (State Environmental Quality Review) of the Environmental Conservation Law.

LOCATION OF ACTION: Johnstown, New York

LEAD AGENCY: New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP)
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DESCRIPTION OF ACTION: The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation has prepared a Master Plan/FEIS for Johnson Hall State Historic Site. The adoption and implementation of a Master Plan for Johnson Hall State Historic Site presents a series of preferred alternatives for the future development and operation of the Site. The plan sets forth a long-term vision to guide future development of new and enhanced Historic Site facilities. The Master Plan seeks to further the Historic Site's mission to nurture a greater appreciation for the lives of Sir William Johnson, Molly Brant, and the history of their estate through the preservation and interpretation of Johnson Hall's collections, historic structures, and the surrounding landscape. The Master Plan provides comprehensive guidance for the long-term, sustainable development and management of the Historic Site, ensuring it remains a responsible steward of its inimitable cultural and natural resources for decades to come. Planning for new facilities is in accordance with this, and the proposed location of new or expanded facilities avoids sensitive resources to the extent practicable.

**State Environmental Quality Review
FINDINGS STATEMENT
Johnson Hall State Historic Site
Master Plan**

October 28, 2020

Pursuant to Article 8 (State Environmental Quality Review Act – SEQRA) of the Environmental Conservation Law and 6 NYCRR Part 617, the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP), as lead agency, makes the following findings:

Title of the Action:

Adoption and Implementation of a Master Plan for Johnson Hall State Historic Site

Location:

Johnson Hall State Historic Site is located in the City of Johnstown in Fulton County, New York.

Description of the Action:

The Master Plan for Johnson Hall State Historic Site provides long term guidance for the development and management of the Historic Site and protection of its resources as summarized below.

Date of Completion of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS): October 7, 2020

These findings consider the relevant environmental impacts, facts, and conclusions disclosed in the Final EIS; weigh and balance relevant environmental impacts with social, economic, and other considerations; provide a rationale for the Agency’s decision; certify that the requirements of 6 NYCRR Part 617 have been met; and certify that consistent with social, economic, and other essential considerations from among the reasonable alternatives available, the action is one which avoids or minimizes adverse environmental impacts to the maximum extent practicable, and that included within the Plan are those mitigation measures that will avoid or minimize adverse environmental impacts to the maximum extent practicable.

Findings:

1. The Final Plan was subject to a complete Environmental Impact Statement process including a public information meeting and an online public meeting. The Final EIS contains a chapter on responses to comments on the Draft EIS, “Chapter 5 - Comments and Responses.” This chapter contains clarification of issues raised during the review of the Draft EIS. It also provides information that has been used in the preparation of the Final Plan.
2. Johnson Hall State Historic Site is located in the City of Johnstown, along New York State Route 29, in southern Fulton County. Along its eastern border, the Historic Site is adjacent to the border of the Town of Johnstown.
3. Johnson Hall was sold to the State of New York by Sabra Burr, a private landowner, in December 1906. Throughout the twentieth century, management of the estate was handled by several State agencies. The Conservation Department—known today as the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC)—Division of Parks managed the estate from 1907 until 1944. A reduction in the Division’s management responsibilities during World War II lead to management of the estate by the State Education Department between 1944 and 1966. Responsibility for Johnson Hall returned to the Division of Parks in 1966, the same year the New York State Historic Trust—which later became the State Board for Historic Preservation—was established to assist with management of historic sites. The Division of Parks later became an independent State agency, the State Office of Parks and Recreation—renamed the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation in 1981—and manages Johnson Hall into the present day.

4. Johnson Hall was the third home and country estate of Sir William Johnson from about 1763 until his death in 1774. As the largest single landowner in the Mohawk Valley, Sir William was one of the most important men in colonial America. Sir William Johnson and his estate, Johnson Hall, is significant not only to the region's colonial settlement, but also several broad patterns in American history: the nation's Indigenous, early-American trading, French and Indian War (1754-1763), and Revolutionary War (1775-1783) histories.
5. There are numerous historic and cultural resources at the Site. Restoration activities and archeological explorations have helped to preserve and protect the integrity of these elements. There are six buildings within the Site. Two of these are original to the Hall estate; one is a reconstruction of an original structure; two were built during the first quarter of the 20th century; and the last building was constructed within the past two decades. There are other structures associated with Johnson's farm and village settlement that are located outside of the present boundaries of the Historic Site.
6. OPRHP assumed jurisdiction for a 3.3-acre property-directly adjacent to the Historic Site-with +/- 1,680 square foot single-family home in August 2020. The home, built around 1925, was occupied until the year of sale. When surveyed by the SHPO in 2003, staff determined the structure to be non-historic and ineligible for listing with the National Register.
7. Johnson Hall was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1960, added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1966, and first included on the New York State Register of Historic Places in 1980.
8. The approximately 33-acre Historic Site is a post-agricultural landscape typical of the Mohawk River Valley region. Most of the Site's land cover is an extensive lawn area interspersed with small clusters of trees and shrubs, many of which are not native to the region. A large portion of the Site is covered in successional northern hardwood forest and successional old fields. There are no significant natural communities and no known occurrences of rare or endangered species currently found at the Site.
9. Hall Creek, a rocky headwater Class C stream, traverses the northern portion of the Historic Site. The classification indicates that there are no records of trout populations in the Creek. This is likely due to a general lack of refuge pools in the stretch passing through the Site and the sizable bedrock outcrop that forms a small waterfall at the base of the large culvert under Johnson Avenue. Hall Creek eventually feeds into Cayadutta Creek, which does support trout. As part of the Hall Creek-Cayadutta Creek subwatershed, Hall Creek helps to supply cold, oxygenated water to trout populations downstream.
10. The Historic Site offers interpretive guided tours and a variety of interpretive and educational events. Passive recreational activities offered include walking, running, picnicking, biking, dog-walking, photography, and birding. More active forms of recreation, such as snowshoeing and cross-country skiing, occur at the Site's formally designed 20th century strolling park, Johnson Hall Park. Johnson Hall can be reached by bicycle from the Fonda, Johnstown and Gloversville Rail Trail, which intersects West State Street less than a half-mile from the Site. There are no overnight recreational opportunities at Johnson Hall.
11. The Master Plan identifies a vision statement and goals for Johnson Hall State Historic Site. The vision will continue to provide protection and interpretation of resources—historic, cultural, natural, etc.—that help to tell the story of Sir William Johnson. The overall goal is to provide a diversity of high-quality interpretive and educational opportunities balanced with stewardship of the Site's resources, in order to nurture a greater appreciation for the lives of Sir William Johnson and his contemporaries, including Molly Brant—his wife—and the Haudenosaunee people, helping the Site to become a leading regional cultural center known for sharing the remarkable story of early America and the nation's roots in the Mohawk Valley.

12. The Plan presents a series of “Preferred Alternatives” for future development and operations at the Historic Site. Status quo alternatives were evaluated for each element of the Plan as well. The Status Quo Alternative consists of the current facilities, programs, and practices. The various alternatives were combined to create a single Preferred Alternative that best met the goals for the Site. This alternative represents the Final Master Plan. Cumulatively, the actions described in the Plan present the long-term vision for the sustainable management of the Site, preserving and protecting the inimitable resources associated with its cultural, social, and political legacy.
13. The Plan considers the historic, cultural, natural and recreational resources of the Site and responds to the needs and safety of visitors, protection of historic, cultural, scenic and natural resources, and principles of sustainability. The plan also prioritizes implementation actions and recognizes that implementation will be dependent on public and private funding.
14. The Master Plan calls for protection of the Site’s existing historic and cultural resources by:
 - Removing the restroom from the basement of Johnson Hall and restoring the space to a more original condition.
 - Continuing interior restoration work and furnishing of Johnson Hall.
 - Opening the second floor of the Northwest Stonehouse to interpretation.
 - Installing a fire detection system in the Northwest Stonehouse.
15. The Master Plan calls for enhancing historic and cultural resource interpretation and education by:
 - Repurposing the first floor of the Northeast Stonehouse as a flexible multipurpose space.
 - Constructing an additional restroom on the first floor of the Northeast Stonehouse.
 - Outlining the footprint of the Trade House and install interpretive signage.
 - Constructing a Trade House.
 - Outlining the footprint of the Blacksmith Shop and install interpretive signage.
 - Constructing a Blacksmith Shop.
 - Constructing a Longhouse.
 - Constructing a Garden House.
16. The Master Plan calls for enhancing the historic landscape of the Site by:
 - Planting a period-appropriate formal garden.
 - Creating a dramatic sense of arrival to the site.
 - Installing landscaping, fencing, etc. to screen mechanicals or development occurring outside State land.
 - Removing the subsurface roadbed to facilitate orchard health.
 - Improving the aesthetics and function of the rear property boundary.
 - Developing and implementing a site planting plan.

17. The Master plan calls for improvements to documentation and maintenance of the Site's historical record by:

- Updating the Cultural Landscape Report.
- Updating the National Register of Historic Places and National Historic Landmark files with the State Historic Preservation Office and National Park Service.
- Siting and engineering construction in a location and manner that is least impactful to the archaeological record.
- Preparing a Phase 1B Archaeological Report for areas of new construction.
- Preparing a Historic Furnishing Plan.
- Expanding collections and exhibits based on current Collections Policy and available exhibit space.
- Developing relationships with partners to gain access to rotating collections.
- Enhancing public access to Sites records and collections.
- Monitoring climate and environmental controls for collections storage.

18. The Master Plan expands interpretive, educational, and programmatic opportunities by:

- Increasing engagement and consultation with Indigenous Nations, African American, and other stakeholder communities to shape interpretive content.
- Developing exchange programs with Indigenous Nations and communities.
- Preparing an Interpretive Plan.
- Regularly offering living history events and other hands-on programming.
- Increasing the number of special events and programs.
- Developing specific programs for interpretive buildings.
- Creating programming that reflects upon the ongoing impact of historical themes.
- Using interpretation and programming to connect with broad audiences.
- Creating interpretive brochures and guidebooks for interpretive structures.
- Providing interpretive materials in multiple languages.
- Introducing multimedia platforms and other media services.
- Expanding curriculum-based programming at local schools.
- Developing and implementing an interpretive signage plan.

19. The Master Plan expands recreation opportunities by:

- Constructing a signed interpretive trail at the rear of the 2020 Acquisition (137 Hall Avenue) parcel.
- Building a bridge across Hall Creek and expanding the signed interpretive trail onto parkland north of Hall Creek.
- Paving Johnson Hall Park's strolling path with asphalt.

- Incorporating the Johnson Hall Park strolling path into interpretive programming.
- Introducing new programs interpreting period recreation and leisure.

20. The Master Plan calls for protection of natural resources and enhances sustainability by:

- Using living shoreline design to stabilize the banks of Hall Creek.
- Partnering with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), and the Fulton County Soil Conservation District.
- Interplanting and restoring native species populations.
- Developing a site-specific management strategy for invasive species.

21. The Master Plan calls for improvements to site access, circulation, and wayfinding by:

- Building a new parking lot.
- Removing the existing parking lot and restoring ground vegetation.
- Encouraging pedestrian and bicycle access.
- Establishing circulation paths around the site.
- Improving directional and wayfinding signage.
- Installing a gateway monument sign closer to the Hall Avenue road entrance.
- Improving site signage along Route 29.

22. The Master Plan calls for improvements to facilities and infrastructure by:

- Constructing a Visitor Center to include exhibits, a gift shop, multipurpose space, offices and restrooms.
- Relocating staff offices, gift shop, and exhibits to the new Visitor Center.
- Constructing a new maintenance building and consolidating maintenance functions
- Landscape screening maintenance facilities.
- Repurposing the existing maintenance garage for use as the residential staff garage.
- Repurposing the Caretaker's Cottage as support staff housing.
- Landscape screening the support staff cottage.
- Renovating the residence on the 2020 Acquisition (137 Hall Avenue) parcel for use as support staff housing.
- Demolishing the barn on the 2020 Acquisition (137 Hall Avenue) parcel.
- Demolishing the Visitor Kiosk.
- Creating utility corridors when introducing, replacing or removing service lines.
- Maximizing energy efficiency using green design, utilities, and infrastructure.

23. The Master Plan calls for improvements to operations and staffing by:

- Purchasing a point of sale system.
- Developing an artist-in-residence program.
- Initiating a volunteer docent and junior docent training program.

24. The Master Plan calls for improvements in communication and partnerships by:

- Enhancing the site's social media presence.
- Enhancing the partnership with the Friends of Johnson Hall.
- Developing partnership with the area Chamber of Commerce and other tourism agencies.
- Enhancing partnerships with local colleges and universities.
- Encouraging collaboration and thematic connections with other Regional historic sites.
- Continuing to offer opportunities for stakeholder and public input regarding site programming and development.
- Exploring merchandising partnerships.

25. Impacts associated with the implementation of the Plan and corresponding mitigation measures identified are as follows:

- Impacts to land will occur where the Master Plan calls for the removal of extant structures, construction of new facilities, and the infrastructure to support these changes. Though new development is proposed in this Master Plan—which will result in some physical change to the land—direct impacts to biological resources are expected to be minimal. Projects have almost exclusively been sited in areas with previous development, limited environmental sensitivity, and general accessibility to existing infrastructure. Erosion control and stormwater management techniques will be in accordance with the New York State Stormwater Design Manual and will be incorporated into site specific designs for all construction projects that will disturb soils. Vegetative buffers will be preserved and seeding and mulching of disturbed areas will occur as soon as possible. Disturbed areas will be restored using native vegetation where appropriate.
- Potential impacts on land would also result from the construction of new trails. Impacts of trail construction will vary based on the proposed use of the trail, its proposed surfacing, and its location with respect to steep slopes and streams. Disturbance of land will be limited to the required width of the trail corridor. Trail construction will follow the policies and guidelines for trail building that have been established by recognized trail organizations and government agencies. Adherence to these guidelines will assure that work is completed in a manner that maximizes protection of Historic Site resources.
- Implementation of the Master Plan is not expected to have significant adverse impacts on water resources. Erosion and sediment controls will be installed as needed during construction. An increase in impervious surfaces could result in an increase in the quantity and velocity of runoff generated during storm events. Permeable materials will be used whenever practical with respect to site conditions, cost and operations, especially for parking areas. All new structures and parking areas will have drainage infrastructure designed to mitigate stormwater runoff. Green design will be utilized for new buildings as much as possible without detracting from its historic resources. All new facilities will be designed to ensure that adequate vegetative buffers are maintained between facilities and

adjacent water resources. Several projects, such as stabilization of the Hall Creek banks, will reduce erosion, restore impacted areas and in turn provide better stream protection and ecosystem health. Several of the natural resource management strategies provide guidance for the future management and protection of important water resources such as Hall Creek.

- Impacts to air quality are expected to be minor and of a short-term nature. Air quality impacts from increased traffic due to implementation of the Plan are not expected to be significant. Short-term, temporary air quality impacts may occur during construction. These effects will be temporary and localized and will occur over time as the Plan is implemented.
- Overall the Plan is expected to have a positive impact on the natural communities. The Plan seeks to restore ecological diversity and health through the planting of native species and the use of living shoreline designs that will help to stabilize the banks of Hall Creek. Prior to implementation, OPRHP staff will review and assess designs for the construction and development of interpretive trails. This review ensures trail routing will avoid impacts to natural resources—including the spread or introduction of invasive species—and ensure trails are sited in a sustainable manner. Significant efforts will be made to preserve existing trees and protect the viewshed from the mansion. Areas that will require vegetative restoration or will be part of a design will incorporate the use of native species or historically appropriate non-invasive species that are indigenous to the area. Facility design and implementation will be consistent with OPRHP's Tree Management and Native Plants policies.
- Minimal impacts to the fauna are expected due to the small amount of physical change proposed to natural areas. Construction projects are usually planned for the late fall and winter when public use is lower. This timing also minimizes disturbance to wildlife by avoiding periods of higher biological activity, such as bird breeding seasons and bat roosting. Similarly, tree removals at OPRHP facilities are often timed to occur between November and March to minimize disturbance to wildlife.
- The Master Plan calls for the preparation of Site-specific management strategies for invasive species. This strategy will include best management practices to prevent accidental introduction of invasive species through construction, operations, and other activities.
- The Site's cultural landscape is a significant resource. The Plan includes continued maintenance of existing scenic viewpoints and calls for the installation of landscaping and other interventions that screen mechanicals and development built outside the Site's property boundary to help preserve the Site's sense of place. Any new construction or renovations to existing structures will be designed to complement their surroundings and will not be visually intrusive.
- The Master Plan recognizes the important historic and archeological resources within the Site. It is a specific goal of the Master Plan to site and engineer new construction using designs that are compatible with the historical context of the Site, and to construct them in a location and manner that is least impactful to the Site's archaeological record. Any project or activity proposed in the Master Plan that may impact historic resources or landscapes at the Site will undergo Section 14.09 review by OPRHP's Division for Historic Preservation (DHP), in accordance with the State Historic Preservation Act. Any routine operation or maintenance that requires ground disturbance also requires further review by DHP. To assess the impact of any proposal for development, DHP will apply the Secretary of Interior Standards. These standards and criteria reflect national, and international, consensus among preservation specialists and advocates.
- The Plan will mitigate risks associated with running water through a historic structure by removal of the restroom from the basement of the mansion to restore the space to a more original condition and more conducive to interpretive programming. Similarly, the installation

of a fire detection system in the Northwest Stonehouse provides for the integrity of the resource and the health and safety of visiting patrons.

- To minimize the potential adverse visual impacts of new interpretive structures on the cultural landscape, Regional Engineering staff will work with Historic Site and DHP staff to devise approaches to design that are appropriate for an 18th century landscape. Collaboration between the Region, Historic Site and DHP staff will ensure that new interpretive structures are also designed to require minimal maintenance. This should help reduce demands on Site and Regional trades staff and promote operational efficiency at the Site. Additional mitigation measures include the provision of interpretive programming and signage that emphasizes that the structures are purpose-built for educational purposes and that the facilities are not reconstructions. Other mitigation steps may be prescribed by DHP once the structures are included in regular site programming.
- The Master Plan provides for the long-term benefit of the Historic Site's collections and archives by expanding collections and further developing exhibit spaces with appropriate environmental controls. The development of educational exhibits at the Visitor Center, provision of interpretive materials in multiple languages, installation of interpretive signage sitewide, and engagement with a variety of cultural communities will help the Historic Site to fully interpret its cultural resources using a variety of perspectives and promote a nuanced understanding of key historical themes. Additional beneficial impacts associated with the Plan include the preparation of a Historic Furnishing Plan and a Cultural Landscape Report.
- Implementation of the Master Plan will result in substantial beneficial interpretation and education impacts. Increased engagement with, and outreach to, Indigenous nations, African American, and other stakeholder communities in the development of interpretive and educational programming ensures that the Site offers a diversity of perspectives on the historical legacy of the Site. Regularly offering living history events, hands-on programming, special events, and programs maximizes the appeal of State Historic Sites to a wider audience, promotes personal connections to historic themes, and provides the visiting public with memorable sensory and tactile experiences that encourage repeat visitation.
- The Master Plan will result in improvements to recreational opportunities at the Historic Site. The paving of the Johnson Hall Park strolling path will provide safer, more accessible use for the visiting public. The development of interpretive trails will expand low-intensity recreation opportunities such as enjoying site interpretation, walking, running, birding, and photography. Recreational improvements will follow the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) guidelines.
- Implementation of the Master Plan will result in some transportation improvements but does not call for any significant changes to traffic patterns or access to the Historic Site. The Site's new Visitor Center parking area will improve circulation, include ADA-compliant parking spots, and feature improved directional signage.
- Public health and safety are important elements in Site operations. New or substantially rehabilitated facilities will be designed and constructed to meet all applicable health and safety codes including compliance with the ADA.
- Sustainability principles and energy efficiency measures will be incorporated into the design of all new Site buildings. Construction activities associated with Master Plan implementation may result in some minor temporary increases in noise during construction.

26. The Plan describes the process for supplemental environmental review. The Plan also provides guidance as to when additional environmental review may be required and identifies the types of actions that are likely to require additional review. These include: new actions not addressed in the EIS that do not meet the Type II categories identified in Part 617, any change from the preferred alternatives for cultural resource and landscape protection; interpretation and education; recreation enhancement; natural resource protection; access, circulation, and wayfinding; management and operations or other elements of the plan which would result in significant environmental impacts, any leases, easements, memoranda of understanding, or other agreements between OPRHP and private entities or other agencies that affect resources in a manner that is not sufficiently addressed in this plan, any project determined through review by the OPRHP Division for Historic Preservation to have an Adverse Impact on historic or cultural resources at the Historic Site, and any proposals for new trails, trail segments, or trail uses not addressed within the Master Plan.

Portions of the EIS are somewhat general or conceptual. Decisions regarding the type and extent of certain actions will be dependent on the findings from site-specific studies or analysis in the field. For example, the specific designs for the new Visitor Center, interpretive structures, and maintenance facility will require more detailed site analysis and inter-Agency collaboration. The findings from these site-specific evaluations may identify impacts that were not adequately addressed in the EIS. Under such a circumstance, an additional or supplemental environmental review will be required.