

Proposal: Relocation and Preservation of Oak Cottage

To: Forest Preserve District of DuPage County
From: James Privitt
Date: 10.14.2025



Introduction

Dear Forest Preserve District of DuPage County,

My name is James Privitt. I grew up just down the road from Oak Cottage in Naperville and passed by it nearly every day. I've always admired the home and used to make my dad stop to take a closer look on our hikes or bike rides through Greene Valley. I've spent much of my life working as a preservationist, curatorial researcher, and volunteer at historic sites—including Naper Settlement and the Glessner House in Chicago. My wife and I currently reside in Texas to help care for her parents, but we plan to return home to DuPage County to raise our growing family.

As someone passionate about history and having a background in real estate, I've remained active in preservation efforts—currently working with the Denton County Historical Society and the restoration of the Scott-Barker House in Melissa, TX. We see Oak Cottage as an irreplaceable part of DuPage County's history and are proposing a viable, long-term solution that will save it from demolition, breathe new life into the home, and ensure it continues to contribute to the local community.

Proposal Overview

1. Relocation and Ownership

- We propose the relocation of Oak Cottage to a privately acquired lot selected for its compatibility with the home's historic context and character.
- The lot will be purchased and prepared by us, including coordination with licensed contractors to handle all necessary relocation steps.
- We respectfully ask that the Forest Preserve District consider contributing to the cost of physically relocating the structure. We are open to discussing and negotiating what that contribution might look like.
- Upon successful relocation, we would take full ownership and Oak Cottage will once again serve its original purpose: as a lived-in family home that is preserved, maintained, and loved.

2. Restoration and Responsibility

- We will assume full logistical and financial responsibility for:
 - Fully restoring the structure using preservation best practices
 - Maintaining the house and grounds in perpetuity
- We will manage or assist the hiring and coordination of a licensed, experienced historic structure mover, and help oversee the preparation of a new foundation, utilities, and site infrastructure – including reusing original materials (such as limestone)
- We will commit to preserving the historic integrity of both the interior and exterior.
- The house will be our forever home, ensuring personal investment and long-term care.

3. Interpretation and Community Access

At the New Site:

- A permanent historic marker detailing Oak Cottage’s origin and relocation
- Periodic open house events for the public (e.g., annual tours)
- Eligibility for inclusion in local heritage and preservation programs

At the Original Site:

- The Forest Preserve District may opt to repurpose the original site:
 - Interpretive signage where Oak Cottage once stood
 - Potential reuse of the original footprint/foundation as a memorial or garden space
 - Signage directing visitors to the new location to continue the story

4. Benefits to the Forest Preserve District

- Oak Cottage is saved from demolition without future liability to the District
- The home’s legacy is preserved and remains connected to the community
- The original site is repurposed in a way that aligns with FPDDC’s mission
- The District, County, and city or village can highlight this as a successful preservation partnership

Mission Alignment

This proposal directly supports the Forest Preserve District’s mission to protect and preserve cultural history while connecting the community to nature. By relocating and restoring Oak Cottage to a compatible nearby site, we are preserving a significant historic resource, returning it to active use, and relieving the District of future liability or maintenance burden.

The project aligns with the 2014 Strategic Plan and 2019 Master Plan Goals by:

- Preserving and protecting a significant structure while allowing the District to focus on open space preservation (Goals 1 & 4).
 - Fostering community engagement and heritage awareness (Goal 5).
 - Creating meaningful opportunities for cultural connection while reducing District infrastructure responsibilities (Goals 2 & 3).
 - Leveraging private investment for public preservation benefit (Goal 6).
-

Benefits to DuPage County and the Receiving Municipality

1. Cost and Logistical Savings:

- The Forest Preserve District is relieved of the financial and logistical burden of repairing, maintaining, or demolishing the house.
- Even when restored, publicly owned historic buildings remain costly, politically sensitive, and offer little revenue potential.
- The original Oak Cottage site can be freed up to serve as a landscaped memorial, garden, or education area aligned with FPDDC's mission.

2. Tax and Economic Value:

- Through private residential use, the relocated Oak Cottage will return to the tax rolls, generating annual property tax revenue for the city and county.
- Restoration of the house and improvements to the lot will increase the property's assessed value and contribute positively to surrounding property values.
- The project may qualify for local, state, or federal historic preservation tax incentives and grant eligibility.

3. Heritage Preservation:

- This plan preserves one of DuPage County's most endangered historic homes, honoring local history in a living, accessible way.
- Permanent covenants will be considered to ensure long-term historic protection and prevent future misuse or destruction.

4. Community Advancement:

- As a prominent restored historic home, Oak Cottage will enrich the cultural and visual landscape of its new neighborhood.
- The home will be an anchor of local heritage, supporting educational outreach, cultural pride, and public interest.

5. Private Ownership Benefit:

- No reliance on public funds or city oversight for maintenance or programming.
- A dedicated local family with preservation expertise and a vested interest in the home’s care ensures accountability.
- Prevents potential neglect or misuse by outside investors or speculative buyers.
- Ensures thoughtful preservation led by experienced individuals committed to historic integrity and community values.

Restoration Plan and Timeline

1. Restoration Timeline:

- **Months 1–3:** Finalize approval and contract agreements, conduct detailed inspections, and create a comprehensive restoration plan in collaboration with historic preservation professionals.
- **Months 3–12:** Relocate Oak Cottage to the new site, finalize ownership, establish foundation, utilities, and begin full restoration—modernizing essential systems (HVAC, electrical, plumbing) while preserving the historic features.
- **Months 12–24:** Complete final stages of restoration, landscaping, and interpretation elements (signage, interior displays).

2. Collaboration:

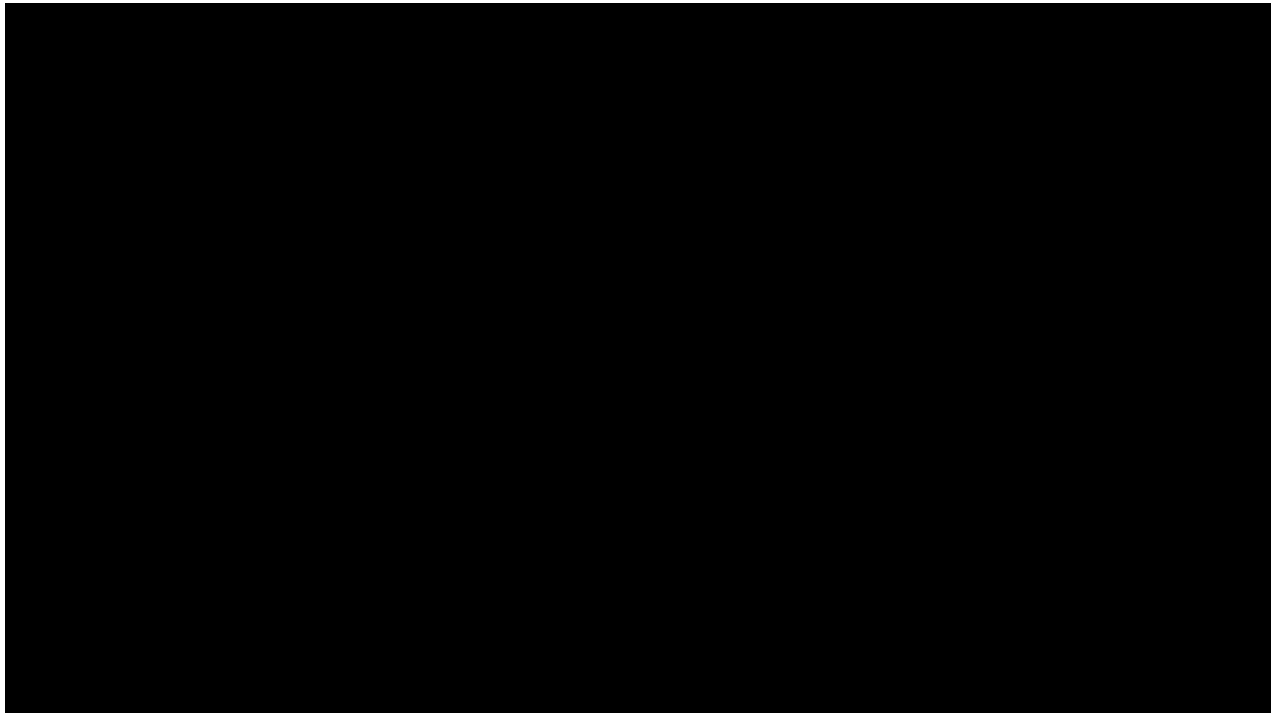
- We will work with licensed preservation professionals to ensure that all work complies with historic preservation standards.
- We are happy to provide periodic updates to the Forest Preserve District and local officials, as appropriate, to maintain transparency and community engagement.

Proposed Terms

1. Relocation site & logistics:

- We will acquire and prepare a compatible lot in DuPage County to receive the house.
- We will manage all logistics of the move and restoration, but request that the Forest Preserve consider contributing financially to the cost of physically relocating the structure. The exact amount can be negotiated.
- Our intention is to relocate Oak Cottage to a privately acquired lot within the Village of Woodridge, Illinois, which remains our priority location due to its proximity to Oak Cottage’s original setting, appropriate neighborhood context, and alignment with its historic character.
 - Importantly, we have met several times—both virtually and in person—with the Village Manager, planning team, and Mayor of Woodridge, who have expressed strong support for the idea of bringing Oak Cottage into their village. They are enthusiastic about accommodating the relocation and see it as a community enhancement project.

- Should site availability or suitability require it, Naperville and Lisle are also under active consideration as alternative receiving municipalities.
- The final lot selection will be determined based on:
 - ✓ Appropriate lot size and frontage to properly site and showcase the house (a minimum frontage of approximately 80 feet and a lot depth of 80 feet).
 - ✓ Compatibility with surrounding neighborhood character and zoning.
 - ✓ Site accessibility for the relocation process and future community engagement.
 - ✓ Availability and acquisition feasibility of suitable parcels within the area.
- As part of preliminary due diligence, several parcels have been identified as potentially appropriate relocation sites, including:
 - [REDACTED]
 - [REDACTED]
 - [REDACTED]
 - A map of these parcels is included below for reference. These parcels represent the type and character of the site envisioned for relocation.



Final lot acquisition will be secured upon selection and execution of an agreement with the Forest Preserve District, allowing site-specific planning, permitting, and relocation coordination to begin promptly.

2. Proposed Transaction Terms

- In recognition of the significant personal investment required to relocate, restore, and permanently steward Oak Cottage, we respectfully propose a nominal purchase price of \$1 for the structure itself.
- This reflects:
 - The substantial private investment required to secure an appropriate new site.
 - The long-term financial commitment to its restoration, preservation, and public engagement.
 - The management of all relocation logistics.
- This nominal transaction structure is intended to minimize District costs, eliminate future liabilities, and ensure the building's preservation through private ownership, stewardship, and investment—while delivering a highly visible preservation success story for the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County.

3. Ownership and Use:

- Upon ownership, we will assume full financial responsibility for the house's restoration, ongoing maintenance, and long-term care.
- Oak Cottage will be used as our family's primary residence.
- We will open the home to the public several times a year to celebrate its history as well as that of the city in which it resides.

4. Historic Preservation Commitment:

- We agree to preserve the historical integrity of Oak Cottage inside and out.
- We will install permanent historical signage and open the house to the public for select educational and cultural events each year.
- We are open to placing covenants to protect the home's future.

5. Public Relations and Heritage Promotion:

- This relocation effort will demonstrate a highly successful preservation outcome for DuPage County and FPDDC.
- We will promote the project as a model for public-private cooperation in historic preservation.
- Our goal is to restore the home in a way that earns recognition from local and regional preservation organizations.

Proposed Next Steps

1. Schedule a Follow-Up Meeting:

- We would like to meet with Forest Preserve District leadership to review and discuss this proposal in greater detail and address any questions. This will also provide an opportunity to outline expectations and next steps together.

2. Conduct Feasibility Study:

- Upon selection, we will commission and fund a feasibility study in coordination with preservation professionals. This will include architectural and engineering assessments, relocation logistics, site feasibility, cost estimates, and a draft restoration plan. This work will be completed in close coordination with the District to ensure alignment with its mission and review process. We already have an experienced historic structure mover and qualified contractors identified to support this work, ensuring the feasibility study can move forward quickly after selection.

3. Launch Relocation and Restoration:

- Following completion of the feasibility study and execution of an agreement, we will initiate planning, permitting, and relocation efforts to begin preservation work immediately. This will include final site selection, contracting with the mover, and beginning phased restoration.

Closing

DuPage County is home for our family, and we are committed to preserving its history and enriching its future. This proposal balances the Forest Preserve District's priorities with the community's desire to save an important landmark while ensuring a practical and cost-effective solution for all parties involved. It's a wonderful thought that this house can continue its long tradition of sheltering a growing DuPage County family.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you and discuss how we can make this vision a reality together.

Sincerely,
James Privitt



Additional Considerations

Preservation Expertise

- My background includes years of hands-on experience with historic preservation at sites like:
 - **Naper Settlement Museum:** Led restoration projects, including building relocation and preservation. Conducted curatorial research and assisted in navigating legal, planning, and fundraising aspects.
 - **Glessner House Museum (Chicago):** Participated in preservation efforts, supported curatorial work, and assisted in educational programming.
 - **Gibson-Grant Log House (Denton County, TX):** Provided preservation support and served as a docent during its interpretation and stewardship phase.
- Most recently, we are actively relocating and restoring the **Scott-Barker House (1870s State Landmark) in Melissa, TX** in partnership with local officials—a process that mirrors this proposal and provides us with current, relevant experience in managing historic structure moves.

Financial and Technical Capability

- We are financially stable and capable of funding the entire restoration and long-term maintenance of Oak Cottage.
- We have successfully restored several homes and manage a portfolio of real estate, including historic properties.
- We possess deep technical knowledge in all areas of home rehabilitation, from structural work to interior design.
- We have established contacts in specialized trades necessary for historic projects (movers, carpenters, masons, etc.).

Commitment to Community

- Our goal is to make Oak Cottage an active, meaningful part of the community—not just a preserved building, but a source of pride and education.
- We will work with local organizations to promote its history and open it for public events.

References

- **Bryan J. Ogg:** Historical Consultant, Preservationist, Author, Morton, IL
 - [REDACTED]
 - [About Bryan](#)
 - [Bryan's Blogs](#)
 - [Bryan's Publications](#)

- **William Tyre:** Executive Director & Curator, Glessner House Museum, Chicago, IL
 - [REDACTED]
 - [About William](#)
 - [William's LinkedIn](#)

- **Peggy Riddle:** Museum Director, Denton County History & Culture, Denton, TX
 - [REDACTED]

- **Megan Joblin:** Historical Park Manager, Denton County History & Culture, Denton, TX
 - [REDACTED]