

News

Summer face-lift

PETERSBURG — *A major restoration effort at Battersea is on the way for this summer.*

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PETERSBURG — A major restoration effort at Battersea is on the way for this summer.

On Monday, board members of Battersea Inc. assembled for a pre-proposal conference on the first phase of work, which is meant to be a face-lift of the building's exterior. Executive director Tempe Barbru estimates the expenses "will stay under \$100,000."

Since the city purchased the 1768 estate for \$200,000 in 1985, little has been done to restore it. Due to a lack of funds, the city's objective had always been to keep the house from deteriorating. Battersea Inc. was founded in 2006 as a non-profit organization to raise funds for restoration.

The Mary Morton Parsons Foundation in Richmond recently issued a \$50,000 grant, which Battersea had to match with another \$50,000.

"We were able to get the money through fund raising in both private and business sectors," Barbru said.

Most of the money will be used for what Barbru calls "phase one" of the project.

"We are hoping to select contractors in May and to begin with the restoration in June," Barbru said.

Battersea developers have identified a series of needs, starting with chimney caps, window protection, cement removal below the water table in the basement and the first story, drain extensions and the treatment of the ground contact woodwork. The building also needs gutter realignments and some roofwork.

"It all relates to fixing the damage caused by water and moisture," Barbru said.

Planners estimate that the exterior renovation will take the entire summer, but could last as long as fall, depending on weather conditions.

"We definitely want to be done by the end of the year," Barbru said. The estate and the building will remain open to the public during the restoration work.

Once the exterior is fixed, Barbru wants to start working on the inside of the mansion, even though there are no concrete plans yet.

"We basically want to preserve it to the fullest possible extent," she said.

Board member Ben Greenbaum said that he envisions a room-to-room approach when restoring the inside.

"We rely on fund raising, so it would make sense to finish one room and then work on the next," he

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PI FILE PHOTO. The exterior restoration of Battersea could begin as early as June. Much of the work will be prevent water damage. The historic home will stay open to the public during the work.

said. And there is much to be done.

"We need to start with removing the paint and peeling off the old wallpaper in the entire building," Greenbaum said.

The vision for Battersea is to become an historic home for the entire community.

"We don't want this to be your typical plantation museum," Greenbaum said. "We want for the people to actually use the estate for recreation and education."

Greenbaum speaks of concerts, art shows, antique appraisal shows, flea markets and even astronomy nights.

"It could be similar to Meadow Farm in Henrico County," he said. "I don't think that's overly ambitious."

Battersea Inc. is also hoping to acquire a collection of historical relics to be displayed at the mansion. Relatives of Col. John Banister, who built the house, came to Petersburg recently.

Harrison Giddens, who lives in Tampa, Fla., is the great-great-granddaughter of Banister's granddaughter, Emily Banister Cocke. Giddens owns various collectibles from Battersea, including furniture and art.

"We will have to think about what we will donate to Battersea Inc.," Giddens said.

Giddens said she felt a rush when she first walked into the mansion.

"I feel like I'm in touch with my ancestors who lived here," Giddens said after walking through the rooms of the estate. "I'm anxious to see Battersea fully restored."

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