



Our mission is to promote, preserve, and enhance the distinctive character of greater Erie through community-based planning, design, and historic preservation.

May 25, 2021

Shawn Wheeler
Senior Civil Engineer
PA Fish & Boat Commission
595 E. Rolling Ridge Drive
Bellefonte PA 16823

Dear Mr. Wheeler:

On behalf of Preservation Erie, I would like to express our concerns over the proposed demolition of the Joshua C. Thornton House, which is historically important to the Fairview Township community and architecturally significant as a local expression of Italianate villa/Italianate residential property with good integrity. The resource has been determined eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C in the Area of Architecture.

Even though the Joshua C. Thornton House was included in the earlier Historic Resource Survey of Erie County, it does not appear in Preservation Erie's countywide inventory of historic resources completed in 2014; it should. The resource is one of just over 300 remaining examples of the Italianate style in Erie County. Within the style, the Joshua C. Thornton House represents the most common subtype in Erie County, which is the square (or nearly square) building with a hipped or pyramidal roof capped by a cupola and featuring projecting eaves with decorative brackets.

The home was built c. 1870 by Joshua C. Thornton, who amassed great personal wealth through farming. Because of this, the resource also reflects the rich agricultural history of Fairview Township and Erie County as a whole.

Erie County has a strong agricultural history. A temperate climate, fertile soil, and access to rail transportation make the Lake Erie shoreline ideal for fruit and vegetable farming. Inland, Erie County farmers specialized in dairying for most of the 20th century. Though agriculture remains an important sector in the county's economy with more than 1,000 operating farms, studies show that the sector is slowly shrinking, threatening the preservation of Erie County's agricultural tradition and historic resources like the Joshua C. Thornton House, which embodies this history.


We support the findings of the PA State Historic Preservation Office (as relayed in their letter to the PA Fish and Boat Commission dated April 19, 2021), employ the PA Fish and Boat Commission to act as good stewards of the historic resources in your care, and request that alternatives to demolition of the Joshua C. Thornton House be sought.

We also join with the PA State Historic Preservation Office in asking: Is removal of the historic house necessary? Have alternatives that allow the house to be retained in its current location and continued to be used as housing or repurposed for another function/use been considered? Has selling of the property (and subdividing the parcel) been considered? Has leasing of the property to allow for adaptive reuse and rehabilitation of the house been considered?

Preservation Erie is the primary advocate for historic and community preservation in Erie County. Our mission is to promote, preserve, and enhance the distinctive character of greater Erie through community-based planning, design, and historic preservation. We provide educational programs and technical expertise to municipal and community leadership, organizations, and property owners and work collaboratively with neighborhood groups, community revitalization agencies, regional historical societies and museums, as well as statewide entities such as Preservation Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission's State Historic Preservation Office.

Again, we employ the PA Fish and Boat Commission to be good stewards of the historic resources you own, which are important not just to the Fairview Township community but to the Commonwealth as a whole. Our organization greatly appreciates the opportunity to provide comment on the PA Fish and Boat Commissions proposed plans and welcome the opportunity to participate in future discussions about the Joshua C. Thornton House. Please contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Melinda A. Meyer". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Melinda Meyer
Chair, Preservation Erie

CC: Timothy D. Schaeffer, Executive Director, PA Fish & Boat Commission
Cheryl Nagle, Above Ground Resources Environmental Review Specialist, Western Region, PA SHPO
Barbara Frederick, Above Ground Resources Environmental Review Supervisor, PA SHPO
Bill Callahan, Community Preservation Coordinator, Western Region, PA SHPO
Sabina Freeman, Fairview Area Historical Society



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