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Moultonborough's Taylor House featured in This Old House



Moultonborough's historic Taylor House is featured as the 'Save This Old House' for sale in the March/April 2020 issue of *This Old House* magazine, the national publication associated with the popular 'This Old House' and 'Ask This Old House' programs. The town-owned landmark house at the center of Moultonborough Village was listed for sale for \$62,700 in December 2019, and advocates for the house's preservation hope that national visibility will help to find an investor for its redevelopment. Moultonborough's 2020 town warrant includes Article 19, seeking \$75,000 to demolish the house, if an appropriate buyer is not found. A vote will be taken on Article 19 at Town Meeting on Saturday, March 14th.

Significant both for its architecture and community history, the Taylor House is considered a valuable historic asset by state advocates and in recent planning studies focusing on Moultonborough Village revitalization. In 2019, the house was identified as both an asset and opportunity for redevelopment by the UNH First Impressions program, and the UNH Report urges leveraging such historic assets to attract investment and new business in the Village. In 2018, Plan NH's Design Charrette Report on Moultonborough Village noted how the "building is important to the village's sense of place...it is a structurally solid structure that suffers from deferred maintenance and cosmetic issues," recommending that it be sold for rehabilitation and to be returned to the Town tax rolls.

In November 2019, the Town's Planning Board voted to support the sale of the Taylor House, and Planning Board Chair Scott Bartlett presented a letter to the Board of Selectmen requesting 'immediate action' to list the property with a professional real estate agent. Bartlett noted how "sale and rehabilitation...to achieve a productive use by returning it to the tax rolls...represents a better economic benefit to the taxpayers than requesting funds to demolish the structure." Noting how the house "represents a significant element of continuity to the village environment (which) residents have repeatedly endorsed in the many studies involving community input conducted to date," he states "there is no compelling reason to demolish...before all attempts to market it have been explored."

The Taylor House was added to the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance's 'Seven to Save' statewide endangered property list in October 2017, after town officials first

started to discuss its demolition. The 'Seven to Save' program recognizes significant properties under threat by neglect, lack of planning, and development pressures. In an October 2019 letter urging the Board of Selectmen to list the house for sale, the Alliance's Executive Director Jennifer Goodman wrote "We believe that demolition of the Taylor House is premature and unwarranted," noting "From our experience involved in scores of community projects around the state, we know that it takes time and the right alignment of seller and buyer interests and market forces for redevelopment plans to come together."

State preservation leaders emphasize that saving historic properties and retaining small-town character are essential in efforts to attract investment, draw new residents and visitors, support local businesses, and promote economic vitality. The Taylor House (properly the French-Taylor House) was added to the honorary New Hampshire State Register of Historic Places in 2019, providing benefits for its rehabilitation including special consideration or relief in the application of access, building, and safety codes. In addition, the house qualifies for RSA 79-E, the Community Revitalization Tax Relief Incentive Program, which is intended to encourage investment with the rehabilitation and active re-use of historic buildings by providing temporary tax relief for 5 to 13 years.

Since March 2017, when severe winds damaged the Taylor House's roofing, the Moultonborough Heritage Commission has focused on finding a future use for the property, recognizing that loss of the building would severely impact the Village's unique character, streetscape, and sense of place. In August 2018, the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources wrote in support of such efforts to save the house: "Historical resources define our village centers...We urge the Moultonborough Board of Selectmen to work with the Heritage Commission and other community partners to explore ways to repurpose rather than demolish the French-Taylor House. We ask the Board to fully consider the irreversibility of demolishing the house and its effect on the historic community."

When the Board of Selectmen again started to discuss demolition of the Taylor House in September 2019, Commission chair Cristina Ashjian noted "There is not a single Moultonborough planning study that recommends demolition of any community landmark. Instead, recent studies and public opinion demonstrate that Moultonborough residents value historic buildings, and support finding active new uses for them." She cited how 84% of respondents to the Town's Village Vision survey supported preserving and repurposing historic buildings, and the Village Vision Report was endorsed at Town Meeting in March 2015. Since then, the Master Plan update, the 2018 Charrette Report and community input session, and the 2019 UNH First Impressions Report have all confirmed those findings.

Now in early 2020, the Taylor House is listed for sale with the 603 Property Group. Interested parties can find professional reports on the property's history and condition on the Moultonborough Heritage Commission webpage or by contacting Town Planner Bruce Woodruff (www.moultonboroughnh.gov/heritage-commission). Woodruff said, "this very informative article in *This Old House* magazine points to all the right reasons and the opportunity to save an integral part of the village center of our Town; without it and a viable use for it, the village will look like a puzzle board with a missing piece in the center."