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SUGGESTED APPROACH TO REHABILITATING THE GERRISH RAILROAD DEPOT AS A SNOWMOBILE CLUBHOUSE

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The railroad depot at Gerrish is a simple country railroad station located on the former Northern Division of the Boston & Maine railroad. Little changed since passenger rail traffic stopped on the line in 1965, the station still retains a great deal of character both inside and out.

The Gerrish station and the depot at Potter Place in Andover are the only two unaltered railroad stations remaining on the Northern Division. The features that make the Gerrish station recognizable as a railroad depot also add to the attractiveness and historical interest of the building. The building's little-altered condition makes it appealing not only to the snowmobile club, but also to railroad hobbyists, to motorists passing by on N.H. Route 3, and to anyone interested in the history of Boscaawen.

Preservation of the depot as a clubhouse would not only give the club a meeting place beside the new recreational trail, but would also serve as a statewide model of preservation which could encourage other snowmobile clubs to save and adapt other empty depots.

From the standpoint of historic preservation, it would be desirable to preserve as many features of the station as possible during conversion to a clubhouse. Preservation of remaining features would not only retain the special character of the building, but in many cases would also reduce the cost of rehabilitation. Among the features that might be preserved are:

1. The roof covering of cement-asbestos shingles.

The roof was originally covered with wooden shingles (which remain under the cement-asbestos). The present covering was probably added during the early 1900s to save on maintenance costs. Other Boston and Maine Railroad depots were roofed with the same large diamond-shaped shingles, and this should permit us to find replacements for the few shingles that are broken or missing. Except where a few shingles have been damaged, the roof appears to be sound and tight.

Keeping the present roof would save money by eliminating the cost of removing and disposing of the cement-asbestos shingles (which would be classified as hazardous waste), the cost of laying plywood over the original widely-spaced sheathing boards (necessary if the roof were to be re-shingled with asphalt), and the cost of buying and laying new shingles.

If the club wanted to cover the roof with wooden shingles at a later time, the surviving original widely-spaced roof sheathing boards would lend themselves to this. The cost of re-shingling in wood would include materials and labor, and would be fairly expensive.

2. The exterior sheathing of the building.

The sheathing boards are apparently in good condition, but the clapboards have deteriorated badly on all but the north end of the building. It should be possible to re-nail the sheathing as necessary and re-clapboard directly over the old boards.

The club has suggested retaining the freight doors on both the east and west sides, securing them in place and covering them with wall material on the interior. This is a good suggestion. The plan would preserve the exterior appearance of the building and would express the identity of the depot as a freight-handling facility.

3. The interior horizontal wall sheathing and the partition that divides the waiting room (on the north) from the office and post office (in the middle of the building).

The club needs a large meeting room, and also a kitchen/toilet area. If the kitchen/toilet area could be located in the old waiting room, the sheathed walls and ceiling in this area could be retained. The partition between the old waiting room and the office/post office could also be retained, and the two windows in this partition could be adapted as pass-through windows for food delivery from the kitchen to the meeting room.

Preservation of the old beaded "ceiling board" wall sheathing would retain the original interior finish of the station. With a limited amount of preparation, the sheathed walls could be repainted in old Boston and Maine Railroad colors. If any lead paint is present on the sheathing, a careful job of repainting would qualify as "in-place management" of the lead and no lead abatement would be required under state or federal laws. (Because the depot would not be used as a residence or licensed day-care center, there would be no legal requirement for lead abatement in any case.)

If evidence suggests that the sheathing was originally varnished rather than painted, it should not be difficult to strip the paint off the boards using a chemical paint remover.

Retention of the sheathing would make it possible to insulate the walls of the building simply by pouring or blowing insulation into the framing cavities from the attic, where the tops of the wall studs are exposed. Insulation could be poured or laid over the top of the sheathing that forms the ceilings of the rooms.

The rest of the meeting room would incorporate the present baggage room at the south end of the station. This is presently an unfinished room. Its walls and ceiling could be covered with modern beaded "ceiling board." Ceiling board that more or less matches old sheathing is available from various lumber dealers and mills, including Steenbeke's in Concord.

4. The two-over-two window sashes.

Most of the windows sashes in the building are two-over-two units with a type of sash that became popular around 1890. These sashes are probably not original to the building, but seem to reflect the period when the depot was last modernized. (The six-over-six sashes in the baggage room are of an older pattern and may remain from the original period of construction.) The Boston and Maine Railroad took over the older Northern Railroad in 1897, and may have upgraded the stations on the Northern line shortly after that date.

While the existing window sashes are too badly damaged to be preserved, the character of the building would benefit from the use of similar new sashes.

Window units that exactly duplicate these old sashes are still available from Brosco, a leading national millwork supplier. Similar sashes may be made by Rivco in Penacook. These sashes are among the least expensive window units on the market. Various storm panels or storm/screen windows are available to fit these two-over-two windows. It should therefore be possible to duplicate the existing windows in the depot.

5. The brick chimney.

The present chimney appears to be in good condition, but probably needs rebuilding within the attic and above the roof. Once a heating system is decided upon, the chimney could be used to vent a furnace. If a cellar were to be excavated under part or all of the building, the chimney could be carried down to the new cellar floor.

The club has suggested two possibilities for flooring the building: pouring a concrete slab inside the sills, at the present floor level, or excavating a full or partial basement and re-framing the first floor with wooden framing. If the latter plan proves feasible, it would have the advantages of providing a basement room for meetings, storage, and utilities.

Re-framing the first floor in wood would provide a more resilient and comfortable floor than would a concrete slab. Although the building's sills are close to grade, it should be feasible to jack the structure enough to support the building while a cellar is excavated.