



Grand Plan to Expand

Building a Future for Cotuit's Past

The Historical Society of Santuit & Cotuit has a Grand Plan to Expand. And by “grand” we mean ambitious, outstanding, even monumental (because we’re preserving monuments to history, after all). You might also say we have a Superb Plan to Expand, except saying that wouldn’t be as much fun... and it doesn’t rhyme.

I love the historical society already! What seems to be the problem?

We’re deeply grateful for your support of HSSC! It’s a joy when you share in our events and programs, including Autumn in Cotuit, the Taste of Cotuit, the Historical Walking Tours and our informal History Uncorked evenings. We’re delighted when you bring guests here to step back in time at the 1808 Samuel Dottridge Homestead and the Rothwell Ice House. We enjoy hearing your own memories as you walk through the Cotuit Museum, sampling a slice of our village’s history. If you live in a house built prior to 1900, we’re pleased when you request a historical plaque for your home, adding to Cotuit’s built-in interest as a historic district.

Our main problem is, in short, a space shortage. In fact, a lack of sufficient space is impacting every facet of operations, whether we’re talking about objects in the collection, archival materials, gift shop inventory, or items needed for fundraising events, such as tents, tables and chairs. But it’s the overcrowded condition of the archives – where the documents, photographs, books and maps so vital to historical research are kept – that’s really hampering our mission to preserve Cotuit’s past and tell its story. Presently, the archives occupy a small room directly behind the Museum Store. The 10 x 16-foot room does double duty as the administrative office and – given its proximity to the shop – inevitably catches some overflow in inventory (the shop’s actual storage closets being located at some distance, over in the Fire Museum).

While archival materials have been carefully catalogued and stored over the years, it can be daunting to access them without putting these often fragile objects – not to mention the archivist – at some risk. We’ve also reached our capacity for accepting new acquisitions of any significant size for either the archives or the collection. Yet we hate to say “no” when offered an opportunity to preserve some special connection to Cotuit’s past.

HSSC probably could use some extra space, but where do you plan to find it?

What's really grand about our plan to expand is that it addresses a number of challenges facing the historical society without sacrificing historical authenticity or precious parking space. It barely even infringes on the lawn. In short, we're not expanding outward (only very little); we're gaining space by building up and digging down. The plan is to demolish the existing Fire Museum (a relatively new addition) then reconstruct it with a second floor for the archives and administrative office and a climate-controlled basement for the storage of objects in the collection. The ground floor will remain museum space, and will be fully integrated with the adjacent gallery. To the rear of the new gallery, we'll have space to store the event paraphernalia currently kept in the Dottridge Basement of the Treacherous Steps. Despite all this, the new addition's footprint will be only 3 feet wider and 3 feet deeper than it is now. We love how the exterior design reflects and complements the character of the old barn that serves as the Cotuit Museum – and hope that you will, too.

Once the archives and administrative office move upstairs, the room behind the Museum Store will be remodeled as (1) a convenient storage and work area for the gift shop; and (2) a restroom, which will be convenient for visitors and in a more appropriate location than in the Dottridge Homestead.

This almost makes too much sense. But how will it affect my experience?

Good question! We don't want to gain space merely in order to operate more efficiently; we're very intent on *Building a Future for Cotuit's Past*. As much as we love delving into the dusty nooks and crannies of Cotuit's history, we realize we need to present the past in a way that's fresh and relevant to early 21st-century visitors. You'll see this happen in three important ways.

A. Improved Research. The new Archive Room will include a research area, where historians – whether professional, amateur or impromptu – can comfortably examine documents. And having archival materials more readily accessible is sure to aid our own research, so we can tell Cotuit's story more completely and compellingly, referencing more of those intriguing details that always help bring history to life.

B. Revitalized Gallery Space and Exhibits. With more openness between the current Cotuit Museum and the new ground-floor gallery, we envision more of a chronological flow in telling Cotuit's story. And the entire space will be more welcoming. At present, the Fire Museum is accessible only through an ordinary doorway that's easily disregarded and bypassed. We can't wait to exhibit our 1916 "Model T" Fire Engine (the first motorized fire truck on Cape Cod) with greater distinction!

Also in anticipation of our somewhat expanded gallery space, we're eagerly re-evaluating and re-imagining our presentation of Cotuit's history. The museum already features some beautiful display boards and exhibition cases showing the village's participation in such

19th-century industries as whaling, cranberry and oyster farming, and tourism. But we'd like to plug a number of gaps. This will include fresh exhibits on the village's founding and settlement as well as its historic homes. We also have the opportunity to acquire a Cotuit Skiff, and we're eager for the space to display it.

As we think about updating other interpretive materials, we're especially excited about using technologies so prevalent in today's world to connect visitors with historical information. In particular, we envision an interactive display where you'll be able to tap into the wealth of research we've accumulated on Cotuit's 132 historical homes. Who formerly lived in that Greek Revival? How old is that Cape Cod cottage? Where are all the Mansard "ladies"? In a museum with relatively limited wall space, we also envision electronics as being a good way to introduce visitors to such significant residents as mill owner Josiah Sampson, librarian Lucy Gibbons Morse, Congressman Charles L. Gifford, and Milton Crocker, who ran the "Coop" for half a century. People, after all, like to learn about people.

C. Homestead Preservation. Once the new restroom has been installed, we'll finally be able to complete the preservation of HSSC's centerpiece, the Dottridge Homestead, a modest 1½-story Cape built by one of Cotuit's first settlers and reflecting 19th-century life on Cape Cod. It's a project that's been under way since 2016. The space now occupied by the bathroom and a work closet will be restored to its original use as a pantry and buttry, places for food and beverage storage adjacent to the kitchen and keeping room. This would increase the homestead's authenticity as well as create an additional point of interest for educational opportunities.

This really does sounds like a worthy effort! How can I get involved?

The capital campaign associated with our Grand Plan to Expand will run through 2022, but the major construction should be completed in time for our 2023 season. Like the plan itself, the bottom line isn't especially grandiose: We estimate that the total cost of this project will be \$350,000. We anticipate some funding coming from grants, particularly for the completion of the Dottridge Preservation Project; and we plan to raise additional monies through special fundraising events.

However, there's no doubt we'll need considerable help from the historical society's loyal supporters – people like yourself who love Cotuit and appreciate the ways in which the village's history enriches life here today. We're trusting that you truly understand the importance of *Building a Future for Cotuit's Past*.

Project Budget

An estimated budget for the project breaks down as follows:

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| \$250,000 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Construction of a museum gallery to replace the Fire Museum, including a climate-controlled basement for collection storage and a second-floor space for the archives and administrative office. (This figure includes the demolition of the Fire Museum and renovations to unify the new gallery and existing Cotuit Museum). |
| \$40,000 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Creation of new and revitalized exhibits, including more interactive technology that will help museum visitors of today and tomorrow learn about the Cotuit of yesteryear. |
| \$50,000 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Installation of new restroom and a gift shop storage/workspace in the current Archive Room. (This figure includes water line relocation). |
| \$10,000 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Restoration of the pantry/buttery in the Dottridge Homestead. |

We hope you will consider supporting this campaign with a one-time donation. All donors who give \$1,000 or more will be recognized on a permanent plaque in the new gallery. But we welcome donations of any size and will certainly acknowledge them over the course of the capital campaign as opportunities allow.

Should you be considering a major gift, we're also very pleased to review naming opportunities associated with various aspects of the expansion project. We'd love to hear and discuss your ideas!

Thank you for considering how you'd like to join with us in making history in the way we preserve Cotuit's history. As always, we'll be ever so grateful for your support!

HSSC Campaign Committee

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[Donate today](#) **Any amount counts.** Thank you!