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Solebury Township Historical Society
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New Hope, PA 18938

Hello Robert McEwan,

Thank you for inviting me to visit you in the Solebury Township Historical Society's school house. It was a pleasure discussing the needs of the Historical Society as it grows into the space. I understand the challenges, especially for a non - profit organization, of making the building relevant and retrofitting it for our modern day, high tech society with as low an impact as possible. Following is a summary of some of my thoughts and observations this morning:

Upon entering, I was pleasantly surprised that the interior of the School House is basically unchanged with windows intact, the central stove is quite impressive and the black (green) board is a strong reminder of the intended use of that structure. After speaking with you about the organization of the various materials you need access to and the need for additional storage for books, periodical storage boxes, office supplies, maps etc, I had the strong sense that the scale of what you add to the space should be simple and low enough that the school house feeling is not overpowered. The height of the chalk board and the low school house desks at the front of the room set the scale and mood of the building. I mentioned making a few adjustments to the placement of file drawers, flat files and additional cabinet storage to open up the front corners of the room so that the entire perimeter of the room is visible from all angles. I think this will allow a visitor to appreciate the original feel and size of the School House.

During our walk through I suggested creating two "floating" banks of storage: As you enter, to your left, one double sided (back to back) bank of file drawers with end panels. This would allow you to remove the various smaller file drawers under the chalk board. By adding a top to this double bank of files, you would create a nice plateau for display and signage. The second "floating" bank would be to your right, in front of the small kitchenette and bathroom. The outward facing drawers (flat files and open shelves for the gray periodical boxes) could be organized at two different heights and in the back of this bank you would have additional storage for folding chairs, office supplies etc. The top of this bank, on two levels, would give you more display area and would also allow you to continue serving refreshments to your guests during your various events.

I also think you could add a new line of book cases under the windows on the right side of the room (mirroring the left side) which would give you a great deal of additional storage space for books and periodical boxes. I believe these types of additions would help preserve the proportions of the School House as it was back in the day.

Ultimately, there are other walls that could be built upon as we discussed.

Finally, I think I would discuss with your group how to keep the School House as uncluttered as possible which might mean having a clear understanding of how many donations (and of what nature) you would accept. Without having the use of a "staging" area, work room or storage area, one could easily fill the space making it look more like an antique store than a fine example of an original School House. I visited your website and it was so nicely written and clearly outlines what you have in terms of files of homes predating 1900, school records, and maps. Utilizing the two display areas I mentioned, I think you could maintain a beautiful and simple original piece of architecture which would allow you to adapt to the various events you have throughout the year.

I would be happy to meet with you and your group to further discuss planning ideas and aesthetic direction if that would be helpful.

Again, thank you for inviting me in. I'll now go and read about memberships!

Most Sincerely,

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