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September 18, 2026

Dear Commissioners,

I am unable to attend Tuesday evening's meeting, where I understand there will be a discussion of the town's options concerning the Robert Morris Inn, so I am submitting this letter, writing as an Oxford resident who lives two houses down from the historic property. Watching the property sit condemned and deteriorating has been difficult, both for what it means to the character of our town and, frankly, for what it means to property values on the Strand and throughout Oxford. I have spent the past several weeks digging into the Robert Morris Inn bankruptcy, reviewing the docket, researching applicable public and private funding programs, and thinking through what role our town can realistically play in seeing this building not only preserved but contributing to the economic and social fabric of Oxford. I wanted to share what I've learned and offer some thoughts on a path forward, because I think there's real work the town can do here that doesn't require money we don't have.

What Oxford should NOT do

I know some in the community have floated the idea of Oxford acquiring the Robert Morris property. I'd urge the Commission to resist this notion. Oxford has neither taxing nor bonding authority sufficient to fund a multi-million-dollar acquisition; more importantly, there is no taxpayer interest in acquiring and carrying the ongoing liability of a large, structurally troubled historic building. A vacant municipality-owned property doesn't become easier to fund or maintain than a privately-owned one, it just shifts the burden onto residents who have no realistic way to shoulder it. Moreover, such a move would close off access to tax-credit and public financing tools that leverage the capital of a private-sector buyer (see below).

What Oxford should do

Nearly every public financial resource available to support the renovation of the Robert Morris Inn would only flow to a private or nonprofit owner, not to a government entity. That means that Oxford's energy is best spent leaning into its natural authorities: regulatory cooperation and institutional advocacy, which come at essentially no cost to the general fund. Specifically, I'd ask the Commission to consider the following actions:

- **Adopt a resolution of support:** formally endorse the Inn's preservation, designate a single point of contact within the town government to coordinate all actions, commit to expedited Historic District Commission and zoning review for a qualified buyer, and pledge to issue letters of support for federal and state funding applications. This costs nothing and materially strengthens a buyer's or grant applicant's case.
- **Confirm (and renew if needed) Oxford's Sustainable Communities designation with Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD):** This is the threshold requirement for several of the funding programs below, and Oxford's own 2015

designation narrative already commits the Town to supporting rehabilitation of historic structures in the district.

- **Work with Talbot County on a historic property tax credit:** Maryland law allows both towns and counties to offer property tax credits to owners who restore a historic building like this one. Since Oxford residents' property tax bills include both a town portion and a county portion, I'd encourage Oxford to talk with Talbot County about jointly offering a credit to make the RMI property more attractive to a future buyer.
- **Prioritize public infrastructure spending to support the Robert Morris Inn:** Oxford owns and maintains its own streets, sidewalks, streetscape, stormwater drainage system, and water and wastewater utility. Continued investment in this infrastructure around the Inn, along with efficient permitting through Town Hall's single review process, would directly support the site's usability and value for a future owner.

To summarize, the town's job is to lower the cost of doing business in Oxford through regulatory speed, certainty, and its own local tools. A town the size of Oxford has few resources to acquire and manage a property like the Robert Morris Inn, nor do we have the ability to lower the cost of capital for a potential buyer. What the town can do is point a prospective buyer toward the public and private resources that do provide incentives for the buyer, and pledge to support all efforts to access those resources.

Options for a prospective buyer

Once the bankruptcy is resolved and the property can change hands, a serious buyer could assemble a diverse financing stack that in combination could potentially cover a third or more of restoration costs before a dollar of their own equity is at risk. I believe there is additional philanthropic money that could support the renovation, but that will require significant work to identify and cultivate such donors. However, here is a list of existing federal and state incentives that would apply to the Inn:

- **Federal Historic Preservation Tax Credit:** 20% of qualified rehabilitation costs, since the Inn is individually listed on the National Register.
- **Maryland Historic Revitalization Tax Credit:** an additional 20%, stackable with the federal credit, under the Competitive Commercial tier (up to several million dollars for a project this size).
- **USDA Rural Development Business & Industry Loan Guarantee:** federally guaranteed financing that dramatically de-risks a bank loan for exactly this kind of rural historic hospitality project; USDA has backed comparable historic inn rehabilitations elsewhere in the country.
- **Maryland Heritage Areas Program loans and grants:** Oxford sits within the "Stories of the Chesapeake" Heritage Area, which offers loans up to 50% of project cost.
- **Maryland Historical Trust capital grants and its low-interest loan program,** and Preservation Maryland's revolving loan fund.
- **DHCD's Neighborhood BusinessWorks loan program:** up to \$5 million in direct financing available to a private buyer of a property in a designated Sustainable Community.
- **C-PACE (Commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy) financing:** Talbot County has already opted into this state program administered by the Maryland Clean Energy Center (full

disclosure, I serve as the chair of the board of MCEC). The buyer could finance up to 100% of qualifying energy efficiency, HVAC, and resiliency upgrades, repaid as a long-term assessment on the property tax bill rather than a traditional loan.

How interested citizens can help

Finally, I believe there's a meaningful role for a citizen-led effort separate from, but complimentary to, the town's regulatory role. I understand there are residents willing to provide financial resources to support the redevelopment of the Robert Morris Inn. I would suggest the following actions, and would be willing to contribute to these efforts:

- **Create (or fiscally sponsor through an existing nonprofit) a 510(c)3 “Friends of the Robert Morris Inn” committee** that can accept tax-deductible donations, hold a future preservation easement, and be the eligible recipient for grants and legislative appropriations that can't go to a private for-profit owner. Initially the committee would engage in marketing activities described below; later, a c(3) organization could apply for grants that would directly support the renovation of the Inn.
- **Build a prospectus** for prospective buyers, including an honest condition assessment, a realistic financial model, and a clear summary of the financing stack above, so a serious buyer can see the possibilities.
- **Increase national visibility**, including a nomination to the National Trust's “America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places” list, and outreach to boutique hospitality networks and preservation-minded buyers who specifically seek out projects like this one. A note on the “America’s Most Endangered” list--the National Trust evaluates sites based on their historical significance, severity of the threat, the presence of an active local group fighting for the site, and the potential impact a national designation would have on saving the site. The existence of an active local group is crucial for this designation but would also carry weight in pursuing other support for the Robert Morris Inn.
- **Coordinating (not competing)** with the current listing broker and the bankruptcy trustee, so any interest generated flows into the actual sale process rather than around it.
- **Cultivate private donors** who have philanthropic funds to support the “Friends of the Robert Morris Inn” non-profit activities.

I'd welcome the chance to discuss this with the Commission directly, and I'm happy to bring together other residents with relevant skills (marketing, hospitality, finance, historic preservation) to get this moving. Oxford has a genuine chance to see the Robert Morris Inn restored as the asset it should be, without the town taking on a multi-million-dollar burden.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Karen Wayland