



ARLINGTON COUNTY, VIRGINIA

**County Board Agenda Item
Meeting of April 22, 2006**

DATE: April 11, 2006

SUBJECT: Acceptance of donation of a historic Lustron House currently located at 5201 12th St. S. in Columbia Forest and authorization for County staff to proceed with necessary actions to hire a contractor to disassemble the building and store it for reassembly by the County at a later date.

C. M. RECOMMENDATION (S):

1. Accept donation of a historic Lustron House located at 5201 12th St. S. in Columbia Forest in order to save it from demolition by the current owner.
2. Reallocate \$21,900 from General Fund General Contingency (001.713) to CPHD (001.624.64HP.0240) to pay for disassembly and storage costs.
3. Authorize County staff to proceed with hiring a contractor to disassemble the building and store it for future reassembly and reuse by the County.

ISSUE: None.

SUMMARY: Clifford M. Krowne, the owner of the subject property, first contacted County Historic Preservation Program staff in May 2005 to declare his intention to demolish the Lustron House, but would offer to postpone this work if the County was interested in the historic house and would have the building removed from his lot. Despite Dr. Krowne's appreciation of the historical and architectural value of the building, it does not meet his needs and he desires to redevelop the lot. Since spring 2005, County staff in DCPHD, DPRCR, and DES have been collaborating on a solution to preserve the house by relocating and creatively reusing it.

The actual preservation of the house will be a multi-phased endeavor, the first phase of which merely saves the building from demolition by disassembling it and temporarily placing all of its components in storage. Accomplishing this first phase not only allows the property owner to proceed with his redevelopment plans, but also allows County staff to continue planning for and executing the subsequent phases of the project at the County's pace and discretion.

County Manager: _____

County Attorney: _____

Staff: Cynthia Liccese-Torres, CPHD, Neighborhood Services Division

Upon final selection of the relocation site, a community process will be conducted prior to reassembly to inform the immediate neighborhood. At present, the preferred relocation site being considered is a County-owned right-of-way parcel located off Arlington Boulevard (US 50) in Arlington Heights between South Garfield and South Highland streets.

BACKGROUND: The Lustron house is a pre-fabricated, all-metal house created and developed in the post-World War II era. Only 2,680 Lustrons were built in the United States between 1948 and 1950. The design and manufacture of Lustrons aimed not just to satisfy an overwhelming and immediate need for affordable housing, but to raise the quality of living for middle-class Americans. Lustrons were ingenious not only in their materials, but also for their open floor plan, space-saving built-in cabinetry, and virtually maintenance-free and fireproof all-metal construction. Creator Carl Strandlund was inspired by the mass production efficiency of automobile factories and strived to use similar principles in Lustron production. Lustrons are significant as the only successful widespread use in history of porcelain enamel as an interior and exterior building material for single-family homes. This use of porcelain-enameled steel marked another milestone in 20th century attempts to use industrial materials for housing.

Because of their small size and unusual construction, Lustrons are at great risk for redevelopment and are becoming increasingly rare. This is especially true in Arlington, which originally boasted eleven and had the largest quantity in the Metropolitan Washington, D.C. region. Today, only six Lustrons survive in Arlington County. Of these, the Krowne Lustron House retains the highest level of architectural integrity and is worthy of preservation.

The Krowne Lustron House, built in 1949, is a Westchester Deluxe 02 model with two bedrooms, one bathroom, and 1,085 square feet of living space on one level. With the exception of the kitchen appliances, the home still retains all of its original interior and exterior features, including: the built-ins in the dining room, living room, and bedroom; the sliding pocket doors in the bedrooms and bathroom; all the tile flooring under the carpet; all the metal paneling and roofing; all the bathroom fixtures and Art Deco-styled bathtub; all the windows and doors; and the original Gas-o-matic furnace unit.

DISCUSSION: The current property owner, who has been patiently working with County staff since spring 2005, has stated that if the County is interested in preserving the house, then it must be disassembled (or at the very least substantially deconstructed) by May 1, 2006. With this deadline pending, the building must be in County ownership before the general contractor can be hired and before any disassembly work can begin. This project has the support of the Historical Affairs and Landmark Review Board (HALRB) as well as the Arlington Heritage Alliance, a private, non-profit Countywide historic preservation organization.

The Cultural Affairs Division of DPRCR is considering the possibility of using the building for cultural and arts programming, which may include such small-scale functions as outdoor Arts al Fresco music and other arts events, indoor chamber music, poetry readings, discussion groups, and small exhibitions. Long-term guests (visiting artists, Sister City interns, etc.) also could be housed there. To interpret the site to the public, interpretive signage, a promotional brochure, and public tours would be produced and conducted in coordination with Historic Preservation Program staff. However, prior to reassembly of the building, the County will explore and

evaluate other possible uses of this building consistent with then current needs and the requirements of the selected site.

Although not part of the requested County Board action at this time, the subsequent stages of the project will include: establishing utilities at the new site; laying a new concrete slab foundation; reassembling the building; installing new wiring, an HVAC system, and flooring; and refurbishing other interior components (e.g., installing smoke detectors, treating or replacing rusted panel components around the bathtub, repairing or replacing the gutters; and spot-treating as needed any exterior rusting). Prior to occupancy, new appliances will need to be installed and furniture added to equip the building for its new use.

It is recommended that the County Board accept the donation of the Krowne Lustron House and authorize County staff to proceed with hiring the contractor to disassemble and store the building. As plans for reassembly are finalized, the County reserves the right to not complete the subsequent phases of the project and not reassemble the building. In this scenario, the County may elect to sell the building components as a whole set or as individual parts.

FISCAL IMPACT: The hiring of the general contractor to disassemble the house and place it in a portable storage trailer will cost \$18,500. Rental of the storage unit, including associated delivery fees, for a six month period will cost \$3,400. This total expenditure of \$21,900 will preserve the building and allow the County sufficient time to continue planning for the reassembly and reuse of the building. The reallocation from the General Fund General Contingency will be sufficient for these costs.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Copy of donation letter from current owner Clifford M. Krowne to the Arlington County Board.
2. Photographs of the exterior and interior of 5201 12th St. S.
3. Historical information on Lustron houses.

County Manager: _____

County Attorney: _____

Staff: Cynthia Liccese-Torres, CPHD, Neighborhood Services Division