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Letter from President Tom Page to Membership Regarding Recent Membership Meeting on Disposition of Putnam House

Dear Danvers Historical Society Members,

On behalf of the Danvers Historical Society Board of Trustees, I am reaching out to update you on events surrounding the disposition of the General Israel Putnam Homestead at 431 Maple St (DAN.51; National Register Individual Property listed 4/30/1976).

As you are aware from recent outreach, the Society convened a meeting of the membership on Saturday, January 18, to discuss the de-accessioning (removal from the collection) and sale of the Putnam House. This meeting was the culmination of many months of due diligence by our Board and several special communications to the membership on the issue. Most importantly, this January meeting and vote followed the August 2019 membership action instructing our Trustees to pursue all appropriate options to finance upkeep of the architectural holdings. The Board and Staff feel a deep commitment to such important membership decisions, and have made every effort to invite members into the process concerning this matter.

The January meeting was very well attended and included detailed presentations by DHS Vice President David McKenna and a representative of the General Israel Putnam Homestead Trust (GIPHT), Eric Emerson, as the potential buyer. A key part of the afternoon discussion was the review of permanent preservation restrictions that will be placed on the deed, conveying the house with protections in perpetuity. The GIPHT also offered their vision for the long-term preservation of and future access potential to the Putnam House.

Following these presentations, several members approached the podium and spoke passionately about the motion before the Society. I was

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personally very pleased to see so many of our members eloquently advocating for their respective positions, and I was moved by the shared respect for a civil and participatory process.

With nearly 200 members present, a quorum of our membership was achieved and a call to accept the sale of the Putnam House, with preservation restrictions, to the GIPHT was offered. The motion to ratify the Board vote of December 19, 2019, to de-accession the Putnam House and enter into a contractual arrangement with the GIPHT was passed by a margin of 132 (yes) to 50 (no). As instructed by the vote of the membership, the Danvers Historical Society is working to complete the sale of the Putnam House to the Homestead Trust.

The Board of the Danvers Historical Society does not see the sale of the Putnam House as an ending, but rather a new opportunity to better preserve and share the legacy of this nationally recognized historic building. Many of you know the costs and special effort associated with caring for such priceless buildings. The Society had to face this same reality, adhering to our fiduciary responsibilities and weighing the needs of our entire building portfolio and historic collections.

Importantly, this membership vote will also help to draw to a close the legal dispute, which erupted between descendants of the Putnam family and the Society over the disposition of the house. We are pleased that this situation is now on a path to resolution. We look forward to the renewed potential for partnership with the Putnam and Emerson families about this distinctive Danvers treasure.

In closing, I want to thank again all those who attended the January meeting and participated in the deep consideration of the issues at hand. I welcome your thoughts on this matter and the recent vote, and look forward to seeing you at upcoming events of the Danvers Historical Society.

Sincerely,

Thomas M. Page
President