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DANVERS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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**Danvers Historical Society Membership Votes to Preserve Putnam House
through Sale to Descendant Trust for Adaptive Reuse**

Danvers, MA—The membership of the Danvers Historical Society voted to sell the historic Danvers structure known as the General Israel Putnam House of Maple Street, Danvers, to descendants of the Revolutionary War commander. The purchaser is the General Israel Putnam Homestead Trust (GIPHT), a Danvers-based organization.

“After years of discussion and evaluation, I am pleased that the Membership of the Danvers Historical Society has come together to do what is best for the Putnam House and for the long-term sustainability of the Society itself,” noted DHS President Thomas M. Page.

“This was a great outcome for historic preservation in the Town of Danvers,” Page added.

The sale of the property required a two-thirds majority vote of a quorum of the current membership, with the balloting taking place at the Senior Center on Stone Street. Nearly 200 members packed the Center’s common room on Saturday, January 18, to listen to illustrated presentations by Society Vice-President David McKenna and GIPHT representative Eric Emerson, who is a descendant of General Putnam. The vote was 132 to 50 in favor of the motion to convey the property to the GIPHT.

Lively discussion followed the presentations and included commentary by members of the Society, who debated the “yes” or “no” vote on the decision to sell the property to the Trust, which is also a 501(c)(3) nonprofit.

“It was a hard decision to come to. We had the best of intentions as a Society when we took on the property, but we came to a good resolution and that is to convey the house back to the descendants of the original owner. They have a plan to improve and maintain the house, preserve its character, and reconnect its legacy to the story of Danvers,” commented McKenna.

The sale of the Putnam House to the General Israel Putnam House Trust (GIPHT) will include several permanent preservation restrictions on the deed. These will require the preservation of an upstairs room known as the “Israel Putnam Birth Room,” the use of in-kind materials for repairs or replacements, the careful treatment of the exterior façade, and similar preservation measures.

Ultimately, the GIPHT would like to adaptively re-use the property, a preservation practice that encourages the updating of historic buildings to modern codes and functionality, while keeping as much as possible of the character and materials that represent a bygone era.

Eric Emerson, representative of the GIPHT, commented, “The Putnam family is happy to get his opportunity to ensure that the Homestead will be around for another 3 centuries. And, the Trust is looking forward to working with DHS and others who are passionate about Danvers history.”

The Emerson family has operated the Putnam Pantry on Route 1 in Danvers since 1951.

The Putnam House is a First Period home, dating to the 1640s, and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The home was owned by successive generations of the Putnam and Emerson families from this early period to the 1990s, when it was gifted to the Danvers Historical Society for preservation and interpretation within their architectural portfolio. The Society made several attempts to restore and reuse the Putnam House, but was unable to raise sufficient funds to undertake the work.

With the sale of the Putnam House to be completed in the near future, the DHS looks forward to continuing communication with the Trust as it works to expand its local audiences and history-connected programming within Danvers and surrounding towns.

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The General Israel Putnam House, Maple Street, Danvers, MA.
Courtesy photo: Danvers Historical Society.