
Restoration Exploration

Former Flowing Springs Restaurant building

4000 Pottstown Pike, Pottstown, PA 19475-9410

Prepared for Francis Pascal

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SCOPE

Chester County Home Inspections LLC was contracted to perform a preliminary assessment of this property. The objective of this exploration was restoration feasibility - to get a sense if the building can be restored cost-effectively to be used in its former capacity as restaurant.

This technical inspection focused on:

1. Primary – building structural integrity
2. Secondary – electrical, plumbing and mechanical systems
3. Cursory – building exterior, roofs, land

This document is the output of the investigation. It is the result of the cursory 4-hour inspection with the clarity of additional research, studying the pictures taken during the inspection, and thinking it over during the documentation process. Everything in this report is based on my knowledge and experience as a professional building inspector. A structural engineer should be consulted if certifiable results are needed.

FINDINGS

1) Origin and expansions

Public records indicate date of origin as 1880. Land use is Commercial, Retail, Restaurant. Building total is 6565 sq ft; restaurant is approximately 4800 sq ft. It last served as boarding house with the number of rooms unspecified, possibly 6.

Date code on the building facade indicates year established as 1925. Buildings constructed in this region in the 1880's used lime as the bonding material of the stone since cement was not yet used in small buildings at that time, even though it had already been invented. The use of Portland cement started about at the start of the 20th century. This building construction is stone and cement, not lime, thus suggesting that the 1925 building date is probably more likely than the 1880 established date.

Sections had been added on but the period is uncertain. It could be that the original “core building” was established earlier, and that it was re-pointed when the additional bar room was built in 1925. Re-pointing is the process of replacing the lime-based bonding material with cement, see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Repointing> for reference. Note that the pointing on the exterior has a decorative edge versus the inside where the surface is plain.

The bar room was not part of the original structure. This was evidenced by the roof line with cedar shakes that is visible inside the newer bar room.

An additional wing was added at the front of the building through the enclosure of the exterior patio. Another wing was added at the back of the building to extend the kitchen for restaurant equipment.

2) Building assessment

a) Foundation, floors and walls

Buildings in this region through the 1800’s were not built with foundation footers. The use of concrete footers for foundations started at the turn of the next century. We need to determine – for the sake of understanding the building foundation – whether these exterior walls were built upon footers. The scope of this inspection could not determine that. I speculate that we would find that the original core building had no footings, and that the newer bar room and other additions were built upon foundation footers.

The newer bar room is structurally sound with no discernable settling. This room does not carry the weight of floors above.

The original stone building had significant structural settling as evidenced by the flooring that is not level through all floors. As the foundation settles, so do the walls and roof structure that it supports. Wall settlement was evidenced by door and window frames that are out of square. It is important to note that the walls are mostly plumb (leaning walls indicate larger problems). This degree of settlement is not unusual for a building of this heritage.

Floors above the restaurant level had been haphazardly converted to rentable one-bedroom apartments. The workmanship for those conversions is poor and the work is incomplete.

b) Roofs and overhangs

The roofs were inspected by camera; this is a preliminary inspection only. All roofs appear structurally sound. The ridge line of the main building is sagging only slightly. Roof covering and most flashing appear adequate. Soffits and fascia were mostly intact though some wood rot was noted. This is in dire need of paint.

c) Building Exterior and Windows

The exterior of the enclosed patio needs updating. There was significant wood decay from lack of maintenance. Almost all of the large windows of the patio were broken. There was significant vegetation overgrowth against the walls - this retains moisture and accelerates decay.

The windows of the upper floors of the building were fair; a few windows panes were broken. If this were to be living space then I'd recommend that all these windows be upgraded for insulation value, however, if the rooms will be empty then the windows could be left. Some repairs are of course needed to exterior trim.

The paint on the building has failed. Peeling paint at the soffits appears to be from poor preparation before last paint application (it does not appear to be peeling from roof leaking).

d) Building Interior

The interior of the restaurant floor level was better than expected, beautiful floors and stone work. The newer bar room was outstanding. The large wood- or coal-burning fireplace appeared in good structural condition. It appears that it was last used as gas / propane heating. The large chimney appeared structurally sound and has spark screens. Its close proximity to trees outside though still makes this a fire risk if it will be used as a wood-burning fireplace – a larger distance to trees should be considered.

The number of bathrooms seemed inadequate for the amount of seating. The condition of the bathrooms were unsatisfactory but appeared that updates should be easy.

The upper floors were dismal.

e) Electric

The main service and distribution panels and the wiring appeared newer. I did not notice any cloth wiring which was used through the 1970's. I did not have time to open the panels, so further assessment will be necessary.

f) Plumbing

This was a cursory scan only. Water supply was copper. Drains consist of cast iron and PVC. This needs attention as there were leaks and lots of corrosion. Cast iron is below grade which can be problematic. We noted a sewer backup that washed through the kitchen – according to seller's representative, this had been resolved by Roto Rooter. Condition of septic needs thorough investigation for suitability and cost analysis.

g) Well

The well equipment is old. I activated the well pump manually – it raised the pressure to 70 PSI very rapidly, suggesting that the pump is strong. This is not definitive; a full well certification should be done. There was a singular sediment filter which is probably inadequate for the water

volume of a restaurant. There was also a disconnected ultra-violet water treatment system (for bacteria) which is unlikely to be effective.

h) Propane, gas, oil

There is an on-site propane tank; ownership and maintenance schedules should be researched. The tank is at an undesirable location – there is drainage problems between the tank and the building where grading will need to be done to address the standing water on the property. Relocation of the tank might be necessary.

i) Heating

There is a boiler that is very old but appeared functional. Heating the building is through radiators. I could not determine in this cursory period if the restaurant floors are serviced by this radiator also – if so, this boiler is likely to be inadequate.

j) Cooling

I noted commercial roof-top HVAC units with ducting that appeared suitable for the size of the restaurant. These HVAC systems were not evaluated.

k) Decks, patios, entrances

The concrete steps at the main entrance (left side of building) are suitable. Steps and ramps at the entrances on the right side of the building were inadequate.

The deck at the bar room would be in usable condition with minor repairs. The deck has a step-down to a landing area by the door. It seems that it would be difficult to keep this clean from leaves etc. Overall, the deck layout felt okay though a flat uniform deck would be preferable.

CONCERNS

1) Water penetration

The primary concern is the water penetration through the building. The “flowing springs” are interesting and could serve as a point of attraction; however, there was standing or running water in all corners of the basement. It appears soil around the building is water logged. This is detrimental to the building structure. The settlement that has occurred in the past century will continue unless this water issue is resolved or managed.

A cursory evaluation on the exterior revealed that the water management around the building is inadequate. This can be improved with grading, installing drain fields, swales, etc. It is essential that the water problems be resolvable to make this a suitable endeavor.

2) Posts, piers and footers

Some of the posts that support the building are improper, added at some point in time to try to offset building shifting. Those posts are not set on footers but resting directly on the basement floor.

Some posts were in standing water, many were wet and wood rot was noted at some posts. These posts are decaying as the wood softens and gives way. There is definitely effort that needs to be done to shore up the building structure.

3) Leveling

The steps and adjacent floors along the center of the building were leaning towards the middle of the building. Essentially it appears that the center of the building is weakest. This settlement and leaning is as expected – it is due to the issues with the posts and piers that are inadequate. This is fixable to a degree by jacking up the entire interior as the posts and piers are replaced. (Additional leveling, if desired, can be achieved by reconstructing floor supports.)

Note that floors closer to the perimeter were sloping in unison with the settlement of the building exterior walls. This is not fixable because the exterior walls cannot be lifted.

4) State of rooms over restaurant

These rooms are a mess. There were leaks from broken radiator pipes that destroyed ceilings and floors on one side of the building. Plumbing in general is dismal, leaks were noted and therefore mold behind walls is highly likely. The rooms reek of animal waste. Windows are broken. The original (= desirable) lath-and-plaster walls and ceilings were covered with drywall mud. Amateurish upgrade work made it worse.

5) Damage from past leaks

Concealed issues such as floor damage cannot be found without more access to rooms.

6) Insect damage

We noted carpenter bees damage at the exterior. We should be concerned with termites. This wet wooded lot is conducive to termites.

7) Sewer backup

Apparently the sewer backup was resolved but it did not appear that way.

RECOMMENDATIONS

If desire to proceed, then a comprehensive inspection will be needed in the following areas:

1) Structural

- a) Foundation footer
- b) Foundation walls
- c) Piers and footers
- d) Floor structure basement
- e) Floor structure main floor
- f) Floor structure second floor & attic

- g) Wall structure – framed walls (may require opening walls)
- 2) Roof structure and roof coverings
- 3) Electrical
 - a) Service entry, grounding, bonding
 - b) Main and subpanels, feeds to kitchen and bar areas (exclude circuitry for upstairs rooms)
- 4) Plumbing
 - a) Drains and waste stacks, ventilation
 - b) Water supply lines and fixtures
- 5) Heating and cooling assessment
 - a) Existing equipment, condition, status
 - b) Capacities, serviceability
- 6) Source of water penetration; remedy options
- 7) Restaurant appliances and fixtures
- 8) Sewer
- 9) Propane and related plumbing
- 10) Well Certification
- 11) Water quality

SUMMARY

The building has much potential. The restaurant portion could be serviceable quickly. The interior rooms could be shored-up over time if they won't be needed for the business. I believe those could be a restored to be suitable for leasing out as a bed-and-breakfast type establishment that runs alongside the restaurant business. It would be ideal to capitalize on the space rather than let it sit idle.

There will be significant cost to bring the building back to life. From my experience in property restoration, I estimate the exterior updates to cost in the region of \$100k (paint, windows, decks, entrances, grading, landscaping, and parking). Estimate \$30k to address the structure repairs (water issues, building supports), \$30k for plumbing and mechanical systems (bathrooms, boilers, heaters, pumps), and \$20k for restoring interior rooms. This rough order of magnitude estimate is upwards of \$150k for the restaurant portion, not including kitchen equipment.

I am available as your resource for further analysis as needed. Thank you for the opportunity to inspect this building. I love classic heritage and historic buildings like these and would love to see it brought back to full serviceability.



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