



Newton Falls USO Center Historic Structure Report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FEBRUARY 14, 2023

PERSPECTUS

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PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The Newton Falls USO, built in 1941, is approaching its 82nd year. At the peak of USO operations in 1944, there were 85 USOs in 38 Ohio Communities providing club services to off-post locations. There were a total of 3,035 USO clubs operated by the USO agency, community operations, and oversea agencies at that time. This building continuously provided service to the civil defense workers at the Ravenna Arsenal in World War II.

After the war, it was purchased by Newton Falls in 1947 and became the location for a community center until it closed due to municipal budget cuts in 2015. It hosted varied programming for many different organizations, from high school proms and recreation clubs to senior programs, to programs dedicated to the performing arts.

The Newton Falls USO Center was designed in the International Style of architecture. The complex arguably achieves a level of historic significance important to the State of Ohio, and was listed in the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A for contribution to the broad patterns of history. This structure is one of only four known original Type “A” USO buildings remaining in the United States. It is the only one of its kind surviving in the State of Ohio.

Perspectus and its consultants (“the Perspectus Team”) were contracted by Heritage Accord to produce a Historic Structure Report (HSR) for the Newton Falls USO. During the fall and winter of 2022, the Perspectus Team visited the site to assess existing conditions and to discuss with the property stewards the evolution of and continued care for the complex, as well as goals for the future.

During the Winter of 2022, the Perspectus Team created the Historic Structure Report narrative and graphics, and developed an Opinion of Probable Cost for the recommended work scope. Both Heritage Accord and the sponsoring Jeffris Foundation have reviewed the HSR and provided comments.

The purpose of an HSR is to provide a history of the property, to explain the evolution of the structure over time, to document the existing conditions of the structure, and to analyze the needs of the property stewards to inform recommended work scope with associated cost opinions. A completed HSR is a requirement of the Jeffris Foundation, as this funding entity must understand the property and its historic significance before supporting restoration/rehabilitation projects.

This Historic Structure Report is an optimal first phase for historic preservation efforts for significant buildings. It will construct for Heritage Accord a comprehensive documentation of the buildings and previous initiatives. The HSR will provide a valuable foundation for future programming, capital needs, maintenance planning, and new work recommended or planned. This reference document will assist in restoration and rehabilitation efforts for the 1941 International Style building. The Historic Structure Report can serve as the basis for proposing physical changes, and can support Heritage Accord’s mission to operate the facility in the most appropriate manner and assists in the evaluation of future improvements of the building. This work will once again provide Newton Falls with a gathering space for the community.

LOCATION AND PHYSICAL CONTEXT

The Newton Falls Community Center (Center) is part of the approximately 39-acre Newton Falls Community Park and located within the City of Newton Falls, a community of 4,915 residents, and Trumbull County, Ohio.

The building is located at 52 East Quarry Street on a 1.32 acre lot. The Center's main front-back axis is normal to the urban grid of Newton Falls itself and 21.24 degrees east of north.

The Center sits on the northeast corner of the site and 0.12 miles from a bend in the Mahoning River. The Center is rectangular in plan, with a one-story entrance and two story gabled section over the dance hall. The architecture of the Center may be described as a collection of rectilinear volumes grouped around a square-floor-plate Lobby. This Lobby serves as a foyer to the pitched high-ceiling Auditorium. The Auditorium's original ceiling is concealed by suspended acoustic panels.

SITE PLAN

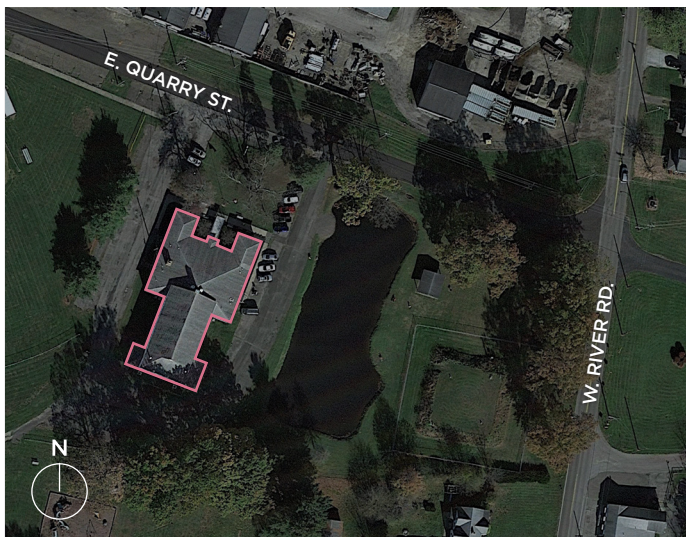


Image 3

The Center contains 10,974 square feet gross First-Floor area, of which 793 square feet is constructed above a basement, originally used as boiler rooms. The remainder of the building is suspended over a crawlspace.

DESCRIPTION

The building design configuration and substance was to create a mass-produced building constructed with readily-available materials frequently used with residential construction. The Center—then a Club—relied primarily on moderately-skilled, easy-to-hire carpenters for labor, with limited use of masons and plasterers. Standardized plans for the USO building program, including the Newton Falls USO Center, were designed by the New York architectural firm of Kahn and Jacobs. The Newton Falls USO Center was designed in the International Style of architecture. Charles Kissler, a local architect, produced the construction drawings for the Newton Falls USO.

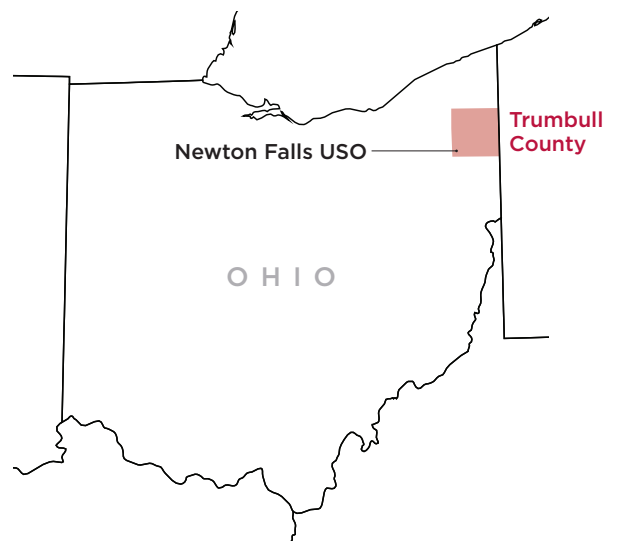


Image 4

The Center foundation is on 16-inch x eight-inch (nominal) concrete masonry unit blocks integrated with an interior standard modular common brick wythe by means of continuous header courses at 19-course vertical intervals. Foundation wall height, measured from Basement floor to the underside of First Floor joist bearing, is approximately nine feet, with two feet of foundation wall exposed to outside view and in the crawlspace over which the great majority of the structure is built. This crawlspace is accessible from the Basement and through a number of openings through the concrete masonry foundation wall. This design appeared to provide access to underfloor plumbing for First Floor fixtures.

The walls are framed in two-inch x four-inch (nominal) studs at indeterminate horizontal interval and sheathed in half-inch-thick plywood sheet or $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch (probable) wood tongue-and-groove plank (probable) to resist lateral shear forces. This sheathing is covered with 15-pound felt impregnated with bitumen. The builder then applied asbestos-cement shingles (ten-inch exposure) over the felt, cladding the wall with a durable, fire-resistant, and thin material. Chips and missing fragments now mark the shingle edges. It became more hazardous to remove and replace the cladding as the material deteriorated, even as the deterioration itself required the installation of new cladding. Instead of undertaking the demolition of the shingles, a renovation contractor encapsulated them under shiplap-profile vinyl siding.

The roofing is asphalt-fiberglass composition laminated shingles of approximately 200 pounds per roofing square and 12-inch x 36-inch modular dimension.

The 1940 builders almost certainly daylit and naturally ventilated the Center perimeter using mass-produced double-hung windows with essential components fabricated entirely from wood, products consistent with other contemporary military camps and with the design objectives noted above. There are only four different sizes of window installed in the Center, demonstrating simplicity and ease of upkeep. The majority of windows were replaced, probably as part of the overall envelope renovation when the vinyl siding was installed. Only two wood windows remain, with light-gauge, residential-quality metal double-hung products replacements. Interior Center doors were of single-panel type. Many such remain in place, with a few replaced by hollow-core flush units

The interior is notable for its use of durable modern finishes and a lack of gypsum plaster products, materials that would require a skilled craftsman to install and, as mentioned, run counter to the general design philosophy. Flooring at the Center is of three kinds: maple wood strip flooring, resilient tile, and wall-to-wall carpet. The wood strip flooring, used exclusively throughout the Auditorium and suited to dancing or sports play, is clearly original to the 1940 construction. Wall surfaces in the Auditorium that have been stripped of paint and other coatings show a rough, fabric-like appearance and suggest that these are fashioned from cellulose-based fiber wall board ("Homosote"), a dense compressed-paper material favored for its sound-proofing and reverberant qualities. This material is prized for spaces hosting concerts and speeches.

The original Center ceilings have been replaced with or, at least obscured by, a ubiquitous 24-inch by 48-inch suspended acoustic panel ceiling (fissured surface) using standard 15/16 metal track, with a white coating. This system extends even across the Auditorium where it flattens the 1940 hipped ceiling created by the underside of the sloped roof structure. The architectural value of the Center's Auditorium has been severely compromised by the use of this acoustic panel ceiling, which hides the room volume and the original exposed wood trusses.

REQUIREMENTS FOR WORK AND OVERALL TREATMENT APPROACH

The Newton Falls USO is in fair to poor condition, and with the intended return to a community space, the following treatment approach is recommended:

1. Uphold the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. The "Standards" are 10 common-sense preservation principles for treatment approach. The Standards include prioritizing compatible use; repairing rather than replacing deteriorated features; matching replacement features to the original; ensuring that new additions are reversible and treatments do not cause irreparable damage; and using the gentlest means possible for cleaning. Depending on funding type, upholding the Standards is a requirement and subject to review by the State Historic Preservation Office.
2. Follow the prerequisites of the jurisdiction: Ohio Building Code (OBC), including Chapter 34 Existing Buildings /Historic Structures; Trumbull County and Newton Falls Building and Zoning Department requirements.
3. Make improvements in order to comply with life safety codes, accessibility recommendations, and energy efficiency guidelines while referring to OBC's Chapter 34 Existing Buildings and Structures.
4. Regarding the main public interior spaces, maintain the historic integrity (defined by the National Park Service as including design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association).
5. Bring components into good working order or provide for planned upgrades for newer technologies.
6. Extend the usable life of the building components through planned upkeep ("Cyclical Maintenance and Capital Projects Plan").
7. Maintain a weather-tight structure.

RESTORATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Based upon the preliminary condition assessment Perspectus performed in fall 2022 and the stakeholder meetings, the following primary concerns should be addressed. This includes repairs to exterior elements to restore the building envelope; restoring the building fenestration, and replacing aging mechanical/electrical/plumbing systems. This restoration program has been divided into five projects, which could be separate projects but would be most cost effectively completed as one project with all trades on-site one time.

Project Priority + Description	Cost Opinion Range
1 Secure building exterior against weather, restore integrity of building envelope	\$947,900 - \$1,110,000
2 Secure building interior against weather conditions, restore integrity of building fenestration	\$218,000 - \$244,300
3 Rehabilitate building support systems and interior finishes.	\$2,045,000 - \$2,350,000
4 Expand accessibility for the disabled.	\$60,500 - \$72,600
5 Improve landscape setting, landscape equipment and pedestrian safety	\$71,600 - \$84,400

*Costs reflect 2023 dollars. See page 121 for full cost including: General conditions, insurances, contractor overhead and profit, escalate to midpoint of construction, contingency (design, estimating, bidding, and market conditions), permits, construction change order contingency, A/E fees.

MAINTENANCE AND TREATMENT PROVISIONS: CYCLICAL MAINTENANCE PLAN

Perspectus has provided a format to record completed work so the HSR can be a living document with amendments and supplements. The HSR can be used for further research and investigation, especially for interpretation of the structure based on historical and physical evidence.

Further, the Board should consider commissioning a formal Cyclical Maintenance Plan (CMP), as the Newton Falls USO will benefit from this. An active CMP will ensure regular monitoring of building conditions, making it easier to avoid future replacement of historic fabric by tracking repair and upkeep efforts. This plan can provide an established, accurate budget for anticipated annual maintenance efforts.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

The Newton Falls Community Center (Center), also known as the Newton Falls United Service Organization (USO) Center, was nominated in 2017 to the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A, whereby the “property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history” at the statewide level of significance. This structure is one of only four known original Type “A” USO buildings remaining in the United States. It is the only one of its kind surviving in the State of Ohio. It also was one of the first USOs designed for defense workers employed by the Ravenna Arsenal.

The period of significance was from the 1941 construction until the August 1947 transfer of building ownership from the Federal Works

Agency to the Village of Newton Falls. The Newton Falls USO Center is one of very few material manifestations of its kind left that captures an important period in American history, the beginning of World War II and the colossal war support effort on the home front.

Elevation to the National Register of Historic Places is not only an honorary designation, but also serves to protect the property from demolition funded by state and federal sources, along with providing access to private, state and federal funding or grants for historically designated properties.

CONCLUSION

The Historic Structure Report is often a prerequisite when applying for grants for building upkeep and restoration. The Heritage Accord Board of Directors is forward-thinking to seek to assemble a plan to rehabilitate the complex for future contribution to Newton Falls and USO history. This Historic Structure Report will serve as a reference and a guide to support the continued care efforts.

The narrative details historical research and physical architectural description, the graphics illustrate chronological development and preservation planning, and photographs and annotated elevations illuminate the condition assessment of a snapshot in time. Each element will aid in the decision making surrounding programming and treatment as suggested in the prioritized projects matrix, illustrated in the proposed concept plans, and narrated in the materials care section. The following pages reflect a true partnership between the property stewards, stakeholders, and the consulting preservation architecture firm. Perspectus is honored to participate in this activity.

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