

Stabilizing the Assembly Rooms

*One hundred fifty-five years standing.
The next hundred is the work in front of us.*

Annual Members' Meeting
Monday, 15 June 2026 · 6:30 pm
6090 Lawyers Hill Road, Elkridge MD



*The Assembly Rooms · Lawyers Hill Road ·
February 2026*

Why we're here

1870 — 1871.

Judge George Washington Dobbin gives his neighbors land to build a hall — a deliberate gesture to heal a community whose loyalties had been split by the Civil War. Plays, dances, picnics, and readings replace political argument. The Assembly Rooms opens in 1871 with a production of "The Rivals."

2025 — 2026.

Programming has grown: farm pop-ups, concerts, art exhibits, a poster collection, partnerships with Morningside Farm, Rockburn Land Trust, and the Howard County Tourism Center. We expect to host more than 1,000 visitors in 2026.

The building is tired.

A wood-frame, pier-and-beam structure 155 years old has been quietly losing its battle with moisture for a long time. The 2008 stabilization slowed the decay but did not stop it. Sills are rotted. The east deck is unsafe. The crawlspace drains into itself. A temporary steel jack is currently holding part of an interior corner.

Tonight.

We're asking the membership to back a one-time stabilization of the Assembly Rooms, funded by a Maryland Heritage Areas Authority grant matched dollar-for-dollar by us, so this building can host the next hundred years of community gathering.



What we are saving

The stage and barrel-vaulted ceiling, looking south into the assembly room.

Designed by Washington architect Robert Stead, who also lived two doors down on Lawyer's Hill. The original Assembly Rooms burned and was rebuilt to the same form. The interior is materially unaltered: rough heavy timbers, T-and-G boards, jib windows that still open to French doors on summer nights, the same proportions audiences saw in 1871.

Maryland Historical Trust calls the Assembly Rooms "of national significance" for its post-war healing purpose and recommends inclusion (with the broader Lawyer's Hill area) in the National Register Historic District — which was listed in 1993.

What lives below the floor we dance on

Documented by Fitzgerald's Heavy Timber Construction · Feb 2026



Rotted wood sills at the east entrance, interior. The white box is daylight where structure used to be.



Exterior west window at foundation level. Moss has colonized the lower three courses of cedar shingle.



Crawlspace under the south stage wall, looking north. Leaves and bare earth, no vapor barrier.



Interior west foundation corner. The two blue posts are temporary steel jack shores currently holding load.

Fitzgerald's diagnosis

Maryland-based timber-frame restoration firm, in business since 1992.

Wood sills	Selective removal; replace in white oak.
Stage framing (SE / SW)	Sister, block, or dutchman-splice.
Eastern deck	Reconstruct in historic proportions.
East stage door	Localized repair; mitigate moisture.
Site drainage (E / W)	Regrade; subsurface perimeter drain.
Gutters & downspouts	Reconnect to controlled discharge.
Shingle / flashing detail	Tighten transitions at openings.
North window shutter	Rehang; keep original hardware.

Root cause














Wood structural members bearing directly in soil and in moisture-prone conditions.

The 2008 stabilization addressed the urgent symptoms — failing girders, foundation movement, threatened occupancy — but did not separate the building's timber from the ground it sits on. Moisture has continued to wick into sill plates and lower wall assemblies ever since.

This project breaks the cycle: lift vulnerable timber out of contact with soil, give it a defined foundation, move water away from the building.

The scope, in order of cost

Each row is grant + match. Bar length is total project cost.

<i>Trade</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Project total</i>	<i>Relative cost</i>
Framing	Repair sills and stage framing	\$33,428	
Rigging	Support load-bearing walls during work	\$19,605	
Cladding	T&G boards, cedar shingles at repair points	\$16,074	
Concrete	Footers for south wall and deck piers	\$10,280	
Demolition	Selective removal: walls, shingles, concrete	\$9,882	
Site	Trenching, grading, subsurface drainage	\$8,985	
Electric	100A → 200A · heater circuits · 4 heaters	\$8,719	
Mobilization	Staging, haul-in, tear-down	\$7,554	
Masonry	Block foundation and pier construction	\$6,990	
Doors	Remove, install new sills, reinstall (3)	\$3,303	
Paint	Touch up: doors, window, shutters	\$3,196	
Milling	Rough-sawn boards and timbers	\$3,122	
Gutters	Reconnect to drainage improvements	\$1,215	
Windows	Rehang one pair of shutters	\$1,167	
All trades		\$133,520	<i>+ \$3,356 in-kind volunteer time</i>

The money

\$68,437

Grant request

\$68,437

Match (1:1 required, dollar-for-dollar)

\$136,874

Total project cost

Where the match comes from

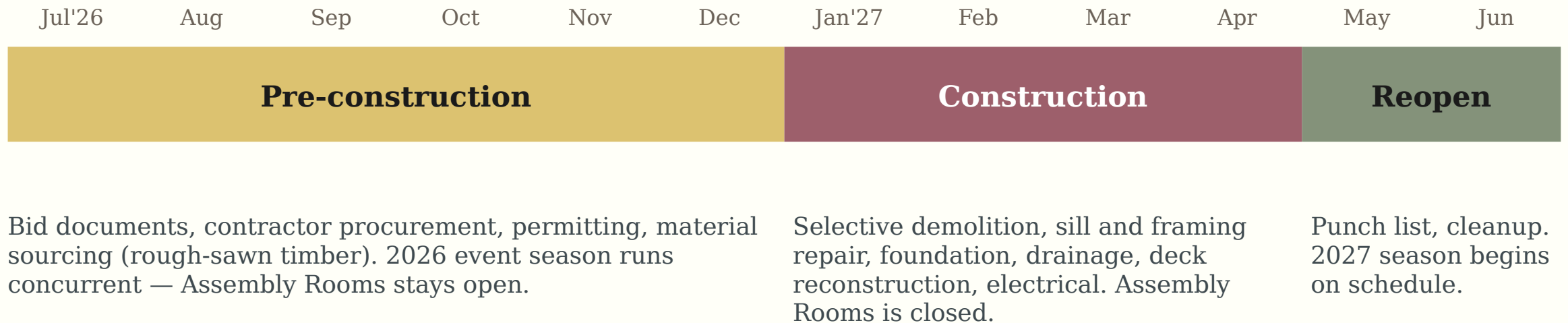


Existing reserves — \$21,027 Contractor contributions — \$21,027 New fundraising — \$21,027 Donated materials — \$2,000 Volunteer time — \$3,356

The organization has enough in cash reserves to cover the full match if needed. The intent is to spread it: about one-third reserves, one-third contractor charitable contributions, one-third new community fundraising.

When the work happens

Off-season construction. The Assembly Rooms stays open for the 2026 program calendar and reopens for 2027.



The 2027 calendar (May–Nov: Farm Pop-Ups, concerts, art exhibits, July 4th picnic, Annual Meeting) will run on schedule.

The people on this

All board roles volunteer; outside contractors selected for preservation experience.

Board project team

Debra Roth

President · Project Manager

25+ yrs program management; contractor coordination.

Dustin Thacker, Assoc. AIA

Volunteer Architect

Architect and structural consultant; former HoCo HPC.

Nessly Craig, Ph.D.

Project Advisor

Retired UMBC Biological Sciences professor.

Burnet Chalmers

Project Advisor

Retired President, The Milby Company.

Wendy Ng

Board (former Treasurer)

Bowstring Art Studios; Howard Co. Arts Council.

Contractors & consultants

Fitzgerald's Heavy Timber Construction

Structural assessment & scope

Thurmont, MD; in business since 1992. Traditional joinery, heavy timber systems, preservation-sensitive repair. Authored the 19-photo conditions assessment.

JEM Electrical Co.

Electrical scope

Woodbine, MD. 100A → 200A service, dedicated heating circuits, 4 Bromic infrared heaters.

Secretary of the Interior

Standards of compliance

All work performed under the Secretary's Standards for Rehabilitation, reviewed under MHAA grant terms.

What happens if we wait



Crawlspace pier — patched. A 19th-century brick pier reinforced with concrete block. The kind of fix that has gotten the Assembly Rooms this far, but isn't the long-term answer.

Elkridge Assembly Rooms · Annual Meeting · 15 June 2026

Decay accelerates. Wood members bearing on damp soil lose strength faster every winter. The east deck is already past safe public use.

Repair costs compound. Piecemeal repairs cost more in total than a single, root-cause stabilization. The 2008 work is proof — it stopped the immediate crisis but did not solve it.

Programming gets disrupted. We now host events that draw 200 people. An emergency shutdown would cancel a season and cost momentum we've spent two years building.

The historic district suffers. The Assembly Rooms is a contributing resource in the National Register Lawyers Hill Historic District. Loss or deterioration of one contributor weakens the district's integrity for everyone.

How members can help

Give

We need to raise about \$22,000 in new community gifts to cover one-third of the match.

- Venmo:
@Elkridge_Assembly_Rooms
- PayPal Giving Fund (link on the website)
- Membership: \$25 individual · \$50 family
- Larger gifts — talk to Debra or any board member tonight

Volunteer

Board valued at \$35.53/hr per state nonprofit rate. Every committee hour is real match dollars.

- Fundraising committee
- Document archiving
- Event planning & hosting
- Landscaping & grounds
- Construction-period site monitoring (Dec '26 – Apr '27)

Show up

Bringing one new person to an Assembly Rooms event is the single highest-leverage thing you can do.

- Annual Meeting · tonight
- Farm & Coffee Pop-Ups · 2026 season
- Concerts incl. Ronn McFarlane
- Art exhibits incl. The Birds & The Bees (Alicia Thacker)
- July 4th Picnic · hayride, lawn games

The background image shows the interior of a historic wooden building, likely a saloon or assembly room. It features a long wooden bar with a white table in front of it. The walls are dark wood, and there are several framed posters or signs on the wall, including one that says "THE TIMES BEAR" and another that says "MOUNTAIN MADNESS". The floor is made of dark wood. The text is overlaid on this image.

Built to heal.
Standing 155 years.
Yours to keep standing.

Thank you.

elkridgeassemblyrooms.org · @Elkridge_Assembly_Rooms