

# **National Speleological Society**

## **Headquarters and Conference Center**

### **Draft Master Plan (V 1.0)**

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## **Introduction**

This master plan is intended to outline the next phase of development/use of the National Speleological Society Headquarters located in Huntsville, Alabama. Currently, the facility is used as administrative offices and library space. Part of the intent of purchasing the building included the ability to create space for a museum, conference rooms, and educational programs.

The National Speleological Society acquired the new NSS Headquarters and Conference Center in 2010 for an initial purchase price of \$1,600,000 from the Cahaba Shriners. Additional funds were borrowed to upgrade and to renovate the facility for use by the NSS with a total funding amount of \$2,600,000. During this time, the NSS has refurbished and moved the administrative offices from the Cave Avenue location into the new building, moved the NSS Library into a much-expanded space allowing for easier organizing and cataloging of materials, and moved our bookstore to a much better shipping and receiving facility. There has been one NSS Convention held on the grounds.

The ballroom and grounds have been used to generate rental income to help offset the operational expenses for the building. Outbuildings are used to store books and work materials, lawn maintenance equipment and also for storage of cave rescue equipment by the Huntsville Cave Rescue Team.

Funding for the purchase was acquired from internal funds, a commercial loan, and member donations. Initially, the NSS secured a 15-year commercial loan with a five-year balloon payment (common terms for commercial loans). At the end of our five-year refinance period, we had paid down the principal owed and refinanced the remaining principal borrowing from our Life Member Fund - managed for the NSS by the National Speleological Foundation. Thereby, borrowing the funds from society and obtaining favorable interest rates and a slightly better return for the Life Member Fund. As of February 2019, the NSS owes \$179,412 with a projected loan repayment date of May 2022. The monthly mortgage payment is \$4,952. Currently, Team 404 fundraising, along with additional donations, is meeting the monthly mortgage payments. In addition, we have obtained a very generous donation of approximately \$388,000 for use in creation of a museum and education program at the Huntsville Headquarters.

### **Property Description**

The NSS Headquarters and Conference Center is located at 6001 Pulaski Pike, on the northwest side of Huntsville, Alabama. The property is rectangular in shape and is approximately 95 acres in size. The Headquarters is located approximately three miles north of the former NSS Office and Shelta Cave Preserve located at the intersection of Cave Avenue and Pulaski Pike. The eastern third (30 acres) of the property contains the Headquarters and numerous outbuildings including storage sheds, bandstand, outdoor restrooms, pavilion, and food serving area, campground, and parking lot. Most site activities are associated with this portion of the property.

The western portion of the property is hilly and has been left as a wild scape. The western portion of the property (65 acres) contains three small caves and will be managed as a William J. Stephenson Nature Preserve. The area is wooded and contains numerous large trees as well as thick undergrowth in places.

### **Campground and Outdoor Facilities**

The eastern quarter of the property, east of the Headquarters building is a gently rolling property that includes a pavilion, bandstand, restrooms, and campground with approximately 25 electric hook ups. The pavilion and bandstand are in good shape, having had a new roof installed. However, the restrooms and kitchen prep area are in need of an upgrade. The electric service in the campground is in a poor state of repair and needs to be upgraded or replaced. The campground and outdoor facilities have been utilized for meetings, family reunions, scout groups, as well as camping areas for cavers visiting the area. There is a lawn tractor stored in one of the outbuildings used for lawn maintenance. The trees in the campground are generally in good shape and provide shade for camping. The area along Pulaski Pike includes our sign and a

flagpole which will include an area for commemorative bricks. A chain link fence separates Pulaski Pike from the property and extends along the northern and eastern boundaries.

## **Headquarters and Conference Center**

The Headquarters and Conference Center is composed of an entrance foyer (Roger J. Sperka Educational Hall) (A100), administrative offices (B100), bookstore (B017), shipping and receiving area (B018), restroom facilities in the foyer (A101 and A102), food preparation area (A105), RASS Auditorium (ballroom) with stage (A104), Russell and Jeanne Gurnee Memorial Library (Library) (C103), and five meeting rooms and restrooms located on the west side of the building (D100 to D108) (Figure 1). A hallway connects our business areas with the ballroom, library, bookstore, shipping and receiving, and five meeting rooms - commonly referred to as the "back five." Attached is a map with each room numbered for reference.

The five meeting rooms have been used for staging of materials during renovation of the building, as well as a meeting site for volunteer coordination, sleeping rooms during work weekends, the Huntsville Grotto monthly meetings and Huntsville Cave Rescue Team.

The Executive Team, Fundraising Committee, and building and grounds management team have discussed the use of the foyer, hallway, and meeting rooms located in the building. This area will compose the core of our museum, conference center, and education program.

The foyer is located in the front of the building (east side) (A100), closest to the parking lot, and is the main entrance into the building. This area is the focus of the Speleo Arts Initiative and is used to display photographs and art work. Restrooms (A101 and A102) are accessible on the north side of the foyer and were renovated in December 2018.

Entrance to our administrative offices is through a door on the south side of our foyer. The administrative offices (B100) are composed of an office and work cubicles, conference room (B101), and hallway (B106) connecting the offices to the bookstore (B0107), library C103), storm shelter and archives storage (C101), and five meeting rooms (D100-D108). There are also office restrooms (B103-B104) accessible from the south side of the hall.

The RASS Auditorium (Ballroom) (A104) is accessible through double doors located on the west side of the entrance foyer. The Ballroom includes a stage with curtains, disco ball, food prep/warming room (A105), and storage closet for tables and chairs (A108). The ceiling tiles in the Ballroom have gone through extensive cleaning to remove accumulated smoke and grease from years of use. On the northwest side of the Ballroom is a small restroom with two showers, and storage area. This small restroom area is being considered as a prep/dressing room for parties and needs renovation. On the southwest side of the ballroom is a storage area for our AV Library.

The "Back Five" meeting rooms are located on the west end of the building. They were used by the Shriners as their divisional meeting rooms. Some of them contain modest kitchen facilities. The meeting rooms are labelled as follows (see figure 2).

**Northeast meeting room (D100)** – currently used by the Huntsville Grotto for monthly meetings.

**Northwest meeting room (D103)** – storage of office equipment and staging area.

**Back Restrooms (D106 and D017)** – Located near the western exit doors. Composed of men’s and women’s rooms with limited stall space. This area backs up to the rear (south) wall of the mechanical room. This room is more commonly referred to as the “Paint Room.” The Paint Room is accessible through exterior doors. This area also contains electrical service panels.

**Southeast meeting room (D101)** – currently being used for archive storage.

**Southcentral meeting room (D104)** – used for storage of building materials. This room includes a partial cinder block divider.

**Southwest meeting room (D108)** – smaller meeting room with kitchen, refrigerator, table, etc. Used for volunteer coordination and planning.

### **Next Steps for the NSS Headquarters and Conference Center**

The initial development of the site after the 2010 purchase was directed to house our administrative activities and library. The administrative offices were modernized and facilities to house our bookstore, proforma shipping and receiving and organizing our library were created. However, this initial development did not include the creation of a fully functioning meeting/conference center.

This draft master plan was produced to guide the next phase in development of the Headquarters and Conference Center. It was prepared after consultation with many of the past and current NSS Directors, Officers, and members. When the purchase of the new Headquarters facility was presented to the membership, the size of the facility was sufficient to house all of our administrative functions with ample room to provide additional member services. The Ballroom and meeting rooms were identified as areas that could also be used to generate rental income to help offset overhead costs, provide a member service for educational, conference and meeting rooms, and to house and present our sizable collection of caving memorabilia.

### **Identification of areas for Development**

#### **Roger J. Sperka Educational Hall (A100)**

The renovation of the Roger J. Sperka Educational Hall (entrance foyer) has been completed with modern lighting, repair of walls, and a museum-quality track system for hanging art work. There is a television screen in the foyer that can be used to scroll announcements and information for our members and the general public. The walls of the foyer will be used to display art work from the membership. The Speleo Arts program was initiated in January 2018 to place artwork in the building with an emphasis in the foyer area and hallway. The hallway and foyer area will also house display cases for the NSS’s museum collection to showcase the history

of the society. Funds from the Museum and Education Grant have been used to purchase display cases and as seed money to support our Speleo Arts project. The foyer does need to update the lighting system to LED's to save energy and to minimize impact on displayed artwork.

### **Sperka Hall Restrooms (A101 and A102)**

Remodeling of the Sperka Hall restrooms started in November 2017 and was completed in early December 2018. Progress was difficult as the NSS has worked through city permits and contractor issues. The restrooms were in dire need of upgrading from "early 1960s truck stop" motif to modern ADA-compliant facilities. Funding for this project was allocated from the Roger Sperka Estate and from our Museum and Education Grant. The cost of the final upgrade to the restroom was total cost of this project was approximately \$80,000.

### **Administrative Offices (B100)**

The administrative offices were renovated soon after the purchase of the property from the Shriners. They are now clean and modern and very presentable to the public. The administrative space includes an office area, four cubicles, conference room (B101), restrooms for staff (B103 and B104), storm shelter and archives area (C014), bookstore display area (B107), and shipping and receiving area (B108).

The administrative areas are basically complete with some minor areas that need to be finished including the conference room door and countertops.

### **Russell and Jeanne Gurnee Memorial Library (C103)**

The space housing the library is almost triple the space that was available at the Cave Avenue office and includes a state-of-the-art rolling shelf system, new carpeting, hall windows, desks and work areas. Our collection is now being organized and cataloged and is accessible to the members and public. The library is considered one of the major assets of the NSS and is the largest speleological library in North America and one of the largest in the world.

### **RASS Auditorium (Ballroom) (A104)**

RASS Auditorium includes a stage and a floor area of 10,000 square feet. It is one of the largest ballrooms in the Huntsville area with an unobstructed area. The RASS Auditorium continues to be rented for family reunions, weddings, public meetings, various shows, and even housed the Huntsville Roller Derby for many years. A sound-dampening door was installed to help minimize noise emanating from the building. The room is complete with an ever-popular disco ball. The RASS Auditorium underwent extensive cleaning and painting after NSS acquisition. In particular, the ceiling tiles had years of accumulated smoke and grease. These were removed, thoroughly washed and reinstalled over multiple work weekends. The auditorium is also the primary venue for the increasingly popular NSS Bat Ball, held over the New Year's holiday. The auditorium contains a food prep/warming room (A105) which includes shelves, stove, refrigerator, freezer, and exterior doorway. The food prep area needs a large warming oven and an electrical upgrade. A funding source had not been identified for the Food Prep area needs.

## **Museum and Educational Center (D100 to D108)**

The “Back Five” rooms were identified for the development of our museum, conference center and educational programs. All rooms are accessible through a central hallway, but each room also has an exterior door.

An analysis of available meeting room space in Huntsville indicated a need for conference and meeting space that can be used by corporations and the public and potentially is a substantial income generator. In addition, the rooms can be used for an expanded membership and public education and outreach program. Currently, the rooms are used for storage of materials from the initial HQ remodel and one room is used as the meeting room for the local grotto (Huntsville).

The Back Five rooms offer an opportunity to expand the services we offer our members through an educational and museum offering and also offset expenses at the HQ.

For use as corporate and educational meeting rooms, there are substantial upgrades that are needed for each room including replacement of electrical heating and cooling systems with more efficient gas systems, Wi-Fi, video screens, video conferencing, conference telephones, conference speakers, projector systems and screens, white boards, kitchenettes, comfortable desks and chairs, and storage space as indicated in the attached floorplans.

The following three rooms will form the core of the conference center.

Northeast meeting room (D100)

Northwest meeting room (D103)

Southwest meeting room (D108)

Restrooms (D016 and D107)

The **Northeast (D100) and Northwest (D013) meeting rooms** have exterior access along the northern roadway. The wall between the Northeast and Northwest meeting rooms will be removed and a movable partition will be placed between the two rooms, so they can be combined to make one large room.

The **Southwest** meeting room (**D108**) has exterior access to a large deck. This is the smallest of the three southern rooms, contains a small kitchenette and built in display cabinets and closet. This room is across from the Back Five restrooms.

Beyond the core rooms are the Southeast and the Southcentral meeting rooms.

The **Southeast room (D101)** will house the NSS museum collection and can be used for educational outreach and used to display our extensive collection. This room is currently used to store the NSS archive material as it is sorted and cataloged.

The **Southcentral room (D104)** contains a cinder block partition and small kitchenette. This area will be ideal to create a research station and bunk room for visiting scholars. It should include an updated kitchen system, Wi-Fi, video system, tables and chairs, and laundry facilities.

However, it can also be connected to the Southeast meeting room by removing a wall and adding a movable partition.

The **Back Restrooms (D106 and D107)** are in need of upgrading and modernization. The back walls of both the men's and women's restroom can be removed, and the facilities expanded to include a shower system that is accessible to the north exterior wall. An expanded restroom facility will enhance the use of the conference/meeting rooms and also provide a much-needed resource for visiting cavers.

### **Western Parking Lot**

Membership has identified the need for a tower that can be used for climbing instruction as well as cave and high angle rescue practice. Providing access to the tower will provide training opportunities for cavers, fire and police departments. The tower should accommodate rappelling and SRT use. Funding for a climbing tower would be pursued through the Museum and Education Grant and other funding sources.

## **Renovation Priorities and Proposed Phases**

**(See Detailed Attachment – NSS Headquarters Phase 1-8 Scope of Work)**

### **Phase 1. System Wide Upgrade -**

This is a building wide effort that will involve more than one room. They include upgrading of HVAC systems in the Back Five meeting rooms and upgrade of Audio-Visual systems in each meeting room.

### **Phase 2. Bunkroom, Restrooms, and Climbing Tower –**

The renovation and expansion of the back-restroom area (D106 and D107) will help to support our conference and education center. The restrooms will also have exterior access for campers and our membership. Currently, there is very limited access to shower facilities on the property. The Paint Room will be eliminated, and materials stored in this area will be moved to other storage areas/buildings.

The Southwest meeting room (D108) will be renovated into a bunk room for visiting scholars, educational instructors, interns, accommodations for visiting officers, research station, and for use by sections, committees and grottos when overnight accommodations are needed.

A climbing tower is proposed for the western parking lot and will be used for vertical training, cave rescue training, etc.

### **Phase 3. Create Large Meeting Room -**

The Northeast (D100) and Northwest (D103) conference rooms (Sahara and Grotto meeting room) have been identified for upgrades and renovation. This will include removal of the dividing wall, installation of a moveable partition, installation of

desks/tables, chairs, video screens, conference phones, projection and sound equipment, white boards, storage cabinets, and kitchenette.

#### **Phase 4. Create Museum Room -**

Southeast meeting room (D101) is currently being used for storage and staging of our archive and other library material. The purchase of display cabinets for the Hallway at the administrative area will allow us to display some of our materials while this room is waiting renovation. The room will house caving artefacts and memorabilia.

#### **Phase 5. Upgrade Remaining Meeting Room -**

Southcentral meeting room (D104) is currently being used for storage and staging of various building and demolition materials leftover during the initial building renovation. These materials should be removed for storage to some of our out buildings as they do not require climate-controlled conditions. This room may be renovated to become another classroom/meeting room or can be used for storage of books and other materials that require climate control.

#### **Phase 6. Dressing Room -**

The room located north of the stage (A111) contains two toilets, shower, sink, and hot water heater. This area will be upgraded to create a more private area for shower and restrooms and may be used as a dressing and prep room to support activities in the RASS Auditorium.

#### **Phase 7. Kitchen -**

Additional upgrades may be necessary to transform the food prep area (A105) to be more serviceable for catering services supporting activities in the RASS Auditorium. This would include upgrades to most appliances, addition of stoves, cold and hot storage areas, etc.

#### **Phase 8. Foyer and RASS Auditorium (Ballroom) -**

The Sperka Entrance Hall (foyer) (A100) will require upgrading of lighting fixtures, walls and ceiling paint, installation of display cabinets, and upgrading of doors. The auditorium will require painting of walls and sound dampening.

#### **Additional Areas of Consideration -**

**Upgrade of Campground Electrical System** - The campground electrical system is in need of an upgrade to provide service to campers and renters.

**Renovation of Pavilion Restrooms** -The pavilion restrooms are in need of upgrade and moderation. The renovations may include showers for campground use.



**Replacement and upgrade of Pulaski Pike Fence** -The fence along Pulaski Pike, fronting our property has been damaged by numerous cars and is difficult to maintain. The fence should be replaced with a series of bollards (posts) that would stop cars and trucks from damaging the fence and the fence should be upgraded to a decorative and secure wrought iron fencing system. This would provide more security and provide curb appeal for potential renters.

## **Schedule**

The draft Master Plan is submitted to the Board of Directors for consideration and discussion at the March 23, 2019 BOG meeting. Upon approval, the BOG comments will be incorporated in the draft Master Plan and then released to the membership for comment.

Time line for implementation of the Draft Master Plan.

March 23, 2019	NSS Board of Governors Meeting (Draft Master Plan reviewed)
April 1, 2019	Comments from NSS Board of Directors incorporated
April 30, 2019	Renovation estimates completed for first four phases of work Document released to NSS members for comment
May 15, 2019	Membership comments completed
June 1, 2019	Final Master Plan is completed for NSS Board Meeting
June 17 <sup>th</sup>	NSS Convention Board Meeting and vote to implement plan

## **Funding Sources**

Funding sources to support renovations and upgrades identified in the Master Plan will need to be derived from a number of sources. This will include corporate and member grants, member fundraising, facility rental, etc. The Beach Grant was donated to support our museum and educational programs and Mrs. Beach encouraged the funds to be used to upgrade the western rooms into an educational and museum center. The board will need to decide the priorities and funding sources to implement the Master Plan