

Task Force to Study Loring House

During his address to the 203rd convention of the Diocese of Maine, Bishop Brown asked for a group to study the best and highest use for Loring House, 143 State Street, Portland, the diocesan offices and a former episcopal residence for 5 bishops.

What is Loring House?

A beautiful, and beautifully restored, former 3-story mansion that is now the diocesan offices. Loring House is connected by a cloister to the cathedral's chapel, and between Loring House and the cathedral is the Bishop's Garden, a burial ground. Loring House is also the site of the diocesan archives. There is no dedicated parking for Loring House, nor is it accessible for persons with disabilities.

Purpose—to consider several questions related to Loring House:

- What is the highest and best use of the Loring House building vis a vis the mission and ministry of the Diocese of Maine?
- What facilities do the bishop and staff need to work most effectively on behalf of the Diocese?
- If a physical office is needed, where would it be most helpful for it to be located, and what should it include?
- Considering the highest and best use of Loring House, and the needs of the bishop and staff on behalf of the diocese, should Loring House continue to serve as the Bishop's Office?
 - If so, are there changes that should be made (e.g., accessibility)?
 - If not, what does the committee recommend for (a) disposition of Loring House, and (b) facilities for bishop and staff?

Information to gather, surveys to send, and assessments to make:

1. **Diocesan needs**—What does the diocesan community (clergy and congregations) need and desire for the diocesan staff to serve them? Here, a diocesan-wide survey might be an effective tool to assess this question, as well to get perspective about what people throughout Maine think about Loring House and its future.

2. **Diocesan staff needs**—What does each member of the diocesan staff and any paid consultants need and desire to carry out their responsibilities?
3. **Cathedral needs**—What does the staff of St. Luke's Cathedral need to carry out their responsibilities? In addition to the cathedral staff's perspective, what else does the cathedral need for physical space to carry out God's mission?
4. **Repurpose for income**—Could Loring House be used (and refurbished) as an income-producing asset? Examples might include converting Loring House into market-rate and/or affordable housing, renting it to non-profits and for-profit organizations for office space. re-purposed.
5. **Sell**—What are the financial and non-financial advantages and disadvantages, and possibilities and restrictions, to selling Loring House?

Scope—what are the initial action steps?

1. Appoint people to the task force: a member of the Standing Committee, a member of the diocesan council, a member of the cathedral church of St. Luke, a trustee of diocesan funds, a commercial real estate professional familiar with the Portland market, and up to three others from the Diocese of Maine. These appointments will be made by the bishop and the chair of the task force.
2. Gather the task force and create action plan—including interviewing and/or surveying stake holders (e.g., diocesan staff, cathedral staff and vestry, neighbors)
3. Consult with Canon Terry Reimer, or other designated staff persons or diocesan leaders for information and support.
4. Provide updates to bishop and governing bodies (standing committee, diocesan council, and trustees of diocesan funds) with reasonable frequency.

Deliverable—what is the task force's objective?

1. Produce a report and a recommendation no later than diocesan convention in 2023.

Resources—what will help the task force?

- History and background. The diocesan archives and diocesan staff could be resources for information, including data from other dioceses who have made similar decisions to sell, re-purpose, or maintain office buildings like Loring House.
- The Diocese of Maine consults with a real estate attorney, Robert Danielson, who may be a resource for the task force; Canon Reimer can say more about this potential resource.
- Administrative and communications support. The Canons for Administration and Communication, as well as the bishop himself, can provide reasonable support and help for the task force to accomplish its work and to communicate updates to the diocesan community.
- Budget. To be determined; not non-existent, but by no means unlimited.

Constraints—what might limit the task force?

- City of Portland Historic Preservation Board, although the extent of this as a constraint is not clear.
- The history and symbolism associated with the building—it has been a bishop's residence or diocesan offices for over 100 years—has cultural and spiritual weight. This may exacerbate a natural human tendency to resist change.
- Cathedral and Loring House have a joint footprint; the ownership is complicated. Some have a perception that the two properties are not distinct. The Bishop's Garden is a burial ground.
- Records, mostly paper, but not exclusively, of the Diocese are retained at Loring House. Individual offices, the records room, and the basement contain working, or legally required retained, records. The Archives of the Diocese are in the basement in three spaces: the secured space that is locked and environmentally controlled for temperature and humidity, the Biddeford Room, and the Artifacts Room. Storage is specific to the current footprint and to remove the collection to an archives-specific space would come at significant cost. Access to the archives is needed for researchers, members of the diocese, archives consultant (who maintains the collection and accepts new materials), and staff.