**Statement to the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County Board of Commissioners regarding Oak Cottage**

**By Kendra Parzen, Advocacy Manager**

**July 11, 2023**

Good Evening Commissioners, my name is Kendra Parzen and I am advocacy manager for Landmarks Illinois. Founded in 1971, Landmarks Illinois is the state’s leading voice for historic preservation. We work with people across Illinois to protect the special places that define their communities. I join other advocates this evening to emphasize the importance of Oak Cottage in the Greene Valley Forest Preserve, and to urge the Forest Preserve District to act now to secure its future.

Before the land that is now the Greene Valley Forest Preserve was sold to the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County, it was the homestead and farm of the Greene family. The cottage, built in 1850 as a family home for early settler William Briggs Greene, is an important piece of DuPage County’s agricultural history. Oak Cottage and the Greene Barn together provide essential context for Greene Valley’s origins as an early Naperville homestead. Were Oak Cottage to be lost, it would not only remove an important piece of cultural heritage from the landscape, it would also diminish Greene Barn’s ability to communicate Greene Valley’s history.

In September 2022, I wrote to you to express concern that the draft master plan for the Greene Valley Forest Preserve called for the demolition of Oak Cottage. We are grateful that the Forest Preserve District and Stantec Consulting listened to community voices and reconsidered the recommendation to move immediately to demolition, and that the final plan reflects an opportunity to put Oak Cottage back into use. Nevertheless, we remain concerned that demolition is still on the table.

Earlier this year, Landmarks Illinois placed Oak Cottage on our list of the Most Endangered Historic Places in Illinois. This annual list calls attention to places across the state that are under threat. Inclusion on the Most Endangered list is a call to action, as well as a commitment from Landmarks Illinois to lend our expertise and resources to local advocates and officials to find a preservation solution. I offer those to you this evening in support of preserving Oak Cottage.

At Landmarks Illinois, we know that it can take time and persistence to successfully rehabilitate a historic building for a new use. That’s why I am here to encourage the Forest Preserve District to move forward as quickly as possible with the study to document the history and condition of Oak Cottage, and to clearly define the timeframe that will be allotted for a third party to identify a new use. A shared understanding of current conditions and needs, as well as unambiguous parameters for moving forward will lead to the highest possibility that a viable new use can be identified within a limited timeframe. I also ask that the Forest Preserve District work closely with community advocates and organizations, who are ready and willing to partner to support a viable reuse for Oak Cottage.

Thank you for your consideration.