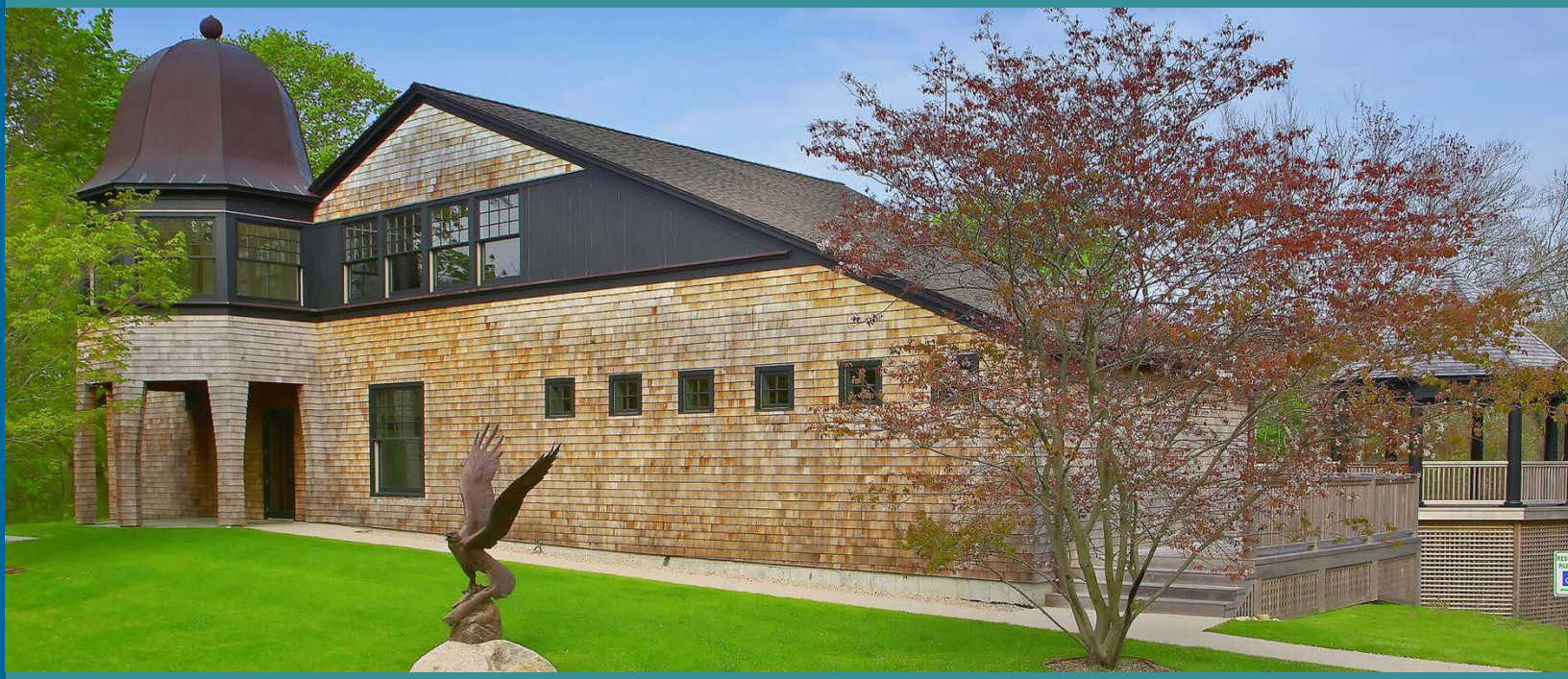
HENRY L. FERGUSON MUSEUM

STRATEGIC PLAN REPORT 2025 - 2028



PRESERVING HISTORY
ADVANCING CONSERVATION
STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2 PLANNING PROCESS
SITUATION ANALYSIS

4 VISION, MISSION & VALUES

5 COMMUNITY FEEDBACK
ORGANIZATIONAL RESEARCH

6 PLAN GOALS AND STRATEGIES

8 MOVING FORWARD

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over six decades, HLFM has grown organically, from a place for the collection, preservation, and exhibition of items of Fishers Island pre-history, history, and natural history to include an active land trust that stewards nearly 400 acres of wetlands, grasslands, beaches, and forests.

This Strategic Plan is meant to advance and unify HLFM's work in order to contribute to an even more informed, engaged, and vibrant Fishers Island.

HLFM VISION **A Fishers Island where our unique history and natural character are protected and treasured by all.**

HLFM MISSION **To preserve our shared history and conserve our natural habitats by engaging, educating, and inspiring all Fishers Islanders.**

HLFM VALUES

Conservation: We believe in safeguarding Fishers Island history and biodiversity for future generations.

Curiosity: We believe the pursuit of knowledge about the past and our natural surroundings is essential to shaping our future.

Community: We believe our greatest impact is achieved together, in partnership with the Fishers Island community.

Connection: We believe our work should inspire, empower, and create connections between people and Fishers Island.

More than 150 individuals contributed to the Strategic Plan, offering historical knowledge, personal opinions, creative approaches, and industry expertise that shaped the plan goals.

PLAN GOALS

1. **Advance Preservation and Conservation on Fishers Island**
2. **Engage the Community and Build a Unified Identity**
3. **Develop a Leadership Pipeline for the Future**
4. **Boost Stewardship, Support, And Technical Capacity**

This plan reflects HLFM's deep sense of responsibility as steward of the island's history and its natural environment, as well as its leadership in helping to build a strong and connected local community.

The work outlined in this document will help HLFM address changing staff, board, volunteer, and donor demographics, while expanding its conservation, preservation, education, and engagement mission. The work entailed here will require collaboration and partnership with the entire Fishers Island community.

PLANNING PROCESS

In fall 2024, the Henry L. Ferguson Museum's Board of Trustees embarked on its first strategic planning process, led by a Strategic Planning Committee comprised of the following board members and staff:

Pierce Rafferty, *Director*
Elizabeth McCance, *Board President*
Heather Burnham, *Board Member*
Murray Fisher, *Board Member*
Mike McNamara, *Board Member*
Sarah Rose, *Board Member*

The committee outlined a multi-month process to (a) assess current strengths and challenges; (b) gather feedback from the board, staff, and community; (c) research best practices; and (d) develop a roadmap for the future. In addition, the committee engaged in a preliminary discussion regarding HLFM's ideal staffing model and target funding model. The strategic planning process concluded in June 2025.

Over the course of six months, the Strategic Planning Committee of HLFM engaged more than 150 individuals through surveys, interviews and research. The participants included year-round residents, seasonal residents, visitors, museum program attendees, land trust volunteers, donors, visitors, HLFM staff and board, and leaders in the museum, land conservation, and nonprofit sectors.

SITUATION ANALYSIS

HLFM was established in 1960 to exhibit and protect the Native American and ornithological collections of H.L. Ferguson. In 1966, HLFM obtained its first land parcel, creating a sanctuary and charting a new aspect of its mission. Also in 1966, HLFM's Board of Trustees voted to create a collection of Fishers Island history.

Since that time, HLFM has pursued a multi-faceted mission that includes the collection, preservation, and exhibition of items of pre-history, history, and natural history of Fishers Island in the museum and its programs, and, through the land trust, the preservation in perpetuity of undeveloped property in its natural state.

Today, HLFM programming includes four main halls of permanent exhibits, seasonal exhibits, a lecture series, adult and youth programming during the summer season and adult remote programing in the off-season, nature walks, trail maintenance, and habitat restoration. HLFM, through its Land Trust, holds 70 fee-based parcels and 10 conservation easements, protecting more than 375 acres (about 14% of the land mass of Fishers Island). Additionally, HLFM is a member and co-chair of the Fishers Island Seagrass Management Coalition (FISM) and its fiscal steward and umbrella body, employing FISM staff and applying for grant funding.

HLFM regularly partners with local nonprofits and agencies to provide engaging, informative, and entertaining activities for the Fishers Island community. As a remote island, with extraordinary natural resources, limited land, and deep generational ties, Fishers Island itself presents a unique and interesting operating environment. The Fishers Island ecosystem of organizations and individuals is sensitive to shifts and, as a major island institution, HLFM is aware of its stewardship responsibilities.

HLFM is governed by a Board of Trustees comprised of 20 members. Professional staff include three full-time employees and three part-time employees. The board, through its numerous committees, takes on significant organizational responsibilities. These include grant writing, fundraising, securing land, mowing, managing land, managing consultants, acquiring art, contributing to programming, creating marketing collateral, assisting in website design, and more. The professional staff execute the day-to-day operations of the museum and land trust, as well as support the board in its functions.

The work of the staff and board is supplemented by contracted services (accounting, land maintenance, and website management). HLFM's general operating budget is close to $500,000 per year, with the bulk of its funding derived from contributions and grants.

In the coming years, HLFM anticipates changes in its board and staff, with the likelihood of turnover and growth. It also sees shifting patterns in its volunteer, donor, and visitor groups. As HLFM plans for increased professionalism, collaboration, and visibility, it acknowledges the unique challenges it faces in continuing its current work and adding new initiatives. Issues such as employee housing, land and housing costs for new and current residents, the costs of acquiring and conserving land, and a finite pool of volunteers and donors, all present unique challenges.

KEY CHALLENGES

- Moving from an organic process of developing HLFM work to a more sustainable, strategic, and focused approach.
- Clarifying how the museum and land trust fit together and presenting that identity more clearly to the community.
- Attracting, training, supporting, and retaining staff, board members, and volunteers who are equipped to lead HLFM into the future.
- Securing the resources necessary to support growth and assure stability.
- Determining its role in the Fishers Island ecosystem of organizations and developing a stronger partnership approach.

This Strategic Plan aims to address these challenges and to provide a roadmap for the next three years.

VISION

A Fishers Island where our unique history and natural character are protected and treasured by all.

MISSION

To preserve our shared history and conserve our natural habitats by engaging, educating, and inspiring all Fishers Islanders.

VALUES

Conservation: We believe in safeguarding Fishers Island history and biodiversity for future generations.

Curiosity: We believe the pursuit of knowledge about the past and our natural surroundings is essential to shaping our future.

Community: We believe our greatest impact is achieved together, in partnership with the Fishers Island community.

Connection: We believe our work should inspire, empower, and create connections between people and Fishers Island.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Community feedback was gathered through a board survey, a community survey, board committee input, and one-on-one interviews. More than 150 individuals participated, providing insights, opinions, and ideas for HLFM to consider in crafting its Strategic Plan.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK THEMES

- HLFM's exhibits and talks are world-class.
- HLFM should lead even more in land preservation, conservation, and stewarding natural resources.
- HLFM should expand its youth/teen programming and its off-season programs.
- The museum facilities and permanent exhibits would benefit from upgrades.
- Technology can be a major driver of conservation, preservation, and programming.
- There is an unrealized potential for volunteer engagement on Fishers Island.
- HLFM organizational partnerships (on and off-island) can grow and be even more robust.
- Lack of housing and infrastructure will be a continuing concern for HLFM as it recruits staff.

INCLUDED IN OUTREACH

- HLFM Board
- HLFM Staff
- HLFM Members
- HLFM Donors
- HLFM Volunteers
- Island Nonprofits
- Island Clubs
- Municipal Entities
- Town of Southold
- Year-Round Residents
- Seasonal Residents
- Island Visitors
- Off-Island Nonprofits

Respondents underscored the important leadership role HLFM plays on Fishers Island and the passion and expertise its extraordinary Director, Pierce Rafferty, brings to his work. HLFM is the trusted steward of island history and of its land. As HLFM moves into the future, there are many opportunities for engaging children, teens, and adults in learning, sharing, and exploring both history and ecology.

ORGANIZATIONAL RESEARCH

Committee members conducted online research and personal outreach regarding other similar organizations, noting that it is relatively rare to find a nonprofit operating both a museum and land trust. The research yielded valuable information about staffing, funding, and programming. Nonprofits researched:

- ★ Block Island Land Trust
- ★ Brandywine Conservancy and Museum of Art
- ★ Cape Cod Museum of Natural History
- ★ Nantucket Historical Association

PLAN GOALS AND STRATEGIES

The Strategic Planning Committee identified the following goals, which form the pillars of the Strategic Plan:

1

Advance Preservation and Conservation on Fishers Island

2

Engage the Community and Build a Unified Identity

3

Develop a Leadership Pipeline for the Future

4

Boost Stewardship, Support, and Technical Capacity

To accomplish these goals over the next three years, HLFM will pursue strategies and employ tactics designed to advance HLFM's mission. The strategies are ambitious and will require a thoughtful and focused commitment of time, resources, and energy.

The Strategic Plan is intended to be a dynamic roadmap. Thus, while the goals, strategies, and tactics below are intended to provide clear guidance to the board and staff, elements may ultimately be adjusted to meet the needs of HLFM.

These goals, strategies, and tactics form the basis of the plan:

1. ADVANCE PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION ON FISHERS ISLAND

a. Collect and tell the stories of Fishers Island's community

HLFM will expand its collection of oral histories, family narratives, and island resident records; initiate a community time capsule project; pursue collaborative historical projects with local organizations such as the Fire Department; and establish a plan to regularly gather artifacts, objects, and ephemera from island residents.

b. Improve and expand programs to share our natural and cultural histories

HLFM will enhance its educational offerings by establishing an Education Committee, expanding nature walks (including those tailored for children), and increasing off-season talks and outings. The Museum also plans to grow its FIND field-based curriculum, create new programming in partnership with other island organizations, and develop more content focused on Fishers Island's pre-history.

c. Formalize and develop land trust activities

HLFM is currently developing comprehensive parcel-specific land management plans and once completed will implement and expand ecological data collection and analysis, and it is launching a monitoring program across all conserved properties.

d. Utilize technology to add informational dimensions

HLFM will integrate technology through interactive kiosks, wildlife cams, drones, and digital media; strengthen partnerships with like-minded institutions; improve its website for remote content discovery; explore tech-enhanced permanent exhibits; and develop a long-term plan for digitizing its collection.

2. ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY AND BUILD A UNIFIED IDENTITY

a. Empower members to influence programming

HLFM will actively involve community members in shaping its offerings by soliciting ideas for lectures, exhibitions, events, and activities; implementing virtual suggestion boxes across communication platforms; and encouraging guest-led events and co-curated displays.

b. Expand volunteer opportunities and collaborations

HLFM will strengthen community engagement by exploring the addition of a volunteer coordinator, broadening volunteer opportunities with a focus on community interest, and expanding teen employment beyond the HLFM Land Trust Youth Corps ('Trail Dogs') to include museum-based roles.

c. Develop partnerships with island organizations

HLFM will continue and grow its partnerships with other island institutions, by co-sponsoring and co-creating events and acting as a convenor where appropriate.

d. Communicate the museum's updated mission

HLFM will launch a campaign to share its updated vision, mission, and values; create branded materials; and regularly communicate with the community through the Foghorn, social media, and the Museum's website.

3. DEVELOP A LEADERSHIP PIPELINE FOR THE FUTURE

a. Update and refine the board recruitment process

HLFM will strengthen its leadership pipeline by developing a board skills matrix, establishing clear committee standards, and actively cultivating future board members through engagement opportunities. The Museum will also implement a system to retain institutional knowledge from departing members and formally establish an emeritus group with a defined role.

b. Develop a Staffing Model for current needs and future growth

To ensure long-term organizational strength, HLFM will fill current staffing gaps, study effective staffing practices at peer institutions, and conduct a time and responsibility audit of board and staff roles. The Museum will create a comprehensive staffing plan to guide near- and long-term growth and develop emergency succession plans for both staff and board leadership.

c. Develop a Staff Recruitment Plan

HLFM will strengthen its workforce by researching effective recruitment and retention practices, cultivating feeder relationships with key institutions, developing targeted volunteer recruitment strategies, and exploring housing options to support both current and future staff.

4. BOOST STEWARDSHIP, SUPPORT, AND TECHNICAL CAPACITY

a. Create and execute a three-year Development Plan

HLFM will launch a three-year Development Plan focused on assessing current fundraising capacity, setting and pursuing strategic development goals, implementing a communications strategy to support fundraising efforts, and creating a coordinated grants management plan in collaboration with staff.

b. Develop Building, Facilities, Land and Capital Expenditure Plans

HLFM will strengthen its infrastructure by establishing a Facilities/IT Committee, implementing a regular maintenance schedule, and evaluating current space usage, including off-site storage. The Museum will also create a long-term facilities plan supported by a capital improvements fund and develop land use strategies aligned with future programming needs.

c. Develop and implement a file storage system

HLFM will establish an organized and sustainable file storage system by adopting clear policies for naming, retention, and destruction; improving physical storage and evaluating off-site needs; and standardizing digital storage through common protocols and centralized cloud access for board and committee materials.

d. Develop technical capacity

HLFM will enhance its technical infrastructure by selecting an electronic payments system, securing reliable IT support for both in-person and virtual programs, upgrading audiovisual equipment, and improving software for conservation monitoring and land trust management.

MOVING FORWARD

As Fishers Island continues to evolve, the Henry L. Ferguson Museum remains committed to preserving its history, protecting its natural environment, and deepening community connection. This strategic plan establishes a clear direction while remaining flexible and responsive to change. It will be reviewed and refined regularly to reflect new insights, opportunities, and needs.

Thank you for being part of this shared effort. Together, we will build a Fishers Island where our unique history and natural character are protected and treasured by all.