The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) has awarded the Historical Society of Delaware, Inc., Sustaining Cultural Heritage Collections grant, PF-249698, to perform preventive conservation measures and improve the environmental conditions for collections. NEH is an independent grant-making agency of the United States government dedicated to supporting research, education, preservation, and public programs in the humanities. This public notice is issued as part of NEH’s responsibilities under 36 C.F.R. Part 800, the regulations which implement Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966, as amended, 16 U.S.C. § 470. NEH, a funding agency, is required by regulation to identify and assess the effects of any proposed actions on historic properties. If any proposed action will have an adverse effect on historic resources, NEH works with the appropriate parties to seek ways to avoid, minimize, or mitigate any adverse effects. Additionally, the Section 106 regulations require NEH to consider the views of the public on preservation issues when making final decisions that affect historic properties.

In its grant application, the Historical Society of Delaware, Inc. proposes the following undertakings at the George Read II House, located at the Shelburne Museum site at 2 The Strand, New Castle, DE 19720. Mechanical improvements involve installation of a new, energy-efficient HVAC system and installation of an aspirating fire detection system. Non-mechanical improvements, as well as operational protocols, will be implemented to control natural light, increase storm protection and resiliency, stabilize the preservation environment and increase night-time security. An existing small collections storage area will be relocated to further protect and allow better conditions and accessibility of collections. The improvements will allow the Historical Society of Delaware, Inc. to effectively manage energy, improve and stabilize the preservation environment and safeguard collections.

The George Read II House is a historically and architecturally significant National Historic Landmark in the New Castle Delaware National Historic Landmark District. Additionally, the George Read II House is under a historic preservation covenant due to a Save America’s Treasures federal grant for prior work on this significant building.

The George Read II House was constructed for George Read II, a lawyer and son of Delaware statesman George Read I, a signer of both the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. Construction of the house, completed in 1804, is unusually well-documented in original drawings and more than 130 letters and 40 invoices. Prior to its acquisition by the Historical Society of Delaware, Inc. in 1975, the Read House was inhabited by three families over a period of 175 years. Read House collections span this period and also include extensive archeological collections from the 1.3-acre site and an undeveloped companion site between The Strand and the Delaware River. Furniture, fine art including paintings and hand-painted wallpaper murals, textiles and other decorative arts, everyday objects and interior treatments including stenciling, decorative woodwork and delicate plasterwork enhance the Federal-era architectural features.

In a letter dated September 8, 2020, Kara A. Briggs, Architectural Historian for the Delaware Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs advised that the project is in accordance with the Secretary of the
Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation. Based on the application and Section 106 review, NEH has determined that there is no adverse effect upon historic properties, as defined by Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

As required by Section 106, NEH is providing the public with information about this project, as well as an opportunity to comment on any knowledge of, or concerns with, historic properties in the proposed project area, and issues relating to the project’s potential effects on historic properties. Comments may be submitted to the NEH by e-mail to FPO@neh.gov. The deadline for submitting comments is September 21, 2020.