



April 16, 2026

Dear Community Members and Friends of Bidwell Mansion,

I want to start by acknowledging the wait for the structural assessment report. I know many of you expected to see these findings in December, and I appreciate your patience while we took the necessary time to vet and finalize the report's technical observations and evaluations. While the report is still not final, my goal is to ensure we are all moving forward with a clear, shared understanding of the facts—no matter how complex they may be—before we take our next steps together.

While Bidwell Mansion is a cornerstone of Chico's history, it is also an invaluable resource for all of California. As a designated State Historic Park and a California Historical Landmark, it tells a story of statewide significance that belongs to all of us. Balancing its deep local meaning with its status as a statewide treasure is a responsibility we take very seriously.

What the Assessment Tells Us

The report confirms the immense scale of the challenge we face following the fire on December 11, 2024. While the Mansion's brick silhouette remains, the findings regarding the building's current condition are significant:

- **Total Interior Loss:** All wood framing, interior floors, walls, and the roof were destroyed in the fire.
- **Debris Impact:** Essentially all finishes, fixtures, and furnishings burned in totality, collapsing and gathering within the basement and first-floor levels in a large pile of debris.
- **Brick Structure Condition:** While the primary brick structure is still standing, it is not "ready to build". The brick may still have the possibility of being reused either as standing walls or reuse of the historic material.
- **The Shoring Requirement:** Before any interior debris can even be removed, the remaining brick walls must undergo extensive, phased shoring to ensure they do not collapse during the clearing process.
- **Seismic Stabilization:** To safely reuse the brick, the assessment calls for seismic stabilization with a fiber-reinforced polymer (FRP) coating of 100% of the brick. This is a specialized, costly modern technique required to bring the unreinforced masonry up to reasonable safety standards. Further study will be needed to confirm this option.

- **Salvage and Documentation:** Most historic Victorian wood ornamentation is a total loss. However, we are carefully evaluating a few select items, like iron window sash weights and an interior fireplace surround, for potential salvage and documentation.

Shaping the Vision

There is a wide range of possibilities for the future of this site—from preserving the remaining shell as a stabilized ruin to a full reconstruction or the creation of a new memorial space. It is critical that we clearly understand community preferences among the options such that we can conduct focused and detailed studies to assess their feasibility.

Three pillars of input and consultation are instrumental in helping us shape this final vision for this statewide resource:

- **Public Input:** Your voice is the foundation of this process. We need community input to help us understand which of the broad possibilities you want to see, which will in turn narrow down the options and help us focus our future scope of work.
- **Mechoopda Indian Tribe:** The Mansion sits on land originally inhabited by the Mechoopda people. We are engaged in government-to-government consultation with the Tribe. This is a respectful and confidential process, and their input is equally important to this effort. Their perspective will be instrumental in helping us shape a final vision that honors the full history of this land.
- **SHPO Consultation:** A future step in our roadmap will be formal consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO). This will allow us to reevaluate the mansion's historic status and ensure the community's chosen direction aligns with legal preservation standards.

The Roadmap Ahead: Engineering, Funding, and Construction

Once we have the community's vision—the expected product at the end of this reimagining process—and have completed our primary consultations, we can move into the technical and administrative phases required for a project of this magnitude:

- **Focused Feasibility Study:** We will launch a study focused specifically on the vision you help us define. This will provide the data on technical requirements, precise timelines, and accurate cost estimates for that specific scope.
- **Engineering and Final Estimates:** Specialists will develop the blueprints and actual engineering estimates. These are necessary for the complex work of routing new systems and utilities through a historic shell or managing site-wide hazardous materials remediation.
- **The State Capital Outlay Process:** We will move the project through the state's formal mechanism for securing long-term capital funding. This is a rigorous process required for major public infrastructure and State Park projects.

- **Determining Funding Sources:** We will work to determine where the funding will come from, which remains unclear at this time but could include a combination of state funds, public bonds, and/or donations.
- **Public Works Contracting and Construction:** Finally, we will navigate the state's contracting processes to hire the highly skilled tradespeople required to begin the physical construction of the final product.

Beyond the Mansion itself, State Parks will pursue additional efforts to improve the site's relevancy and inclusion. This may include planning efforts to update the General Plan and refresh the Interpretive Master Plan, as well as pursue projects to improve the Visitor Center, Exhibit Hall, and surrounding grounds.

This is a journey we are taking together. By being thorough now and letting your voices—and the voices of our Tribal partners—shape the vision, we are building a foundation for the future of Bidwell Mansion that will serve both the Chico community and the people of California for generations to come.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:

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Matthew Allen
District Superintendent
Northern Buttes District
California State Parks