

La Vernia School Board Members,

Thank you for taking the time to approve the Historic Property Tax Exemption for **Whitehall/Polley Mansion**. Polley Mansion is an 1848 Greek revival National Register of Historical Places and a Texas Historical Landmark property, that we have continued to restore, preserve, and protect since 2015. It is a one-of-a-kind home that has its roots in the formation of Texas (i.e., the builders are both **Old 300's** under Stephen F. Austin's first colony). The house and the cookhouse are featured in several books, articles, and museums. Our mission has always been to preserve the property and share it with the community. **The Friends of Polley Mansion** is a non-profit organization that does not charge people to visit, nor does it earn an income from events we sponsor on the property. Any donations that are received are used for the maintenance and restoration of the house and property. Our yearly calendar fills with people requesting a tour of the house and property. It is truly a Wilson County gem.

In August of 2023, **KSAT News** spent the day at Polley Mansion to film a segment on Wilson County. The segment was very popular. KSAT News aired it again a year later. They filmed a drone video of the Cibolo Valley, interviewed us and several local people, including several historians and a local pastor. In February of 2024 and 2025, we were a satellite location for an **African American Storytelling event** which was hosted by the Haven Oaks Community Bible Church in Sutherland Springs. The event is again scheduled for March 2026. This event brings visitors from San Antonio and the surrounding areas for a day of collaboration, tours, and meet and greets for the purpose of piecing together stories of the men, women, and children of the local area. Leaders from **SAAACAM (San Antonio African American Community Archive and Museum)** have visited each year to bring scholars and educators who are interested in early Texas African American history. In April of 2023 and 2025, the **Guadalupe County Master Gardeners** held their annual plant sale during our Polley Mansion open house. Around 400 people attended the plant sale and open house each year. Over \$4,000 was raised last year (2025) for

the Guadalupe County Master Gardeners, a non-profit, volunteer organization serving both Guadalupe and Wilson Counties. Over the course of three years, approximately \$8,000 has been raised for this nonprofit. The Polley Mansion Heritage Garden is a certified Guadalupe County Master Gardeners volunteer site. Members of the group can earn volunteer hours in the garden. Another Master Gardener plant sale and Polley Mansion open house is scheduled for April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2026.

In 2024, the Polley Mansion property and the adjacent properties were one of the many sites chosen to be a part of the **iNaturalist City Nature Challenge**. During this three-day global event, participants at Polley Mansion identified, logged, and counted several hundred wild plants, animals, insects, and fungi to document biodiversity. To date there have been 2,800 observations, 1,016 species and 373 identifiers documented on the property!

In the past few years, we have had numerous groups, visitors and inquiries about the house. We've had women's groups, historians, families, home schoolers, and church groups tour the property all free of charge. We were honored to have Dr Richard McCaslin, retired Professor of History from the University of North Texas, and the current State Historian of Texas visit in 2025.

We have had over 60 photography sessions with numerous photographers throughout the area and included portraits of families, brides, maternity, engagement, high school seniors, and local businesses.

In 2026, we will not only have visitors and events on the property, but we will also present a program on historic preservation: ***The Ups and Downs of Historical Preservation: Whitehall/Polley Mansion 2015-2025*** to the **Wilson County Historical Society** on January 27, 2026. We will also have a booth presenting the Whitehall/Polley Mansion at the **Wilson County History and Heritage Festival** on April 18, 2026 in Floresville.

We appreciate your time and approval of this historic property tax exemption. The Whitehall/Polley Mansion is a Wilson County treasure, and we are grateful to be its caretakers.

Sincerely,

Robin and Keith Muschalek

La Vernia, Texas

January 26, 2026