

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Amanda Holmes

Fishtown Preservation Society

231-356-8878, aholmes@fishtownmi.org

Fishtown Preservation Establishing Permanent Headquarters in Leland's Van Raalte House

Leland, MI, October 1, 2025 — The Fishtown Preservation Society (FPS) announces the successful purchase of the John and Janice Van Raalte House and surrounding property at 101 South Lake Street, adjacent to Historic Fishtown. This landmark addition preserves a vital piece of the Leland riverfront and provides FPS with its long-sought permanent home to sustain and grow its preservation mission.

The two-story house, built by John and Janice Van Raalte in 1960, is located unobtrusively next to Fishtown's south side, on Lake Leelanau above the Leland Dam. Its strong original construction will serve as the foundation for Fishtown's operational center and allow FPS to grow beyond the confines of the small space that it has rented from the Leelanau Historical Society since 2007. The structure and appearance of the house will change little, and given the significance of the family in Leland's past and present, FPS will continue to acknowledge its origin as the Van Raalte House.

Moving to the Van Raalte House will bring FPS staff into physical proximity to Fishtown to simplify and clarify the role of Fishtown Preservation in overseeing the work of saving and caring for the historic working waterfront. The additional space and support will allow FPS to expand programming that supports the larger community, including by using Great Lakes commercial fishing as a lens through which to understand the past, present, and future of the Great Lakes environment and economy.

FPS plans to enhance interpretation, displays, and educational programming within Fishtown, while retaining the vibrant retail spaces that have drawn visitors to Fishtown since the 1950s. FPS owns the fishing vessels *Joy* and *Janice Sue* along with their commercial fishing licenses, and the support of commercial fishing remains central to the organization's mission. The new location will include space for research, volunteer, internship, and apprenticeship components. Having dock space on the Leland River above the dam also opens possibilities for environmental programming on Lake Leelanau.

The Van Raalte family approached FPS in 2024, after the generational transfer of the house, because they preferred that a not-for-profit acquire the property rather than a commercial developer. The land is

currently zoned commercial, allowing multiple structures up to 35 feet in height. By purchasing the property, FPS forestalls development and preserves the existing river viewshed from the M-22 bridge, helping to sustain the current look and feel of both Fishtown and Leland.

Thanks to support from generous donors, FPS has completed raising the \$2.2 million to purchase the property, and is now engaged in fundraising for the substantial modifications to convert a private home into the FPS operations center, as well as to meet modern code and ADA requirements. The estimated cost for the renovation and site work is **\$1,067,000**. FPS has raised approximately two-thirds of this total, with \$420,000 remaining.

Fishtown Preservation invites everyone who treasures Fishtown to join in support of this project and to share in this encompassing vision for Fishtown's future. The goal is to complete fundraising by the end of October and begin renovation work before the end of this year, and for FPS to move into its new home by late in 2026.

###

About the Fishtown Preservation Society

FPS, a non-profit corporation, owns and operates Fishtown, a working waterfront with a cultural fishing heritage that draws thousands of visitors each year to the Leelanau Peninsula and Leland. With its commercial fishing and maritime heritage, Fishtown is home to a broad and rich history and is an important economic asset to the region. FPS acquired ownership of the core of Historic Fishtown in 2007 in order to preserve its historical integrity and ensure that it continues as a publicly accessible, authentic connection to regional history and Great Lakes fishing and maritime traditions. Anyone seeking more information may visit Fishtown Preservation at www.fishtownmi.org or call 231-256-8878.