

HISTORY

Condemned buildings pose challenge to group aiming to preserve historic Hogestown



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SILVER SPRING TOWNSHIP — Jean Motter was an infant when she first attended the Hogestown Presbyterian Church.

It then was an active house of worship vibrant with Sunday school classes, bake sales and the annual Christmas play put on by local children.

“We always had a picnic in the summer back in Willow Mill Park,” said Motter, 76, who lived her

entire life in a home just across the road from the church at 6611 Carlisle Pike.

“When I was a kid, we had church there in the evening,” she added. “We had a choir. We had to learn to recite verses by heart. When I look at it now and see the work that needs to be done, it’s heart-breaking.”

Constructed in 1858, the wood and brick building served as a church of convenience back when inclement weather made it too difficult for Hogestown area residents to travel to the Silver Spring Presbyterian Church, local historian Christine Clepper Musser said.

The two women are involved in a grassroots committee seeking ways to not only revitalize the church, but also to restore something of the old village character of Hogestown, which is bisected by four lanes of Carlisle Pike traffic.

Calling itself the Hogestown Redevelopment Committee, the group has been active since last November and was made an official committee by the Silver Spring Township supervisors in February, said the Rev. Mike Ripton of Hampden Township, a committee member.

A recently ordained minister, Ripton had retired after 36 years with the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. His last job with the state agency was as the official in charge of all state-owned historic sites and museums. For a time, Ripton was museum director of the Mechanicsburg Museum Association.

Condemned

While the church in Hogestown never really had a name, it was deeded over to Presbyterians who lived in the area, Ripton said. “It was well constructed by a talented builder who used a standard church plan.”

At one point, the building served as a church, community center and Grange lounge, Ripton said. It stopped being useful as a house of worship after better transportation solved the problem of traveling in bad weather.

While local residents always referred to it as the Hogestown Presbyterian Church, Silver Spring church officials called it the Hogestown Chapel, Motter said. She attended Sunday school at the building up until about 1996 when the remaining 11 or so members decided to disband the local congregation.

“When I was little, we used to go to church from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m.,” Motter said. “The pastor came up here every Sunday to preach. Sometimes he had only one or two people, but he would still preach.”

The church was converted to a private residence and was occupied up until three years ago when the couple living there abandoned the property, Ripton said. “It then went into a foreclosure process. During that time, it has only come up infrequently in sheriff sales.”

The church was condemned after a recent walk-through of Hogestown village by members of the Silver Spring Township municipal staff, Musser said. She explained how the walk-through was made at the request of committee members. Two other structures including an old tavern were condemned as structurally unfit for habitation.

Nate Spade is vice-chairman of the township board of supervisors and liaison to the redevelopment committee. He said the walk-through was done to address zoning issues within the village and to evaluate the public safety risk of structures in Hogestown. Enforcement action has been taken by the township zoning and codes department since Silver Spring Township started meeting with committee members, Spade said.

Restoration

There is great interest among committee members toward seeing the church restored, Spade said. “The township wants to see this structure back in a state of good repair. We don’t want to see Hogestown lose that building. We are conscious of the historical heritage of the township and the importance of historic buildings.”

There are obstacles in the way. Both Spade and Supervisor Dave Lenker said there are several liens on the church property, and it is believed that a bank has ownership of the building.

Ripton added that as long as the church is in foreclosure, the committee lacks the access it needs to the interior to determine if it is even feasible to save the building.

“We are going to have to engage an attorney so that the process is followed carefully,” Ripton said.

Lenker said one goal of condemning the church property was to provide the township with the necessary leverage to get the current owner to correct the structural issues. While the township can’t get involved with the restoration of a privately-owned structure, staff can provide the owner with guidance on how to seek out grants and other programs that could help fund improvements, Lenker added.

Committee members are optimistic about the future of the church property.

“It’s a shame,” Musser said. “It’s in bad shape, but we believe it can be saved.”

The group is planning a 5k run in October to raise money for their effort to revitalize Hogestown.

Motter said she would like to see the building restored as a kind of community building or museum. There are artifacts from the Hogestown congregation in storage including Sunday school attendance records going back to 1899.