



## Welcome Comments at Adaptive Reuse Meeting, 20 March 2013

Helen Kull, Preservation New Jersey

Welcome to the 2nd public meeting to discuss the adaptive reuse of the 1867 Sanctuary at Ewing! For those of you who missed the first meeting, I am Helen Kull, and I've been involved from the start:

- as a member of the congregation that formerly worshiped there
- founder of the group that sought to raise money to restore the bldg in 2009 when the cong was unable to do so
- later as an invited Board member of Preservation NJ, after they offered to help
- now as a member of PNJ's 1867 Sanctuary at Ewing Committee, which is seeking to preserve and renew the life of this grand structure

Before I continue though, I'd love to know:

Who are you? Show of hands: representatives of...

arts orgs, event organizers, funeral directors, musicians, church members, curious members of the public, architects/planners/preservationists, donors who wish to see how their money is being used, prospective brides – what else?

And just to be clear, your presence here tonight does NOT commit you to using the space in the future – although we'd certainly love to have you!

For those of you who may not know the history, I will very briefly tell you that at the time of the discovery of significant structural problems in the Sanctuary with the roof trusses and stone walls supporting them, and through the painful decision to demolish the building, many of us could still envision of the potential of this structure. Constructed in 1867 just after the Civil War in an era of optimism, this formidable presence on the landscape in a very rural farming area not only served as a place of worship for the then 160-year old congregation - it was also a center for the community, in which events, meetings, gatherings, socialites' weddings and simple funerals were held. [Here, for example, is a description of the "audience room" of the church "tastefully decorated" for the second annual meeting of the West Ewing Rural Improvement Association in September of 1880] For years, it was the only building in the area that could host a crowd, and it served as a social center for decades, through to the Second World War. Its significance to the community then was great.

As we began raising money in 2009 to restore the building, we found that the building still held significance for many, many people beyond those that belong to the congregation, although perhaps not in the same ways. Certainly its physical presence still commands the bend at the Scotch Road, as well as the park-like cemetery which surrounds it. For many it holds memories of baptisms, weddings and/or funerals of friends or loved ones. For others, its tall steeple reminds them of their faith, or a Higher Power (of any faith tradition) in their lives. Some have been attracted by its excellent acoustic, and the sound of the majestic organ playing or instruments and voices raised in song. Still others appreciate the architecture, and the simple and solid beauty of its form.

Unfortunately, there are hundreds if not thousands of churches and other houses of worship around this country which find themselves in the same sad situation: the caretaking congregation, often reduced in size from what it once was, can no longer afford the maintenance, upkeep and expenses associated with such grand and glorious buildings. Many are abandoned and eventually demolished; other congregations adapt by sharing their space with other congregations and users. But others are given new life, with creative ways to adapt old buildings to new uses. And that's why we are here tonight.

In May of 2012, in an unprecedented move, Preservation New Jersey – NJ's only state-wide, membership-supported, preservation advocacy organization - took hands-on responsibility for the former Ewing Presbyterian sanctuary, signing a 50-year lease to “preserve and renew” what has been renamed as “The 1867 Sanctuary at Ewing.” While the lease restricts PNJ from leasing the space to a competing congregation on Sunday mornings, it does allow PNJ to use it for a variety of approved uses: weddings, funerals, concerts big and small, theatre performances, coffee houses, exhibit space, meetings, gatherings, movies, discussions, debates, etc. And at our meeting in January, the group of 50+ people present suggested several additional ones.

Now - before we begin to make the structural reinforcements which are currently necessary to earn a Certificate of Occupancy – NOW is the time to decide how to adapt the 1867 Sanctuary to accommodate any potential future uses. How can this building BEST serve the greater Ewing community again? How can this 19th c landmark be significant to us in the 21st century? Can it still accommodate worship, public and entertainment uses? Can ecumenical, spiritual and secular uses all coexist? Can we afford it? Can we phase the work over time? This and more will be considered tonight.

I continue to be so thankful that PNJ had the courage to assist us in this effort. I am especially pleased and grateful that the Princeton Area Community Foundation , and the New Jersey Historic Trust, have encouraged our pursuit of this effort by granting us funds with which to do the work. And I am honored and thrilled that fellow Presbyterian Michael Mills, and his colleagues at Mills+Schnoring Architects LLC, are working with us on this project, and are here again with us tonight to guide us through this process.

Architects Christa Gaffigan, Alison Baxter and Michael Mills will explain what “adaptive reuse” means, recap the first meeting in January, and present the options they have envisioned for the building, based on the public input from January and some additional input that the 1867 Committee has provided to them.

After their presentation we will entertain your comments and questions, and then David Knights, President of Preservation New Jersey, will explain where we go from here, the people and groups that are helping us get there, and the various ways in which you can help.

Thank you for your interest in this effort. I now invite you to dream with us now, as we envision what could be!

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