

**120 EAST STATE A NJ NONPROFIT CORPORATION**  
**REPORT TO Coastlands Presbytery**  
**FROM the Board of 120 East State**  
**October 20, 2022**

Thank you for inviting us to inform you about 120 East State, formed by First Presbyterian Church of Trenton to achieve its mission goals through its extensive historic property in the heart of downtown Trenton.

We invite you to watch this introductory [video](#) (3:44).

Our mission is to preserve, steward and operate Trenton historic property for community benefit. This [two-page flier](#) provides an overview of our work to date and the work ahead.

We were incorporated on April 8, 2022. Our IRS nonprofit status was finalized on September 23, 2022.<sup>1</sup>

On April 14, 2022, we applied to the New Jersey Trust for two grants. On September 28, we learned we would receive both the Capital Preservation Grant (\$750K matching) and Historic Site Management Grant (Planning) (\$75K matching \$25K).<sup>2</sup>

On August 15, 2022, we applied to the first-ever round of the New Jersey Economic Development Authority's new Historic Property Reinvestment Program (state tax credits). We were recently notified our application is progressing through four stages, and that we have moved successfully through the first two (environmental projection, labor, and taxation; legal); next comes scoring (we will score high because of the importance of the property and its largely undisturbed state) and underwriting. We anticipate a positive outcome and notification by year's end.

We have received generous guidance and support from our community. We continue to seek community input and engagement through opinion surveys and planned advisory groups. Encouragement has also come from people across our region, including in state government, who understand the need for this kind of investment in our capital city (see [Executive Order 40](#), by which Gov. Murphy seeks to provide state support to Trenton efforts). We are pleased to share with you community letters of support for our applications to the [Historic Trust](#) and [HPRP](#).

As a Board, we have created a strong project team. We employ the Rev. Molly Dykstra, minister member of Coastlands, given Validated Ministry status in her role as our Project Leader, and we have engaged business consultant [Michael Goldstein](#) and architect Annabelle Radcliffe Trenner

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<sup>1</sup> Other organizational documents which may be of interest are: [Board Purpose Statement](#) 8/14/22; [Organization Chart](#); [Bylaws](#); and see our website, under development, at 120eaststate.org.

<sup>2</sup> See [news release 9/28/22](#).

of [Historic Building Architects](#), Trenton (which just received an award for the restoration of Stuart Hall at Princeton Seminary).

Though it is truly unfortunate that, in 2018, the NJ Supreme Court ruled that houses of worship could no longer receive public funding for historic preservation in our state,<sup>3</sup> First Presbyterian has been able to find a way. The case was brought by the Freedom From Religion Foundation, out of Madison, Wisconsin. According to state historic preservationists, the ruling will cause damage to local communities, and was poorly argued by the state. Nonetheless, determined to preserve its legacy, FPCT has been willing to relocate its worship services and invest over \$1 million in the best solution possible at this time: moving forward the work of 120 East State in alignment with both the church's mission and the city's plans for a healthy, vibrant community.<sup>4</sup> Our capital city, its residents and businesses, need and deserve exactly this kind of investment from large institutions, many of which have abandoned it over the years. We are proud to carry out this intention of FPCT, in real commitment to its neighborhood home of almost 300 years.

We are available to provide you with any further information or address any questions. Please contact Molly at [admin@120eaststate.org](mailto:admin@120eaststate.org) or 609.240.6273 for assistance.

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<sup>3</sup>See these links for further information about the 2018 NJ Supreme Court Ruling News regarding historic preservation monies and houses of worship:

- <https://www.northjersey.com/story/news/new-jersey/2018/04/18/historic-preservationists-say-nj-supreme-court-ruling-could-have-detrimental-effects-local-communiti/529169002/>
- <https://ffrf.org/outreach/awards/freethinker-of-the-year-award/item/33470-david-steketee>

<sup>4</sup> See the [city plans](#) for the neighborhood of 120 East State.

To: The Presbytery of the Coastlands  
From: Nina Reeder, COM appointed moderator, First Presbyterian Church of Trenton  
RE: Update 2/7/22 – 10/25/2022

On Monday February 7, 2022, Elder and co-treasurer Jean Bickal offered the following on behalf of the Session of FPCT to the Special Administrative Review Committee, the liaisons from the Commission on Ministry, and the Session moderator:

“The ruling elders of FPCT have worked toward uplifting our church family and community in many ways for many years through our hunger ministry and our partnerships with several community based organizations. We remain committed to preserving FPCT’s history and making positive impacts within Trenton. We strongly believe that, despite our size, we are strong in spirit and direction. We are grateful for the support of the SARC and the Presbytery’s willingness to support our vision and our mission as we embark on this new phase in our 300+ year history.

With our congregation and the Trenton community in mind, we respectfully submit the following motions:

1. That FPCT pursue the property development program developed by Michael Goldstein with the following initial steps to be taken by the Session:
  - a. Hire an attorney to form a 501c3
  - b. Identify the projects, costs, and documents necessary for a Historic Trust grant application (due date April 15, 2022)
  - c. Hire Clarke, Caton, Hintz, to determine possible Register of Historic Places listing for the for the church owned properties on Hanover Street
  - d. Extend the contract for Rev. Molly Dykstra through May 31 to assist Session in fulfilling this motion
  - e. Hire a property manager to eventually facilitate all properties matters
2. That Session will explore alternate sites for worship in the event that a Historic Trust grant requires that the 1839 building and Fellowship Hall cannot be used for that purpose (with the understanding that the congregation wants to worship and have an office on our current campus as soon as possible.
3. That the Session respectfully requests that the Presbytery of the Coastlands postpone any decision to create an Administrative Commission for FPCT for six months (August 2022). The Session commits to working with the congregation and SARC to explore possibilities for our mission and connections with the community.”

**These motions passed unanimously on February 7, 2022.**

In order to accomplish the goals that the Session set for themselves in the motions passed on February 7, 2022, the session has:

1. Met weekly. The magnitude of the project and the serial nature of the work necessary to form a 501c3 and complete an extensive grant application, as well as manage the day to day tasks of a large physical plant and a congregation in transition, requires nimble and timely decision-making. Although exhausting for all concerned, weekly meetings have provided abundant space for the sharing of hopes, dreams, joys, concerns, and the grief that attend such a transition. In addition, they have meant that the work gets done when it needs to get done and the tasks do not pile up and become more overwhelming than necessary. This has not been an easy or always smooth process of discernment. It is to the great credit of this group of Presbyterians elders that, although there have contentious moments, they have continued together, seeking God’s will for this

historic congregation. This work and that laid out below are the work of the Session. To suggest otherwise is an affront to their faithfulness and commitment.

2. Hired Rev. Molly Dykstra as Property Project Facilitator through May 31, 2022
3. Passed a comprehensive church budget. The treasurers did yeoman's work in putting together a budget in an environment where some of the buildings will be leased, rental income is unclear, and the sharing of expenses with the 501c3 is still being negotiated.
4. Began conversations with Elder Samuel Bonner to select and hire an audit firm to conduct a review of the church's financial ministry.
5. Formed a 501c3 (now known as 120 E. State Street, Inc.) to carry out the Session's goals for the Steeple Center (sanctuary and fellowship hall). The 501c3 board has significant congregational representation (2 out of 5 members)
6. Session held extensive question, answer, and listening sessions with project developers and Trenton community members.
7. Session committed a \$1 million gift for initial funding for 120 E. State Street, Inc., to cover start-up costs and to provide the required matching funds for the initial Historic Trust grant.
8. Session continues discussion concerning strategies for additional monetary gifts to the project, potentially totaling between \$2 and \$3 million.
9. The congregation celebrated a "New Beginnings" worship service for Palm Sunday, April 10, to mark the end of this season of the congregation's life and the exciting possibilities that await them in the next season.
10. Developed a draft lease with 120 E. State Street, Inc., to accompany the grant application. Final terms of the lease were negotiated in May, in order to provide this document to the Presbytery Trustees for approval by the presbytery itself.
11. The Session voted to accept the terms of the lease and recommend the lease to the congregation for approval at a Special Congregational Meeting on June 23, 2022
12. The congregation approved the terms of the [lease agreement](#) at a Special Congregational Meeting on June 23, 2022.
13. The Session agreed to and signed a [Memorandum of Understanding](#), developed by the Presbytery Council, giving the Session permission to fully execute a lease for the FPCT sanctuary building and surrounding grounds with 120 East State. This fully executed lease was a condition of application for \$825,000 in NJ Historic Trust monies that will provide for the stabilization and updating of the sanctuary building exterior.
14. The 501c3 board submitted the application to the Historic Trust for \$825,000 for the initial exterior work required on the Steeple center, including the fully executed lease as permitted by the Presbytery Council in its Memorandum of Understanding.
15. Session signed a lease agreement with St. Michael's Episcopal Church in Trenton, to provide interim worship space for the congregation while they determine where, when, and how they will return to worship on their current campus. For this interim period at least, the session has provided corporate worship using pulpit supply for leadership.
16. The 501c3 board submitted the application to the Historic Trust for \$825,000 for the initial exterior work required on the Steeple center, including the fully executed lease as permitted by the Presbytery Council in its Memorandum of Understanding.
17. Session contracted with Clarke, Caton, Hintz to begin the process of securing historic designation for its properties on E. Hanover Street.
18. Session continues the work of sorting, organizing and clearing the former sanctuary and fellowship hall spaces in preparation for renovation and renewal work.
19. Session received the great good news that the grant written by 120 East State and made possible by the fully executed lease submitted with permission from the Memorandum of Understanding developed by the Presbytery Council had been approved in the amount of \$825,000 to aid the stabilization and restoration of the exterior and windows of the former sanctuary building.

Notes:

1. Although the Historic Trust grant requires that there be no corporate worship in buildings for which grant monies are requested, the congregation will continue to have an office in the facility and host its ongoing community ministry programs and other programming from these buildings.
2. The provision of pastoral care for this congregation remains a concern. This small band of believers is a tight knit group and cares for one another with attention and love. In addition, Presbytery representatives to this congregation are willing and available should the session request help.
3. The session has developed a job description for a part time pastor while they continue to explore staffing possibilities and opportunities.

The Commission on Ministry affirms the session of the First Presbyterian Church of Trenton in their forward looking vision for Presbyterian witness and ministry in Trenton. We support the session in its stated vision for the future of its historic sanctuary and fellowship hall:

From the Session of First Presbyterian Church Trenton:

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Moved and passed, May 3, 2022 Moderator: Rev. Jessica Dixon