

# Church seeks funding to repair last historic steeple in Bellefonte

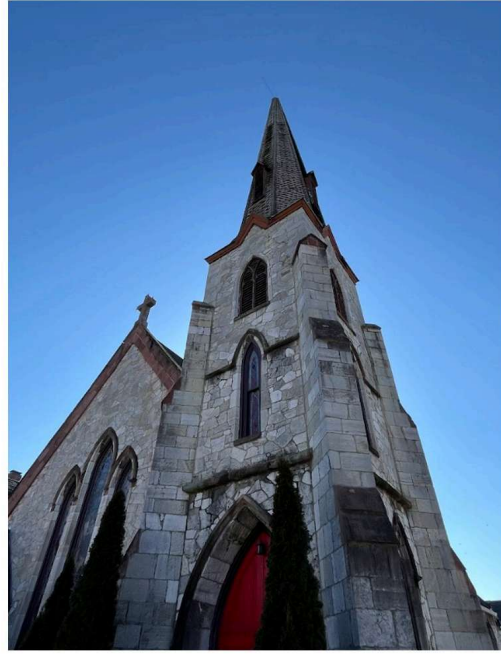
JACOB MICHAEL

A historic church is seeking financial support to repair its steeple, which happens to be the last original historic steeple remaining in Bellefonte Borough.

Representatives from [St. John's Episcopal Church](#), located at 120 W. Lamb St. beside Bellefonte Elementary School, attended the Centre County Commissioners' [Feb. 24 meeting](#) to ask for a letter of support for a [Keystone Historic Preservation Construction Grant](#) application. The letter was approved unanimously.

If the church is awarded the \$100,000 grant, it would be put entirely toward the repairs, which are estimated to cost just over \$200,000. According to the Rev. Ruth Ferguson, the steeple was damaged after a rare derecho storm [hit the area last April](#).

"Our steeple, which is the last historic steeple that's left in Bellefonte — I think there were nine at one point — but it needs repair that is above and beyond what your average parishioner can pledge to cover, unfortunately," Ferguson said. "We would love to be able to preserve it... any structural deterioration there might interrupt the



The historic, original steeple of St. John's Episcopal Church in Bellefonte was damaged in a storm last year.

things we do."

Sze Wing Yu, the church's grant committee head, added that the damage includes several curled shingles, a broken cross and deteriorated wood, stone and metal parts inside the steeple.

Yu also noted that because of the church's historic nature, a steeplejack — a person who deals in repairing old steeples and golden domes — has to be contracted for the work, as opposed to a regular engineer. So far, they've only reached out one specialist, but the church is actively seeking more quotes.

"It's important to do this kind of preventative main-

tenance stuff now rather than let it keep deteriorating," Yu said.

St. John's Episcopal Church was erected in 1871, Yu said at the meeting, although the church's practitioners have been worshiping in Bellefonte [since 1825](#). The current steeple is the exact one that the church was built with 155 years ago.

The church is also located in the borough's historical district and is a staple in Bellefonte's Victorian heritage, Ferguson and Yu said. Its location within the district makes it eligible for the grant, which only applies to structures listed in the [National Register of Historic Places](#), or

structures that are old enough to be registered.

“It is a *beautiful* church, and I’ve visited it several times there in downtown Bellefonte,” Commissioner Mark Higgins said at the meeting.

“Unfortunately I think you’re right, it is the last really tall steeple remaining in the downtown Bellefonte area.”

Ferguson and Yu must wait until at least June to know if they’ve been awarded funding. If the funding is awarded, the grant application requires that the project start by Sept. 1, and quarterly updates must be provided until the project’s completion by Sept. 30, 2028 — at the latest.

Yu said that she will also apply to a number of other state and federal grants to raise funds, and that the church will hold several fundraising events for the repairs throughout the year.

More updates on the church’s grant application and information about upcoming fundraising events will be shared on the church’s [Facebook page](#) and public [Facebook group](#).