

Judge to take bit part in courthouse project

Beyond new roof, renovation details have been sketchy

By MONA CASTEEL

Shenandoah County Circuit Judge Dennis Hupp apparently will serve only as an advisor during the planned \$1.2 million restoration of the county's historic downtown Woodstock courthouse.

Renovation of the courthouse is expected to get under way early this year.

Although the scope of the project is not clear, early indications are that it will at least include installation of a new standing seam roof and the creation of a single courtroom for the circuit court.

The courtroom would meet a requirement in the original deed to the property stipulating that should the land on which the building was

constructed cease to be used for the courts ownership of it would revert to heirs of those who gave it.

Asked recently what role he would play in the renovations, Judge Hupp described it as "advisory." He said he had attended meetings with architects a year ago and toured the old courthouse at that time.

Judge Hupp said he "made references" to a 2008 letter he wrote to county supervisors describing in some detail improvements he thought should be included.

"I trust they will consult me from time to time as need be as they go about the project," the judge said of architects and contractors.

The only public statement issued thus far has been that the planned new metal roof will be painted silver. The existing roof is green.

Historic preservationists consulted about the roof recommended that it be painted silver.

The roof on the 1795 portion of the building fronting on Main Street was constructed

of chestnut singles, according to the book *Shenandoah County and Its Courthouse*, a book authored by the late historian Fred Painter.

The historic courthouse was constructed in three phases. Nearly 100 years after the original 1795 building was completed, the building was expanded in 1871 along the Court Street side. When the storage of court records dictated it, a third addition was added further west to serve as a clerk's office.

Two of the county's three

courts met in the building until the early 1970s when Circuit Judge Elliott D. Marshall ordered county supervisors to construct a new courthouse for the circuit court, one that would include a clerk's office and offices for the county government.

That building opened in 1973, and two years later the old courthouse was renovated for the general district and juvenile and domestic relations courts.

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Old courthouse to get new roof, courtroom

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It was Judge Hupp who in 2008 delivered the answer to the supervisors' conundrum over the future of the landmark.

Judge Hupp said if supervisors would renovate the 1871 portion of the building to meet Virginia Supreme Court courtroom standards he would occasionally hold hearings there to maintain the building's historical status as America's oldest courthouse west of the Blue Ridge Mountains in continuous use. The project also would prevent heirs of Abraham and Barbara Brubaker, who in the 1780s donated land for it, to claim the property.

In March 2010, Hupp told The Free Press that he considered his role in the renovation of the landmark "as one who simply makes sure the county has adequate courts facilities." He also cited an historic interest. "We have the distinction of being the oldest courthouse still in use west of the Blue Ridge Mountains. I have a personal interest in that. It's

the right thing to do."

At the least, the renovations project will require a courtroom, a waiting area for witnesses, a conference room and a judge's chambers.

Judge Hupp has suggested that a holding cell in that area of the building be retained.

Though community and historical groups have indicated they may use parts of the original building, renovation of the 1871 portion will serve no immediate purpose but to satisfy the original deed.

"Although I do not foresee for quite some time the need for a second circuit courtroom on a routine or daily basis, there are times now when having a second courtroom would expedite the handling of docket," Judge Hupp wrote the county administrator.

When the renovations are complete, taxpayers in Shenandoah County, a rural community whose crime rate has been historically low, will bear the cost of operating three courthouses, including personnel required for increased security.