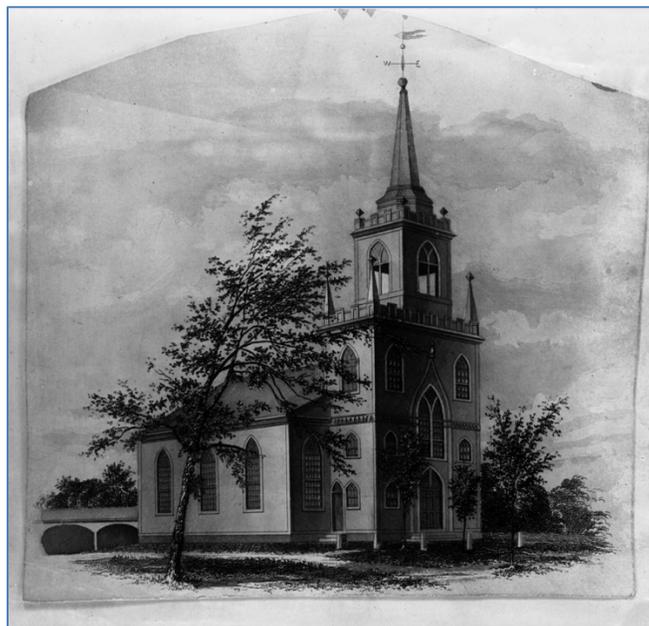
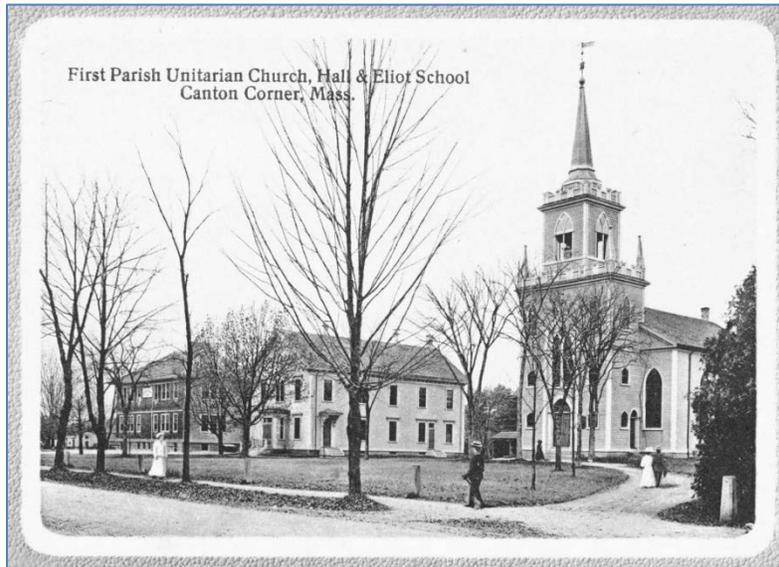


Steeple Restoration Project

First Parish Unitarian Universalist, Canton, Massachusetts is a consolidation of two of the oldest churches in Canton. The First Parish Unitarian Universalist (FPUU) Steeple Project is the historic preservation and restoration of the steeple and spire of the oldest church in Canton. The current sanctuary was dedicated in 1824. With funding from the Canton Community Preservation Committee and our own resources, we will renovate the sanctuary's steeple and spire; restore its magnificent weathervane atop the spire, and plan for the restoration of its majestic Gothic Revival railing features (pinnacles and embattlements) as pictured in the historic photos here.



Rehabilitating the steeple ensures our historic 1821 Paul Revere & Son bell will continue to ring every Sunday for all of Canton to enjoy. The newly re-gilded weathervane, which predates the current church, will shine anew, drawing the attention of passersby. Our historic church is a centerpiece of the picturesque Canton Corner Historic District, and we are committed to restoring it to its original glory. Please take a look at our list of Questions & Answers below for further discussion of this project.

Questions and Answers

- [Why is the church asking the town for money?](#)
- [Can anyone get a CPC Grant?](#)
- [Why doesn't your diocese or religious governing body maintain the building?](#)
- [What has the church done to maintain the steeple?](#)
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- [What about the separation of church and state?](#)
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- [What are the process and the timeline for getting approval of the CPC grants?](#)

Why is the church asking the town for money?

First Parish Unitarian Universalist is located in the Canton Corner District, which is listed on both the State and National Register of Historic Places, and is one of the oldest and most prominent structures in the historic district. The Canton Community Preservation Committee (CPC) has monies set aside for historical preservation, affordable housing, outdoor recreation, and open space. Under the guidelines of the Historic Preservation Act, as a historic building First Parish qualifies to apply for CPC funding.

As custodians of this historic building, we take pride in maintaining it for everyone in town, not just for ourselves as parishioners. CPC funds will allow us to restore First Parish's historical integrity and appearance as a principal landmark of Canton Corner. [↑](#)

Can anyone get a CPC Grant?

No, applicants for Historic Preservation funds from the CPC must pass several hurdles before being considered for funding. The structure must be listed on the State or Local Register of Historic Places. A perpetual Historic Preservation restriction may be required by the local CPC to ensure that future modifications to the renovations supported by the CPC grant do not alter the historic character of the building. [↑](#)

Why doesn't your diocese or religious governing body maintain the building?

The First Parish Unitarian Universalist (UU) church is a self-sustaining community. We receive no support from any diocese or equivalent organization: The operation of the church is paid for entirely by our individual members (~100) through an annual fund drive or canvass and rent from groups and individuals who utilize our building. [↑](#)

What has the church done to maintain the steeple?

The church has had the steeple painted many times over the almost two-hundred-year history of this building. Over time, the original railings fell into disrepair and, as evidenced by photographs over a fifty-year period, the top rails came down, and eventually, the lower rails were taken off when parts of that railing began falling off in the 1970s. Most recently, the church paid to have the steeple painted in September 1999, and to replace and paint the bell cradle, which houses the Paul Revere bell, in March 2000. [↑](#)

How has the church contributed to historic preservation of the structure in the past?

One of the more recent and more expensive historic restoration efforts was the extensive work performed on the sanctuary's stained glass windows. This was a \$54,000 undertaking that was financed entirely by the congregation. [↑](#)

What about the separation of church and state?

The Community Preservation Act allows for the funding of historic preservation for any structure that is listed on the State or Local Register of Historic Places, and, as is often the case in New England, some of the oldest buildings in a town are churches. CPA funds have been used in many Massachusetts towns for the historic preservation of churches.

In many ways, the town of Canton and First Parish has been intertwined since their inceptions beginning in 1717 when new Land Grant settlers of Plymouth Colony gathered and dedicated the "meetinghouse" in what is now Canton Corner Cemetery. The town later built its second meetinghouse at the present day site of First Parish using it for both religious services and as a public building and for Town Meeting. When the newly independent First Congregational Church congregation outgrew the second meetinghouse in 1820, the present day church sanctuary was built on the same location and dedicated in 1824. First Parish still plays a vibrant role in the Canton community and has been good neighbor to the town. [↑](#)

Don't you get money from the cell phone 'towers' inside the steeple?

Yes, First Parish does receive approximately \$27,000 in revenue annually from one cell tower company. These funds are used to support our operating expenses, including maintenance of our building and grounds, compensation for ministry and office staff, sponsorship of programs and activities for youth and adults, and contributions to local and global justice work.

For several years, a second cell tower company rented space inside the steeple, and half of the rent received from that cell tower was dedicated to maintain our historic building. Some of that maintenance in recent years has included replacement of exterior doors, electrical work, furnace and water heater replacement, parking lot repairs, installation of a handicap-accessible bathroom, slate and roof repairs, a septic connection, exterior and interior painting, floor refinishing and carpet replacement. [↑](#)

What is the total cost of the First Parish steeple restoration project?

The preliminary—but professionally produced—budget for the total cost for the First Parish Canton steeple restoration is \$219,370. We are approaching the project in two phases: steeple, spire and weathervane restoration budgeted at \$125,620; and re-creation/replacement of the Gothic railings and embellishments budgeted at \$81,250. First Parish Canton has provisionally been awarded \$99,120 in CPC money for the first phase of the project. First Parish Canton will contribute its own funds for a portion of project with a cash contribution of approximately \$15,000 and in-kind professional project management services.

It is important to note that, while the first stage of the restoration is mostly the renovation of the steeple and spire and weathervane that you can see today, a major objective of this effort is to replace the Gothic railings and embellishments that represent true historic restoration—allowing residents of and visitors to Canton to enjoy the church structure as it was originally designed and constructed in the early 1800’s, as seen in the photos on our website and in this document. [↑](#)

Will my taxes go up to pay for this project?

No, the funding for the project comes from the Community Preservation Act (CPA) fund. CPA funds are generated through two sources: a surcharge of 1 percent on property tax bills (already in place in Canton) and an annual disbursement of funds from the state Community Preservation Trust Fund, which distributes funds each October to communities that have adopted CPA. The state funds are generated through fees at the Registry of Deeds. [↑](#)

Wouldn’t this town money be better spent on more teachers or firefighters?

No, the Community Preservation Act fund is earmarked specifically for historical preservation, affordable housing, outdoor recreation and open space. [↑](#)

What are the process and the timeline for getting approval of the CPC grants?

On December 1, 2014, the CPC approved funding for a total of \$99,140 for the renovation of the First Parish steeple. An initial sum of money will be made available to First Parish to assess the scope of the project and have design plans made. Once these plans and that budget are approved, the CPC would release funds for the remainder of the project as needed.

The CPC grant to First Parish was approved by Canton citizens at Town Meeting in May 2015 in the Morse Auditorium at Canton High School. First Parish Unitarian Universalist Canton is in the process of working out a permanent preservation restriction with the Town and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. [↑](#)