

Black congregation, leaders of historic N.C. town strive to save century-old church

By Jeff Hampton
The Virginian-Pilot

EDENTON, N.C.

A black congregation and leaders of one of North Carolina's oldest towns are teaming up to save a hurricane-damaged chapel built more than a century ago.

Grants from prestigious national organizations and fried chicken dinners made by local cooks play some of the parts.

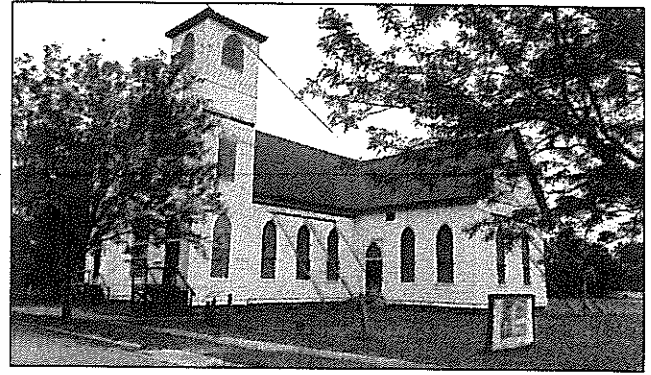
Hurricane Isabel in 2003 flooded much of Edenton, sending waters more than 4 feet surging around the foundations of some of the state's oldest structures. That included the Kadesh A.M.E. Zion Church.

The towering walls

creaked and leaned with the wind until they were shored up with thick metal braces. Carpenters removed the tall, Tiffany stained-glass windows to protect them from breaking. The bell heard for generations from its three-story tower went into storage. Congregation members scrambled to find another place to meet.

"Those were terrible times," said Audrey Bond, lifelong church member and owner of a clothing alteration business on Broad Street. "It was a beautiful sanctuary."

Most of this town's stately homes and public buildings tell the story of white officials and proprietors who incorporated the town of 5,000



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The project to restore the historic Kadesh A.M.E. Zion Church in Edenton will cost more than \$1 million.

in 1722, attorney and town Councilman Sambo Dixon said. The church's restoration will start a greater focus on black-owned structures, he said.

"This is one of the most important African American sites in the state," Dixon said. "This will be a wonderful symbol of our ability to come together as a community."

The church's beginnings go back to 1857. Forty years later, the expanding congregation hired local carpenter Hannibal Badham and his two sons to build a sanctuary on Gale Street large enough for 400. Badham and his sons were highly regarded craftsmen and built many houses in Edenton, a town known for some of the oldest structures in the state.

The carved door frames and the ceiling arching two stories above the chapel floor are among the examples of woodworking mastery, said Mike Ervin, executive director of the Edenton Historical Commission.

"This is before there were power tools," he said. "It was an amazing feat by hand."

Bond remembers when the ringing church bell drew hundreds to the services. The largest funerals and community gatherings in the black community were held at Kadesh Church.

Now parts of the origi-

nal wood floor are rotting. Weathered plywood has replaced the missing windows in attempts to block the elements. Bats and pigeons inhabit the bell tower. Termites chew at the wooden frame.

The project will cost more than \$1 million. Restoration of the stained-glass windows alone will cost about \$250,000, Ervin said. The historical commission hopes to purchase a pipe organ from the 1890s similar to the original that would replace the aging contemporary organ still inside the church.


Project engineers from McPherson Design Group have done historic projects in Virginia, including at Jamestown.

The National Fund for Sacred Places has promised \$250,000, Ervin said. Dixon said he is working on a \$50,000 grant from The National Trust for Historic Preservation, and there are plans are to hire a professional fundraiser.


The town and church leadership are applying for grants. The congregation of about 50 active members also has held a food-related fundraiser featuring some of the best fried chicken around, Bond said.

"Everybody is so happy about what's going on at Kadesh," she said.

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City of Virginia Beach
Department of Housing &
Neighborhood Preservation (DHNP)
2017-2018 Annual Action Plan (AAP)
for the use of Federal Housing and
Community Development Funds



**DRAFT CONTINGENT AAP AVAILABLE FOR 14-DAY
COMMENT PERIOD COMMENCES JUNE 12, 2017**

**Public hearing will be held
Monday, June 19, 2017 at 6 p.m.
Municipal Center - Building 18A
2424 Courthouse Drive, Virginia Beach, VA 23456**

A public hearing will be held at the time and location indicated above to solicit comments on the city's proposed 2017-2018 Contingent Annual Action Plan (AAP). The public hearing location is accessible to the disabled. If reasonable accommodations are needed, please call (757) 385-5894 or (757) 385-5754. This hearing is conducted in accordance with DHNP's Citizen Participation Plan. This notice announces the availability of the draft Contingent AAP for citizens to review and the opportunity for comment at the public hearing. The draft Contingent AAP and Citizen Participation Plan can be viewed at www.vbgov.com/AAP.

The AAP defines the city's priorities for the use of the following funds: Community Development Block Grant (CDBG): \$1.7 million, HOME Investment Partnerships (HOME): \$807,000; Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG): \$156,000; and the Housing Opportunities for People with AIDS (HOPWA): \$1.1 million. The AAP also provides a summary of the city's housing and community development needs, resources and strategies. The draft AAP contains a Funding Contingency Provision: "This plan is contingent on federal funding allocations. All funds as listed are estimates. All proposed activities' budgets in the AAP will be proportionally increased or decreased from the estimated funding levels to match actual allocation amounts, when actual allocations amounts are received from HUD."

Public Comment Period: The purpose of this notice is to meet the waiver requirement for a 14-day comment period for the draft Contingent AAP. The comment period expires on Sunday, June 25, 2017. Comments may be submitted in writing to Andrew Friedman, Director, City of Virginia Beach Dept. of Housing & Neighborhood Preservation, Building 21 - Room 144, 2408 Courthouse Dr., Virginia Beach, VA 23456; or by email to cwalters@vbgov.com. For questions contact Cindy Walters at (757) 385-5754 or cwalters@vbgov.com.