

WPA 'ROUND BUILDING' SHAPING UP

by Amy Davis

Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN: 3 April 2014

Monterey Downtown Inc. members, from left, Margaret Stephenson, Nathan Walker and



Theresa Pugh-Godsey survey the improvements made to the historic WPA building in downtown Monterey. The structure will eventually become a business information kiosk. Ty Kernea | Herald-Citizen



Monterey's historic WPA "round building" has come a long way since this day in October 2011 when David Sampley stopped by to reminisce. His father, John L. Sampley, served as the town's first superintendent of waterworks, beginning in the mid-1930s. Amy Davis | Herald-Citizen file

MONTEREY — Observing it today, one may never guess that the little green round building near the Monterey depot was once in shambles.

"It was a terrible eyesore at one of our entrances into town," Theresa Pugh-Godsey, president of Monterey Downtown Inc., said of the 17-foot-wide concrete structure that, only a couple of years ago, had been characterized by harsh grey and black streaks and

broken cinder blocks where a door should have been.

But that was then.

Lately, though — through the efforts of MDI, who petitioned the mayor and aldermen for use of the building in June 2010 — a new town attraction has been emerging.

At least, that's what MDI members envisioned as they've been restoring the building, a project they deemed worthy due to it being built by WPA workers in 1935 as a well and pump house to purify the town's water supply, which it did until the 1960s.

The idea was that the building would be converted into a business information kiosk for downtown businesses as part of MDI's mission to revitalize the downtown area.

Slowly, the vision is coming to pass — but maybe a little too slowly for some town officials, as indicated during a work session last week.

“Can you give us an update as to where you are with the building?” Alderman Jeff Murphy asked MDI members. “When will it be open?”

Margaret Stephenson, MDI secretary, then gave a presentation, noting the many improvements to the building since work began in late 2011. Some of those improvements include sealing holes and cracks in the walls and roof; repairing the floor and damaged entryway; installing new windows and doors; adding a concrete handicap-accessible ramp and platform; heating and air conditioning; exterior lighting; painting; and landscaping.

“Is it in any condition to use for functions at this point?” Alderwoman Rebecca Iaquina asked.

Stephenson replied, “Absolutely. It has a new floor, and we have heat, air and lights.”

But it's still not complete, as MDI has plans to add audio visual equipment for sharing the history of the WPA building and downtown area.

“We're hoping to get a grant (for the equipment) so we can have a professionally done presentation,” Stephenson said. “But the building itself can be opened.”

Alderwoman Clarice Weist asked, “Who's going to take care of the building while the TV's going? Do you have money to pay somebody to sit there?”

Stephenson replied, “We will have to make arrangements for that, certainly.”

Alderman Dale Welch asked, “How many people can fit in there?”

Stephenson said, “I personally think it's much larger inside than it appears from the

outside. For those of you who haven't seen it, I really encourage you to come and look at it."

Aldermen then discussed some possible uses for the building, including tours and class trips.

"I thought it would be neat to have book reviews there — have tables on the lawn and serve tea for a fundraiser," Weist said. "There are a lot of local authors who would love to review their books."

Welch pointed out that his original motion to allow MDI's use of the building did not include the grounds.

"Now there are trees planted and all kinds of things in the yard," he said. "When we get ready to purchase another piece of rail equipment (for the depot), guess where that's going to go?"

Pugh-Godsey told the Herald-Citizen she and her fellow MDI members are pleased with the building's transformation so far.

"It's made a huge difference in the town's appearance in the area by the depot," she said.

"All of us are very proud of it and very grateful to all the people who have donated time, materials and money. If it hadn't been for volunteers, donations and grants, none of this would have ever happened."

But for those same reasons, work has been slow-going at times, she said.

"We wish it could already be done," she said. "But, obviously, when you're depending on donations and volunteers, things just don't happen quickly. You've got to do fundraisers and apply for grants. It's just a long, tedious process to see things through."

Pugh-Godsey is optimistic that more grant funds could be available to help move things along with the audio visual equipment.

"If we can get that going, hopefully it won't be too long, but you never know," she said.

More aesthetic improvements are also in the plans, including a nicer finish on the concrete floor, installation of an original light fixture from when the building was still a water treatment plant, wall murals and historical photos.

MDI also foresees the building being used during annual city events such as Spring on the Mountain and Standing Stone Day.

"It could be available for the whole town to enjoy," Pugh-Godsey said.

Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN: 3 April 2014.

*Read more about Putnam Co., TN & surrounding areas at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>