

Residents rally for Peters House plan

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HEBRON — Impassioned attendees at Thursday night's public hearing on the proposed historical designation of the Peters House in Hebron begged the selectmen to preserve what one resident called a "national treasure."

Approximately 40 people crowded into the town office building

meeting room, including direct descendants of Cesar and Louis Peters.

Cesar and Louis were slaves of Samuel Peters who, history says, once lived at the Peters House.

When Cesar and Louis were about to be traded, Hebron residents traveled for days to rescue them and return them to Hebron,

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in an act seen as one of the earliest instances of abolitionism in Connecticut.

The town acquired the Peters House — which dates to the 1700s — in 2004 as part of an open space purchase on East Street for recreational use. The rest of the parcel is a park.

Historians have been pushing town officials to take steps to preserve the house, but selectmen have been mindful of the costs involved in such an effort.

At one point the house was slated to be sold to a private owner, but after negotiations fell through, the selectmen appointed a use study committee to review options for the house.

The committee recommended the house be used as a combination municipal office and museum, and town officials are still reviewing what will become of the house and how, or whether, to restore it.

Meanwhile, the town's historic properties commission and planning and zoning commission, as well as the state Commission on Culture and Tourism, have backed seeking a historic designation for the house.

Now, it remains to be seen what the select-

men decide.

A historical designation adds controls that limit how and what can be done on the site, with preservation always a goal.

No one at the public hearing wanted the selectmen to decide against the historical designation.

In fact, the applause after each supporter spoke indicated the majority was in favor of it.

Some of the supporters had a more personal stake in the matter.

Ade Peters, a direct descendant of Cesar and Lewis, asked selectmen to preserve the house and grant the designation, noting how valuable the site's history is to his family.

"The house should be kept as an historical property," he said.

Hebron residents, both those who have lived in town for generations and relative newcomers, spoke in favor of the designation.

"We have a national treasure in our community," said resident Dan Larson.

Some residents noted that even without the history, the architectural features alone would make the home worth saving, while others

spoke about how the historical designation would draw tourists to town and make the park parcel even more valuable.

Resident David Morrison spoke on behalf of the designation and also presented written input from his wife, Susan Morrison, a former chairman of the historic properties commission.

"It's been documented historical," Morrison said. "Now it's time to designate it historical."

Donna McCalla, the president of the Hebron Historical Society, a member of the Historic Properties Commission, and a long-time proponent of restoring the Peters House, said she had a new reason to preserve the site as a historical asset.

She had learned earlier in the day that the house was now being included on the Freedom Trail, buildings that are associated with the Underground Railroad and the abolition movement.

Board of selectmen Chairman Jeffrey Watt said the board would take all of the public input into consideration, and make a decision on the designation at the Feb. 19 selectmen meeting.

40-year-old... expert Jerry Yang 49 dies