

# TCNJ, preservationists at odds over future of 1730s farmhouse



The William Green Farmhouse on the College of New Jersey's campus. (Cristina Rojas | For NJ.com)

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**EWING** — The College of New Jersey, with its picturesque campus, may seem like an unlikely place to find one of Ewing's oldest settlements.

But across from the baseball fields sits the William Green Farmhouse, whose oldest surviving section dates back to the 1730s.

The building, known for its Flemish bond brickwork, is listed on the state and national registers of historic places. The Greens, who were prominent among the early settlers, expanded it at the end of the 18th century and again in 1830.

For the past 40 years, groups have been working with the college to support the building's restoration, but now its future is in limbo as the college focuses its efforts on raising at least \$40 million as part of its **first comprehensive campaign**.

"Lending our name to this effort would distract from the focus of our own ongoing campaign," TCNJ spokesman David Muha said. "We are focusing our resources and reputation on those priorities that most closely support our mission."

The Friends of the William Green Farmhouse formed in 2000 with the goal of finding enough funding to stabilize and restore the historic farmhouse.

In 2007, TCNJ spent \$100,000 to mothball the building in anticipation of future rehabilitation.

"That was a significant step in our opinion," said Billy O'Neal, the group's vice president. "I almost cried, that's how overwhelmed we were."

But little has been done since then, he noted.

"It took away the urgency of doing anything else because it at least stabilized it," he said.

In 2012, the farmhouse was approved for use as an alumni reception center. An estimate pegged the cost of full restoration at \$2.6 million — more than 10 times the cost in 1976 and double the cost in 2001.

Anne McArthur, the group's president, fears that costs will only continue to rise.

"At some point the college needs to take some sort of responsibility for this National Register building that they knowingly bought," she said. "The sooner they restore it, the less it will cost."

The group began making plans to raise funds and apply for grants. They approached school officials last year about getting a letter of support so they could reassure donors about where the money would be going and for what purpose.

But they were dealt a blow earlier this year when TCNJ informed them that it would not endorse a fundraising effort or commit to any future use, McArthur said.

That setback landed the farmhouse on Preservation New Jersey's **10 most endangered historic places in the state for 2015**.

McArthur said TCNJ is sitting on history that could be a showpiece for the college and serve as a teaching resource for students and professors.

"Basically, we're waiting on the college ... to meet with us and hopefully reverse their decision," McArthur said. "It's up to TCNJ at this point."

She said the group has a number of ideas for the building, ranging from an alumni center to a coffeehouse to an event space for sports teams, but the hope is that it would become a part of the fabric of campus life.

"We would like to see a small section of it be used as an exhibit of the house's history and the Green family's history, but to me, it's very important that it be an adaptive reuse that fits into the needs of the college," she said.

For more information, visit [williamgreenhouse.org](http://williamgreenhouse.org).

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