# What’s next as renovation work continues on Gardiner’s Christ Church

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Workers from Roof Systems of Maine assemble metal steeple frame pieces Oct. 26 on a closed section of Dresden Avenue in front of Christ Episcopal Church in Gardiner. (Joe Phelan/Staff Photographer)

GARDINER — When renovation work began on Christ Church a year and a half ago, the project was to fix the bell tower on the historic church.

But as work progressed, more damage has been found, doubling the estimated cost.

Now, for most of the month, Dresden Avenue will be closed between Church and School streets to accommodate the ongoing work to rebuild the spire.

“Taking the spire off was a big deal,” said the Rev. Kerry Mansir, the rector of Christ Church on the Common. “They had to just tear it down to pieces, but doing that, they realized that that had a lot of damage and probably would have needed to be repaired at some point anyway. So in some ways it’s better to just do it all at once.”

As repairs progressed, it became clear that additional work needed to be done due to the deteriorated state of the tower. What the church originally thought would be a $1 million project now costs an estimated $2.2 million.



The Rev. Kerry Mansir, the rector of Christ Church on the Common in Gardiner, speaks at a ceremony in 2025. (Morning Sentinel file)

The facade of the tower has a granite exterior and rubble in the middle. Over time, water deterioration resulted in the granite shifting, and the church was told they had about five years before it could become dangerous. After securing $890,000 from federal government appropriations, the project started, and they began taking out pieces of the granite wall.

“The original plan was not to take the spire off, the steeple part, but to just repair the walls of the tower with everything in place,” Mansir said. “As they started pulling granite pieces out, that’s when they could actually see down between the granite facade and see that the rubble was just sand. That’s when they decided that it would not be safe to repair it that way, they had to take the spire off.”

Every piece of granite removed has been labeled to be put back in the same place once it’s ready, and stored in a unit down the road.

“It was sort of like Legos, where everything has a letter and a number so it would go back in the same place,” Mansir said.



A worker tightens a bolt as the Roof Systems of Maine crew assembles metal steeple frame pieces Oct. 26 on a closed section of Dresden Avenue, in front of Christ Church on the Common in Gardiner. (Joe Phelan/Staff Photographer)

The Episcopal church is in the middle of its restoration, which began in the spring of 2025 and is projected to be done in the spring of 2027. The spire, which is currently being rebuilt, is aimed to be back on the church before this winter.

The original church was founded in 1771 by Sylvester Gardiner, built next to St. Ann's church yard in the lot next to the current church. Although he lived in Boston, Gardiner owned property in Kennebec County, and decided to build a church to encourage people to settle the area.

The original wooden church was burned down in 1793 by Henry McCausland, who claimed he heard the voice of God telling him to kill the the minister. The church was rebuilt in 1815, and eventually the congregation outgrew the building, leading to the construction of Christ Church.

Robert Hallowell Gardiner, the grandson of Sylvester, paid for the majority of the construction, which cost about $5,000. The granite used in construction was from a Litchfield quarry. It was finished and consecrated in 1820, the same year that Maine became a state.

The church is home to a Paul Revere & Sons Foundry bell, which was bought in 1820 after selling the previous St. Ann's church to the town. Mansir said that it was rung for flooding or fires.

Alongside an initial $890,000 grant, the church has received funding from other smaller grants and fundraising, such as $250,000 from the Maine Historic Preservation Commission. Mansir said the community has been very generous in helping to preserve the church.

"We have felt a responsibility to preserve it for the town … So (we are) just trying to talk to the community about how we're not just preserving it for us, we're preserving it for the town," said Mansir.

Mansir said the church is seen as more than a place for worship — it's a place for the community. They host a community dinner each Sunday, and many local groups use the space for gatherings. Mansir said that they are able to give back to the community financially through a grant from a local organization.

Despite the renovations, Mansir said that the church has been operating as normal.

"We don't just want to be putting money into the building," she said. "We're trying to keep that perspective that our role is really to serve the community."

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