# After nearly a century of decay, Bethlehem's Maplewood Train Station razed with hope of rising again

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[](https://www.unionleader.com/content/tncms/live/%22%20%5Cl%20%221)

An excavator on Wednesday knocked down the remains of the Maplewood Train Station, which will be rebuilt elsewhere in Bethlehem.

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This photo of Bethlehem’s Maplewood Station was taken more than a century ago.

* Provided by Maplewood Station

Top of Form

Bottom of Form

BETHLEHEM — Abandoned since 1924, the Maplewood Train Station was razed this week, and in the process, is getting the chance to live again.

In response to a surge of tourists in the 1850s from as far away as New York City, who came up to Bethlehem Village via horses and wagons from train-served communities in the valleys below, the burghers of Bethlehem in 1881 built themselves a narrow-gauge line.

The line, according to [**MaplewoodTrainStation.org**](http://maplewoodtrainstation.org/), had two stops: Maplewood and the Bethlehem Station in Bethlehem Village.

The rise of the automobile doomed the stations with Maplewood, until recently, rotting away in the woods at the east end of the Maplewood Golf Club & Inn while the Bethlehem Village station was converted into a private residence.

The residence is that of Bruce Caplain, who is a Bethlehem selectman and a founder of [**MaplewoodTrainStation.org**](http://maplewoodtrainstation.org/), a nonprofit formed to save its namesake.

He said in an email that the station would be taken down starting Oct. 25.

On Maplewood Station’s Facebook page, someone posted that the demolition, by Mt. Cleveland Construction, was “a huge step forward in saving the station.”

While not immediately available Thursday, Caplain has previously said that restoring the Maplewood Station is a two-phase project that culminates with the recreation of the station at a centrally-located site in Bethlehem.

That site has yet to be chosen.

The station would be open to the public for historic displays and community programs, he said, while serving as a physical reminder of Bethlehem’s tourism history.

Phase II is expected to cost upwards of $500,000 and would be grant-funded.

On its website, the Bethlehem Heritage Society said that “During the height of the summer season, as many as eight and ten trains came into Bethlehem daily.”

The trains were “met by the stage coaches to carry the guests to the various hotels and boarding houses,” said the website, adding that “In those days, people came to Bethlehem in June and stayed through the summer, well into the month of September.”

**Abandoned Bethlehem train station may be back on track**

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Top of Form

Bottom of Form

For the first time in nearly a century, there’s activity at the Maplewood Train Station in Bethlehem as a volunteer group begins documenting the structure before reassembling it and opening it to the public.

Phase I of the project, said Selectman Bruce Caplain on Wednesday, started with the installation of wooden buttresses on the west side of the depot, which is a short distance off Maplewood Hill Road, abutting the Maplewood Golf Club & Inn.

He said that soon an architect will visually record every facet of the building and come up with a plan for a contractor to “take it apart,” ideally by the fall, and in Phase II, put it back together near the center of town.

Phase I is expected to cost $12,000, Caplain said, and already two people have said they would match the first $7,500 raised by the nonprofit [MaplewoodTrainStation.org](http://MaplewoodTrainStation.org).

Phase II, which would cost $500,000, entails getting grant funding to rebuild the station on a site still to be chosen, ideally somewhere prominent like on Main Street, said Caplain.

It would be open to the public, available for historic displays and community programs, and serve as an example of Bethlehem’s tourism history.

That history goes back to the 1850s when people from as far away as New York City and from all over New England took trains into the valleys around Bethlehem where horses and wagons waited to bring them to the heights of Bethlehem Village and its grand hotels.

In 1885, according to [MaplewoodTrainStation.org](http://MaplewoodTrainStation.org), a narrow-gauge rail line was built in Bethlehem with two stations: Maplewood and the Bethlehem Station in Bethlehem Village, the latter of which Caplain transformed into his residence.

The train tracks in front of both stations are long gone, said Caplain, and the Maplewood Station may have been abandoned since 1924, but it has never been forgotten.

A CPA who has called Bethlehem home for almost 13 years, Caplain noted that “a lot of people have had the idea over the years” of rehabbing the Maplewood Station.

Caplain recalled a conversation with Selectman Linda Moore about the Maplewood station, and learning that it was one of the things that attracted her to settle in town.

That conversation expanded to include Clare Brown, whose family has been in Bethlehem “for generations,” said Caplain, and who is also a founder and president of the Bethlehem Heritage Society.

Joined by other passionate locals, including Jack Anderson, Bethlehem’s longtime fire chief, the group that became [MaplewoodTrainStation.org](http://MaplewoodTrainStation.org) sensed there was hope for the Maplewood Station.

“We sort of started to feel like we could do this,” Caplain said, and for the past eight months, they’ve fine-tuned what needs to be done.

“We’ve talked to the architect, we’ve talked to the contractor, we know how to do it all,” he said, and now it’s a matter of funding the work.

More information about the Maplewood Station project and tax-deductible donations to it can be found on Facebook, Instagram, and by visiting [www.MaplewoodTrainStation.org](http://www.MaplewoodTrainStation.org).

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