Restoration planned for 1807 home

It’s been more than five years since an American Federal-style house at 548 Manatawny Street, built in 1807 by farmer Jacob Levegood, was threatened with demolition.

Today, the building is safe and secure, but it has yet to be restored.

Boyertown businessman Ricky Watt, who bought the property in 2012, originally planned to restore it for a family member.

Watt cleaned out years of accumulated trash and secured the house.

He protected the envelope of the building, installed replacement windows, sealed the basement to prevent water from leaking in, and eliminated potential moisture problems.

In the meantime, however, a property in Oley that Watt always wanted became available, and he bought it instead of finishing the restoration of the Levegood house.

Now Watt has signed an agreement of sale for the house with a family that intends to restore it and live there.

The original floors, woodwork, staircases, and mantels will be retained and the house will be returned to its original floor plan.

For years, the stately building had been vacant and neglected by a series of owners.

It was twice threatened with demolition, first in 2009 by developer David Specht, who wanted to build an assisted living facility on the site, and again in 2012 by developer Gerry Baldachino, who had been told the building was falling apart and beyond repair.

Fortunately, under Pottstown’s zoning ordinance, a developer must show there is no feasible use for a historic building.

Specht was unable to do so and Council turned down his demolition request — by one vote. Baldachino allowed a historic preservation architect to inspect the house. The architect reported the building was in surprisingly good condition — and an excellent example of early 19th century residential architecture.

Baldachino, who bought the house as part of the adjacent Manatawny Village development, sold it to Watt.

The episode demonstrates the importance of Pottstown’s historic preservation ordinance, especially when many ill-informed people think a building is no longer useful or economically feasible to rehabilitate just because it is old.