

## Government Shutdown Puts Damper On Harriet Tubman National Historical Park

By NPT Staff, *October 19, 2025*



[Harriet Tubman National Historical Park](#) in New York officially became part of the National Park System in January 2017. However, because the [A.M.E. Zion Church](#), where Tubman worshipped, needed significant restoration work, the park didn't open to the public until last year.

The park is located in Auburn, New York, where Tubman lived for the last 54 years of her life.

Courtney Kasper, the executive director of the Cayuga County Office of Tourism, called the city “Harriet Tubman’s chosen free home” during a recent interview. “It was a place that she was able to choose...to live in freedom because she had liberty at that point.”

Apart from the A.M.E. Zion Church, the site also holds Tubman’s [brick home](#), as well as the [Harriet Tubman Home for Aged and Indigent Negroes](#) that she helped establish as a place to care for the old and the poor in her community.

Outside of the park’s boundaries sits Fort Hill Cemetery, where Tubman is buried. Going to see her gravesite and pay your respects is “one of the most moving experiences that you can have here,” said Kasper.

But the church is key to the visitor experience, she explained. To prepare for the opening, the Park Service restored the church to how it looked in 1913, which was the year that Tubman passed away. “Everything in there is original or historically recreated to be accurate,” said Kasper. “It’s a really moving experience to go in there because [her faith] was something that was so important to her, and it was also the place where her funeral was held.”

Because the park is located in a residential area, said Kasper, “you’re still surrounded by that community that was there during the time when she was here, even so much so that there are still living descendants that live in the neighborhood. It’s a really special place that [has] a unique engagement with the community.”

Today, just over a year after the park’s opening, the government shutdown has brought park operations to a standstill and closed the doors of the church. Because all of the staff at the site have been furloughed, NPS was unavailable to comment on the closure.

“It is unfortunate because this year...we were really going to celebrate as a grand opening that this park was here and we were going to make it a very...community-minded, community-oriented grand opening,” explained Kasper.

So far, said Kasper, most visitors haven't seemed to express much frustration with the closing, likely due to the fact that so many of the sites associated with Tubman are still accessible.

While Tubman's home is within the historical park, it is run by the A.M.E. Zion Church because Tubman deeded them the property when she passed.

Visitors can also still see Tubman's gravesite, and the New York State Equal Rights Heritage Center is currently operating as a secondary location for park information.

However, without park rangers present, visitors are missing out on an important source of knowledge. "I think one of the most valuable assets here is the lead ranger for the Harriet Tubman National Historical Park, [Brittany Lane](#)," explained Kasper. "She comes from the Civil Rights sites in the South, so she has such a great knowledge... That is one thing that the visitors are really missing out on is being able to engage with her."

For now, the government shutdown shows no signs of ending, and for Kasper and other community leaders, the biggest concern right now is the unknown.

"It's really such a sweet piece of the story to stand inside that church, and it's an experience like no other," said Kasper, "so my concern is going to be that, hopefully, we can still get people to come here."

What has helped lighten the burden placed on the park during the shutdown is the community that surrounds it and stands in support of its mission and history.

"I've never been in a place where there is so much community and so much partnership," said Kasper. "We do not compete with each other. We all collaborate with each other. And the National Park Service was a key piece of that collaboration because we would look to them often for many different things. You know, it's sad and hard not to have them at the table to continue these conversations."

In spite of the shutdown, visitors can still connect with Harriet Tubman and the history of Auburn. It was here that "she actually got to do the things that she wanted to do and make the friends that she wanted to make," explained Kasper. "[E]ven if maybe you can't experience her [NPS] site, the land that you're walking on was the same land, the same ground that she walked on, where she got to live in total freedom."