

# Lasting Legacy: An Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the Current Plan to Renovate the St. Paul's School

By Lillian Lee



*Photo of front exterior of St. Paul's Main Building. Photo taken by Lillian Lee.*

# Table of Contents

- Introduction.....3**
  - Theoretical Grounding..... 3
  - Conclusion..... 4
- Overview of St. Paul’s School Site.....5**
  - Site Significance..... 5
  - History of the Property.....6
    - History of Saint Paul’s School..... 7
    - History of St. Paul’s Property Restrictions..... 8
  - History of Proposals.....8
- Case Study..... 11**
  - Site Overview and Historical Elements..... 11
  - Community Impact..... 12
  - Implications.....13
- Elements of Proposed Plan.....13**
  - Current Plan..... 13
  - Community Value..... 14
  - Preservation Value..... 21
- Recommendations and Conclusion..... 24**
  - My Analysis and Commentary..... 24
  - My Recommendation..... 24
  - Final Conclusion..... 26
- Bibliography..... 28**

## **Introduction**

This paper was completed during the summer of 2024. Working for Preservation Long Island, I have come to a better understanding of various endangered historical sites, especially those in Garden City, and how preserving these sites can foster a shared connection that can build a stronger community. In this research paper, I considered St. Paul's School (also referred to as "the site") in Garden City, NY and evaluated how the site will be repurposed to serve the preservation requirement it demands. While the site has been in disuse for over 30 years, the recently intensifying discussions and related polls that were held compelled me to compose this paper. These revived conversations will play a crucial role in determining the site's future, making this a pivotal moment in Garden City's history. As of this writing, the data from the polls have not been made public. However, this paper can be utilized in support of the transformation of the site into a community center and contribute a different perspective on the center's features. Additionally, the site holds great historical value for the Village of Garden City (sometimes referred to as "the Village") which contributes to community culture, giving credence to the argument for preservation.

This paper will not include nor address any financial or budgetary aspect of the project due to the complexity involved and the studies that would have to be conducted in order to be meaningfully accurate. Conducting a thorough cost assessment would require extensive studies on construction costs, maintenance, and community impact. Furthermore, any successful project that covers the space for community use would likely divert revenue away from extant local businesses that currently service those needs. Since the outcomes of this repurposing project are difficult to predict without a great deal of studies, this paper will instead focus on the social and structural elements.

## **Theoretical Grounding**

There are two major, bifurcated components to this project: urban planning and historic preservation. Though servicing divergent needs, both disciplines use data to manage change in a fixed environment. Together, they can help create balanced, sustainable, and culturally rich environments that honor the past while accommodating future growth.

Urban planning focuses on the physical, economic, and social impacts of the environment. It facilitates public participation and contribution to an agglomerated population. Revitalizing existing parts of an area, setting goals, and analyzing data, urban planning requires a united community to finalize a plan that serves the needs of its community economically, environmentally, and socially. Some methodologies of urban planning experts are to meet with

stakeholders such as government officials, developers, and the public regarding land use, and gather data from field investigations. “Through modeling, planners can understand the general behavior of the system and, consequently, decide the strategic allocation of land uses and human activities with respect to performances of the considered process and the socio-ecological and economic uncertainties.”<sup>1</sup>

Historic preservation is a “conversation with our past about our future.”<sup>2</sup> It's a way of understanding our essential past to preserve for the future, transferring knowledge and stories to future generations. Preservation Long Island (also referred to as PLI) is an organization which supports and advocates an object's or building's historical value. According to Arizona State University, “Sometimes experts evaluate the characteristics of historical objects, organize special events, prepare artifacts for exhibition, or track the condition of collections. Historic preservationists ensure the long-term care of artworks, documents, objects and buildings.”<sup>3</sup> Whether joyful, painful, or uncomfortable to remember, the protection and preservation of remnants during those times will help toward a future, where, as a society, we can learn from our experiences, build a more empathetic society, and honor our heritage. Preserving and repurposing historic structures can revitalize neighborhoods and stimulate economic growth.

Urban planning and historic preservation require a community consensus to transform or improve a site with a legacy that needs to be preserved. Although each project involving repurposing is different from the next, they all serve similar purposes and can end up revitalizing or completely altering a community.

## Conclusion

This paper evaluates the current plan for repurposing the St. Paul's School Site and how it aligns with the principles and methodologies of historic preservation and urban planning. Using both fields, alongside a case study of the Ridgeway Community in Wisconsin, this research helped examine how the site can be repurposed. I have gathered data and communicated with residents, stakeholders, the mayor, and PLI to understand and uphold the community needs and preservation values. While each group had its own opinion, they agreed that meeting the community needs and benefitting it was the most important aspect. There have been significantly diverse proposals, ranging from creating a sports complex with key historical features embedded

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<sup>1</sup>Fariborz Haghghat, Federica Gobattoni, and Daniele Larosa. “Modeling and Urban Planning: A Systematic Review of Performance-Based Approaches.” *Sustainable Cities and Society*, October 5, 2019. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S2210670719316968>.

<sup>2</sup>Caroline Henry. “Historic Preservation.” U.S. Department of the Interior, June 17, 2021. <https://www.doi.gov/pam/asset-management/historic-preservation>.

<sup>3</sup>Arizona State University. “Historic Preservation Job Skills: ASU Online.” *Historic Preservation Job Skills | ASU Online*, October 13, 2022. <https://asuonline.asu.edu/newsroom/online-learning-tips/tips-getting-historic-preservation-job/>.

in it to completely demolishing it and storing away its features. However, the central question still remains: what plan can effectively find a balance between preserving the site's historical legacy and meeting the evolving needs of the community?

## **Overview of St. Paul's School Site**

Hearing ongoing discussions from fellow residents or officials on a daily basis can frustrate and fatigue residents. The site is marked with complexity and contention, complicating the efforts to develop a workable plan that satisfies the town residents and honors the building's historical legacy. The town residents, preservationists, and other experts have been involved in back and forth conversations with no immediate or obvious solution. Each group has strong and divided opinions, so careful deliberation is necessary.

The biggest pushback has been with regards to the funding for the project and management of the site's large property. There has been continuous debate over how much of the site should be preserved, who pays for the preservation, the level of community involvement, and who will operate the project. While there has been a lot of traction with this project over the past few years as indicated by the frequency of surveys and polls, the town is still devising a plan that will serve the community while simultaneously preserving the legacy of St. Paul's architecture and history.



*Photo of St. Paul's Main Building  
Photo taken by Lilli Lee.*

Ever since the school closed in 1991 after being in operation for 108 years, there have been dozens of proposals, none of which crossed the threshold for consideration. For example, residents and developers were hoping for more parking space, affordable housing, senior housing, offices, etc. However, what they found to be the most reasonable and realistic plan is to transform the site into a community center.

## **Site Significance**

St. Paul's School in Garden City is a historic place with a 141-year legacy. It is often regarded as the most significant real estate in Garden City due to its rich historical and cultural background. However, its condition is deteriorating and becoming structurally unstable. Just

stabilizing the building would be an economic burden to residents and the town for decades. It leaves many residents weary of the subject and anxious for a forward momentum.

In 2010, St. Paul's School was counted as "one of the most substantial historic buildings on Long Island"<sup>4</sup> in PLI's Endangered Historic Places List. According to Elizabeth Abrams, Interim Executive Director at Preservation Long Island, and Tara Cubie, Preservation Director, PLI releases an endangered list biannually. They advertise for people and organizations from across Long Island to nominate buildings to their list. The PLI team discussed whether the building is historically significant, the extent of the support behind saving, and who is willing to save the site. They primarily focus on the buildings that are at the greatest risk, especially the ones facing potential demolition.



*Postcard with image of St. Paul's School. Source unknown.*

The Preservation League of NY also included St. Paul's on their "Seven to Save" list. Their 2023 list "spotlights historic properties that exemplify challenges facing historic places across the state. Sites listed this year [2023] draw attention to the importance of preserving modern architecture, the need for Legislative passage of a historic home tax credit, and the threat to New York's historic resource and scenic vistas from inappropriately-sited wind farms."<sup>5</sup>

## History of the Property

On July 17, 1869, Alexander Turney Stewart, the New York City merchant millionaire, set out to create a place that reflected his wisdom and wealth. He purchased 10,000 acres of the Hempstead Plains on Long Island, known to be the largest private land purchase of the century. And so, at age 70, Mr. Stewart embarked on creating his legacy in Garden City.

He and his architect John Kellum designed a master plan and mapped out streets and blocks of Garden City. Together, they designed and developed a village filled with wide avenues, hundreds of trees, 60 homes on spacious lots, and a grand hotel on a 30 acre park. All of these

<sup>4</sup>Tara Cubie. "Advocacy Update: Saint Paul's School Interiors Village of Garden City." Preservation Long Island, April 2024. <https://preservationlongisland.org/preservation-alert-saint-pauls-school-interiorsvillage-of-garden-city/#:~:text=Paul%27s%20School%20is%20one%20of,safeguarded%20with%20the%20outmost%20priority>.

<sup>5</sup>PLNYS Staff. "Seven to Save: 2003." Preservation League of NYS, November 24, 2003. <https://www.preservenys.org/seven-to-save>.

were in close proximity to the railroad, A.T. Stewart's Central Railroad of Long Island, for an accessible commute to Manhattan.

In 1876, Stewart died, leaving his wife to carry out his vision. Cornelia Clinch Stewart was a philanthropist and collector; she had no background in traditional real estate development. But Mrs. Stewart did work alongside her husband and knew everything about the Garden City development plan. So, she continued her and her husband's visions despite a plethora of public doubt.

Mrs. Stewart oversaw the building of homes, but The Chapel at St. Paul's School was her greatest accomplishment. She also built the Cathedral of the Incarnation, Bishop's Residence, and two church schools in memory of her husband. Her glorious and renowned visions are known as the St. Paul's Chapel, the See House, the Deanery, Cathedral School of St. Mary's for girls, and Cathedral School of St. Paul's for boys. Mrs. Stewart agreed to deed these properties to the Episcopal Church of Long Island under the condition that her husband be entombed in the Cathedral.

### History of Saint Paul's School

The American Institute of Architects Architectural Guide to Nassau and Suffolk Counties describes the St. Paul's School as "an extraordinary structure with a style rarely encountered



*Photo of St. Paul's in the 1890s. Source unknown.*

outside of an urban context. It includes an ornate 300-foot facade, 500 rooms, and fenestration with 642 windows. During its completion, it was Long Island's largest structure other than a resort hotel."<sup>6</sup> After being planned by Mr. Stewart and constructed between 1879 and 1883, the High Victorian Gothic structure began operation as an Episcopal School. Designed by architect Henry G. Harrison, the building included a huge mansard-roofed brick building and hundreds of rooms that could house students and school masters. The original building consisted of housed laboratories, classrooms, libraries, dining halls, kitchens, a large reception

parlor, permanent workplaces for staff, and a gothic chapel. The St. Paul's building includes multiple elements to make it a Victorian exuberance: Polychromatic voussoir-arched windows,

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<sup>6</sup> The American Institute of Architects, Long Island Chapter, and The Society for the Preservation of Long Island Antiquities. *ALA Architectural Guide to Nassau and Suffolk Counties, Long Island*. New York: Dover, 1993.

elaborate cast-iron balustrades, and Dorchester stone trim. It was even described as a rare gem for being Long Island's largest structure other than a resort hotel.

The school was active until it was decommissioned in 1991. In 1993, the Village acquired the property for public and recreational use. The campus also included a library (Ellis Hall), a gymnasium (Cluett Hall), a field house, and wooden cottages.

All buildings other than Ellis Hall, which has been demolished, still stand under public or private ownership. The main building of St. Paul's was even listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1978. To this day, St. Paul's School and the Cathedral, completed in the 1880s by the commission of Mrs. Stewart, demonstrate the history and cultural values of Garden City.

### History of St. Paul's Property Restrictions

Between 1992 and 1993, the 50 acres of St. Paul's campus was owned by the Village. For the past three decades, 40 acres of the property have been used as playing fields for village residents. The remaining 10 acres, which include the structures, remain problematic, unresolved, and occasionally forgotten.

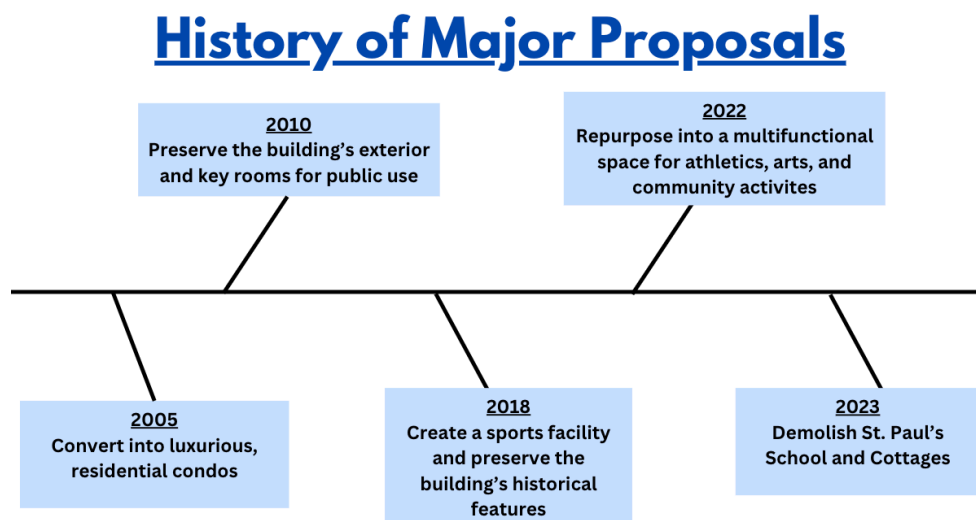
The town's earliest proposal was to convert the principal building into a senior care facility. However, it was contested in a lawsuit brought by another group of village residents. The court ruled that, as the proposed use was for a private profit-making purpose, not for public or recreational use, it could move forward. After the lawsuit, the Board of Trustees (referred to as "BOT") designated St. Paul's "Parkland" to protect and preserve its campus for future Village residents, further restricting other potential uses of the buildings. If the town wanted to propose a new plan, they had to be approved by the New York State Legislature.

## **History of Proposals**

There have been dozens of proposals dating from 2004 to 2024, highlighting the long standing nature of this issue. In short, there were proposals for preservation, demolition, facadism, and others. One proposal involved moving the Garden City High School into the site. However, the site was not designed to hold that many people, and expenditure of education funds as the primary purpose was for community. Furthermore, the hallways were very narrow and the dorm rooms would not be large enough for classroom spaces. When the site was still open as a school, there were only 50 students. It could not be retrofitted to accommodate hundreds of Garden City High School students and faculty. Another proposal was for the aforementioned



senior housing/assisted living, but it was dropped from consideration as the site is solely for public use. In addition to these concepts, 5 major plans had been proposed for the use of this site:



### December 2005

In 2005, there were many difficulties and challenges with stabilizing the site's historic wood frame structure built in the 1880s.<sup>7</sup> The town wanted to restore its distinguished features and historic front, redressing the years of neglect. City officials discovered research that supported repurposing the site into highly luxurious, residential condos. However, that development would not allow for community use, nor would it preserve the Chapel facade and its interior features. While there were many preservation benefits to securing the building and repurposing it into condos, restoration/reconstruction would be risky to the economy, residents, and construction workers.

### June 2010

In 2010, the Village wanted to completely preserve the building's exterior because of its historical significance.<sup>8</sup> They also wanted to rehabilitate the chapel and major rooms on the first floor, restoring safe conditions for public use. This proposal aimed to stem the building's deterioration from disuse, protect the structure for current and future use, keep costs within taxpayers' budget, preserve its historical value, and adaptively reuse the building. However, the plan was not pursued due to some residents' argument for total demolition.

<sup>7</sup> "St. Paul's Presentation December 15, 2005" Incorporated Village of Garden City, The Village of Garden City, September 16, 2024. <https://www.gardencityny.net/DocumentCenter/View/486/St-Pauls-Presentation---December-15-2005-PDF>

<sup>8</sup> "An Alternative Proposal to Save St. Paul's June 2010" Incorporated Village of Garden City, The Village of Garden City, September 16, 2024. <https://www.gardencityny.net/DocumentCenter/View/459/An-Alternative-Proposal-to-Save-St-Pauls--June-2010-PDF>

### July 2018

In 2018, the Village sought to incorporate a sports facility at the site and name it ‘The Centre of St. Paul’s.’<sup>9</sup> It would include indoor synthetic turf fields and an ice hockey rink. Executing this proposal would serve community needs and preserve the site’s historical features: wooden pews, existing brick, stained glass, lancet arches, historic organ, and wood work in corridors. Although it seemed like a plan that balanced both preservation and community needs, it would involve facadism, which could completely destroy the building’s unique interior design and sacrifice its integrity. Repurposing St. Paul’s Chapel, a historical sacred space, into a sports complex is not justifiable to its history. The stained glass not only highlights religious scenes, but the Chapel itself reflects the vision of Mrs. Cornelia Stewart and Mr. Alexander Stewart.

### October 2022

In 2022, funding was approved for the St. Paul’s Committee social media campaign and for cleaning services for the interior of the Main Building.<sup>10</sup> In Town Hall meetings, the Village aimed to “preserve the past and create the future.” They provided cost estimates and an analysis on reuse, facadism, and demolition. In the St. Paul’s Main Building, the Town envisioned Athletic Programs, a Community Space, a Performing Arts Center, a Children’s Center, a Department of Recreation, and an Events Garden Courtyard. Reasons for not pursuing this plan were not publicly known.

### October 2023

In 2023, the Village proposed securing the existing building and involving either north or south facadism. Construction/rehabilitation would include repairing stairwells, skylight, Chapel stained glass, woodwork, doors, and roof.<sup>11</sup> However, replacing all 50 original windows would damage the site’s historical importance. Installation of new flooring in public spaces would also run afoul of the preservation of the site’s original tilework. They planned to demolish the school and Cottages, provide clean soil for site infill, and plant grass and trees.

The town is in the process of executing a plan that would bring Garden City residents closer together after social distancing during the pandemic. They believe that everything under one roof and appealing to people of all ages will foster a safe space for bonding and meeting neighbors.

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<sup>9</sup> “St. Paul’s Presentation November 8, 2008,” Incorporated Village of Garden City, The Village of Garden City, September 16, 2024. <https://www.gardencityny.net/DocumentCenter/View/487/St-Pauls-Presentation---November-6-2008-PDF>

<sup>10</sup> “October 12, 2022 Town Hall Meeting on the Future of St. Paul’s” Incorporated Village of Garden City, The Village of Garden City, September 16, 2024. <https://www.gardencityny.net/DocumentCenter/View/1979/October-12-2022-Town-Hall>

<sup>11</sup> “St. Paul’s School presentation Oct 03 2023,” Incorporated Village of Garden City, The Village of Garden City, September 16, 2024. <https://www.gardencityny.net/DocumentCenter/View/2097/St-Pauls-Information-Session--Westerman-Presentation-October-3-2023-PDF>

## **Case Study**

One of the most efficient repurposed models is the Ridgeway Community Center in Wisconsin. This community center was an outstanding example of a project wherein a community came together to execute a reuse project that positively impacted their town.

### **Site Overview and Historical Elements**

Analogous to St. Paul's School, the building in Ridgeway first served as an educational facility and was vital to the community's history. According to the Ridgeway City Clerk and Treasurer, "The school meant a lot to the residents here. ....It's a real focal point of the community,"<sup>12</sup> reflecting a very similar viewpoint of Garden City residents who believe the St. Paul's Clock Tower acts as a symbol of Garden City.

The original structure in Ridgeway was constructed in 1939 as part of a Federal Public Works Administration Program. It operated as the Ridgeway High School until the 1960s. In 1965, a wing was added to the original structure and continued to function as a school until it permanently closed in April 2020. Immediately after the Ridgeway school closed, officials planned for action and attempted to get it back into operation, as an extended period of disuse would result in further deterioration. After receiving a \$5,000 grant from Compeer Financial, they were able to conduct a study for the rehabilitation of the former school into a community center. Ridgeway town leaders even purchased the structure for \$1 in 2021 from the school district, surveyed residents, purchased the property, and worked together as a town to draft repurpose plans. Renovations were completed in 2022 with loans and donations.<sup>13</sup>

The Ridgeway Community Center was renovated within two years without a lengthy deliberation over a plan. The site in Garden City, abandoned and neglected for 33 years, on the other hand, has made little progress. However, that big difference is partly justifiable. Garden City has to take into consideration many historical and architectural elements that are not easy to just restore or demolish due to cost and preservation concerns. Also, St. Paul's School is decades older and much larger than the Ridgeway building, complicating the quick execution of a plan. Due to St. Paul's School's listing as a registered historic place and designation as a historic building, repurposing it is a much more controversial topic than that of the Ridgeway building. In other words, residents of the Ridgeway community weren't constantly arguing whether to demolish or preserve.

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<sup>12</sup> Chris Solberg. "Adaptive Reuse: Ridgeway Community Center." Rural Resurrection, June 2, 2022. <https://ruralresurrection.com/adaptive-reuse-ridgeway-community-center/>.

<sup>13</sup> The Village of Ridgeway. "Ridgeway Community Center." Ridgeway Wisconsin, 2022. <https://www.ridgewaywi.gov/rcc>.



*Photo of Ridgeway High School/Ridgeway Union High School.  
Photo credit to The Village of Ridgeway website.*

## Community Impact

Ridgeway is a small community with 661 residents (as of 2024) who populate quaint streets and historic homes.<sup>14</sup> Contrastingly, 22,891 people resided in Garden City as of 2022. This major difference in population underscores the greater challenge of meeting the needs of Garden City residents.<sup>15</sup> In Ridgeway, fewer preservation concerns and a smaller population enabled a quicker solution to the repurposing of the school into a community center. Though the building serves a relatively small population, it has become a hub of activity and is rapidly growing in utility. The recreation facility consists of a large two-goal basketball court, two restrooms, computer room, multi-purpose room, and a small kitchen. A variety of events regularly fill the community calendar: pickleball, open gyms, Card Club, Alcoholics Anonymous, EE reviews, and birthday parties.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, the library offers story time every Mondays and Saturdays, Coffee Club every Mondays, Weekly Craft Projects, Summer Events, and Community Movies. The community center also operates its own Facebook account to continue to attract visitors and residents. Thus, the calendars on the Village of Ridgeway highlight a sense of activity and frequent engagement with the space, demonstrating its success.

<sup>14</sup> Town of Ridgeway. "Charm Meets Simplicity." Town of Ridgeway, 2024. <https://www.townofridgeway.org/blank-2>.

<sup>15</sup> Data USA, and Census Bureau. "Garden City, NY." Data USA, 2022. <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/garden-city-ny/>.

<sup>16</sup> The Village of Ridgeway, "Gym Reservation Calendar, Community Room Reservation Calendar, and Ridgeway Volunteer Library," *The Village of Ridgeway*, 2024, accessed September 23, 2024, <https://www.ridgewaywi.gov/rcc/page/gym-reservation-calendar>

## **Implications**

While the Ridgeway Community Center is not an identical model to St. Paul's School due to its fewer historical elements, it is a great example of an impressive transformation that could inspire residents to turn a defunct school building into something greater while still preserving its historical legacy, making it a relevant case that reinforces the special attention that historical elements require. Preserving a building that served the community before is critical to the community's identity, despite differences in condition, historical, or cultural value. Just like the Ridgeway Community Center, the Garden City Community Center can bring residents together in remembrance of the once standing school.

Though such uniform success and satisfaction cannot be expected, Garden City can certainly draw valuable lessons from Ridgeway. Garden City's larger population presents greater depth and variety of challenges, but the principles of community will still apply, which can guide the project. By balancing the need to preserve the site's legacy with creating a resource-plenty space for residents, Garden City can transform the deteriorating school into a beautiful and strong-spirited hub that represents the town's past and future. It can be a safe facility full of opportunities for all residents. Just as Ridgeway has done, Garden City can engender a sense of unity and a space for shared experiences.

## **Elements of Proposed Plan**

### **Current Plan**

Since St. Paul's was designated a parkland in 2004, the repurposing possibilities became limited. However, the designation did clarify and simplify the pathway for how the building can be repurposed. The conversion of St. Paul's into a community center is the only realistic option. The BOT and other town officials looked at other community centers across Long Island, and none of them is as large as the property where St. Paul's stands. Mayor Mary Flanagan believes that the site could become an outstanding community center and will unify town residents if the project has widespread support from the community.

The St. Paul's Advisory Committee has actually accomplished some progress and are expecting next steps.<sup>17</sup> They've interviewed key stakeholders in Garden City to ensure that each has a voice and an opportunity to participate, when it comes to deciding the future of St. Paul's.

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<sup>17</sup> "Path to a St. Paul's Master Plan in 2024," Incorporated Village of Garden City, The Village of Garden City, September 8, 2024. <https://www.gardencityny.net/291/Path-to-a-St-Pauls-Master-Plan-in-2024>

The officials have identified and hired Brandstetter Carroll Inc., a planning and architectural firm that specializes in public buildings, to assess their needs and survey residents. They have visited seven community centers in the tri-state area to learn how these centers bring their respective communities together. They've distributed a survey to 2,000 random residents to gather information on what residents want, what parts of the building should be preserved, and how much residents are willing to pay for the preservation effort. Their goal was to receive at least 400 responses, which was achieved as of this paper's writing. At the conclusion of their survey collection efforts, they will conduct a comprehensive analysis before releasing their findings. Upon completion of their analysis, they will present their findings on community centers, potential offerings of the Garden city community center, and programs that best fit the space. After that phase, work would commence on a "reimagined" St. Paul's, which fits the community's needs while preserving the site's historical elements. To keep residents fully informed through the project realization, officials plan on sharing potential ideas and conducting polls.

## Community Value

Garden City is a very tight-knit community with a strong sense of connection and pride among residents. Whether it's over sports, shopping, restaurants, St. Paul's, or other shared interests, Garden City residents always find a way to be actively involved and foster a sense of belonging. No matter their interests or backgrounds, Garden City residents are dedicated to maintaining the spirit and legacy of the town. This commitment was clearly reflected in a poll result released in October 2023 by town officials: 61% (2,635 residents) of the 4,339 responders were in favor of preserving St. Paul's Carter Hall, the main building, while 39% (1,704 residents) supported demolition of the building.<sup>18</sup> Those who wanted to save St. Paul's believed that the site could transform into a space that serves as a hub for the community. They hoped for a resource unavailable to them in their own youth but considered it vital for the town's future and a great way to unite everyone.

### Inclusive Community Center for Garden City

Turning this historic site into a community center would amplify the residents' pride for their village. They can feel further connected and embedded where they live. Transforming St. Paul's into something new can build and foster a more shared community that transcends

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<sup>18</sup> "St. Paul's Public Opinion Poll Information Sessions and Results," Incorporated Village of Garden City, The Village of Garden City, September 8, 2024. <https://www.gardencityny.net/456/St-Pauls-Public-Opinion-Poll-Information>

generations. There has even been research that states that multi-generational play has “mental and physical benefits for adult and children.”<sup>19</sup>

The residents and their spirits are paramount in this decision making process as they make up the community. Five main benefits of a new community center are boost to the local economy, space provision for the youth, community involvement promotion, community value improvement, and health and happiness enhancement through exercise.<sup>20</sup>

Garden City lifers grew up without a community center, so they believe it would be a beneficial addition. A private citizen added that by 2028, the majority of Garden City’s population will be 65+. So, officials have to strategically plan for features that can serve for present and future needs. The community center would have to be multi-generational and friendly for seniors, adults, teens, children, and babies. It should even be pet friendly.

Older adults could reap great benefits from participating in community activities, including mental health and well-being improvements, and connection with family and friends. Given all these benefits, a community center in Garden City “can help them form strong senses of security and belongingness to the community.”<sup>21</sup> In making repurposing plans, planners take the age demographic of the target population into account. The new community center could include Community-based Supports and Services (CBSS) to help older adults with specific resources like wellness programs, nutritional support, counseling services for caregivers, and housing and finance assistance. An example of a great way communities target certain age groups is the Villages in Florida. Each Village is a collection of neighborhoods surrounded by recreational activities, golf, entertainment, dining, shopping, and wellness opportunities. Every day, 55+ age groups can explore different interests during their active retirement.

Given these larger trends, Garden City has sought out the opinions and perspectives of the residents to gain a clearer understanding of the community needs. Thus, a community center will be highly beneficial by accounting for features and programs for all ages.



*Photo of St. Paul's front exterior.  
Photo taken by Lilli Lee.*

<sup>19</sup> “Why Multi-Generational Play Is Important.” Playworld, Playworld, May 16, 2024. <https://playworld.com/blog/multi-generational-play-important/#gref>.

<sup>20</sup> JumpSix2. “What Makes a New Community Center Beneficial.” Sports Facilities Companies, July 6, 2018. <https://sportsfacilities.com/why-a-community-center-is-beneficial-for-your-community/>.

<sup>21</sup> Eugenia L. Siegler, Sonam D Lama, Michael G Knight, Evelyn Laureano, and M Carrington Reid. “Community-Based Supports and Services for Older Adults: A Primer for Clinicians.” National Library of Medicine, 2015. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4339950/>.

## Garden City Recreation and Parks Master Plan Survey

In Spring 2024, the village released the Garden City Recreation and Parks Master Plan Survey. This survey addresses services and improvements over the next 5-10 years, including an informed plan for St. Paul's. A survey specific to the St. Paul's main building has been delayed but will be released soon. The Recreation and Parks Survey was mailed to 2,000 randomly selected households and an online version went live on their website to allow anyone else to provide their input. Random selection minimizes bias, and surveying 2,000 households (of 7,715 in the village) with a goal of 400 responses helps represent the larger group so they can get a general sense.

In short, this survey asked about residents' use of Garden City's parks and facilities, including visit frequency, condition ratings, and desired upgrades. It also asked how they learn about and prefer to receive information, reasons for visiting, activities they enjoy, and what would incite them to participate more. The online survey is posted on the Village of Garden City website under the "Path to a St. Paul's Master Plan in 2024" section to ensure more information and allow for more participation from residents.

## Overview and Survey Data - May Open House 2024

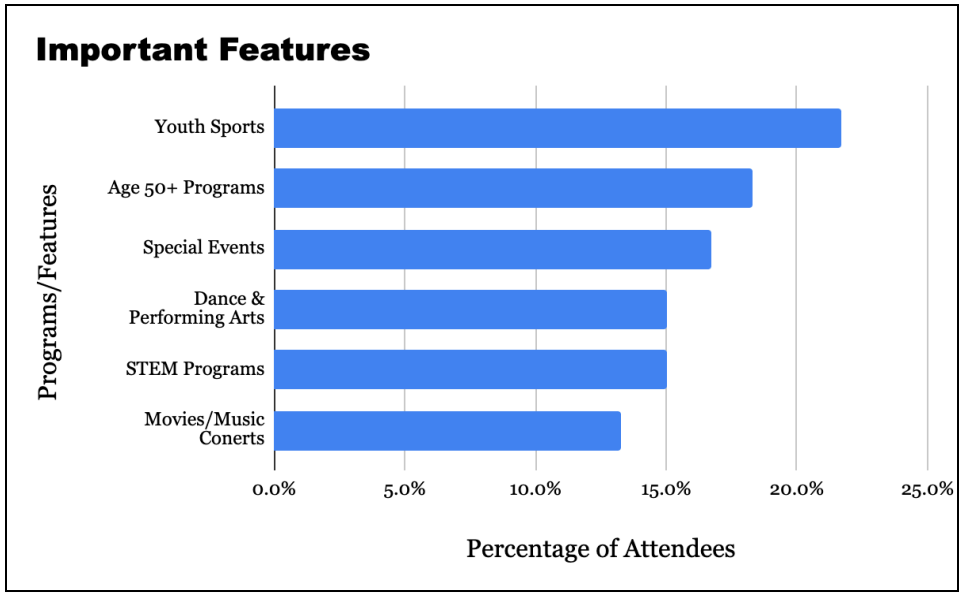
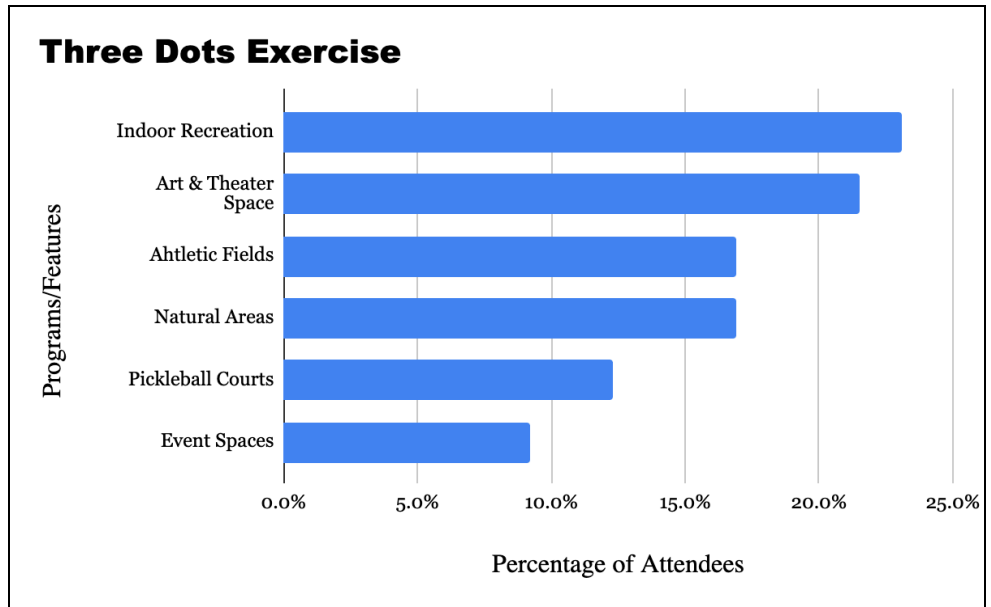
The Village hosted an Open House in May 2024 where all residents and visitors were welcome to participate in activities and exercises. The 140+ residents who attended had the opportunity to give their opinions.<sup>22</sup> Using the data, the Village would be able to gain a better understanding of what residents think would benefit the Garden City community. The data collection methodology included the 3 Dots Exercise and the Dollar Voting Exercise, along with opportunities for residents to share their opinions on poster papers regarding different features in Garden City. The following data are from the June BOT meeting.

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<sup>22</sup> Garden City Village, "BCI Presentation June 6, 2024 Board of Trustees Meeting," *YouTube*, 13:54, June 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uzFEjTME5bE>

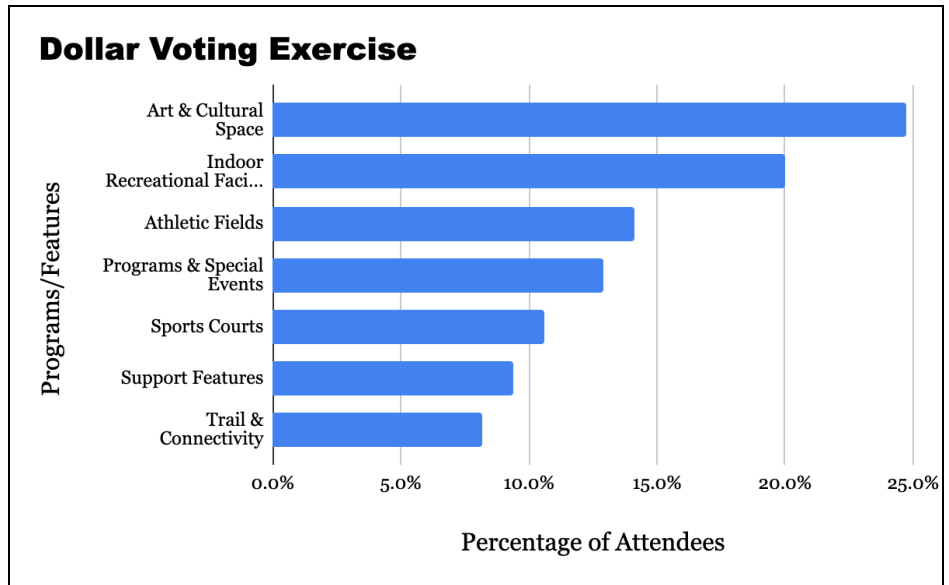


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In the Open House, one of the exercises was for attendees to put 3 dots to show where Garden City Recreation and Parks should add or improve features and programs.

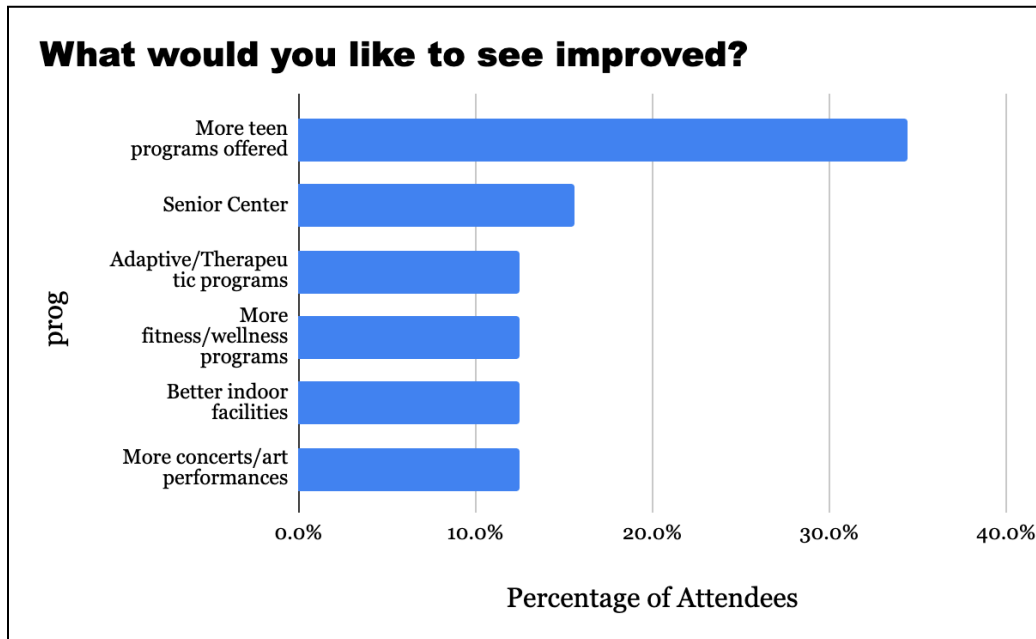


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Attendees were asked which programs meant the most to them.

Attendees also participated in a Dollar Voting Exercise where they were each given \$1,000 of pretend money. They put their money in the boxes in the proportions they wanted their money to be spent.



Community feedback has revealed several areas for improvement to better serve the community. This graph reflects the community's priorities and suggestions for creating a more inclusive and appealing environment.



To enhance community engagement and meet the diverse needs of residents, various features and programs are being considered for the redevelopment of the building into a community center. This table illustrates the potential features that the residents believe will support community activities and draw others to visit.

<b>Feature/Program</b>	<b>Description/Benefit</b>
Indoor Pool	A swimming facility for all ages to enjoy
Newer, Cleaner, Better Meeting Spaces	Improved spaces for meetings and gatherings, offering better comfort
Tutoring Center	A dedicated space for educational support and learning
Cultural Arts	Programs dedicated to arts and cultural activities
Indoor Recreation Facilities	Facilities for indoor sports
Weight Room, Yoga Studio	Fitness areas for weightlifting and yoga/pilates classes
Indoor Athletic Facilities	Areas for various indoor sports, such as basketball or volleyball
Meeting Space, Street Space, Theater	Versatile spaces for community events and performances
New Community Center	A hub for community events and activities
New Indoor Turf Fields	Indoor fields suitable for sports like soccer, football, and field hockey
Large Flexible Spaces	Spaces that can be adapted for different purposes
Gymnastics and Swimming	Specialized facilities for gymnastics and swimming training
Parking Garage	A parking structure to accommodate visitors

### Implications of the Data

Through the data from the charts and table, it's clear that the Garden City community finds sports and recreation the most significant. In the 3 Dots Exercise, 52% of respondents indicated desire for space devoted to active entertainment such as pickleball courts, athletic fields, and any sort of indoor recreation. While cultural hubs were also valued – receiving 24.7%

of monies in the Dollar Voting Exercise – most responses were centered around physical wellness.

More teen programs garnered the most votes, 34%, in the “what would you like to see improved?” activity, while most other programs each received 12.5%, suggesting that many residents believe that the repurposing of the site should focus on the younger generations. In an interview, a Garden City resident voiced his belief that repurposing St. Paul’s should include a community center with youth programs, reinforcing the conclusion drawn from the Open House.<sup>23</sup> He believed that since the youth are the future, kids should have more opportunities for education and sports, adding, “I really wish it lasted a few more generations. It would have served the community a lot better if it was kept a school because young people need good education.”

One notable drawback of devising an athletic space is the flexibility of multi-purpose nature that must be built in. Given the range of sporting features that patrons want in a limited space and the evolving popularities of sports, decisions on inclusion or omission are complicated. Considering that there are some activity spaces – e.g. pickleball courts, gymnastics floor, diving pool – that require permanent installation, a compromise and careful utilization studies will be required. An indoor pool would be utilizable for many purposes including water aerobics, lazy river, general play, aquatic rehabilitation, training, and competition with careful calendar planning.

Another underlying goal for this hub is to promote harmonious coexistence among various age groups, especially between young adults, the primary beneficiary of activity spaces, and other age groups. If members of the community self-segregate by age, it would be a symbolic failure of a community center. Thus, the whole space must be designed to promote fellowship. A social space or a communal space like a mini coffee shop or bakery where all ages can eat and converse could be strategically featured throughout the building.

Various collected data points to the comprehensive range of community needs in Garden City. Through incorporation of flexible spaces, scheduling strategies, and diverse age group considerations, the community center can unite all residents.. While fulfilling every feature request is impossible, a well-planned space can offer a sense of belonging, encouraging all residents to enjoy the hub together. Finding this middle ground is essential to creating a space that reflects the Garden City spirit.

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<sup>23</sup> Resident of Garden City, and Lillian Lee. St. Paul’s School in Garden City. Personal, August 31, 2024.

## Preservation Value

Many believe it is imperative to preserve and guard the nature of the building and its historical elements in addition to the various accommodations of interest. A good plan needs to include preserving all key elements of St. Paul's. Each subtraction of the site's historic pieces reduces its history, beauty, and significance. Even a partial demolition would diminish its historic integrity.

Many residents wish for a complete preservation of the historic gothic architecture, a unique feature of Garden City. Others are proponents of preserving the front facade of the building because it is one of the most beautiful buildings on Long Island. For example, a 10-year Garden City resident Denis Flaherty said, "Its significance is huge. It contributes to the history of the town and village. But it's far too big to stay there as a historical piece. I think it should be a summer camp for children, after school programs for all ages, and it should also be profitable. The first floor could be for the town. The second floor could be rented by businesses or maybe be residential. In my opinion, the best idea is to downsize the building. Save the historical elements and the rest can be demolished to build something else that'll fit our needs. It needs to be updated so it can serve our community."<sup>24</sup>

Many consider the Clock Tower the center of Garden City. Some wish for the glass and Minton tiles to be preserved. There are myriad individual elements that contribute to the site's historical significance: pews, stained glass, exterior architecture, tiles, and the Clock Tower. However, beyond its obvious cultural significance, it holds broader historical significance as well. Various historical and preservation organizations have designated the site as an important building throughout the years. The residents of the Garden City community care about the town and its buildings. Most are excited in anticipation of its use conversion into something greater. Interviews indicate that residents would prefer the site usage as a sports/youth center instead of a complete demolition. The site has been an anchoring feature of this town and community for too long for erasure.

### Stained Glass

The stained glass windows are at once the most historically significant elements and the most endangered due to their condition and age. Mayor Carter Flanagan recognized the value of the windows and the urgent need for a plan. She added that, "regardless of what the decision is ahead for the St. Paul's building, it is recommended that the windows be taken out and safeguarded so that they won't be affected or destroyed during construction." In September 2023, residents became concerned over the historic stained glass windows because the building's

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<sup>24</sup> Denis Flaherty, and Lillian Lee. St. Paul's School in Garden City. Personal, August 31, 2024.

condition was diminishing their value. Later in the year, the Village Board outlined their goal of preserving all 9 stained glass windows. Currently, some of the windows are safely stored, the biggest step taken so far in this project. The windows were sitting in the defunct Chapel for decades, so a measure had to be taken with urgency. Administrator Ralph Suozzi even commented that removing the windows was the practical thing to do “until a future use of them is determined.”<sup>25</sup>

After 30 months of inaction, the Village hired expert Christopher Botti, the president of Botti Studio of Architectural Arts, to help preserve the windows and a skylight in the main building. They removed the windows and transported them to their Indiana studio for storage. In his interview with town officials, Christopher Botti said, “The Tiffany windows are so special because they have multiple layers and are opalescent. The Chapel is in unstable condition, so the city wants the remaining, undamaged parts of the windows moved and safely stored. These windows are incredibly significant and not very common on Long Island.”<sup>26</sup> This preservation was a major step in a very difficult process of restoring such a huge chapel.

A drawback of storing the windows, however, is that it runs the danger of not being included in the restoration proposal and being forever forgotten. Because at least one of the windows in the Chapel was an original work by Tiffany, it’s very valuable.<sup>27</sup>

## Clock Tower

St. Paul’s and its Clock Tower are intricately associated. The Clock Tower is such a vital symbol of the town’s culture and history, not just as a pretty tower, but with a practical function. The clock is visible from a wide distance, giving it a high utility. People can view it “above the trees at the intersection of Stewart, Cherry Valley, and Cathedral Avenues, and between trees on Cherry Valley Avenue and 9th Street, looking across from the Garden City Golf Club.”<sup>28</sup> The clock tower is large and classic in style with copper flashing and slate tile.



*Photo of St. Paul’s Clock Tower.  
Photo taken by Lilli Lee.*

Some risks associated with the Clock Tower preservation is its requirement for ongoing maintenance to stay operational. The

<sup>25</sup>Rikki Massand. “Preservation of St. Paul’s Stained Glass Windows a Priority.” The Garden City News, September 28, 2023. <https://www.gcnews.com/articles/preservation-of-st-pauls-stained-glass-windows-a-priority/>.

<sup>26</sup> Garden City Village, “Video Interview with Ettore Christopher Botti in St. Paul’s Chapel January 9, 2024,” *YouTube*, 8:45, January 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MHA9UYJGh68>.

<sup>27</sup> Rikki Massand. “St. Paul’s stained glass windows to be removed, restored.” The Garden City News, November 30, 2023. <https://www.gcnews.com/articles/preservation-of-st-pauls-stained-glass-windows-a-priority/>.

<sup>28</sup> The Village of Garden City. “St. Paul’s School Demolition for Additional Open Space.” The Village of Garden City, June 2010. <https://www.gardencityny.net/DocumentCenter/View/180/St-Pauls-FEIS-Executive-Summary-PDF>.

tower itself is already in decay, with potential structural issues when undergoing construction. It has serious cracking and damage due to water leakage. Its poor conditions include the roof, which needs replacement.

If an assessment indicates an extreme deterioration of the tower, the town may forgo its restoration. The town may deem it unworthy of preservation due to the hassle and associated cost. However, the practical and emotional role in the town life that the clock tower plays dictates the necessity to save it. As an essential historical element of the site, the clock tower deserved to be preserved.

### The Chapel

The Chapel is another vital and beautiful aspect of St. Paul's, and includes historic pews, stained glass, and tiles. To date, there hasn't been any plan for the Chapel nor its features, but there should be. It's concerning that the Chapel and its features have not been articulated in the current plan because a failure to preserve them would diminish the site's historical value. They add to the school's authenticity and should be safeguarded with priority. Additionally, the aforementioned features of the Chapel should be moved or restored together during the construction progress. Many of the interior spaces should be restored and renovated, but the beauty and history of the Chapel requires the whole of its interior features to remain untouched.



*Photo of the Chapel interior. Photo credited to Abandoned.*

There is unimpeachable support to save the exterior of the remarkable building. However, the cost associated with saving historically significant interior features has been more controversial. Emptying and modernizing its interior would remove the heart and soul of the structure. Garden City residents deserve a thoughtful restoration that celebrates and protects both the interior and exterior of this historic landmark. The best solution should avoid an excessive renovation or construction to ensure preservation. The Chapel could be repurposed into a performance space or a conference room to still highlight its original features. As chapels are set

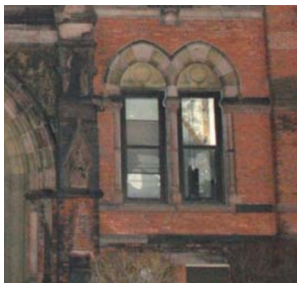
up as audience spaces with decorative adornments, the space would aptly be used for lectures, small concerts, or presentations, where visitors can still be surrounded by the St. Paul's legacy.

## **Recommendations and Conclusion**

### **My Analysis and Commentary**

Building on the insights from the previous sections, I've gathered and analyzed essential information about the site, the elements of the proposed plan, and the community's preservation and recreational needs. The data also suggests that the future plan should balance the importance of maintaining the site's integrity while introducing features that serve the community's current and future needs. In particular, the strong support for recreational spaces and teen programs should guide the town officials' approach.

My recommendation is to prioritize preservation, ensuring that the site's legacy is remembered, while simultaneously incorporating a community themed space for all ages to enjoy. This will reverse the social effects of COVID-19, fostering connection and lifting community spirit. Garden City must not lose sight of this intriguing opportunity to bring everyone together. This novel approach to turning the historic site into a community center can inform the preservation of other historic school buildings that contribute to neighborhoods, preserve a legacy, and provide a sustainable approach. New adaptive reuse projects are not only practical and high-quality, but they also add to neighborhood culture and pride, and they can contribute to community development.



*The images demonstrate the damage caused by the Village's lack of maintenance of the school, which is a publicly owned historic resource. No matter the plans for St. Paul's reuse, the structure's future depends on immediate action to stabilize the building. Right image shows broken windows. Left image shows missing and worn shingles. Photo credited to Lawless and Mangione.*



## My Recommendation

In their 2018 article, PLI encourages the Village to organize charrettes, a series of group meetings that allow residents, business owners, etc to participate in community conflict resolutions and projects.<sup>29</sup> Through charrettes, community members will come together to create a detailed, agreeable plan for St. Paul's. Unlike a consensus, which is "a generally accepted opinion or decision among a group of people," charrettes may take as long as 4 to 7 days.<sup>30</sup> Opportunities for problem solving, decision making, and negotiation tactics foster community involvement and help participants think critically.

Organizing a coalition that brings together preservationists, architects, developers, historians, local officials, and town residents is another effective way for residents to become involved. These groups can work together to ascertain the town needs, required government support, and the pathway to the project completion. This coalition could include Brandstetter Carroll Inc., the North Shore Land Alliance, the Peconic Land Trust, the Lion Gardiner Foundation, local preservationists, and any party interested in the persistence of the school's legacy. Involving residents, educators, alumni, and any passionate supporters of historic preservation would ensure that diverse perspectives and voices are heard. The coalition could also explore partnerships with other historical societies, educational institutions, or grant-making organizations to gain funding and resources for the project.

My recommended proposal is to repurpose St. Paul's School into a vibrant community center, just as one of the favored current proposals that Garden City officials are considering. However, I additionally propose the allocation of space within the building to relocate the Nassau County Museum, recognizing the importance of such institutions in preserving local history. Such a move would mutually benefit the building and the museum: the museum to continue to thrive in a location with easier access and is surrounded by other historical significance while the community center would serve as a hub for all ages. This includes space for events, activities, volunteer opportunities, a special needs program, a community garden, a cultural and arts program, and maybe even a mental health support program. Community center usage based revenue, grants, and local tax-based supports would ensure the maintenance of the historically significant interior and exterior of St. Paul's. The transformation would be vital to Garden City's continued pride and spirit, and inspire the rest of Long Island to safeguard their legacy. By combining community functions with cultural preservation, my proposed solution would create a multi-purpose space that honors the past while addressing the Village's current and future needs.

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<sup>29</sup> Bill Lennertz, Aarin Lutzenhiser, and Tamara Failor. "An Introduction to Charrettes." PlannersWeb, February 15, 2014. <https://plannersweb.com/2008/07/an-introduction-to-charrettes/>.

<sup>30</sup>Cambridge Dictionary, s.v. "consensus," accessed September 23, 2024, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/consensus>

I believe that the St. Paul's site can benefit from a featured space for art exhibitions, a mini theater, a community garden, and larger meeting rooms. Some programs would include childcare services, teen programs, summer camp, scheduled classes, and senior care. Availability of programs for all ages in a community center is essential in fostering inclusivity and strengthening generational bonds. These new features and opportunities would create interactions and conversations among children, teens, adults, and seniors, where they can learn from and support each other, resulting in a strengthened Garden City and a more resilient community. Additionally, these programs ensure every demographic's satisfaction and access by addressing the needs and concerns of each age group, enhancing all residents' sense of belonging and improving overall well-being. The Community Center should be named in honor of Alex Turney Stewart and Cornelia Clinch Stewart for all their historically inextricable contributions to Garden City. Naming the site for the Stewarts ensures their continued legacy in Garden City at the place originally built through their extraordinary efforts.

The Clock Tower should continue to be the symbolic beacon as the town center for all residents. To that end, the town must repair the space to create an immersive experience of the site's legacy. With a lighting enhancement for the clock, the tower would function as a symbolic guiding light for the town. Dedicating funds to the necessary repairs and avoiding any further damage to the tower's structure will restore it to peak shape so that all of Long Island may enjoy the aesthetics and feel a sense of connection.

In conclusion, the officials and mayor should redouble their efforts for preservation:

- Preserve tilework behind glass so that it can be displayed for all visitors
- Display explanatory plaques of the building itself and its significant elements, informing residents of their historical value
  - By being in the community center, residents and any other patrons can incidentally learn about the historical significance of onboarding those preservation goals
- Accord Long Island residents the opportunity to view and utilize restored aesthetical and historically significant elements, promoting togetherness
- Hold a Grand Opening Gala and regular guided tours to provide an enhanced learning experience for residents.

## **Final Conclusion**

While the existing plan does address some of the important issues, it could do more. Hopefully, the town officials and board involved in the plan will exercise urgency regarding the Clock tower and reconsider adding a museum to maximize the community value and preservation element. They could also plan for a greater utility of the site as a teaching tool or a way to inform visitors about its significance.

Though the Mayor, her committee, experts, and other organizations have not been ignorant of the preservation needs, the current plan puts a greater priority on community impact in order to satisfy the residents in immediacy. However, those two goals are not mutually exclusive of each other: a creative solution could benefit preservation while also enhancing the community value. The best outcome would emphasize preservation efforts at a reasonable cost – both initial and long-term – while not compromising the community value. By prioritizing the site’s historical integrity while enhancing accessibility and remaining affordable, we can ensure that preservation efforts serve both the community’s interests and its heritage. The proposed plan and my recommendation will ensure that all preservational and community needs are met to the best of the town’s ability. The symbolic representational nature of St. Paul’s makes preservation and repurposing imperative, disqualifying demolition as a viable option. Garden City must ensure its continued existence as a meaningful place for future generations and as a vital piece of the town’s identity.

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