



Society for the Preservation of Long Island Antiquities

161 Main Street, P.O. Box 148, Cold Spring Harbor, NY 11724 E-mail: staff@splia.com
Tel: 631-692-4664 Fax: 631-692-5265

15 December 2008

Mr. Peter A. Bee, Mayor and Members of the Board of Trustees
Incorporated Village of Garden City
351 Stewart Avenue
Garden City, New York 11530

Re: Resolution to Demolish St. Paul's School

Dear Mayor Bee and Members of the Board:

As the region's leading advocate for historic places on Long Island, the Society for the Preservation of Long Island Antiquities (SPLIA) is dismayed to learn that the Garden City Board of Trustees is advancing a resolution to demolish St. Paul's School. Such an action will not benefit the public in any meaningful way, and is tantamount to abandoning responsibility for what should be considered a community asset.

Since 2003, the Village Board has floated demolition as an option for this remarkable building. This suggests a lack of commitment on the part of Village leadership and an unwillingness to develop long-range planning for the task of rehabilitation. In the Mayor's Committee on St. Paul's Report of July 2008, what is described under the option of mothballing (really stabilization) is not a "waste of time and money" as suggested by the report. In reality it is Phase I of a long-range plan, which, as described in Appendix Six of the Report, would provide a new roof and gutter system, repointing for the brick façade, and repair of structural masonry, windows, and doors. This would bring the building very close to a useable state, opening it to new partnerships and greater possibilities for reuse.

St. Paul's School (built in 1883) is not a unique preservation challenge, and it certainly is not the most financially demanding. Projects such as the Eldridge Street Synagogue and the Seventh Regiment Park Avenue Armory in New York City, and the Montauk Playhouse on Long Island, all seemed daunting at first and could be described as lost causes. Each required dedicated supporters and long-range planning. The synagogue, built in 1887, abandoned for 50 years, and featuring spectacular interior wall decoration took twenty years to restore. The Playhouse project, largely supported by the Town of East Hampton and begun in the late 1990s, opened to the public in 2006 with Phase II of the larger restoration plan still pending. And the Armory, built in 1877-81 with extravagant interior finishes, is less than half way to completion but is still enjoyed by the public during events. Complex preservation projects such as these and many others were not dismissed by bottom-line economic evaluation. Instead, they were developed through dedication, cooperation, inventive thinking, and a willingness to ride out the long haul.

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St. Paul's School is significant enough to deserve the same special treatment. It is a National Register listed landmark, a magnificent architectural achievement, and a memorial to Alexander T Stewart, the founder of Garden City. It is central to the cultural identity of the Village and, along with the Garden City Cathedral, it is one of the few remaining substantial structures that distinguishes Garden City from all other places. St. Paul's was purchased in 1993 to serve the community, and for the last five years a lot of time and energy has been spent exploring ways to reuse the building. Garden City cannot give up just because AvalonBay was not the right developer. St. Paul's School is too important. It cannot be demolished – Not now, not ever.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alexandra Parsons Wolfe". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "A".

Alexandra Parsons Wolfe
Director of Preservation Services