

## **St. Paul's Update and Current Status – Fall, 2009**

After working with a paid consultant who specializes in luxury apartment developments for almost four years, the Garden City Village Board of Trustees settled on a private commercial developer – AvalonBay Communities – as the best option for St. Paul's. In December 2008, the Board conducted a village-wide “non-binding” poll to gauge residents' willingness to allow AvalonBay (AVB) to convert St. Paul's into private luxury residential rental apartments. That plan was overwhelmingly rejected by the residents.

AvalonBay's plan called for extensive renovation of the current structure, plus the construction of a massive new building incorporating a large 4-story townhouse behind St. Paul's. Further, AVB's proposal required a 99-year non-cancelable ground lease and enormous tax giveaways benefiting AvalonBay. Most unfortunately, the plan made no provision for any public use of the restored St. Paul's.

The board and its consultants tried to stack the deck in favor of AVB's plan by asking the residents to choose one: AvalonBay, complete demolition of the historic building, or “mothballing,” as they called it. Under the mothballing scenario, the Village would spend nearly \$14 million to repair the exterior of the building and leave it vacant.

Nevertheless, despite this biased poll, residents rejected the AVB plan by over 80%, splitting the remaining choices as follows: demolition, 45%, and mothballing, 37%. The residents saw through the charade, but were left with no viable choices.

### **After the Vote**

Once the poll was completed, a majority of the Board of Trustees took the results as a mandate for demolition. The Board hired an Environmental Counsel and engaged an engineering firm to advise them on the environmental impact to the community of taking down the building and to prepare a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), as a prelude to razing the building.

As part of the DEIS, the engineering firm hired a consultant to assess the historic impact of demolition. This consultant is, in fact, not an expert in historic preservation at all, but rather a local university professor of archaeology who specializes in native Long Island shell fishing. He lacks the proper qualifications to thoroughly assess the true effect of the destruction of St. Paul's on the culture, economy, real estate values and environment of Garden City. One can only surmise that he is being paid to tell the Board what it wants to hear.

Moreover, despite minimal costs, the Board voted to shut off the heat in the building and drain all pipes of water, a move certain to speed up the building's decay. They have also closed the building to further inspection by residents,

citing lead contamination.

### **The Board Seems Determined to Destroy St. Paul's**

Following completion of the consultant's report (it may be completed but it has not been shown to the residents), some community input has been tacitly implied. Yet, the Board has not been forthcoming with any information as to a timetable for completion of the DEIS or a schedule of public hearings. When the final Environmental Impact Study is completed, the Board of Trustees will take a vote to either accept or reject it, and it's expected that the board will propose a bond referendum to obtain residents' approval for the monies required for demolition.

Although we would wish otherwise, the Committee to Save St. Paul's is fairly certain that the Board will move ahead with a vote for demolition, an act that would be a permanent tragedy for the Village of Garden City.

### **We Say NO to Demolition**

The Committee to Save St. Paul's is completely opposed to demolition, and we believe that most residents, when presented with the facts, share that view. It is municipal vandalism. It is wrong!

- Wrong to spend \$6-8 million and be left with nothing
- It is less expensive to preserve the building until the economy improves
- St. Paul's enhances property values
- St. Paul's can be used, even on a limited basis, and meet real needs in the community
- All the options have NOT been explored
- The school district's 20-year capital improvement bond approved in October 2009 will increase the "average" homeowner's annual school taxes by approximately \$261
- Once it's gone, St. Paul's is lost forever

Particularly in this economy, it makes absolutely no sense to spend \$6-8 million dollars to destroy St. Paul's and permanently remove such a valuable icon from our Village. Despite claims to the contrary, the Board has not adequately explored other uses for the building. We know that it could be far less expensive to simply preserve the exterior of the building and incorporate limited, but very real, use of the building by the residents.

The recent school bond referendum, while necessary, will impose new burdens on the residents. It is foolish to add to that with a demolition project from which we get NOTHING in return.

### **Expanding the Preservation Effort**

The Committee to Save St. Paul's has joined with other interested resident groups, including The Garden City Historical Society, to oppose the demolition of

St. Paul's and to find a viable, affordable use for the building.

Working with The Garden City Historical Society, we have produced a short video, "Save St. Paul's Now: Protect Garden City's DNA," which can be accessed right from our "News" page. And we are working together with important local, state and national organizations, including the Society for the Preservation of Long Island Antiquities (SPLIA), the Preservation League of New York State, and the Northeast Regional Office of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. All these groups are committed to protecting and preserving St. Paul's, recognizing as they do its vital importance to the fabric of Garden City and the entire region.

Moreover, we are continuing to work with these groups to come up with new options for preserving St. Paul's and new sources of funding that will make it far more affordable, and useful, than demolition.

**What you can do**

Please join our cause. We welcome your active support. For more specific information on what you can do, please stay tuned in the coming months to this website and The Garden City Historical Society website, which can also be accessed from our "News" page.

The Executive Board  
of The Committee to Save St. Paul's