

Community Need

To the Editor:

During recent AvalonBay presentations to Village residents, the subject of community space in the historic St. Paul's building remained elusive. Avalon representatives said the Village will have to pay "rent" in the amount of \$450,000 annually for such space. If the Village determines it needs less space, the price goes down; more space, the price goes up. Residents were also told that Village officials have not expressed a need for space and have not indicated to what use the space would be put.

Perhaps the need for community space inside St. Paul's isn't being addressed properly. Has the Village shared with AvalonBay the results of studies that have already been conducted?

In 1993 soon after Village residents approved the purchase of the St. Paul's property for public purposes, residents received a survey prepared by Quennell Rothschild. They were asked to choose from a limited list, including botanic/flower gardens, nature walk, bike paths, walking paths, outdoor performance facilities for dance, music, outdoor movies, drama, performance art, and of course, athletic uses. Some of those suggestions were implemented at St. Paul's, and we now have beautiful playing fields, a children's playground and use of the gymnasium at the Field House and rooms at Cluett Hall. However, nothing has been accomplished to secure community activities inside the historic building.

Subsequent to that, Adelphi University conducted a Senior Survey to assess what kinds of activities and services Garden City seniors sought. Among the results of that survey, seniors expressed a desire for assistance with financial questions, cab services to get from place to place, more social activities, among other needs.

Recognizing that local groups may still be in need of space for events and meetings, in 2005 Mayor Barbara Miller appointed a Mayor's Committee on Public Needs, with an eye toward utilizing space in St. Paul's School on the first floor and lower levels and in the chapel. In addition to receiving the results of the above mentioned surveys, this Committee reviewed recreational public use/needs data and needs assessments compiled by the Recreation Department.

Mayor Miller's Committee interviewed some 20 community groups and their findings showed a need for large and small meeting rooms, indoor recreational activities such as checkers and ping pong, a large all purpose room suitable for plays, concerts, lectures and movies, cultural activities like dance recitals, theatre, ballet and musicals. Seniors expressed a need for more space for meetings and card playing. Several groups asked for community showcases where team awards, trophies and citations could be displayed.

During the Committee to Save St. Paul's negotiation with the recent Trustee Mauk Mayor's Committee on St. Paul's and consultant Karen Backus & Associates, we were challenged to explain why we proposed 14,000 square feet of public space in St. Paul's.

The Committee to Save St. Paul's not only referenced previous surveys, but also, as part of our outreach, asked members of our Families for St. Paul's group what types of services and activities they would find helpful if provided in a St. Paul's Senior and Community Center. Here's a sampling of their answers: A general meeting area for sitting, reading and talking for all ages; a comfortable teen room that would allow for study-groups to work, yet not be a complete quiet area; classes for young children that are open to all, so that children with special needs can join with their friends; a place where local artists can display their work; music lessons, dance lessons and SAT classes that residents currently go out of town to pursue; classrooms for elder learning; Girl Scouts and others.

One resident wrote that current expenditures on extracurricular activities for their children "outside" the Village is "a significant amount of money, not to mention the significant waste of time, effort and gasoline." Another estimated time at "20 hours a month" outside Garden City for youth activities. Another said it would be "spectacular to attend performances in the chapel!" Another, "I'd like to see seniors talking and interacting with children, telling stories, teaching them to dance." Would residents attend and participate in cultural experiences and opportunities in the fine arts – Yes!

In explaining the need for an enlarged senior center, the Committee to Save St. Paul's pointed out that the current building on Golf Club Lane and the Senior Center at St. Paul's at The Cottages only provides approximately 4,400 square feet for a senior population that is currently 21% of the Village's 21,000 residents. Projections show that that population will rise to about 25% within the next 10 years. After researching facilities in neighboring communities, Committee to Save St. Paul's believed Garden City's senior space and services are woefully inadequate, and the Village could do better by its senior residents, many of whom have contributed their time and talents to making Garden City the premiere community that it is today.

We hope that Village officials share the results of their studies with AvalonBay and if Avalon wishes to review the Committee to Save St. Paul's findings, we would gladly share those results. While Mayor Gerard Lundquist offered a list of available Village space, nothing comes close to having community space set aside in a renovated and restored historic St. Paul's building that residents purchased for public purposes so many years ago. Someone in an elected position of responsibility in our Village, someone with vision, needs to step up and define what should be done within St. Paul's to address the real needs of our residents, instead of letting an outside developer decide for us.

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Committee to Save St. Paul's
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