

Adaptive Reuse of Selected Church Properties in Eastern Ontario



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The Anglican Diocese of Ottawa

SCHOOL OF URBAN AND REGIONAL PLANNING

SURP 823 PROJECT COURSE

DECEMBER 2019



00 Executive Summary

Purpose of the Report

Like many churches in Canada, the Anglican Diocese of Ottawa (ADO) is currently facing declining congregations across the region. Consequently, individual parishes must change their current model to remain an active part of the communities in which they are situated (Allen, 2019; Clarke & Macdonald, 2011). Adaptive reuse is the process of taking an existing building and converting it into a different use than it was designed for originally (Amayu, 2014; Cantell, 2005; Murtagh, 1997). Adaptive reuse is commonly employed for places for worship facing declining numbers, and is often manifest in residential, commercial, community and institutional, and arts and cultural activities (Amayu, 2014).

The purpose of this report is to provide planning guidance and subsequent possibilities for the adaptive reuse of three churches owned by the ADO. These churches include St. James' in Morrisburg, St. Paul's in Almonte, and St. Martin's in Ottawa. The proposed possibilities complement the ADO's mission of providing social benefit to their surrounding communities as they adopt new uses while still retaining worship space. This report aims to support that mission by providing a variety of possibilities that are informed by an urban and regional planning lens. The possibilities propose adaptive reuse options that allow room for exploring new activities that could share church space, while simultaneously imparting the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural benefits that adaptive reuse brings to historic buildings (Amayu, 2014; Cantell, 2005; Murtagh, 1997).

Methods

This project utilized a mixed methods research approach and incorporated both primary and

secondary data sources to ensure the possibilities presented to the ADO for each church were evidence-based.

Parish Portfolio Review

Policy analyses were undertaken to understand the planning opportunities and constraints applicable to each site. These analyses included the land use policy and regulatory frameworks, environmental framework, and heritage framework. Site analyses illuminated the site-level constraints applicable to each case study site.

These analyses included site visits, as well as analyses of circulation, services and amenities, and demographics.

Literature Review and Case Study Analysis

A literature review and case study analysis were undertaken to set the literary context for the report and provide examples of church adaptive reuse (Monk & Bedford, 2016). The literature review defines adaptive reuse, identifies its benefits, and outlines models of church adaptive reuse, while more than 40 case studies were analyzed to provide inspiration for potential reuses (Yin, 1984).

Public Engagement

Interviews and open houses formed a core part of the project methods. Thirty-two semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants such as church administrators and congregants, elected officials, social development representatives, potential partners, and municipal planners, as well as experts in the field of church adaptive reuse. Open houses were conducted at each church on Saturday November 9, 2019. The open houses incorporated multiple activities and were flexible in format.

Needs and Assets Analysis

Information from the parish portfolio review, interviews, and open houses were then analyzed using the two-pronged approach of a needs and assets analysis that applied to both the greater community and the church. Identified needs and assets informed and supported necessary pre-requisites for the churches to undertake before implementing adaptive reuse, as well as possibilities to respond to needs within the community with feasible adaptive reuse activities for the church.

St. James', Morrisburg

Pre-Requisites for Adaptive Reuse

St. James' Anglican Church faces challenges with space flexibility in the building because of the pews in its large ground level room, and difficulties with heating and cooling the church. Additionally, the washroom facilities are not accessible for everyone, and there are budget constraints. In order to sustainably implement adaptive reuse possibilities, the following pre-requisites are recommended:

- 1. Increase Utilization of Space:** Church pews should be removed and replaced with comfortable, moveable chairs.
- 2. Heating and Cooling of the Building:** The building needs to be properly insulated to reduce heating costs and allow for worship in the intended space.
- 3. Accessible Washroom:** Accessible washroom facilities should be provided on the ground floor.

Possibilities

The community needs and assets analysis revealed several challenges faced by Morrisburg residents, including food insecurity, lack of social gathering spaces, lack of services, and absence of opportunities for youth and young professionals. St. James' Anglican Church has the opportunity to create a community hub on its site that encourages social gathering and brings together

community agencies to a single location. The vision of a community hub is multi-faceted with three major components:

- 1. Utilization of Outdoor Space** to include a community garden and social gathering space.
- 2. Renting Space in the Church** for events such as concerts, meetings, retreats, and workshops.
- 3. Developing Partnerships** with organizations as "anchor tenants" in the church to offer services and a drop-in indoor space for gathering.

A community hub offers an opportunity to alleviate many of the challenges felt in Morrisburg and St. James'. Food insecurity could be addressed through the creation of a community garden on the property that provides fresh food options either for individuals who wish to garden the plots or by donating the food to a local food bank such as Linking Hands. Social gathering spaces would be established in both the community garden and inside the church upon better utilization of the space on the ground level. Dependent on the partnerships created, drop-in space could be created that may be programmed, geared towards youth, or left unprogrammed. Services could be offered by organizations at St. James', reducing the need for transit to other nearby cities. If a for-profit partnership is formed, it could help create revenue for the church as well.

St. James' Church



St. Paul's, Almonte

Pre-Requisites for Adaptive Reuse

St. Paul's would benefit from making changes to the property's accessibility. Though these do not entirely preclude adaptive reuse, these alterations would offer greater ease of use of the property for all individuals. The main issues identified regarding this were:

- 1. An Elevator for the Church Building:** An elevator or lift would provide interior access to the basement from the main floor.
- 2. A Ramp for the Rectory:** A ramp would increase access to the rectory for all individuals.
- 3. An Elevator for the Rectory:** The addition of an elevator would provide mobility between all floors.

Parking was an additional challenge that was noted but this would not preclude all of the possibilities identified. Importantly, the possibilities pursued by St. Paul's will be constrained by a 30-metre setback from the Mississippi River, and heritage designations on all three buildings on the site.

Possibilities

The community needs and assets analysis highlighted various challenges for Almonte and St. Paul's. Almonte, for instance, struggles with limited opportunities for youth, and St. Paul's faces financial constraints as well as difficulties drawing residents and visitors from

the town centre to the site. The following possibilities for adaptive reuse of St. Paul's property could help to address these challenges:

- 1. Low or No Development** includes the implementation of artist studios, coworking spaces, one-off event space, and waterfront access.
- 2. Medium Development** includes an addition for the creation of a permanent food bank location; renovations to establish a coffee shop; and/or the creation of affordable housing on site.
- 3. High Development** could include the construction of a fourth building on the property which would serve as affordable housing and event space.

The inclusion of artist studios and co-working space will help bring employment to Almonte while providing revenue for the church, capitalizing on the arts and culture identity of the community, and engaging youth and other generations together during one-off events. These components of adaptive reuse could transform St. Paul's into a vibrant community hub that would attract a range of people. The medium and high development options have been conceived in a way to complement the low development options. These adaptive reuse possibilities could foster the continuation and expansion of the Lanark County Food Bank thereby benefiting families and individuals in Almonte who have limited access to transport and choice of food. The addition of housing would alleviate the housing need felt by some members of the Almonte community and could be done in partnership with a non-profit agency such as Carebridge Community Support, which has expertise in developing and funding such projects.



St. Paul's Church

St. Martin's, Ottawa

Pre-Requisites for Adaptive Reuse

St. Martin's faces significant accessibility deficits that would need to be addressed to support some adaptive reuse opportunities on the property. These improvements include:

- 1. Wider Front Steps:** This could follow the removal of the narrow steps in front of the church.
- 2. New Elevator:** A new elevator placed strategically could permit ease of use and mobility between floors.
- 3. Access Platforms:** Placing leveling access platforms for side doors would increase accessibility for those with limited mobility and baby strollers.

Possibilities

The community needs and assets analysis for this site highlighted the need for community spaces and affordable housing. St. Martin's central location and large property present the opportunity to address these challenges through the proposed possibilities:

- 1. Creation of a Community Hub** would include green space development, interior renovations of the church, and an overall focus on flexible space design and community gathering.
- 2. Partial Redevelopment** calls for the removal of the education wing and rectory to allow for the creation of affordable housing.
- 3. Full Redevelopment**, constituting the removal of all existing structures, could allow for the creation of affordable housing with worship space integrated into the new structures.

A third place-based reorientation of the church property would allow the church to envision a more lively, inviting and permanent use of its large exterior front lawn. Additionally, re-purposing its interior space could allow the church to become more

St. Martin's Church



flexible, presenting the opportunity to rent the space for special events. A partial housing redevelopment would allow the church to address its most pressing community need of a lack of affordable rental housing for young families, while opening up the opportunity for greater revenue and retaining its original worship and event rental space. A full housing-based redevelopment would enable the church to address housing needs while also inviting the opportunity to integrate multi-use spaces that can be provisioned for new worship space and commercial amenities.

References

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