

CASE STUDY FOR THE DEMOLITION OF THE OLD PORT AUSTIN GYMNASIUM
LOCATED AT 8861 LINE STREET, PORT AUSTIN, MICHIGAN, 48467
(HURON COUNTY)

The Village of Port Austin along with the Port Austin Downtown Development Authority, with funding from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) & MI Green Thumb Brownfield Coalition (Land Bank Authority), proposes to proceed with the removal of the Old Port Austin Gymnasium located at 8861 Line Street, Port Austin, MI, 48467 to erect a viable community centered structure.

On January 31, 2024, the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) agreed with the finding that the proposed undertaking would have an adverse effect on the Port Austin Gymnasium which appears to meet criteria for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

The proposed project entails the demolition of the Port Austin Gymnasium and constructing a Four Season Town Centered Farmers Market Structure comprised of a large pavilion. The Four Season Town Center Farmers Market project would revitalize an underutilized area in our Downtown District. The project site currently houses an old gymnasium that has no heat, no running water, no working restrooms, a leaking roof and a bowed floor. In the most recent environmental study, asbestos has been determined to be on site. The building is also infested with mold in the lower levels due to its location and lack of utilization, making the building unusable to the public. This project would remove this building and rebuild a permanent farmers market/town center structure with year-round restrooms. The structure would be a pavilion style structure with restrooms and mechanical rooms on one side. The pavilion would be considered our town center and be utilized for various town events throughout the year. It would also be a central gathering point for the general public, allowing for shade, protection in inclement weather, and year-round recreation.

The Village of Port Austin and Port Austin Downtown Development Authority's thought process in this project has always been, how do we make this parcel a utilized space for our community? What makes sense? How can we provide better amenities to the public on this parcel? Can we renovate and make this space usable? Can we build something that benefits the area? The Four Season Town Centered Farmers Market Structure was created as a result of the brainstorming of how the property can be better utilized.

The Village of Port Austin and Port Austin Downtown Development Authority (DDA), has worked since acquiring the existing building in 2000 on a variety of paths to reach this point. The feasibility of the following alternative solutions are described in more detail below:

1. Renovating & allowing the existing structure to remain
2. Enhancing & adding to the existing structure
3. Allowing the existing structure to remain and leave as is
4. Removing the existing structure while incorporating its history in a new structure

Alternative 1: Renovating & allowing the existing structure to remain

In 2000, the Village of Port Austin's DDA purchased the gymnasium from the North Huron School District after a prior year lease. In 1999, one of the goals of the newly formed DDA was to acquire and renovate

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the building. At this time, a committee was formed to look into developing the gym with the use of grant funds. An initial renovation assessment was done by Hendrick, a general contractor/construction management company in 2000. Hendrick gave an estimate of \$8,800 to bring the building up to 1999 code; replacing the boilers, hot water heater, and toilets, installing a new exterior ramp for ADA access, repairing the exterior stone and tuck pointing that were defective, installing EIFS over the exterior gym panels, replacing the windows, updating electrical, and installing new duct work, plumbing, exhaust fans. (See Attachment A). The work on this assessment was not completed at this time.

In 2008, the boiler system used for heating the gym began having issues. The building was closed down due to this until a solution was found. At this point, many discussions were had regarding the building and what was feasible to do with it for the community. The heat and water had been turned off.

In 2015, Snyder and Staley Engineering performed a structural review (Attachment B) on the existing building. The study stated that the building was sound at this time, but once items start to be renovated inside, additional reinforcements would need to be made to the walls and roof. The cost for this work ranged from \$25,000 to \$75,000.

In 2019, after much discussion over the years regarding the gymnasium and how to make it a viable building for community needs, Wade Trim Engineering was brought on to the project to develop a renovation plan that would incorporate the Farmers Market (Attachment C).

In 2020, the Village of Port Austin held a public hearing regarding applying for a DNR Recreation Passport Grant based on Wade Trim Engineering's suggested site plan to update and make renovations to the gymnasium building due to its outdated nature of the current restrooms, lack of heat and proper electrical work, and outdated layout. The grant application was not approved for funding at that time.

In February 2021, the DDA discussed the gymnasium as a place for the Township, Village, Chamber offices, as well as a place to hold the library, with joint meeting rooms, public restroom, and municipal storage. This concept was abandoned due to lack of interest from the Township and Chamber.

The Village of Port Austin and DDA explored the feasibility of renovating and allowing the existing structure to remain for the Farmer's Market and public use. This alternative was deemed to be unfeasible for the following reason(s):

A. Costs & Extent of Renovations

After reviewing the costs and the mounting needed renovations that accumulated over the years, and with no grant funding to renovate, the Village of Port Austin does not see renovations as a feasible option in keeping the existing building.

B. Environmental, Safety, and Blight

The Village of Port Austin is also concerned about health hazards with the existing building. An environmental study was done in 2024 of the building. Traces of asbestos was found. There is also evidence of mold on the premises. These items can be hazardous to nearby homes and families should the building remain on site.

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The building also persists to be an eye sore to current and future residents and tourists to our area. The Village of Port Austin should have deemed this site condemned/dangerous building due to the health hazards and due to the dilapidation of the interior and exterior features (lack of heat, lack of restrooms, unstable stone on the exterior, deteriorating outside doors, etc.)

Alternative 2: Enhancing and adding to the existing structure

In 2007, the Farmers Market Master, John Pridnia, approached the Village of Port Austin regarding adding to the existing gym structure and reconstructing the gym parking lot. The estimated cost at this time for the proposed project was \$750,000 to add a canopy type structure to North and South of the side of the gymnasium with a covered walkway. The structure was to be used for the Farmers Market as well as various community events. Windmill generators would be used to create heat and lighting for the additions and the gymnasium building itself.

Architect, Shelley Herrington, was contracted in 2008 to create a feasibility study, master plan for the site, and concept design for this project deemed "Port Austin Farmers Market Covered Structure" (Attachment D). One of her services was to interview farmers market personnel, municipal officials, users, and community members to generate alternative solutions for the site plan. Concept designs and a feasibility study were also completed. Funding was sought in the form of grants through various opportunities to continue with the proposed project, however, funding was not available. The reconstruction of the gym parking lot was completed in 2010 at the cost of \$82,078.67, after receiving funding from the USDA, this was the only portion of the project that was completed.

The Village of Port Austin and DDA explored the feasibility of enhancing and adding to the existing structure. This alternative was deemed to be unfeasible for the following reason(s):

A. Costs and Funding

With the lack of grant programming to continue the enhancement project further than the concept designs and parking lot reconstruction, the Village of Port Austin did not see the enhancements as a feasible option of keeping the existing building.

Alternative 3: Allowing the existing structure to remain and leave as is

The Village of Port Austin and DDA explored allowing the existing structure to remain and leave as is. This solution was deemed infeasible after much discussion over the years for the following reason(s):

A. Health, Safety, & Liability

Traces of asbestos and evidence of mold on the premises. These items can be hazardous to nearby homes and families and to those that might enter the building should the building remain on site.

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The Village of Port Austin is concerned with health and safety hazards due to the dilapidation of the interior and exterior features (lack of heat, lack of restrooms, deteriorating roof/leaking, unstable stone on the exterior, deteriorating outside doors, etc.)

Alternative 4: Removing the existing structure while incorporating its history in a new structure

Ultimately, the Village of Port Austin and DDA with the input from the Port Austin Historical Society believe that removing the existing structure and creating a new usable community orientated pavilion while incorporating the gymnasium's history is the most feasible option.

A. Incorporating aspects of the gymnasium's history

The current design incorporates utilizing the existing building's stone in the new structure, serving to maintain some of the historical materials. Port Austin School's insignia would be framed and displayed at the new site as well. A historical placard would be installed onsite to commemorate the site as the previous place where the gymnasium stood.

The Port Austin Reef Lighthouse Association (PARLA) is in the middle of a restoration of the Port Austin Reef Lighthouse, which was originally funded by WPA funds. PARLA has approached the Village about utilizing the gymnasium flooring in their restoration of the galley portion of the lighthouse. The Village would grant this request to maintain the gymnasium's history in the community. The Village is open to any other suggestions SHPO deems fit to move forward with the project while still preserving a part of the history.

B. Health, Safety, & Blight

Alternative 4 remediates any of the health, safety, and blight concerns that the Village of Port Austin has with the current building. The liability/blight of the structure would be removed.

C. Costs & Funding

After years of applying for funding and grants for this property to have enhancements, the Village of Port Austin has been approved for a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) with the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) in the amount of \$2,000,000, that would fund the project construction. Demolition of the building was sought through an EPA Brownfield Assessment Grant through the MI Green Thumb Brownfield Coalition of Huron County in the amount of \$200,000. This grant is waiting in the coffers for the Village of Port Austin to give the ability to move forward.

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