

A Community Vision for Kingsville Public School: Preserving Our Past, Building Our Future



As Kingsville Public School stands vacant following its closure, we face a pivotal decision about its future. The Greater Essex County District School Board has consolidated operations into a larger facility, leaving this cherished downtown landmark at risk of being acquired by the Town and handed over to developers for private residential and commercial use. While the Town might envision a big tax windfall from such a development, this school property is a critical piece of Kingsville's history—a place woven into the fabric of generations of families since 1862.

This is one of those moments when we must weigh factors beyond just the financial bottom line, prioritizing community legacy, sustainability, and long-term vitality. Let's seize this opportunity to adaptively reuse the KPS property as a vibrant, multi-use community hub—one that honors its history, fosters local innovation, and remains accessible to all. This isn't just about saving a building; it's about investing in Kingsville's heart and soul.

Our Vision: A Multi-use Community Facility for All

Imagine transforming KPS into a dynamic center that serves as the beating heart of downtown Kingsville. Leveraging its existing layout—complete with classrooms, common areas for socializing,

and expansive grounds—this space is perfectly suited for adaptive reuse without the need for costly overhauls. Here’s what it could include:



Popup Retail Spaces: Flexible areas for local entrepreneurs to test ideas, host markets, and showcase Kingsville-made goods, boosting small businesses and drawing visitors.



Coworking and Meeting Spaces: Affordable desks, offices, and conference rooms to support remote workers, startups, and community groups, turning KPS into a hub for collaboration and productivity.



Theatre and Entertainment Venues: A stage for local performances, film screenings, and events, enriching our cultural scene and providing entertainment options right in the heart of town. This could serve as a new home for community theatre to replace the beloved Migration Hall, which was lost when the Kingsville District High School property closed down. The old KPS gym would make an ideal space for this, reviving a vital entertainment hub for our town.



Workshops for Artists and Makers: Dedicated studios equipped for crafting and hands-on creation,

empowering local artisans to thrive and share their skills through classes and exhibits.



Studios for Video and Podcasts: Modern recording spaces for content creators, podcasters, and videographers, fostering Kingsville's emerging digital economy and amplifying our community's voices.



Food Court for Small Local Vendors: A lively area featuring rotating stalls for homegrown food entrepreneurs, offering fresh, affordable eats while supporting local agriculture and culinary talent.



Research Greenhouse: A dedicated, state-of-the-art research greenhouse integrated into the hub's grounds would serve as a collaborative innovation lab for agri-tech startups and local growers.



Food Bank and Community Food Garden: Essential services to address food insecurity and

nutritional deficiency, with on-site gardens in the school's beautiful yard that rolls down to the trail and ravine, promoting sustainability and community involvement.



Outdoor Courtyard and Amenities: An inviting courtyard with a patio garden for outdoor cafes and external access to the food court, encouraging social interactions among residents. An outdoor gym

would invite people to keep fit, all making full use of the property's scenic yard and ravine backdrop.

This setup would create a welcoming, inclusive environment where residents of all ages can gather, learn, and connect—much like the school did for generations.



Food Truck Alley: A permanent mobile food space at the hub will provide a platform for food industry entrepreneurs to launch and refine innovative concepts and capitalize on the hub's bustling foot traffic. This will reinforce Kingsville's position as the region's restaurant leader, fostering a spirit of innovation and attracting diverse crowds, further enriching the community's culinary landscape and driving economic growth.

Daycare: Incorporating a daycare center would provide accessible, high-quality childcare that supports working families and fosters community connection. It enables parents to pursue their goals with peace of mind, knowing their children are in a safe, nurturing environment nearby.



Mixed Income Housing: The hub property will feature a new, 2-story, 22,000 sqft structure that will offer a combination of affordable and market rate housing units. Its proximity to the hub promotes community connectivity, supports local entrepreneurship, and strengthens Kingsville's economic and social vitality.



Benefits That Extend to Everyone

Adaptive reuse as a community facility offers tangible advantages that private development simply can't match, while potentially delivering stronger economic outcomes in the long run:

For Tenants and Entrepreneurs: Shared resources like marketing support and professional services (e.g., legal advice, accounting, or event planning) would lower barriers to entry, helping small ventures succeed and stimulating local economic growth. This diversification of revenue streams—from rentals, events, and vendor fees—would make the facility more resilient, fostering the expansion of local entrepreneurial ventures, arts, entertainment, and media production.

For the Community: By keeping KPS public, we preserve access to its stunning setting—the downtown location, lush yard, and scenic ravine views—for everyone to enjoy. It becomes a space for family picnics, trail walks, garden volunteering, and cultural events, enhancing quality of life and building social bonds. It can even serve as the vital "Third Place" in Downtown Kingsville, a welcoming space beyond home and work where residents can gather, connect, and exchange ideas.

Environmental and Historical Wins: Refurbishing the existing structure avoids the ecological harm of demolition, reducing waste, carbon emissions, and resource consumption. It also safeguards a building rich with community memories—from childhood milestones to neighborhood gatherings—continuing its legacy as a public asset rather than erasing it for private gain.

Economic Resilience and Revitalization: While private development might promise immediate taxes, refurbishment could put the Town on a faster path to cash flow through ongoing operations and community-driven revenue. This isn't just another real estate opportunity; it's about providing the soil and nourishment for a revitalization of Kingsville's local economic base—crucial in our post-pandemic recovery and amid a highly volatile and uncertain international trade climate.

In short, this approach aligns perfectly with the school's original design: classrooms become studios, hallways turn into social corridors, and the grounds remain a shared oasis. It's a smart, sustainable reuse that maximizes what we already have.

Why Now? And Why Us?

Kingsville deserves spaces that reflect our values—community, creativity, and conservation. The area adjacent to KPS around Walnut and Chestnut Streets is already becoming known as a community street hub thanks to the Block Party events. So why privatize a major anchor of that area when we can adapt it to enhance the neighborhood? Such a vibrant community business and cultural center in the lower vehicle traffic Walnut and Chestnut area could bring foot traffic back downtown, which has proven difficult to do on Main and Division due to heavy vehicle traffic. This would help revitalize downtown and boost downtown businesses.

Communities across North America have successfully repurposed old schools in similar ways, proving the model's viability. For instance, the [Bok Building in Philadelphia](#) transformed a former vocational high school into an entrepreneurial hub housing over 170 local businesses, with spaces for craft fairs, markets, and cultural events that attract thousands of visitors annually. Similarly, the [Old Gregg School in Spring Mills, Pennsylvania](#), was converted into a multi-purpose community and recreation center featuring for-profit businesses, nonprofits, fitness facilities, and cultural activities like yoga and dance studios. Kingsville can join these success stories and create a lasting legacy.

Private development might fill a plot, but it won't fill the void left by losing this iconic site. By choosing adaptive reuse, we can create jobs, attract tourism, and strengthen our town's identity, all while minimizing environmental impact.

Let's rally together to make this vision a reality. I urge engaged citizens to join us and share this idea with neighbors.

We are not asking the Town to fund this project. Instead, we are exploring different funding and ownership models—for example, a mix of private investment and not-for-profit management.

Together, we can ensure Kingsville Public School remains a cornerstone for our future—not a memory of what we've lost.

Sincerely,

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