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Laurier student projects outline adaptive reuse for underutilized places of worship in Cambridge

WATERLOO – As part of a course competition for Wilfrid Laurier University's Capstone Urban Studies Project (CUSP), a team of Geography and Environmental Studies students was awarded first prize by the City of Cambridge for their recommendation to adaptively reuse underutilized space within the Central Presbyterian Church in Galt.

The winning team, **Grand River Consulting Firm (GRFC)**, is made up of senior students Elizabeth Roth (project manager), Andrew Drysdale (community engagement manager), Tyler Prentice (research analyst), Alfredo Spagnuolo (policy analyst), Jaclyn Schnieder (communications director) and William Cavadias (heritage specialist).

The team researched four options for repurposing the church's underutilized space outside of its worship schedule to generate additional revenue. The primary recommendation suggested a possible partnership with St. Louis Adult Learning and Continuing Education Centre's Cambridge campus. Renting out the Sunday school rooms to St. Louis during the week could create a nominal income stream for the church while providing St. Louis with an alternative downtown location for their English as a Second Language (ESL) program. The school, which left a previous downtown location due to aging building conditions, currently offers ESL programming at two locations in Cambridge. St. Louis would consider returning to the area if the space was conveniently located for English Language learners who live, work and settle in downtown Galt. The church and school have not met to discuss any potential collaboration.

"It was really rewarding to work with the church staff on this project," said Roth. "Being able to propose a tangible solution, such as partnering with St. Louis Adult Learning, is exciting. We hope they will consider our recommendation."

The adaptive reuse of Central Presbyterian Church won out over other teams' recommendations for Knox's Galt Presbyterian Church, Trinity Anglican Church and Wesley United Church.

"All of the student groups completed meaningful work by collaborating with congregation members, community leaders and city and university staff to develop a series of practical recommendations for reusing underutilized places of worship," said **Elaine Brunn Shaw**, director of planning at the City of Cambridge.

The CUSP program emerged from an increased desire to develop post-secondary programming that helps students deepen their engagement with the community through experiential learning opportunities.

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Thanks to the generosity of the City of Cambridge, **Paul Puopolo** (BA '73) and **Louise Puopolo** of Polocorp Inc., **Christopher Coupal** (BA '95) of Coupal Markou Commercial Real Estate Inc., **Stephen Rhodes** (BA '88) and **Wanita Rhodes** (BA '87) and Laurier's Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, the program is able to give students the opportunity to use their skills as Geography and Environmental Studies majors and to gain comprehensive knowledge about the consulting process.

This is the third year that Laurier's Department of Geography and Environmental Studies has partnered with the City of Cambridge for the CUSP project.

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