

May 21, 2026

**Site Inspection & Preservation Assessment:**  
**Monastery of the Glorious Ascension, 481 North Country Rd., St. James, NY**

**General Remarks**

The historic and architectural resource known as “Timothy House” was acquired by the Monastery of the Glorious Ascension, Inc., in 2018, and application was subsequently made to construct a new house of worship and adjacent parking lot on the property. Pursuant to local code, the proposed improvements required a Special Use Permit, which was granted by the Village of Head of the Harbor on March 13, 2024, in addition to Site Plan Approval, which was issued on August 6, 2025. As a condition of Site Plan Approval, however, the Village required a review of the proposed architectural plans and site improvements by a qualified preservation consultant. The following report has been prepared to fulfill this requirement.

The consultant has practiced as an architectural preservation consultant on Long Island since 1976. First as Preservation Director for the Society for the Preservation of Long Island Antiquities (now Preservation Long Island) from 1976 until 1990, and since that time as a consultant to numerous historical agencies including the Architectural Review Boards of Southampton and Sag Harbor Villages, he remains active in evaluating and preserving historic Long Island architecture, cemeteries and related cultural resources. His specialty is the study, preservation and interpretation of eighteenth century period residential architecture.

**Timothy House**

The 4.24-acre property (SCTM #801-7-3-29.1) on which Timothy House is situated preserves two additional historic accessory structures – an open shed/garage and former ice house – as well as a formal entry gate attributed to the architect Lawrence Smith Butler and an allée that approaches the house bordered by large sugar maples. An open field borders the allée to the northeast and is the site of the proposed house of worship and parking lot.

The c. 1800 Federal style house is historically and architecturally significant, not only because of its gambrel roof form and detailing – among other original features, the covered stoop is supported on rare and slender, octagonal wooden posts – but also because of an addition constructed in the Colonial Revival style c. 1906 by owner/architect Lawrence Smith Butler (1875-1954). It was



evidently Butler who relocated the house back from the main road, creating the secluded setting that survives to the present day. It is this setting that preservationists identify as an unusual and significant feature of the landmark property, and consider it especially worthy of protection.



Beers, Comstock & Cline, *Atlas of Long Island, New York*, Pl. 150 (detail)

Timothy House, together with its accessory structures and grounds, was listed in the State and National Registers of Historic Places in 1973 and are designated as “contributing resources” within the St. James Historic District. The district comprises approximately 90 acres and 27 structures, and stretches for about half a mile along both sides of the scenic roadway:

*Rows of maples, locusts, and overhanging oaks as well as scattered hedges, white picket fences, and an occasional hitching post or milestone line the graceful curves of North Country Road as it winds through the farmland of St. James. Three major buildings along this road form the district’s nucleus: the Timothy Smith House, “Deepwells,” and the St. James Episcopal Church.*

[National Register Nomination Form. 7. *Description*]

In addition to the c. 1800 house and its accessory structures, the National Register Nomination Form identifies “the grounds immediately surrounding the house [that] have been landscaped and adjoin cultivated fields” as features of historical significance.

While the National Register Nomination Form was submitted by SHPO staffer Lynn Beebe Weaver, the voice of Barbara Ferris Van Liew – noted Long Island preservationist and then owner of Timothy House – is clearly heard in the following “Statement of Significance” which framed the central argument for designating the historic district:

*The St. James District, located on a still scenic corridor of historic North Country Road (N. Y. Route 25A), constitutes a microcosm of the social and economic transitions which were typical of numerous communities on Long Island. A cluster of structures illustrating a variety of architectural styles popular in rural Long Island through the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the district is centered around two prominent Smith family dwellings and a well-preserved*

*board-and-batten church...*

*Continued vigilance will be necessary to shield this area in the future from the sprawl of burgeoning commercial development which is spreading over so much of the island.*

[National Register Nomination Form. 8. *Significance*]

Few if any preservationists who were active on Long Island in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century could grasp – or envision – the urgency to safeguard the region’s historical and architectural patrimony as well as Barbara Ferris Van Liew. Born to architect Herbert Henry Ferris, she came to St. James with her husband in 1940 and joined the Society for the Preservation of Long Island Antiquities in 1948. A natural preservationist, Van Liew began as a volunteer and became editor from 1965 until 2001 of the organization’s “Preservation Notes,” an educational publication that continues to inform and alert the Long Island community of preservation accomplishments and challenges. While helping to create the St. James Historic District, Van Liew perceived the district that included her own historic residence as emblematic of the ongoing role of historic preservation in maintaining the physical signs and visible remains of Long Island’s past.

Realizing that a State or National-Registered landmark was not necessarily protected from either subdivision or improvement by local law, however, Van Liew formed an easement on the 4.65-acre property (4.24-acre house lot combined with an adjoining .41-acre parcel serving as a shared driveway), which she conveyed to the Village of Head of the Harbor on November 5, 1997. Creating this easement had evidently been her intention as early as October 1971, when Van Liew completed a preliminary questionnaire that led to creating the St. James Historic District in 1973, writing that “the twelve acres of farmland which forms the setting for this house is to be protected by a scenic easement.” The easement she formed in 1997 sought to preserve “the historic character of the house and the open space character of the property” and itemized a long list of structural features of the house “that should be given special consideration.” Importantly, Van Liew also intended that the property not be further subdivided (it had already been reduced from 12 to about 4½ acres since 1971) as a way of preserving its naturalistic character.

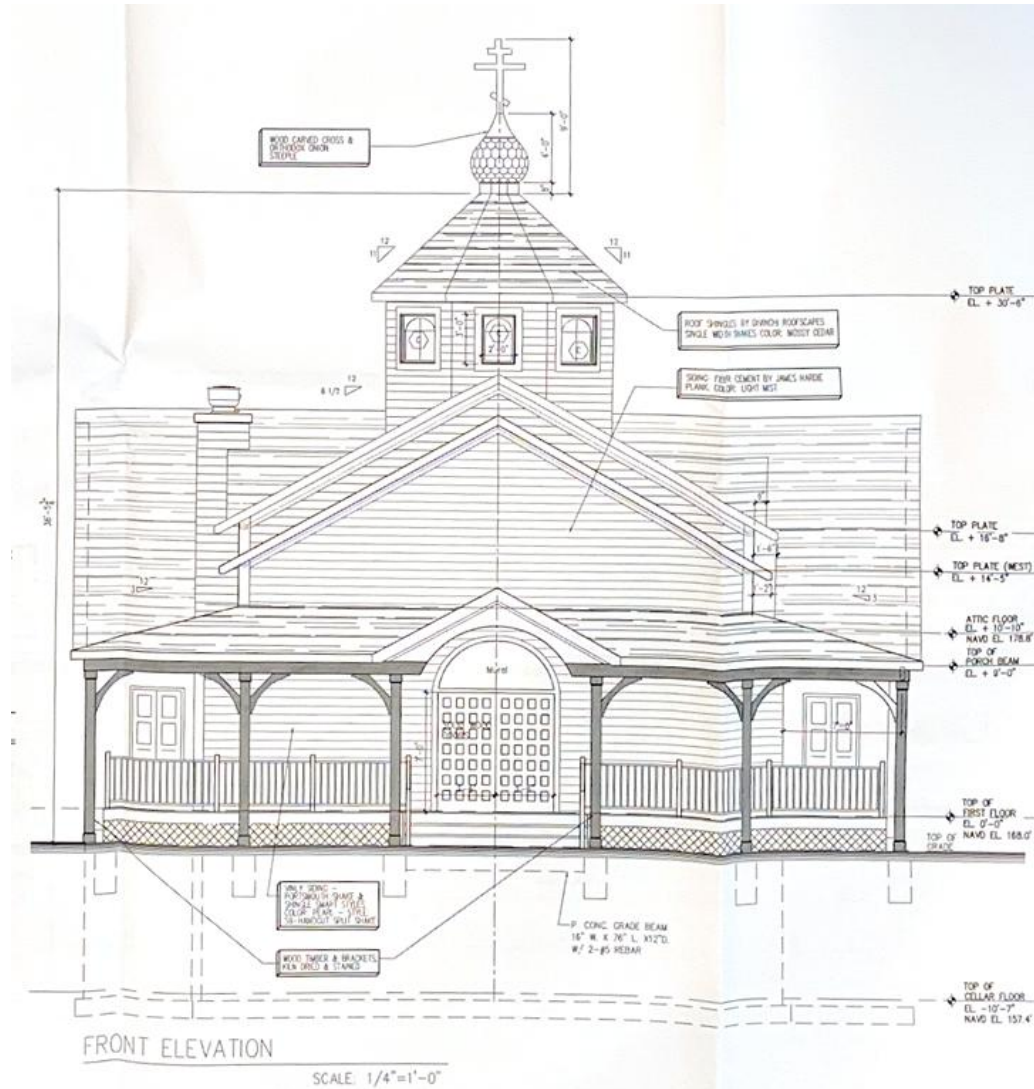
The degree to which the proposed construction of a house of worship and adjacent parking lot acknowledges the language and spirit of Barbara Van Liew’s vision of preserving the character and setting of the historic and architectural resource known as “Timothy House” is addressed by the following Preservation Assessment.

### **Conditions of Site Plan Approval: Historic House & Open Space**

To the extent the property in question will be maintained intact as a 4.24-acre parcel, together with the adjoining .41-acre parcel which serves as a shared driveway, meets the criterion that the existing house and landscaped grounds are preserved without subdivision. The property is complemented by other, oversized residential parcels in the St. James Historic District – notably the 4-acre “Deepwells” property and two additional County-owned parcels on North Country Road – which in area amount to nearly 30 acres of largely unimproved and wooded land within the immediate vicinity of the Timothy House property. Preserving this open space, or the



Of greater concern, and one that poses a potential negative visual impact on Timothy House and its surrounding open space, is the proposed construction of a church in the meadow adjacent the entry drive. The façade of the church (below) faces southwest toward the drive, with its side elevation facing and parallel to North Country Road. The scale, style, material composition, siting and other aspects of the proposed building are the subject of this review.

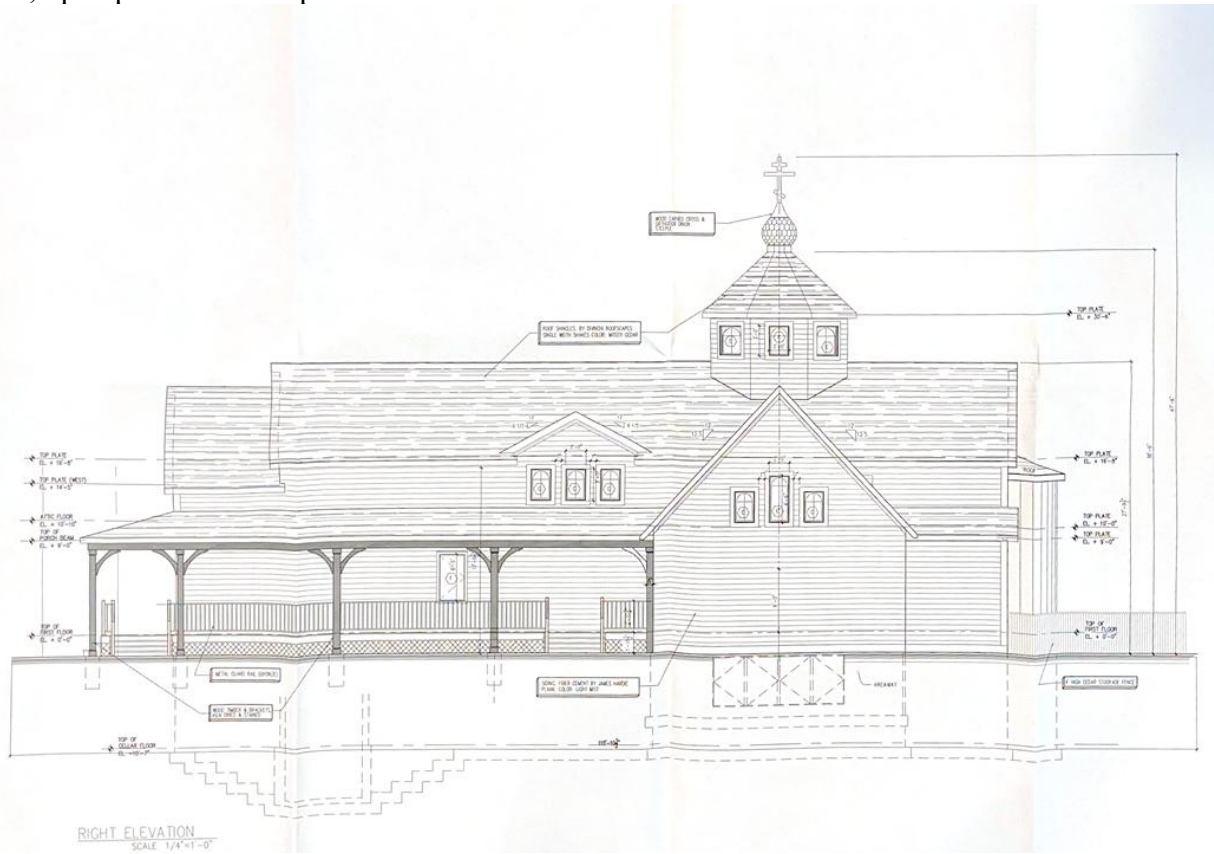


The architectural attributes cited above are enumerated in the Village Code, where the need for compatibility of new architecture with historic resources and the existing landscape is described. The design and setting of the proposed church is therefore viewed in the context of its visual impact on the established St. James Historic District, where the individual contributing elements – both historical and natural – are vulnerable to degradation or compromise through the imposition of new construction.

The siting of the church is paramount. As proposed, while it is visible from North Country Road, the structure is set significantly back from the historic corridor at a distance of 200 feet, leaving the existing open space and wooded verge along the roadway undisturbed. The

rural character of the St. James Historic District is substantially preserved.

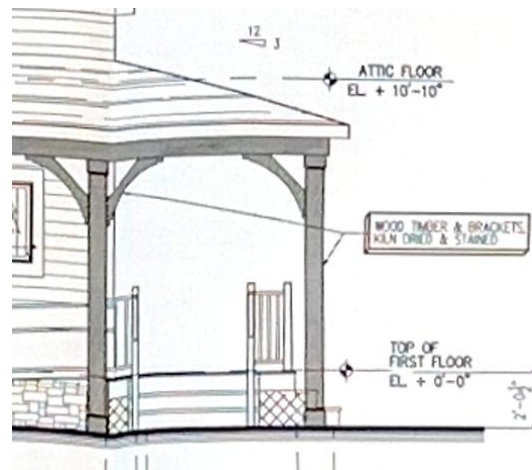
The scale of the proposed structure is modest, relative to the size of the property and its allowable building area. The church will be 4,323 square feet in size, including a 982 square foot, open porch that wraps the front and two sides.



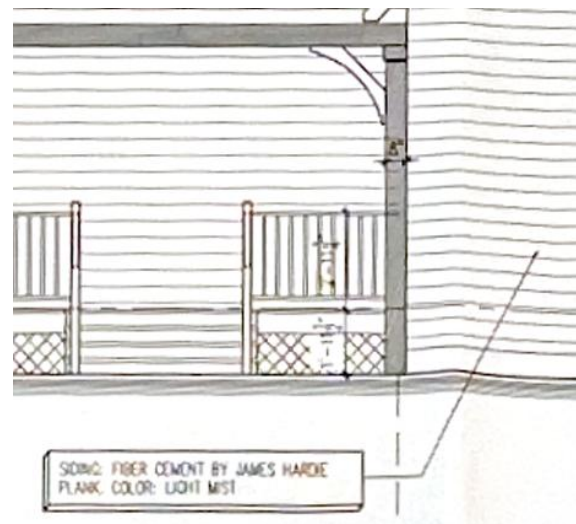
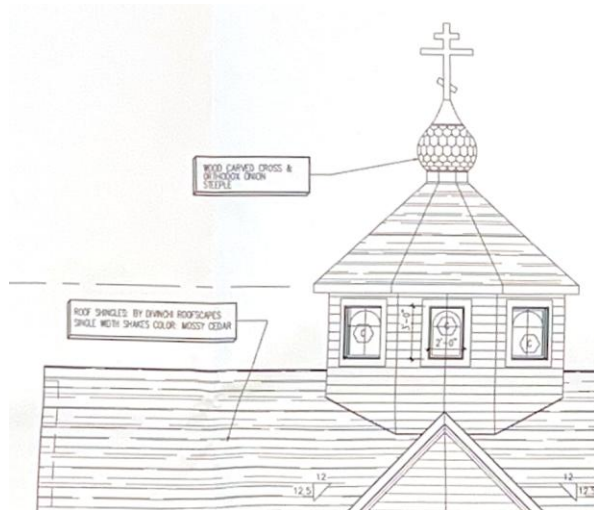
The design and material composition of the proposed building is also compatible and harmonious with existing historic resources in the district. By choosing a rectangular block or central “hall” as the core design element, and enlarging its footprint at ground level with subservient façade gables and an open wrap-around porch, the architect has worked within traditional and historical principals of church design. The octagonal cupola is surmounted by a cross identifying the building as one that serves religious purposes, as demonstrated by the historic c. 1853 St. James Episcopal Church across the road, which is one of the primary resources within the historic district (left).



In addition to scale and design, the proposed church employs architectural materials that underscore its compatibility with surrounding historic resources. The roof covering, siding and open porch structure are proposed to be constructed of natural wood or substitute composition materials, whose colors and textures simulate those of traditional architecture. The porch is supported on square, wooden piers and brackets (right).



The roof covering and siding are specified as substitute materials, that of the roof being an engineered polymer product manufactured by DaVinci Roofscapes designed to create the appearance of authentic slate (below left). Synthetic slate roofing is considerably lighter in weight and offers greater long-term durability. The siding is a fiber cement board or “plank” manufactured by James Hardie. Like the substitute roofing material, “hardie planks” are fireproof and manufactured to simulate the appearance of wood siding (below right).



The use of substitute materials in preserving and restoring historic structures, as well as “infill” design in which a building of new construction is inserted into an existing historic landscape, has been analyzed extensively by the Technical Preservation Services branch of the National Park Service. Their pamphlet “The Use of Substitute Materials on Historic Building Exteriors” (*16 Preservation Briefs*, October 2023) provides general guidance for the use of replacement materials in restoring exterior design elements, and is a useful guide in determining the appropriateness and compatibility of these materials in new design as well. In the opinion of the National Park Service, “substitute materials can be cost-effective, permit the accurate visual

duplication of historic materials, and provide improved durability.” Further, it is recommended that the reason for using “substitute materials instead of historic materials includes... the poor performance of historic material, or environmental pressures or code-driven requirements that necessitate a change in material.”

### **Conclusion**

The proposed religious structure and adjacent parking lot meet the relevant criteria for new construction in the St. James Historic District as required by Village Code:

- **Their location and setting preserve the “overall site topography and vegetative density and character” of the property;** by maintaining the verge of trees along North Country Road and by setting the building substantially back from the property line, the visual impact of the church on the open space is minimized and the character of the landscape and surrounding St. James Historic District is preserved.
- **The massing, scale and material components of the proposed building are well chosen to harmonize with the existing historic resources on the property and within the context of the St. James Historic District.** Its traditional church form and design employ a central hall beneath a gable roof, with façade gables, an open porch and octagonal tower supporting a cross. The structural materials have been chosen to simulate traditional materials – wood and slate – when viewed from the distance that the building is located from North Country Road.
- **The existing historic resource – Timothy House – is included and preserved as an integral feature of the site through its continued use as a residence for those serving the monastic community.** Ensuring a viable and future purpose for the historic house is key to addressing this requirement of the Village Code, which is that “historic structures and landmarks shall be retained, if practicable, as an important component of the visual environment.”
- **Construction of the church and parking facility will not “present an intrusive or disharmonious element in the historic district” because the scale and setting of the church have been chosen to minimize its visual impact,** and the parking lot occupies an area of the property that will not be seen from North Country Road.

While proposing new construction within a historic district is cause for concern and careful review, the scale, design, material composition and setting of the proposed church are compatible and harmonious with the historic resources of the St. James Historic District.

