



# TOWN OF RIVERHEAD

*Sean M. Walter, Town Supervisor*

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## *Press Release:*

*First Congregational Church Awarded Gardiner Foundation Grant To Continue Renovations*



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The historic First Congregational Church of Riverhead has been approved for a grant by the Robert David Lion Gardiner Foundation in the amount of \$73,494 to continue the restoration and preservation of the historic downtown house of worship.

A Town-designated landmark located on East Main Street, the First Congregational Church is both a contributing building in the Downtown Riverhead Historic District created by the Town Board in 2006 and also a contributing resource in the Main Street National Register Historic District created in 2012. The 1909 front part of the structure was one of the last works of Riverhead's leading architect, George H. Skidmore, who designed important buildings all over Suffolk County. The rear part of the building is the original 1841 church and still retains its original Greek Revival elements.

The church self-funded the replacement of its roof in late 2015 at a cost of \$380,000. The Gardiner Foundation grant will fund façade renovation, including painting, restoration of the stained glass murals, rebuilding the front stoop, bathroom renovations and replacing three exterior doors.

“This beautiful church is an example of the important historic architecture of downtown main street Riverhead. It is the Foundation’s hope that this restoration grant will inspire others to help sponsor more revitalization efforts to save these important local sites,” said Kathryn Curran, Executive Director of the Robert David Lion Gardiner Foundation.

“The First Congregational Church is an important part of Riverhead's historic fabric,” said Richard Wines, Town of Riverhead Landmarks Preservation Commission Chairman. “However, due to major structural problems and associated expenses, it is also a threatened resource.”

First Congregational Church Pastor, Rev. Dr. Sean B. Murray said the church “was gratefully indebted to the largess of the Robert David Lion Gardiner Foundation. The funding provided by this grant will allow the First Congregational Church to be preserved as an historical attribute in downtown Riverhead as we continue to honor God’s will in serving the larger Riverhead community.”

James Wooten, Chairman of the First Congregational Church’s Board of Trustees, said that the “entire congregation of the church is appreciative of the generous award from the Robert David Lion Gardiner Foundation. These grant funds will allow us to preserve a valuable historic resource in a timely manner that

respects the historic attributes of the church. Importantly, it will ensure that the charitable work of helping those in crisis can continue without diverting funds from those into the restoration project.”

Similarly, Town of Riverhead Supervisor Sean M. Walter said he was pleased that the Gardiner Foundation award will allow the church “to carry out the necessary renovations in an expeditious and historically sensitive manner.”

The downtown church serves others in the community and is used for programs such as free public concerts, AA meetings, the Bread & More soup kitchen and the Alley Cat Thrift Shop.

The Robert David Lion Gardiner Foundation, established in 1987, primarily supports the study of New York State history, with an emphasis on Suffolk County. Robert David Lion Gardiner was, until his death in August 2004, the 16th Lord of the Manor of Gardiner’s Island. The Gardiner family and their descendants have owned Gardiner’s Island since 1639, obtained as part of a royal grant from King Charles I of England. The Foundation is inspired by Robert David Lion Gardiner’s personal passion for New York history.

