Leap of Faith: Facilitating Adaptive Reuse of Churches in Residential Neighborhoods

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What is Adaptive Reuse?

- Taking an existing building originally intended for a certain use, and converting it to another use
- Changing the use of a structure while retaining some of the existing architectural details that make it unique
- Not just for historically designated properties
Benefits

- **Energy Use**
  By reusing a building the embodied energy is preserved -- the energy that went into the production, such as the natural resources, mining, workers, transportation, and manufacturing.

- **Mixed Use Development**
  Reuse can encourage mixed use development (having retail, living, and entertainment uses in one area), especially in residential neighborhoods.

- **Economic**
  Building does not have to be demolished and rebuilt.

- **Innovation**
  Architects and designers invent creative ideas for the restructuring of the building.

Examples

- Ghirardelli Square, San Francisco
  - Then: Chocolate Manufacturing
  - Now: Housing, Retail, Dining
Examples

- Union Depot, Washington D.C.
  - Then: Train Station
  - Now: Retail, Dining, Events, Transit

Examples

- Tycoons, Duluth
  - Then: City Hall
  - Later: Retail
  - Now: Restaurant, Tavern
Examples

- Fitger’s, Duluth
  - Then: Light Manufacturing
  - Now: Retail, Restaurant, Hotel, and Special Events

Adaptive Reuse of Churches

- Why?
  - Decline in religious participation
  - Parish consolidation
  - Congregation smaller, so large churches redundant
  - Priest shortage
  - Mega churches
  - Storefront churches
  - Aging infrastructure and deferred maintenance
Church Reuse in US through 2010

Source: Robert Simons, 2010

Coffee House/ Storage

- Selexyz Dominicanen
  Bookstore, Maastricht, Netherlands
Brewery

- The Church Brew Works
  Pittsburgh, PA

Arts and Music

- Music Venue: Paradiso
  Amsterdam, Netherlands

- Art Gallery: Blind Whino,
  St. Louis, MO
+ Arts and Music

- Lakeville Arts Center
  Lakeville, MN

+ Dance Studio

- Stacey’s Studio
  Duluth, MN
Event Center

Entertainment

Skaterham
Surrey, England
Office Space

- Mowbraytown Presbyterian Church
  Brisbane, Australia

Residential

- The Spire Lofts
  Brooklyn, NY
Benefits of Reuse in Residential Neighborhoods

- Repair/maintain social fabric of neighborhood
- Job creation
- Increase value of surrounding properties
- Increased tax revenue

Challenges – Site Related

- Generally located in residential zones which limits the types of uses that can occur
- Congregation may place limits on uses allowed
- Neighborhood opposition
- Lack of parking or loading areas
- Land value higher than value of building itself
- *Historic preservation designation limiting exterior alterations*
Challenges – Site Related

- Difficulty in finding one user for entire campus (church, rectory, school, etc.)

Challenges – Building Related

- Higher design costs
- Potentially high construction costs due to environmental issues (e.g. lead, asbestos, etc.)
- Inefficient or insufficient HVAC systems, including insulation
- Outdated electrical or plumbing
- Lack of ADA accessibility

Funding
- May be difficult to finance in marketplace
- Tax credit availability often based on designation – architecture or history
Challenges - Architectural

- Often need an additional floor into larger structure to create economically feasible amount of apartments or offices
- Residential more challenging than office since sufficient separation needed to meet building codes
- Windows
  - Insufficient amount
  - Stained glass
  - Floor insertions destroy unity of multi-story church windows

Potential Approaches

- Rezone
- Create an adaptive reuse ordinance
- Others?
+ Rezone

- May be spot zoning as churches often isolated within residential neighborhoods
- Potential nonconformities with new district *(setbacks, building separation, height, etc.)*
- Opens up property to any permitted use within new zoning district
- Creates opportunity for tear down and replacement with new building

+ Adaptive Reuse

- Approaches
  - Overlay District
  - Part of Historic District
  - Historic Property or Landmark
  - Use Specific Standard related to Use Chart
- Considerations
  - Applicability – where and what type of structures
  - Uses Allowed
  - Architectural Integrity
  - Neighborhood Impacts – parking, traffic
  - Signage
Group Discussion

Scenario 1: Potential Reuse for Quasi-Church

The City of Dale recently adopted an adaptive reuse ordinance that allows the reuse of public and semi-public buildings for high density residential, offices, commercial, institutional or a combination of such uses.

Planning Staff have been contacted by a quasi-church which does not have formal church services but practice their ministry through food packing and distribution. They also will offer bible study and special events. They would like to purchase and reuse an existing church. Discuss whether it should be allowed and what are the areas of concern in allowing such a use.
Scenario 2: Brewery

The City of Rundin is considering an adaptive reuse ordinance that allows the reuse of churches. The City Planner knows that there is interest in converting one of the churches in a residential neighborhood adjacent to Downtown to a brewery. Discuss whether that type of use be considered and if so, are there any conditions that should be included in the ordinance to minimize impacts.

Applicability

Location
- Within Residential Neighborhoods
- Entire City

Building Type/Designation
- Officially designated or eligible historic structures (local, state, national)
- Structures with potential historic value – who determines?
  - Based on age?
  - Does it matter how long it was used for that function?
- Any church – what about churches in strip malls, pole steel buildings, etc.
- What about other public buildings – schools, post offices, town halls, etc.
Uses Allowed

- Residential
  - Density
    - Can it be increased over the underlying district?
    - Are density allowances different for new construction on site versus adaptive reuse?
- Retail
- Breweries
- Industrial
- Mixed Use

Scenario 3: Windows for Daylighting

The City of Lyon has an adaptive reuse ordinance that allows the reuse of churches for multi-family housing and offices. The ordinance prohibits a significant alteration of the exterior of the building without approval of the City Council. However, it does not specifically identify what that means.

A church has been proposed for reuse for apartments. The applicant is indicating that additional windows will be needed in order to provide daylighting for the individual residential units. Discuss the pros and cons of supporting the request and what the City Planner might suggest to minimize impacts.
Scenario 4: Replace Stained Glass Windows

The City of Bloomer has an adaptive reuse ordinance that allows the reuse of churches for multi-family housing and offices. The ordinance prohibits a significant alteration of the exterior of the building without approval of the City Council. A church has been proposed for reuse for offices.

The applicant is indicating that additional clear glass windows will be needed for the individual offices. They will need to replace the rectangular stained glass windows along the main sanctuary. Should that be allowed?

Scenario 5: Additions

- The City of Tulane has an adaptive reuse ordinance that allows the reuse of churches. The City has received a request from a developer to reuse a church. However, the developer wants to put an addition to expand the development potential. The current ordinance does not address this issue. Discuss whether additions should be allowed and whether any regulations to guide additions are needed.
Architectural Integrity

- Historic Preservation Regulations Applicability
- Destroy or obscure essential architectural features
  - Stained Glass Windows
  - Additional Windows
- Additions
  - New floors inserted
  - Allowed on specific facades
  - For specific purposes - staircases, ADA accessibility, utility
  - Require compliance with current zoning standards

- Removals/Demolitions
  - Limit percentage that can be removed
- Approach on accessory buildings
- Additional structures – new building to increase density
Neighborhood Impacts

- Parking
  - Are interior parking spaces needed?
  - Reductions allowed through other means
- Loading

Signage

- Use/modification of existing signage
- Architectural Integrity
- How will signage requirements be determined?
  - Underlying zoning
  - Institutional Use
Example Codes

City of Faribault

- Definition – reuse of any building or structure originally constructed for educational, religious, or public purposes that involves uses not permitted in the primary zoning district
- Conditional Use in Residential Districts
- Must be residential, commercial, institutional, or combination of such uses
City of Faribault

- Criteria
  - Not cause traffic volumes to exceed design capacity
  - Not generate semi-truck traffic on local residential streets
  - Improvements as needed to driveways/access points
  - Adequate on-site parking and loading
  - Screening – particularly off-street parking, loading, and driving areas
  - No exterior storage of goods or equipment
  - Hours of operation as approved by the City Council
  - Exterior renovation or remodeling of the structure must endeavor to maintain existing architectural features so as to not alter the character of the neighborhood.
  - Use regulations for institutional signage within a residential district

City of Duluth

- Definition – reuse of a local historic landmark
  - Must have approved preservation plan

- Interim use in an R-1 or R-2 district (set timeframe i.e. 10 years)
  - Neighborhood meeting required before application

- Allows any use that is permitted in the Mixed Use – Neighborhood (i.e. neighborhood commercial) zone district
City of Duluth

- Criteria:
  - Must be able to provide required off-street parking
  - No additional traffic after 10:00 pm on residential streets
  - Will not create frequent truck traffic
  - No expansion to footprint of existing building
  - Screening/buffering from adjacent uses
  - Must not change the essential character of the neighborhood
  - Must be preserved according to preservation plan

Resources – City Codes

- Duluth, MN
- Faribault, MN
- Rochester, MN
- Ames, IA
- Sonoma, CA
- Bremerton, WA
- St. Petersburg, FL
- Los Angeles, CA
- Detroit, MI
### Resources

- Rebecca Lueg - “Houses of God…or not! Approaches to the Adaptive Reuse of Churches in Germany and the United States”, 2011

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