

Former St. Boniface church bought by developer who plans to save structure



The shuttered St. Boniface Roman Catholic Church, just north of Eckhart Park, appears headed into redevelopment as residential space and a music school.

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Chicago Tribune

SEPTEMBER 24, 2016, 1:41 PM

The former St. Boniface Roman Catholic Church, a fixture on Chicago's Near Northwest Side for more than a century, appears to have been saved from the wrecking ball as part of a proposed deal to turn the building into condos and a music school.

The city's Department of Planning and Development said the property was purchased Friday by Stas Development, which intends to rehab the structure into 15 dwelling units. The plan also calls for a new 24-unit residential building and a Chicago Academy of Music school.

Without the sale, the building's previous owner could have obtained a demolition permit as early as next

week, said Ward Miller, executive director of Preservation Chicago, an advocacy group.

"We're just elated," said Miller, who noted that the church had made the preservation group's first list of endangered Chicago buildings released in 2002.

Eleanor Esser Gorski, deputy commissioner of the planning department's historic preservation division, said the new owners are expected to submit a proposal to the city later this fall. A redevelopment agreement needs to be reached with the city, and public hearings must be held as part of the zoning process, she said.

The former red-brick church, at 1348 W. Chestnut St., can be seen from the Kennedy Expressway with its four square towers rising into the sky.

St. Boniface has been used only sporadically since it was shuttered in 1989 by the Archdiocese of Chicago, beset by the high cost of maintaining historic churches.

Organized in 1864 and originally housed in a wood-frame structure, St. Boniface survived the Chicago Fire of 1871. It was a refuge for Chicagoans displaced by the blaze.

Many of them eventually moved to the surrounding neighborhood, building it up and constructing the brick edifice that was completed in 1904. In time, the parish became predominantly Polish. Decades later it became largely Latino. Today the neighborhood is gentrifying, with new condo and apartment buildings popping up.

But the church's prospects for survival had appeared to be as rickety as the structure itself. In July, the city's Buildings Department issued a demolition permit for the building, then put a temporary hold on the permit after a developer who wanted to tear down the church bought the debt for the building from the bank that held the mortgage.

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