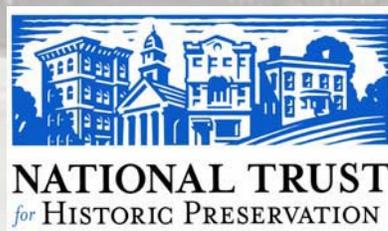


Former Church Converted into Upscale Townhouses

OAK PARK, ILLINOIS

Vacant for 12 years, the 1906 former Second Presbyterian Church is successfully adapted into market rate housing and a plan that meets neighborhood approval.

*Published by:
National Trust for Historic Preservation and
Partners for Sacred Places*



The village of Oak Park is located in the first inner ring of suburbs directly west of downtown Chicago. Although the population size of Oak Park is not comparable to major metropolitan cities, its relationship and proximity to Chicago causes it to experience many of the problems that larger cities do. The history and location have made the village desirable to many new residents, especially because it is the former home of Frank Lloyd Wright and his studio as well as the birthplace of Ernest Hemingway.

But along with this desirability comes the need for the village planners and board of Oak Park to effectively manage growth and create neighborhoods and housing that are sustainable and attractive while accommodating the many new residents. From this concern about the future of the village, a number of creative solutions have arisen to promote the development of owner-occupied condominiums as more buildings are subdivided into multi-unit rentals.

A congregation organized under the aegis of the Second Presbyterian Church in 1905 acquired a parcel of land at the corner of Richland and Washington Boulevard to build their church. Within a couple of years, a modest church structure was constructed and dedicated in a 1906 ceremony. The building committee had had the foresight to leave room on the lot for a more prominent structure to be built; delayed by WWI, a new church was eventually constructed in 1926. The condominiums occupy the smaller, original structure whereas the larger church building is now home to a Latin Mass Catholic congregation called "Our Lady Immaculate" that is not affiliated with the Roman Catholic diocese, purchased in 1990 from the Second Presbyterian congregation.

The building was used for Masonic Lodge from 1956 until 1989 when it was sold to a series of buyers who imagined turning it into a single family residence but were unable to do so. When the building was again listed for sale, a local project manager named Peter Robinson was contacted by a friend who was interested in purchasing the property. From his prior professional work experience, Robinson was able to perform a financial feasibility analysis of the property and determine the costs for dividing the church into separate units and adding a parking



Village of Oak Park

Four condominium units occupy the original 1906 Second Presbyterian Church building, attached to the larger church built in 1996, and now home to a Latin Mass Catholic congregation.

garage underneath the building. When the price was too high for his friend, he decided to purchase the building himself.

It took over a year to get the Planning Board to allow a variance or change of zoning for the property from two to four units. Some of the neighbors were hesitant about the added density to the neighborhood. But when the plans for construction included off-street parking and enabled a building that had stood vacant for twelve years to be occupied again, his zoning appeal was approved.

Working with David Seglin of HSP/Ltd, the development team devised a four-townhouse loft configuration by adding a mezzanine level that would sufficiently increase square footage. The living rooms featured sixteen foot high ceilings and sky-lighting in the roof as well as roof terrace gardens to add a feeling of light and airiness in the units. The challenging portion of the project was reinforcing the beams that ran in the subfloor of the ground level to dig a garage space for six cars. Mr. Robinson knew that without the option of parking, the townhouses wouldn't sell.

Preservation and retaining important historical features were the goals of the project. In order to achieve this, repairs to the roof needed to be done to stop the long-term leakage that had caused the sanctuary floors to buckle.



Village of Oak Park

Badly deteriorated windows were repaired and retained as a character defining feature of the former church building.

Knowing that bricks can spall and look uneven if matched with too cementitious a mortar, Robinson performed mortar analysis to match the existing mortar in terms of color and composition after repointing the exterior walls. He also reworked the coping and chimney.

Because the existing windows would not provide adequate insulation for the future owners, he designed interior storm windows that would not be visible from the exterior and interrupt the fenestration pattern that was a character-defining feature. Robinson had been asked by Doug Kaarre in the Village Planning Offices to repair rather than replace the existing façade windows that badly needed restoration. The quality of the repairs helped to earn him an honorable mention for his restoration from the Village Planning Board.

“Having a building back on the tax rolls helps us with stabilizing the community and adding income to the city services.”

Doug Kaarre, Village of Oak Park

May 2005

PROJECT DETAILS

Project Name:	Mason Lofts
Historic Name:	Second Presbyterian Church
Denomination:	Presbyterian
Construction Date:	1905/06
Date of Closure:	1956/1989
Date of Reuse:	2004
Address:	331 South Richland Oak Park, IL 60302
Neighborhood:	Located within an inner-ring suburban town, the building straddles a neighborhood of primarily single family residences and one of mainly apartment complexes, condo conversion projects, and new condominium buildings.
Reuse:	4 condominium units
Building Size:	10,000 sq. ft.
Project Cost:	\$580,000 / \$105 per sq. ft.
Renovation:	The building is now the home to four individual townhouse loft owners who can enjoy their roof gardens in the summer and heated garage in the winter.
Resolution:	The Village of Oak Park changed the zoning for the building to allow for a multi-unit conversion.
Recognition:	Honorable Mention Village of Oak Park Board of Trustees for Preservation Achievement, 2004.
Contacts:	Doug Kaare Urban Planner, Village of Oak Park Village Hall 123 Madison Street Oak Park, Illinois 60302 (708) 358-5417 David Seglin, Architect HSP/Ltd. 414 North Orleans #208 Chicago, IL 60610 (312) 467-4700

The National Trust for Historic Preservation and Partners for Sacred Places are working together to show models for reusing houses of worship after their religious use is discontinued. The purpose of this series of case studies is to demonstrate viable alternatives for reuse that preserve sacred places. Examples from across the country show a variety of reuses, from residential to retail, urban and rural, and religious properties representing multiple denominations.

As communities take proactive steps to encourage and protect sacred places, these case studies are intended to help community leaders to advocate for alternatives to demolition or inappropriate reuses.

For more information and assistance, contact:



NATIONAL TRUST
for HISTORIC PRESERVATION



NATIONAL TRUST

National Trust for Historic Preservation

1785 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 588-6000
www.nationaltrust.org

Northeast Office

7 Faneuil Hall Marketplace, 4th Floor
Boston, MA 02109-1649
(617) 523-0885
nero@nthp.org
(Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts,
New Hampshire, New York, Rhode
Island, Vermont)

Northeast Field Office

6401 Germantown Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19144
(215) 848-8033
nefo@nthp.org
(Delaware, New Jersey,
Pennsylvania)

Southern Office

456 King Street
Charleston, SC 29403-6247
(843) 722-8552
soro@nthp.org
(Alabama, Florida, Georgia,
Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi,
North Carolina, South Carolina,
Tennessee, Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin
Islands)

Southern Field Office

1785 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 588-6107
sfo@nthp.org
(District of Columbia, Maryland,
Virginia, West Virginia)

Midwest Office

53 W. Jackson Boulevard, Suite 350
Chicago, IL 60604-2103
(312) 939-5547
mwro@nthp.org
(Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan,
Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio,
Wisconsin)

Mountains/Plains Office

535 16th Street, Suite 750
Denver, CO 80202-2910
(303) 623-1504
mpro@nthp.org
(Colorado, Kansas, Montana,
Nebraska, North Dakota, Utah,
Wyoming)

Southwest Office

500 Main Street, Suite 1030
Fort Worth, TX 76102-3943
(817) 332-4398
swro@nthp.org
(Arkansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma,
Texas)

Western Office

8 California Street, Suite 400
San Francisco, CA 94111-4828
(415) 956-0610
wro@nthp.org
(Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawaii,
Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, Washington,
Pacific island territories)

Wisconsin Field Office

319 High Street
Mineral Point, WI 53565
(608) 987-1502
Jeanne_lambin@nthp.org

PARTNERS FOR SACRED PLACES

Partners for Sacred Places

1700 Sansom Street
10th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19103
(215) 567-3234
partners@sacredplaces.org
www.sacredplaces.org