

The Omni Group plans mixed-use development of Catholic church in Federal Hill

By **Mary MacDonald** - September 4, 2018 10:33 am



OUR LADY of Mt. Carmel Church in Federal Hill may become part of a new residential and commercial development. / PBN PHOTO/ MARY MACDONALD

PROVIDENCE – The historic Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church and four surrounding lots may be redeveloped into a mixed-use residential project, according to plans submitted to the city of Providence.

The church, which opened in 1925, is among the city’s most endangered, according to the Providence Preservation Society. The historic preservation organization placed the Roman Catholic church on its Most Endangered Properties list this year, citing the potential for its demolition.

Providence-based The Omni Group plans to purchase the property, including the church and attached rectory, for a large mixed-use development. Its CEO and president, speaking to the Providence City Plan Commission Aug. 21, assured that the Italian Renaissance style church will be made part of the redevelopment.

The Omni Group has worked in the Federal Hill neighborhood for the past five years and is now finishing an apartment building nearby, said William DiStefano Jr., the company’s CEO and president.

“We’re going to save the church,” he said. “We think it will work out really well.”

The rectory, which is attached to the church, would be razed, he told the commission. At least two of the larger lots would feature new construction.

The site under consideration is bound by Atwells Avenue and Spruce, Dean and Bond streets, and covers 40,000 square feet. It is zoned R-4. The developer is seeking a rezoning to allow the mixed-use development, which will require City Council approval.

DiStefano told the commission that the likely mix for the new construction and redevelopment would include residential. A tenant has expressed interest in the church, but he said the talks are preliminary.

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"Residential is strong in the area," he said. "We think we can do some mixed use and residential and make another improvement to the Federal Hill neighborhood."

Even a partial demolition of the church site will be subject to approval by the city's Historic District Commission.

The church was designed by John F. O'Malley of O'Malley & Fitzsimmons, according to The Providence Preservation Society, in its description of the property.

The church has an elaborate façade and an arcaded bell tower. It was closed after final services were held in the church in November 2015.

In June 2016, the Providence Archdiocese announced the congregation would merge with Church of the Holy Ghost on the western end of Atwells Avenue, according to the Providence Preservation Society.

The Omni Group expects to close on the property later this month, DiStefano said.

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