



# THE CHURCH BREW WORKS (ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST CHURCH)

**LOCATION:** Pittsburgh, PA

**SIZE:** 1/2 acre

**FEATURES:** Location, Public Transportation, Access

**OWNER:** Don Casey and Family

**CURRENT USE:** Brewery and Restaurant

**PAST USE:** Church

**CONTAMINANTS:** Asbestos, Lead-Based Paint

**TOTAL ACTUAL COST:** Unknown

## TIMELINE

- 1834 The population of Lawrenceville, PA increases enough to form the area into a borough.
- 1868 Lawrenceville becomes part of the City of Pittsburgh.
- 1878 St. John the Baptist is founded.
- 1901 The parish purchased the land at Liberty Avenue and 36th Street.
- 1902 The cornerstone of St. John the Baptist Church is laid.
- 1915 A fire breaks out in the church and causes major damage.
- 1993 The Diocese of Pittsburgh reorganizes and suppresses St. John the Baptist.
- 1996 The dormant church undergoes construction.
- 1996 The Church Brew Works opens for business.

## HISTORY

As Pittsburgh grew with Carnegie Steel, Clark Steel, and Black Diamond Steel Works in the 1800s, increasing residential development meant the increasing demand for churches, St. John the Baptist being one of them. Founded in 1878, this Catholic Church served the Lawrenceville area of Pittsburgh. It steadily expanded until the early 1900's. The church survived a fire, flooding, and the depression.

By the late 1950's when steel mills started to close, the Lawrenceville population declined, much like the rest of Pittsburgh. Major parishes, including St. John the Baptist, began to lose members.

Due to financial and organizational circumstances, the Diocese of Pittsburgh restructured the churches in its jurisdiction in 1993 and suppressed St. John the Baptist. The building was underutilized for three years until the redevelopment and construction of the Church Brew Works. The Church Brew Works opened for business on August 1, 1996.



Picture courtesy of <http://www.bibula.com>



Picture courtesy of Google Earth

## TOPOGRAPHY

This half-acre lot is located on Liberty Avenue next to the Allegheny River, less than ten minutes away from the heart of downtown Pittsburgh. The building itself was constructed on a hill.

## MARKET CONDITIONS

Located on Liberty Avenue, the Church Brew Works is in a high-traffic area. Liberty Avenue is a major connection between Bloomfield & the surrounding universities and Pittsburgh's Historic Market District, the Strip District, & downtown.

## SITE ASSEMBLY AND CONTROL

After the Diocese of Pittsburgh suppressed St. John the Baptist Church in 1993, the building lay dormant. The sale of this property to Sean Casey for \$191,200 was the first time that the Diocese sold one of its churches to a developer.

The site was granted a zoning variance for nonconforming use. There were no existing tax liens on the property.

## ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS

Due to the aged nature of the buildings on the property, asbestos and lead-based paint were the prime contaminants found. Both were removed before the opening of the Church Brew Works.

## SOCIAL/COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

The community was contacted during the redevelopment of this site, including the local citizen's council, local businesses, a city person, and the neighborhood block watch.

## PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

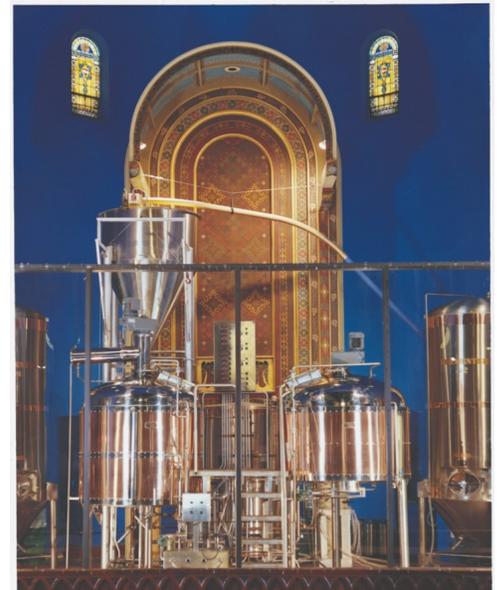
Public transportation is readily available in the area. There is a bus stop directly in front of the Church Brew Works, and the property is located on a high-traffic road – Liberty Avenue. In terms of public utilities, electric and water were existent before the site's redevelopment, yet they were inadequate. Gas existed and was adequate prior to the reacquisition of the site.

## COSTS & ECONOMIC INFRASTRUCTURE

The entire redevelopment project was privately funded by regional investors and local Pittsburgh owners. More than 95% of these funds were directed towards development while the rest were used for asbestos and lead paint abatement and the improvement of public utilities.

## CURRENT STATUS AND LESSONS LEARNED

The developer was able to use 10,000 square feet of the church itself, 4,500 square feet of the rectory, and 2,000 square feet of the adjacent dilapidated school. Because of the restoration of the church's



Picture courtesy of The Church Brew Works website

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- Northern Italian architecture, the Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation gave the church Historic Landmark status in 2001.
- The Church Brew Works opened in the summer of 2006. The restaurant and brewery are currently still undergoing renovations.
- This adaptive reuse has created some uneasiness in the public – a brewery among religious objects does not sit well with some critics. The Diocese of Pittsburgh was assured that all of the sacred items had been removed before the sale of the church. Canon law requires that all religious objects be removed from churches that are being put to secular use. After the Church Brew Works opened, the diocese had been aggressive about “desanctification,” even if religious items are destroyed in the process.
- There has also been an informal partnership made between the Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation and the diocese to encourage a more sensitive reuse of religious buildings. In the agreement, Landmarks agreed to receive consent from the diocese before nominating a diocesan building to either the National Register of Historic Places or the city’s historic designation.



Photo courtesy of The Church Brew Works website



Photo courtesy of <http://thriftshopromantic.blogspot.com>

**ECONOMIC/COMMUNITY IMPACT**

Since the opening of the Church Brew Works, 44 full-time and 40 part-time positions have been created. Also, while the surrounding neighborhood has not changed from the mixture of residential and commercial properties, the value of these properties has increased. Surrounding apartment complexes were sold to New York investors.

Case Study Completed in Summer 2008 by Melinda Angeles

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