

Closed St. Alphonsus School to be transformed into condos

When Alex Radzius walked out of St. Alphonsus, Baltimore, after Mass on a recent Sunday morning, he noticed the building across Saratoga Street where he attended school in the 1950s is primed to become up-scale condos for future city dwellers.

"I see it as a good thing," the St. Alphonsus parishioner said. "It's going to bring more people into the city and it can only improve the area."

Though nostalgic for the school he attended from 1950 to 1958, Mr. Radzius of Union Square is pleased the Upper Marlboro developers plan to make few changes to the front exterior of the closed Catholic school and that it will generate a broader tax-base for the city of Baltimore.

Sold by the Archdiocese of Baltimore in 2005 for \$360,000, the St. Alphonsus-Basilica School - which closed June 30, 2001 - was built in 1873; months after a Baltimore fire destroyed the original 1847 school. The decision to close the school was based on a 1998 assessment of the building which concluded that more than \$1.4 million of work was needed "to stabilize the existing building," according to former director of facilities management for the archdiocese, Lou Baird.

With asking prices ranging from \$259,490 to \$582,645 for each of the proposed 19 condominium units, just one of those residences could exceed the amount the archdiocese received for the entire building.

Construction costs are estimated to reach \$3 million to convert the building into 19 condos with individualized and modern floor plans and residents will have access to on-site storage, a media room, lounge, sauna and an exercise room, said Joseph R. Gradowski, CEO of Phoenix Developers LLC.

He is hoping the building will be ready for occupancy by the summer of 2008.

"I realize this is a positive outcome and I'm glad the building will still be around, but I would have preferred it to remain a school," said Deacon Hugh H. Mills Jr., business manager for St. Alphonsus. "I will also say, this is preferable to it sitting

empty across the street and falling into disrepair.”

The parish didn’t receive any of the profits from the sale of the building, said Deacon Mills, who was born exactly 100 years after the canonization of St. Alphonsus.

When a building within the archdiocese is sold, the profits must first pay off any outstanding debts incurred by the parish, said Bishop Denis J. Madden, urban vicar.

As part of the development project, the crosses will be removed from the front of the former Catholic school and the statue of St. Alphonsus will be taken down from its niche and donated to the parish, Mr. Gradowski said.

“We’re going to have a dedication ceremony for that when the time comes,” he said.

“Its rightful place is with the church.”