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Congregations hope to save historic North Chapel at Liberty Station

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The North Chapel at 2881 Roosevelt Road at Liberty Station in Point Loma. / Photo by Victoria Davis

Built in 1942, Liberty Station's North Chapel stands out like a pearl on the corner of Roosevelt and Truxtun. With white stucco walls, stain glass windows and elaborate tile art over large archways, this sanctuary has served as a place of worship for Naval service members, recruits and their families for more than 75 years.

Today, the chapel is also rented out for weddings, funerals and special events throughout the year, but that could change in a matter of months.

North Chapel will no longer be available for rental after June 30, according to its page on LibertyStation.com. The Corky McMillin Co., which was given the property by the City of San Diego in 2000, is looking to turn the chapel into a retail restaurant.

The website states the chapel's high vaulted ceilings are "perfect for restaurant or retail tenant." There's even a poster outside the chapel saying the space is available to lease.

Arlene Paraiso, a member of one of the two congregations that rent the chapel for church service every Sunday, received the leasing notice in the fall, and started a petition mid-January to fight for her church's home. The petition to preserve the chapel has already received more than 1,000 signatures. Paraiso's new goal is 10,000 signatures. There is even a "Preserve North Chapel" Facebook page.

"I mean, look around you, there's so many restaurants here already," said Paraiso. "Why do they have to touch the chapel?"

This chapel means a lot to Paraiso, not only because of her congregation, but also because of

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her personal family connection to its history.

"I'm a Navy girl. My grandfather was in the Navy and came to America from the Philippines in the '40s," said Paraiso. "My dad was also in the Navy and was trained right here at the Naval Training Center."

In 2014, Paraiso's father passed away and the sailor's funeral was held at North Chapel.

"That's where he said goodbye," said Paraiso, whose cousin was also just recently married in the chapel.

Paraiso believes that McMillin should let the citizens continue to use North Chapel for "it's original use" and keep the historic value.

The NTC Precise Plan states that the North Chapel remains in the "mixed use" area of Liberty Station. While it resides in the Historic District, the chapel can still be used for commercial use. However, on page 26 of the plan, it states: "A Historic District was created at NTC prior to transfer of the site from the U.S. Navy to the City of San Diego... These stately and appealing buildings will remain and anchor the site."

On page 37 of the National Historic Registrar, it's noted that the North Chapel is likely the "least altered of any of the buildings in the proposed Historic District."

Carissa Rosenthal, who handles all media inquiries for McMillin, said in an email, "We're not able to comment on or confirm details on the chapel, as absolutely nothing has been solidified in regard to the future of the property." But Rosenthal did offer the following statement:

"Currently, the North Chapel building is significantly underutilized throughout the week. We are seeking a solution and we're open to the possibilities of exploring the chapel as a multi-purpose facility. The building is a historic property and any future use will comply with adopted guidelines to protect this resource."

According to page two of the chapel's Quitclaim Deed, the property "shall be used and maintained for the public purposes for which it was conveyed in perpetuity as set forth in the program of utilization..."

"This building is not going to waste," said attorney Henry Garon, who has been attending church every Sunday at North Chapel for more than four years. "We're using the chapel for the exact purpose for which it was intended. We still have active service members attending church there and it's a tightly-knit community."

The US Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties also states that any historical property will be "used as it was historically, or be given a new use that requires minimal change to its distinctive materials, features, spaces and special relationships," and that "the removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features will be avoided."

According to Standard Five on the 2005 Planning Commission Agenda's Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation: "Distinctive features, finishes, and constructive techniques will be preserved," including "the chapel interior," including the pews, altar, organ, and other interior chapel features listed on the Historic Registrar. The registrar also states the chapel has "provided a significant community function and is a notable landmark."

"It's all right there," said Garon. "I'm looking at this and I'm saying, 'The law should be on our side.' But McMillin's kicking everybody out and giving us six months' notice and they don't even have a building permit yet to alter the property."

"It's a place where people from all walks of life have worshipped and are still worshipping at today," Paraiso said. "To take that away removes a very unique place in the world, right here in San Diego."

The Peninsula Community Planning Board will be discussing the fate of North Chapel on March 15 at 6:30 p.m. Jon Linney, Peninsula Board chair, encourages the public to attend. Local artist Ron Layen says he will attend to represent the "many artists from the Arts District/Liberty Station in our opposition to this threat."

North Chapel

Where: 2881 Roosevelt Road.

Info: <https://liberystation.com/go/north-chapel>, 619-573-9306, online petition at <https://www.ipetitions.com/petition/preserve-a-historic-san-diego-site-north-chapel>

Craig Goshow | March 09, 2018

I will say this as quoted from the quit claim deed which should be sufficient to keep it as is "According to page two of the chapel's Quitclaim Deed, the property "shall be used and maintained for the public purposes for which it was conveyed in perpetuity as set forth in the program of utilization..."

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How could anyone who advocates an alternative use be entertained? This passage from the quit claim makes it ubundantly clear as to the intent of the transfer!

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