

EPWORTH BUILDING: CHURCH AND COMMUNITY CENTER TO ADAPTIVE REUSE RETAIL & OFFICE SPACE

How do you think adaptive reuse projects in historically significant businesses can positively impact struggling neighborhoods?

The Classical Revival Epworth Building, built in 1915, is located in the Curtis Park neighborhood. It included three components: Epworth Methodist Church and the Junius Brown Titsworth Memorial Gymnasium connected by the Epworth Community Center offices. The building was an important part of the community from its construction, providing meals, education, counseling and job referrals.

History

Just 100 years ago, Epworth's pastors and others in the congregation founded the Denver program of Goodwill Industries, expanding the services provided to the neighborhood. Goodwill recently celebrated its centennial with a party in the Epworth Building. In 1966, the community center merged with the Denver Christian Center to form the Curtis Park Community Center. In 1979, the Church and the High Street Community Center formed the Epworth United Methodist Church of Denver, which still serves the community from its location at 3401 High Street. After the congregation left, Goodwill Industries used the building as a warehouse for about 10 years; then it was vacant until Larry Nelson bought it in 2014 and began extensive rehabilitation to bring it back to life.

Structure

The Epworth Building can be described as Renaissance Revival or Classical Revival in style. The classic orders, round arches and symmetrical composition that characterize these styles are found on the interior and the exterior of the building. The church has large, arched stained glass windows on the west and north, and an octagonal dome centered over the sanctuary space with stained glass in the center. The entry door on the north has a canopy with sheet metal panels pierced with "Epworth" and "Welcome." The gymnasium windows are also arched and symmetrical. The community center offices in the center of the building had a number of large wood roll-up doors so the spaces were flexible and could be changed for different needs (Denver Public Library Archives).

Renovation

After so many years of vacancy and neglect, the Epworth Building needed extensive rehabilitation. The structure was strengthened, the stained glass windows were removed, restored and replaced, other missing or badly damaged windows were replaced with replicas, the brick was cleaned and restored and all utilities were replaced. The decorative plaster in the sanctuary was restored where water had damaged it, and several openings that had been altered over the years were replaced. Goodwill had removed a rose window and added a large garage door on the south - structurally it could not be reversed so it is now a storefront opening

from the sanctuary space onto a new deck. The renovation was designed by Raymond Ollett of Coyote A/D, and completed by Sprung Construction (Five Points' historic Epworth Church to be mixed-use development).

Neighborhood

The Curtis Park neighborhood is one of Denver's oldest, springing up between 1870 and 1893. The population of the city's first "Streetcar Suburb" was encouraged by international immigration and migration within the U.S., but was fairly homogeneous; mostly northern European. In the second half of the 20th century, the neighborhood became more diverse as its population came to include substantial numbers of Mexican-Americans and Japanese-Americans (Curtis Park: Denver's Oldest Neighborhood).

References

Denver Public Library Archives.

The Denver Post. 2015. Five Points' historic Epworth Church to be mixed-use development. Retrieved from <https://www.denverpost.com/2015/06/25/five-points-historic-epworth-church-to-be-mixed-use-development/>.

Denver Public Library. Curtis Park: Denver's Oldest Neighborhood. Retrieved from <https://history.denverlibrary.org/curtis-park-denvers-oldest-neighborhood-upgrade>.