

CLASSIFIEDS: JOBS CARS HOMES APARTMENTS DATING STAR CLASSIFIEDS DEALS PLACE AN AD

News Communities Sports Business Entertainment Living Opinion Obituaries Help

Sign up Log in

FEATURED: Deals.Indy Green.Indy Metromix MomsLikeMe Indy Paws

Find what you are looking for ...

SEARCH

NINE OUT OF 10 PEOPLE BUY ONE OF OUR WATER SYSTEMS AFTER THEY WALK THROUGH OUR DOORS. < click to find out why. >



ADVERTISEMENT

# Historic building constraints prompt church to sue city

## Far-Eastside church complains a designation it never sought now keeps it from serving its members

Sep 27, 2010 | 72 Comments



St. John Church of Christ at Washington Street and German Church Road may exemplify Tudor Gothic revival architecture, but it no longer meets the congregation's needs. / Rob Goebel / The Star



Written by **Bill McCleery**

Religious liberty is being pitted against historic preservation in a federal lawsuit filed this month against the city of Indianapolis.

Twitter

Facebook

Share

Email

Print

A A A



### FILED UNDER

Communities  
East Marion County

Leaders of St. John United Church of Christ on the Far Eastside claim city officials have meddled in the functions of the church by forcing a historic designation on the congregation's 96-year-old building and surrounding 5-acre property on the northeast corner of Washington Street and German Church Road.

That designation has effectively killed the church's plans to sell its property and left it with a building it can no longer afford to maintain, according to the lawsuit filed Sept. 10 in U.S. District

Court in Indianapolis.

### St. John United Church of Christ

» **1855:** Founded at current location; congregation consists mostly of German immigrants.

» **1866:** Congregation replaces original building with a new one.

Structures designated by the city as historic cannot be demolished or significantly altered without the permission of the Indianapolis Historic Preservation Commission.

ADVERTISEMENT

### TOP STORIES

The 'truthiness' of celebrity testimony: It scores big - 5 hours ago

Battle over: GM plant will be shuttered -

Daniels' schedule fuels 2012 speculation -

SEE ALL TOP STORIES

### MOST POPULAR

1. Knight gets in digs at NCAA, Notre Dame during Indy visit
2. Pacers' Hansbrough gets OK to enter fray
3. Might Ferrell follow in Zeller's steps?
4. Franchitti: Conservative approach may again win IndyCar title
5. Keith Smart expected to replace Don Nelson as Golden State Warriors coach



Cody Zeller at 2010 Adidas Invitational



Colts Game Preview: New York Giants, Week 2



Bob's 2-Minute Blitz: Is anyone better than Peyton?

### MOST RECENT GALLERIES



North of South development plans



IHSAA confines Chatard player to sidelines



Avon Heritage

"They've really done a number on us by blocking everything," said church member Larry Miller, 73, New Palestine. "We're concerned with the deteriorating of the building. We can't afford to maintain it, and without the sale of the property, we can't afford to build a new building."

The Metropolitan Development Commission approved the historic designation on Feb. 3, after city officials learned late last year that church leaders were negotiating to sell the property to a developer.

Gershman-Brown Developers wanted the property for a planned CVS store, the lawsuit claims, and intended to demolish the existing structure. The church planned to move to another site a few miles away.

The deal was a win-win, said Tim Armstrong, president of the church congregation. The building, completed in 1914, needs nearly \$1 million in repairs and renovations, Armstrong said, and most congregation members think the church's money would be better spent on a new facility.

The church's annual revenue has been about \$150,000 in recent years, church officials said.

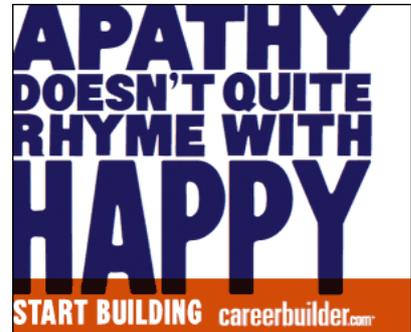
In its lawsuit, the church is asking that the city remove the historic designation and pay the church's legal fees. Representing the church, local attorney Thomas Landwerlen has enlisted the help of two Washington, D.C., lawyers, Roman Storz and Robert Greene, who specialize in cases involving religious freedom.

Page [1](#) [2](#) [Next](#)

Call Star reporter Bill McCleery at (317) 444-6083.

**MOST COMMENTED**

- [Group for gay teens sues over denial of license plate](#) 194
- [GM vote means plant will close its doors](#) 152
- [Meet the Chatard football player who isn't allowed on field](#) 133



ADVERTISEMENT

ADS BY PULSE 360

[GET LISTED HERE](#)

[Comments\(72\)](#) | [Share your thoughts »](#)

**RELATED STORIES**

- [Group for gay teens sues over denial of license plate](#)
- [Rocker arrested after Indy performance](#)
- [Five stabbed in parking dispute](#)

**MORE COMMUNITIES HEADLINES**

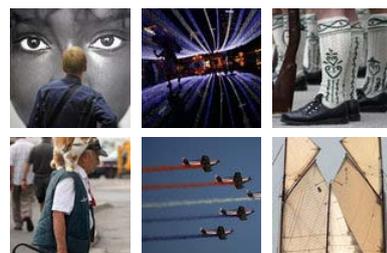
- [Federal grants reward progress at IPS](#)
- [City may offer \\$86M public loan for project near Lilly campus](#)
- [Battle over: GM plant will be shuttered](#)

Selected for you by a sponsor: [Op-Ed Columnist: Going Mad in Herds](#) (New York Times)

**ARCHIVES**

View the last seven days  
[Yesterday, Sep. 27](#)  
[Sunday, Sep. 26](#)  
[Saturday, Sep. 25](#)  
[Friday, Sep. 24](#)  
[Thursday, Sep. 23](#)  
[Wednesday, Sep. 22](#)  
[Tuesday, Sep. 21](#)  
 See our [paid archives](#) for news older than a week.

**UNUSUAL PHOTOS OF THE WEEK**



[SEE MORE PHOTOS](#)

**FOLLOW US ON TWITTER & FACEBOOK**

IndyStar's Headlines are now available on Facebook and Twitter. Don't miss a single headline!

**MOST POPULAR**

1. [Knight gets in digs at NCAA, Notre Dame during Indy visit](#)
2. [Pacers' Hansbrough gets OK to enter fray](#)
3. [Might Ferrell follow in Zeller's steps?](#)
4. [Franchitti: Conservative approach may again win IndyCar title](#)
5. [Keith Smart expected to replace Don Nelson as Golden State Warriors coach](#)
6. [Rocker arrested after Indy performance](#)
7. [IUPUI fires basketball coach Shann Hart](#)
8. [Mannings to meet again](#)
9. [Do the tax math and doctor's not in such bad shape](#)