

For now, towns say they won't tax closed churches

By Mary Kate Dubuss / Daily News Staff

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Despite decisions by other Massachusetts towns to tax the Archdiocese of Boston for church properties that were closed in the reconfiguration process, Framingham and Natick have opted to hold off.

Michael Flynn, Framingham's town assessor, said since the archdiocese could reverse its decision and reopen St. Jeremiah's, the town will not send it a bill this year. The Brook Street church's status is unclear, since some people call it "closed," while others maintain its status is "under review."

"In the future we may (tax the archdiocese)," Flynn said, explaining this is a new dilemma for the assessor's office. "(We) haven't thought too much (about it). It's never happened before."

Assessors in Danvers and Scituate have sent out property tax bills to the archdiocese for closed churches in their communities. Typically, groups including nonprofits, educational institutions and religious groups are exempt from paying property taxes. But the reconfiguration process, which has left some churches empty and others full of parishioners leading vigils, has thrown many town administrators for a loop.

"How seldom have masses of churches closed?" said Jan Dangelo, Natick's director of assessing.

Though taxing the Sacred Heart properties has been discussed among Natick officials, no bills will be sent to the archdiocese now, Dangelo said.

"It has been discussed, however briefly," she said. "I don't think it is good business to all of a sudden...tax a charitable organization."

Sacred Heart is on the market, but according to the archdiocese Web site, as of July 26, it had not yet been sold. That date was when the most recent property sales were posted.

By not sending a property tax bill for St. Jeremiah's, Flynn is saving the town the trouble of potentially issuing a reversal or abatement, if the archdiocese decides to allow St. Jeremiah's to stay open in some capacity.

Both towns' properties would bring in large sums if officials decided to put the buildings on the tax rolls.

Flynn said St. Jeremiah's 107,920-square-foot lot is valued at \$1.7 million.




If taxed under the commercial rate of \$31.21, the archdiocese would have to pay Framingham \$55,020.

Sacred Heart, whose three parcels of land are worth \$1.9 million, would cost the archdiocese \$20,390, since Natick's tax rate is \$10.60.

The Eliot Street's rectory is on a 38,768-square-foot lot and is worth \$517,400, Dangelo said. The church, valued \$1.2 million is on a 16,169-square-foot lot. The lot adjacent to the church is 7,405 square feet and is worth \$224,700.

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