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St. Brigid decision postponed to 2006

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For supporters of St. Brigid, the colorful stained-glass windows, ornate altar and dark wooden pews are as much a part of the soul of the church as the Romanesque architecture.

But after a decade of fighting to save the church, supporters will have to wait until next year to see if both the interior and exterior of the church, built in 1900, will receive landmark status.

At a Board of Supervisors Land Use Committee hearing Wednesday, the committee postponed a decision on the designation, citing legal details that must be clarified because of the unusual step of declaring the inside a landmark as well. Very few public buildings have the interior deemed a landmark.

At the same time, the committee members expressed support for ensuring the building is protected.

The Academy of Art University, which bought the church at Van Ness and Broadway this fall, plans to use it as a community and public assembly space. The university purchased the building from the Archdiocese of San Francisco, which wanted to sell the church to a developer who would have destroyed it to build housing on the site.

Elisa Stephens, president of the university, said her organization supported landmarking the exterior, but was uncertain about the interior.

Stephens said that though the university has no plans to alter in any way any significant interior element, she also wants to move quickly to seismically upgrade it without being entangled in red tape. The church has been closed since 1994 due to damage from the Loma Prieta earthquake

Church supporters, many of them former parishioners or preservationists, touched on the spiritual importance, architectural significance and historic value of the church, particularly for Irish-Americans.

Supervisor Alioto-Pier, whose district includes the church, praised the work of those who fought to protect the building.

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