

CLOSED PUBLIC SCHOOLS: A Framework for Food-Related Adaptive Reuse



Many towns and cities across the United States are grappling with what to do with their vacant schools. Demand for local, artisanal food and beverages is steadily rising, and these new food enterprises are starting to play central roles in revitalizing neighborhoods and reusing former commercial and public buildings. Abandoned factories are being reinvigorated and turned into breweries, culinary incubators, warehouses and indoor farms, and rural groceries into food hubs. How well do these trends translate to repurposing closed schools? What should planners and developers look for when considering adaptive reuse of schools for food-related enterprises?



Case Study: Landmarks Illinois & Closed Chicago Public Schools

In 2013, the Chicago Board of Education closed 49 of its public schools to combat a budget deficit and more efficiently distribute its student population and resources. As the state's leading voice for historic preservation, Landmarks Illinois identified 18 schools of historic and architectural significance to prioritize for seeking reuse opportunities. Recognizing Chicago as a well-established and growing hub of entrepreneurial activity in food and beverage, Landmarks Illinois

hired New Venture Advisors to explore adaptive reuse centered on important assets of these schools – their kitchens, grounds, and multi-use spaces – that could serve as a foundation for food enterprises.

A Framework for Evaluating Food-Related Reuse Potential

Out of Landmarks Illinois' 18 priority schools, New Venture Advisors, a food business consulting firm, identified the most promising school properties for food-related adaptive reuse. In a study completed in July 2015, New Venture Advisors identified potential reuse cases, measured each school's potential for these reuse cases, and sought organizations to support and occupy these facilities.

The following broad factors were considered for each reuse case and led to a recommended list of schools most likely to support successful food-related redevelopment.

Potential Reuse Cases

- Shared-Use Kitchen
- Contract Manufacturing
- Culinary and Nutrition Education
- Hydroponics and Aquaponics
- Urban Agriculture
- Restaurant or Café
- Commercial Brewery or Distillery

Assessing the Viability of Food-Related Reuse

Facility Suitability: School has adequate infrastructure, such as full commercial kitchens versus warming kitchen, dry and cold storage space, first floor multi-use space, loading dock accessibility, ample and accessible parking for visitors and/or delivery vehicles, etc.

Location: School is appropriately zoned for commercial activity. School has access to public transportation, highways, and/or foot traffic.

Potential Tenants: The community or city has local food and agriculture organizations and companies whose operations match desired reuse cases, are looking for space and see closed schools as a strong fit. Identifying an anchoring organization or developer is particularly critical.

Community Support: The community has existing initiatives and energy around food, health and/or agriculture. Community members support the desired reuse case.

Project Champions: There are local non-profits, developers, and/or investors willing to take leadership roles in these reuse projects, and who can manage mixed-use redevelopment.

Learn More

Food-related adaptive reuse of closed schools can help maintain their role as anchors within a community while bolstering an important and growing industry and fueling economic development. Read more about the report's recommendations to Chicago Public Schools [here](#). To learn more about how this methodology may apply to your region, contact Landmarks Illinois or New Venture Advisors at (773) 245-3570, <http://newventureadvisors.net>



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