



UUCB Building Team Notes

February 16, 2012

Clarifying Where We Stand

The Meeting of the Congregation on Sunday, Feb. 12, marked a major milestone on our journey toward a new church building. We have come a long way, and have just as long a way ahead. As the Building Team listened to the discussion and questions at the meeting, it became clear that gaps in understanding, confusion about priorities and anxiety about money were creating stumbling blocks.

The Building Team has spent time talking about the discussions that took place during and after the meeting and has come to understand several things. We will try to address some of these to help fill the gaps and relieve some anxiety.

Process: Why was the Swanson window vote so rushed?

A very effective model of congregational deliberation was set out by the Recovery Team last summer and fall – take an issue requiring a congregational vote, clarify it and present it to the congregation verbally and in writing, hold a series of informational sessions to help the congregation understand and further clarify the issue, then hold a Congregation Meeting to vote. Most recently we followed this process in discussing the proposed change to develop plans to remodel Pennell rather than replace it.

Unfortunately we did not have enough time to follow this sequence in seeking authorization to rebuild the Swanson window. Clearly the congregation would have been better served if we had taken more time to discuss and work through the issue before voting.

The Building Team is working on documenting priorities in the building project and will relate them to the cost and overall budget. As this process moves ahead, we will organize discussions with the congregation to further clarify major issues concerning well loved treasures like the bell, stained glass, and the Longfellow Bible.

Decision Making: Will the congregation have to vote on every proposal for spending money and design idea as we go along?

Please be assured that the window question was an isolated decision put forward because of timing. Remember that the Board charged the Building Team to “Work with the Architect in the design

process to provide direction consistent with input from the Congregation and the church's financial resources." Following the milestone vote on Sunday to have the architect design and send to bid plans for the new sanctuary and remodeled Pennell House, and having received hundreds of Hopes and Dreams and ideas for the building from the congregation, the architect is now in position to develop those plans. The Building Team is helping guide the architect in prioritizing building features based on congregational input, along with the evolving building budget estimates, and will use these filters in seeing the building plans move from concept to reality.

Looking ahead, we plan regular informational sessions and written communications to keep the congregation up-to-date on developments, plans and decisions. The architects now have a significant body of input from the congregation and will use that to create the design that will go out to bid. Realistically, the architects can't design from a moving target of continued input of new ideas and congregation wishes. Otherwise we would never have a church, or one that we could afford.

The architects need clear, timely direction to be able to do their work, and the Board has empowered the Building Team to provide that direction. The Building Team will continue to wrestle with guiding the architects to create the "Building of Our Dreams," which will not necessarily be (as trauma minister Aaron Payson said) the building of any one member's dreams. We heard someone say on Sunday, "Now that we are moving from the stage of hopes and dreams to nuts and bolts, the narrative is becoming more practical."

We believe that the next building vote will be the one to approve (or not) the best bid for construction. According to the current time line that is likely to be in June. Construction would start shortly after that. We shouldn't have to authorize any other spending before that vote.

Money: How can we afford this building?

We are not there yet. The building cost projections are too preliminary to offer meaningful figures to discuss; the asset (income) side of the budget will be unknown in large part until the Capital Campaign feasibility study is completed sometime next month.

We do know, as has been reported before, that we have about \$1 million from insurance for building. The Building Team continues to work with the insurance settlement and expects that an additional \$200-400 thousand will be released to us for including certain safety and accessibility features in the plans. Preliminary discussions about Capital Campaign and other fundraising indicate that the project actually is within reach.

We are an historically cautious congregation when it comes to finances. It is true, though, that we have experienced recent growth both in members and in generosity. Those connected to the Capital Campaign and fundraising at UUCB are enthusiastic about our prospects over the next few years. The Building Team is excited as well, but is keeping an objective view toward the numbers.

The commitment to build is still several months away, and will only be addressed *after* we know the bid price of the project, and after we have completed the majority of the Capital Campaign.

More Process: How did the congregation shift away from the vote to design a replacement of Pennell?

It was clear from the discussions before the vote on Sunday that several people questioned why we were revisiting the vote on the building project. After all, the congregation voted to get the design/bid to replace Pennell after hearing how substandard the Pennell building was, and that it would cost more to remodel it than replace it. The Building Team has been following the Board's charge and following through on the votes of the congregation. But when new information became available from the architects we felt that, to provide due diligence, we needed to consider that information. As the architect looked more carefully at the building (and as confirmed by the structural engineer) Pennell is essentially sound, the deficiencies identified earlier are redeemable and the building can be remodeled for significantly less cost than building new.

After much thought, we felt the fairest and most sensible thing to do would be to bring it to the congregation for another vote. After the vote on Sunday, we feel confident that the congregation supports the current, revised plan.

Communication and Feedback:

The Building Team has covenanted to bring comments and issues from the congregation to the Team, and then to address the issues after discussion. Please speak to any member or email uucbbuildingteam@gmail.com with your comments.