

Unitarian Universalist Church of St Pete
Town Hall Meeting
October 8, 2016

Paul Burnore began the meeting at 12:20pm.

Paul said the reason for the meeting is to share information. There will not be any votes taken today. The BOT is looking for a consensus on how to proceed on three major issues. UUSP does not have a long term plan for growth and needs a start.

Paul reminded everyone that we are in Covenant and that the BOT works at the discretion of the congregation

Topic 1: Parking Lot Development

Current situation:

- 31 parking spaces in gravel and rocks
- Unattractive for UUSP and neighborhood
- Difficult to walk on, potential liability
- City requirement to pave by 2017 (has been on-going)
- Paving cost up to approx. \$100,000+, including required underground water treatment

Options:

- 1) UUSP would pave the parking lot by 2017
 - Cost to church of approx. \$100,000, including water treatment
 - Still 31 spaces, safer, slight visual improvement, less liability risk

- 2) Development of parking lot with Wannemacher Jensen Architects in 2017-18
 - Financial gain of approx. \$300,000 -\$400,000
 - Increase number of parking spaces, improve site, reduce liability
 - Work in partnership with our neighbors Wannemacher Jensen
 - Put out to bid to commercial real estate developers

Discussion

- The possible cost of the parking lot development is high because of the need for extensive water treatment underneath. The actual cost may be lower though.
- The number of parking spaces could increase to 37 or even 47 spaces.
- Paul assured all questioners that any agreement with Wannemacher Jensen would focus on keeping the parking spaces for us in perpetuity.
- Concern was expressed that the grassy area was originally supposed to be a Memorial Garden; Laurie Clement answered that it's never been used for that, there are no remains buried there and we do have a Memorial Garden next to the office.

- Couldn't the lot just be paved over? There are green, permeable solutions that we can explore. However, all such coverings require constant maintenance and we have never had steady volunteers for outdoor upkeep.
- What is the zoning? "Downtown 2" – very flexible, mixed use.
- WJ have been our neighbors for 17 years. They have always been interested in the appearance and use of the parking lot.
- WJ would be best able to deal with property lines which would be tricky for others.

Possible Advantages of Development

- ♣ First step in needed long-range planning for UUSP
- ♣ Cost to UUSP: independent appraisal and real estate attorney
- ♣ Financial gain could be approx. \$300,000 -\$400,000
- ♣ Funds for needed church improvements and Endowment Fund
- ♣ Improved, increased, and guaranteed UUSP parking
- ♣ Attract new members and accommodate a growing congregation
- ♣ Revitalization of Mirror Lake neighborhood

Advantages to partnering with Wannemacher Jensen Architects (WJA)

- WJA neighbors of UUSP for 17 years, well-known, good reputation
- They have done other work in our area: Jamestown Townhouses, St Pete Free Clinic Women's Residence, CASA Women's Shelter
- Personal stake to improve property to help their business and neighborhood
- UUSP approval of joint parking lot development project
- Benefits of mixed-use building with condos, apartments, and small shops
- Shared goals:
 - 1) improved, guaranteed parking with more spaces
 - 2) revitalize UUSP/WJA and Mirror Lake neighborhood
 - 3) additional income
- One partner (WJA) instead of separate architect, developer, and construction partners. Simplifies & avoids paralyzing complexity.

Discussion

- Why fix the parking lot? Five years ago the City declared grass parking lots unsightly; Code Enforcement ruled that five downtown churches had to pave their lots. Two (three?) of those churches got rid of their parking lots because of the cost of improvement. The City did offer a waiver for grass lots that included plantings to hide it. However, our plantings on Mirror Lake Drive are not being kept up and we don't have any on 2nd Avenue.
- Our *pro bono* lawyer, Chuck Hinton, does not deal with property and business issues. BOT has received 3-4 names of attorneys specializing in these issues but will have to pay them. The BOT wants congregational approval before spending that money.
- Many expressed worry about the parking lot – it's very ugly but also dangerous, people can get hurt. There was agreement that we need to do something.
- Some asked about a permeable covering, while acknowledging that it is very expensive. Lori Price pointed out that a permeable lot and borders would require a lot of time and effort for upkeep, we haven't done well in that area.

- Two people felt that this topic needs more than 30 minutes. We need a long range plan first. Does this fit with the mission and goals of our organization?
- Jack agreed that we need long range plans but we have to keep in mind that the fundamental purpose of the church is to help people grow and that includes being of benefit to the wider community. We have about a year to do something about the parking lot; we can either pave it at considerable cost or keep it for years and sell it at higher price or work with WJA. Right now we have a good working partner in WJA and a forward looking, growing congregation.
- Another concern expressed was that If we're to have a bigger impact on the community, we need more people and they will need a place to park. Our neighbors have been compatible but what happens if they move? What happens to their guarantee of parking? Will we have to face legal battles with new owners?
- Another person felt that selling is frightening. Could we consider a "lease-hold" so we could benefit from selling it later?
- It was asked whether we could get more definite information about cost of re-doing the parking lot. Paul said that's one of the reasons for the meeting. Jane Fanning explained that the dilemma for the BOT has been do we hire an attorney and an appraiser and give the congregation all the information or do we get a consensus from the congregation about how to proceed.

Possible Disadvantages for Development

- ♣ No benefit from appreciation of property value
- ♣ Parking during construction
- ♣ Effect on Friday night picnics

Lori added that, if we contract with WJA, we have to have a tool for keeping track of the contract that guarantees free parking. We have a history of losing background paperwork.

Today's meeting is to seek consensus on which process to follow:

- 1) UUSP should plan to pave the parking lot with Endowment funds – no development
- 2) UUSP should put the project out to bid for any commercial developer
- 3) UUSP should go forward with WJA to write a proposal
- 4) UUSP Board should gather facts and recommend to congregation how to proceed

Discussion

- Whichever choice, we still have to get a professional appraisal because we don't know the value of that property
- Appreciation of the church itself would improve if have improvements next door.
- Where would funding come from? How do we pay for an attorney and appraiser? Can we borrow from Endowment?
- Darren Stowe explained that, because UUSP is currently in good financial shape, we have not been taking the monthly draw from the Endowment Fund. Therefore, the Endowment "owes" UUSP \$12,500, by Dec. it will be \$15,000.
- Do we have a survey of the property? Yes

Result

Paul asked for show of hands on each of the four options. A large consensus was #4. There were a few hands for #3. There were no hands for #1 and #2.

Next Steps:

- Engage real estate appraiser and real estate attorney
- Decide on funding
- Gather facts to present to congregation
- Provide regular updates to the congregation
- Congregational approval will be needed for all options

TOPIC 2 – RE DOORS AND ROOF REPAIRS

RE Doors: UL rated fire doors are a safety issue for all upstairs areas.

- Children's RE is currently using 3 classrooms, each requiring a fire door (Eventually all upstairs rooms should have fire doors and upstairs area would have a second exit or elevator)

S.A.S Security Lock and Key estimate: \$2,727

Roof Repairs

- Roof repairs for leakage into upstairs classrooms needed
- Silvers Systems Inc. maintenance estimate: \$3,729
Total of doors and roof repairs: \$6,456

- How should we fund RE doors and roof repair?

Discussion

- Laurie Clements: The Silver Systems estimate of \$3,729 does not include roof repair. It would be for replacing flashing and caulking windows. Repairing the cracks above the windows and in parapets would be \$10,000. So total would be **\$16,456**

- Lisa Hill: We can't legally close the classroom doors so it is very loud upstairs. Since there are no windows in the doors, we can't see into the classrooms to follow Safe Congregation practices. One classroom has a row of buckets to catch rain. The upstairs smells of mold when AC isn't on constantly.

- Lisa also reminded everyone that the congregation had approved new doors last year.

Lori: We did approve the doors, it took a long time to get the cost and we are now asking for approval to go ahead with purchasing and installing the doors.

- Some suggested holding fund raisers

- Barbara Rowell reminded everyone that we need to pay attention to the maintenance of this building. We need a major fund drive. She pledges \$1,000 to kick it off.

- Cynthia Patterson also pledged \$1,000.

- Laurie Clements said that she was sure her father, John, would approve moving the \$4,000 he put in the Little House Roof Fund to RE doors and roof repair.

- It was asked if insurance would cover any of this but no, the problems are visibly long standing.
- A member reminded everyone that time is of the essence; water problems in a building are very serious. Untreated, they cause more damage and health problems.

Result

Paul stated this would be put on the agenda for this week's BOT meeting. The consensus was that the BOT will make a decision this week on how to proceed.

TOPIC 3 – UUSP VISION, MISSION & COVENANT

- Is it time to relook at our vision, mission, and covenant?
 - Does our covenant reflect how we treat each another and the world?
 - Does our mission capture who we are and what we do?
 - Does our vision capture who we want to become?
- What process should the congregation adopt to explore this?
- What is our plan in order to begin in 2017?
- The UUSP congregation should own lead this

Current Mission statement: "To provide a compassionate and welcoming community, inspire spiritual and intellectual growth, and serve as a beacon for social activism and service."

(Congregation approved c. 2005)

2013 Mission statement: "Our mission is to be an inclusive, evolving religious community that inspires spiritual and intellectual growth to make our world a better place."

(Board, 2013, not approved by congregation)

2013 Vision statement: "Our vision is to be the beacon for freedom of thought, belief, and conscience in St Petersburg."

(Board, 2013, not approved by congregation)

Current Covenant: "Love is the spirit of this church and service its law. This is our great covenant - to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, and to help one another."

(James Vila Blake, Hymnal #473)

Discussion

- It was suggested that a committee be formed, that would include Jack, to work on a Mission Statement that reflects who we are today.
- Jane Fanning stated that we need to work on the By-laws and would like to start after the beginning of the year.
- A member reminded the group that during this period, while we move forward, we need to deeply follow "to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, and to help one another." That's what separates us from other organizations.

Result

A consensus was reached that the congregation should review and discuss possible changes to the covenant, mission and vision during the remainder of 2016. The Board should do the same for the by-laws. At the start of 2017 the congregation should form committees to work on the above statements. The Board should do the same for the by-laws.

The meeting ended at 1:25.

Respectfully submitted,
Dani Skrzypek
Clerk to the BOT