

A Vision for the Facilities of West Side Presbyterian Church

A Report of the Property Vision Committee - May 21, 2004

Background

In 2001 the property immediately south of our church became available, and Session appointed a committee to evaluate the possibilities and make a recommendation. Early in 2002, a Property Vision Committee was appointed to explore possible uses for the property in connection with our existing and future ministry needs. At a meeting of the congregation in March 2002, we voted to purchase the property for \$330,000. Two years later, the property is almost paid for.

In the Spring of 2002, the Vision Committee initiated a process to solicit ideas from the congregation, which culminated in two open houses in June. Approximately 25 members of the congregation submitted ideas. Each idea was analyzed and estimates were made of the personnel, facility, and financial resources necessary to perform each ministry suggested. The committee discovered that many of the ministries were not dependent on facilities, but were dependent on additional staff. We discovered that several of the suggested ministries could be housed in multiple-use common space, and that some could be accommodated in our existing facility, perhaps with some remodeling.

In January 2003, the Vision Committee began to explore options for the use of the property that had been acquired, taking into consideration how our current facilities could be better utilized. The idea of relocating the offices on the main floor east of the sanctuary, to provide more space for circulation and socializing before and after services, had been enthusiastically embraced by many people in the congregation, so the committee began to explore ways to accommodate the relocated office functions on the property to the south. Since the office uses would not require all of the space that could be built on the property, other uses were considered as part of a mixed-use project, including multi-purpose ministry space and housing.

Last Fall, Session authorized hiring an architect to assist the committee in evaluating our facility needs and assessing our opportunities for the future. In February, the committee retained Weinstein Architects and Urban Designers to assist with this analysis.

One of the first things the architects did was to meet with representatives of many of the groups that use the church. In these meetings they developed an understanding of the level of use that the various rooms and physical components of our church receive. They also identified some unmet needs and heard suggestions regarding how facilities could be improved. The architects then reviewed what they had heard with the Vision Committee, and developed several facility modification options.

We found that the offices could be moved to the upper level, and the main level opened up for better circulation and socializing after services and at events. Moving the offices upstairs meant that the human presence of the church would remain near the main entry. The addition of an elevator and a new stair would allow accessibility not only to the new office location, but throughout the whole facility. In addition, the elevator would improve the ability to move items from storage to where they are needed.

Although we began this process thinking that we would build an addition on the new property in the short term, we have chosen to bring a proposal to the congregation that invests our resources first in the existing facility so that it is accessible to all and is used efficiently. This sets us up well in the longer term to connect to a new program building when there is a clear mandate for new, on-going programs that will use that site to its full capacity.

We look forward to your comments and to explore the best approach for our congregation. We have included for your consideration a vision of our use of facilities, our findings and recommendations.

Our Vision

The facilities of West Side Presbyterian are the home for the activities of our church, where we...

Worship as a community

Gather in prayer, in celebration, in mourning and in the day to day moments of life

Educate ourselves about the word of God

Nurture the spiritual life of our community

Welcome the broader community with music and drama, programs for children and their families

Our facilities are intended to support these activities and the ministries and people of the church.

Our facilities are our face to the community, and physically represent Christ's presence to all who pass by.

The church opens up to the corner, with the beautiful cherry trees in the center, the stained glass windows of the sanctuary on the right and the presence of the church staff on the left. The doors are unlocked, and people are there to greet both visitors and church members. The beautifully maintained grounds and buildings reflect the level of care in the congregation.

Our facilities are meant to be welcoming to all, to invite entry and participation and respite.

The facilities of West Side Presbyterian are a legacy to this congregation from the vision of those who came before us. We are the stewards of this legacy for our times and for those who will follow.

Findings

In looking to the future of our church, we have acquired the neighboring property to the south. First, this allows us to control the development that will occur next to the church. Secondly, it has presented an opportunity for us to consider the way that we use our facilities, and to consider the possible ways that we can best utilize that property now and in the future.

In our work over the last year, The Property Vision Committee has listened to the ideas of the congregation, we have researched our options for development, and we have hired the services of an architecture firm. Many of the users of the church have been interviewed to understand how we use the facilities and the ways in which the facilities could better serve the ministry of the Church. We have learned the following:

There are lots of activities at our church! There are certain times of particularly high usage, including Sunday mornings, Tuesday nights, and alternate Friday mornings when the Mothers of Preschoolers (MOPS) are here.

There is a lot of space. We have 34,000 square feet of space with a wide variety of character and use.

The outstanding issue with our facilities is the congestion in the entry area. This causes difficulties before and after services and large events. It makes spontaneous conversation and greeting awkward, creates discomfort for our less mobile members and can cause uncomfortable delays in moving a large group of people from the sanctuary to Howell Auditorium, especially at weddings and other special events.

The facilities are not fully accessible to those who have trouble climbing stairs.

A number of ideas were suggested for new programs, including new ministries and housing. If we are to build on the adjacent property, we will need to budget not only for construction, but also additional operational costs and staff to run new programs. This will require an ongoing commitment from the church leaders and the congregation.

Recommended Direction

First, make the best use possible of the space that we have.

Solve the congestion problem in the entry.

Relocate the offices to a place that functions well for the staff, and continues the welcoming nature of our church. Create an excellent working environment for those who serve our church.

Increase accessibility to the upper and lower levels.

Consider short term uses for the adjacent property that will best serve the church, without precluding longer term addition to the church.

Build on that property in the future in response to specific programs that have the long-term support of the church.

Make sure that the proposal that we make is feasible, cost-effective and appropriate to the needs and mission of our church.