



First Unitarian Campus: Building on a Vision

What would “success” look like for our First Unitarian campus in terms of optimal utilization and maximizing future funding streams?

Situation Analysis

We have a campus that is historical, beautiful, and welcoming. It is also (to some degree) crumbling, inaccessible, and less-than-functional. We need to address the programmatic and functional issues facing our campus, and we have a limited pool of resources with which to do so.

The large, often well-to-do families of 30 or more years ago are being replaced by empty-nesters and Gen Xers. Millennials are shifting to the suburbs as they raise families. The new younger members are a transient population, dictated by their developing education and careers.

Decades ago, First UU made the decision to remain in place as an urban congregation. Today that is a double-edged sword of intent versus required resources. Our location puts us on the frontlines in terms of bringing UU values (with LOVE at the center) into play in addressing challenges our Region faces.

Recently, church membership has exhibited an interest or will to undertake social outreach into the community and to welcome the community into our church “home”.

Our mission states, “We strive to be a welcoming congregation, inspiring lives of loving kindness and integrity by nurturing spirituality, building community, and advancing justice.”

But stepping into this role demands a candid assessment of priorities and resources and the development of a vision and strategy for our campus that matches that mission.

We have a limited pool of current funding and an endowment of about \$1.5M that needs to be used sparingly if at all. If we are to shore up aging structures, undertake new initiatives, and reshape our infrastructure to do so, how will we fund it?

It's Not About Projects, It's About Priorities

There are projects which are maintenance in nature – some of which have been deferred for decades. These must be undertaken if we are to remain in place on this campus.

This is a not-exhaustive list includes of items which cannot be postponed:

- Lower West Roof (Fellowship Hall Alcove)
- Upper West Roof replacement (over the Dodson Room)
- Roof replacement over window in Hosmer Room.
- Ceiling repairs in Dodson Room.
- Ceiling repairs in Hosmer Room
- Gutters on the South Sanctuary wall; North Wall (kitchen entrance); Upper West Roof; Hosmer Roof; and East Sanctuary Wall (Memorial Garden).
- Fellowship east corridor entry area leaks.
- Library South foundation wall leaks
- Front entry slabs that are raised and hazardous.
- Addressing drainage issues.
- Refurbishing the monument sign
- Heating in the lobby

Exploring the contracts for the immediate repairs resulted in multiple solutions from contractors. We engaged a consultant, who gave us a good news/bad news report that is currently being finalized. We can probably spend less on the roofing projects and other items than we had originally anticipated. But there are looming expenses associated with a century-old campus that dwarf those projects.

But “success” for our campus demands looking beyond these maintenance issues.

Programming for the Future

Some building programming was undertaken around the year 2000 when Hope Chapel was being designed. In addition to the chapel, work was done in the RE wing, the Sanctuary, and Fellowship Hall. We are reviewing documentation and talking with the architects who did that Hope Chapel work.

At that time the situation at First Unitarian was radically different. We had around 500 members and our RE program was bursting at the seams with young families.

As we look at possibilities both for outreach and for income to support capital projects, we must also examine the infrastructure required to support such projects. A vision for the campus going forward requires examining the flow and function of the spaces – as well as life cycle maintenance issues and marketing issues which must be addressed. If we are making a statement to the community, our campus is at the heart of what is communicated.

- Our building could provide a home for educational, health, and other community outreach projects and could possibly receive some kind of modest rental fees out of grant or operating funding from the groups or agencies providing the services.
- We could market the church as an event space – for everything from weddings to fundraisers and community outreach events that fit within our mission. The Sanctuary could host concerts or performances. All these activities would require commitment of staff and volunteers.

Such uses would also be predicated by an upgrading of cosmetics and amenities – for example refurbishing our entrance sign, replacing carpet, refreshing paint, improving accessibility, landscaping in the Memorial Garden, addressing HVAC issues, and increasing/improving restroom facilities.

What does success look like for our campus? What do we want the fabric and function of the physical manifestation of our congregation to be going forward?

Not addressing this question now is deciding: We will – sooner or later – run out of resources without having made the impact outlined in our mission statement and addressed by recent visioning exercises.

As chair of the Facilities Cluster, I am requesting that Church Leadership develop a vision and plan for the future of the First Unitarian campus.

Respectfully submitted,

Tom Finan
Chair
First Unitarian Church Facilities Cluster