

## What happens if we do not build? Or don't do it now?

*An Update from the Design Task Force – April 25, 2013*

During the last two months there have been many conversations around the need and the proposed plans for a new Parish House for our Religious Education (RE) programs and office staff. ***Thank you to everyone who took the time to participate in the information sessions and discussions with the Design Task Force, The Giving Collaborative, or who have read the information posted on our church website.*** The response to the proposed building plan has been very enthusiastic!

*From Lisa Scott: Instead of just a candle of Joy, I'd like to light a Bonfire of Joy! You guys have done such a tremendous job researching and planning for our potential renovation. Thank you for all of your time, energy, and thought you have put into this. This is a huge project, with many factors to consider, and I am so impressed with the solution you have worked to plan. I so hope we can gather the resources to make this work; this one solution will fix so many of our current facility issues: No more crossing the street for the youth groups and staff! I cringe at the thought of the youth group kids (not to mention the staff, volunteers, and parents) crossing the street to get to OCH. It's an accident waiting to happen. Let us keep our community safer by housing all offices and meeting spaces on the same side of the street. No more landlord and rent to pay for an extra building! Accessibility to all levels with ONE elevator! ONE central location!*

Great enthusiasm! Great ideas! Yet we know that the project comes with a steep price tag and concerns linger about our ability to afford the overall project. Everyone understands that we have a mandate to comply with the accessibility needs of the RE wing by 2016, however, one question that we have heard is “can't we do the accessibility now and continue to rent Old Center Hall (OCH)?” There are a number of factors that affect the answer to that question.

### What is the minimum we need to do?

We have two primary requirements that must be met:

1. RE Wing Accessibility. We need to proceed with plans that will satisfy the mandate to make the RE wing fully accessible by 2016. The penalty for ignoring that deadline is significant fines – reported to be as much as \$1,000/day. The best solution for accessibility would be to proceed with the one-point of access proposed in the current plan, building a 4-stop elevator and lobby behind the existing bathrooms that would connect to the Sanctuary, Parish Hall, and both floors of the existing RE wing. Providing both vertical and horizontal connection between all of our church buildings, this would also allow us to remove the existing dated and undersized lift that connects the Parish Hall and Sanctuary and convert that space to badly needed storage. It is possible to do this as a stand-alone project, however, it is a cumbersome addition that creates design and construction issues in order to tie-in to the existing structure and mechanical systems. **Estimated cost – \$250,000-500,000.**
2. RE Wing Heating System. The heating system for the RE wing needs to be replaced. It is currently being maintained by the valiant efforts of Dick Slade and increasingly costly repairs. **Estimated cost – \$15,000 at a minimum.**

### Can we continue to rent OCH?

We currently have a lease for OCH through August 2014 with a \$100/month increase to our rent (\$17,800/year total). Discussions over the past year with Center Realty Trust (CRT), our landlord there, have indicated that they do not intend to kick us out at the end of that time – they understand our proposed plans for a renovation and the need to have some leeway with a construction schedule. They do, however, have a tenant in line for the building, one who is able to pay a rent significantly

above our current lease. They also have the need to do renovations in the building to prepare the space for that tenant, work that could leave us facing the dislocation of our staff.

In addition, OCH has accessibility issues of its own. Members of our congregation have noted that they are unable to participate in some activities such as the coffeehouse or other special events because they cannot get to parts of OCH.

The prospect of negotiating a *short-term* co-tenancy for OCH, for example, **IF** we could continue to rent the downstairs for office space while attempting to relocate our programming in our current buildings, is uncertain – both in terms of its availability and the cost. Without the second floor of OCH we will need to relocate programs currently using that space – the coffeehouse, sangha, youth programs such as COA, OWL, Neighboring Faiths, etc. The Red Bow Fair would lose 70% of the space available for outside crafters who are a significant draw to our largest fundraiser. While the coffeehouse and sangha might be accommodated in the Parish Hall and Chapel, we would need to purchase portable staging and identify storage for equipment and supplies.

In our discussions with them CRT has emphasized its fiduciary responsibility to create income flow and the need to increase the rental income for their buildings, bringing them up to market rate. Based on our research of similar space, that could more than double our current rent. **Estimated cost – \$6,000 for coffeehouse staging; unknown impact to Red Bow Fair attendance/income; \$17,800 rental for the upcoming year; unknown rental cost going forward**

### **What still remains undone?**

If we meet the accessibility mandate for our RE Wing we still need determine how best to provide adequate, inviting, and efficient space for all of our desired programming and staff.

If we choose to do the minimum required, we will continue to face the following issues:

1. Poor and Inadequate RE Space. Our RE classrooms are dark, with minimal insulation. We have already determined that we cannot meet our programming and storage needs with just the existing space in the Meeting House and RE wing.
2. Separated Administrative Space. The existing offices for the minister and the church staff are not optimally laid out or located, creating ongoing safety issues for our staff and buildings.
3. On-going and Escalating Lease Costs. Continued rental of space also means an outflow of cash to other pockets vs. an investment in our own building and future. In addition, we have no control over the space in OCH, which requires improvements.

### **Can we postpone the construction?**

Current estimates are that construction costs will increase 10% per year. Staging the construction, for example, completing the accessibility (elevator/lobby) module now and further space addition later, would add significantly to the overall project costs. Should we want to seek a mortgage to assist us in funding the project, the cost of debt financing is currently at an all-time low. As interest rates increase, so will the cost of that potential financing. As the demand on the construction industry continues to climb we might not be able to retain our chosen vendor.

*From Stephanie Murphy: I wanted to let you know how thrilled I was to learn that you are working with Windover (Construction) on the church building project. I am very familiar with two of their recent projects and have nothing but good things to say about them. My nephew attends and my sister-in-law works at the Cape Ann Waldorf School in Beverly. Windover worked on this project, and the school is just beautiful. The design respects both the setting (the Morraine farm in Beverly) and the philosophy of the school itself. I also am extremely familiar with a*

*project Windover did on Belgrade Lakes in Maine. My parents own a house that is part of the development there. Again, the people involved and the design are all reflective of the environment in which the properties sit. In my opinion, they are a fabulous company to work with and I am so glad that you have chosen them. The buildings are gorgeous and my sense is they really listen, understand, and respect the needs of those they are working with.*

This is a challenging project – one that represents what Fred Glore calls a “defining moment” in our church’s history. Many options have been considered and weighed to reach the current plans – what members of the Design Task Force and Advisory Group consider to be the best balance of function and cost.

*From Deb Olander: The previous building project (which I think of as Phase I) transformed our meeting house from a tired and somewhat shabby gathering place to a beautiful, functional and serene space. I could go on and on with examples – the cramped and dingy staircase from the parish hall to the vestibule, the children running around on a crowded stage that consumed the front part of the parish hall, the ridiculously configured bathroom within a bathroom, the tired RE classrooms. To get a sense of the transformation, take a walk over to Old Center Hall and compare the look, feel and functionality of that space with that of our beautiful meeting house. It may be difficult to imagine if you are new to North Parish, but the entire meeting house had a similar feel to that of OCH. Of course, it is the people that make our congregation vibrant, but the building project is about more than improving our real estate. It is about creating inviting and accessible spaces that will enhance and facilitate gatherings for our members and staff. I am impressed by the work of the Design Task Force and hope that we, as a congregation, will come together to complete Phase II. Let's finish what we started; let's make this investment in our future.*

(For links to the design schematics, costs, and other informational documents see our new website – Support Us: Capital Campaign.)