

**Building Committee
Interim Report
February, 2019**

Meeting since 11/2017

Summary

The Committee was established at the annual meeting in June, 2017. The goal was "to gather information about the cost and benefits of various options to remain in the current building or to move to a different location, given our current and future needs".

This was understood to be the next step in the temple's visioning process, and was given further impetus by the need for extensive repair work to the heating/cooling system, and by the subsequent loss of the building's long-time tenant. The Committee consists of nine congregants and Rav Jeremy (see attached list of committee members), and has met 12 times.

80-100K \$

Five options have been explored: 1) modernizing the heating/cooling system; 2) renovating the current space; 3) purchasing land and building anew; 4) buying and renovating a new space; 5) renting a new space with the option of purchase. There was brief discussion about razing the current structure and building anew on the property, which would require more detailed exploration. In addition, there was some conversation about redesigning the lower portion of the synagogue to provide supportive housing to special populations; eg, refugees or a special needs group.

In conjunction with this work, it has been necessary to acquire as much specific information as possible with regard to the value of our current property, the costs of repairs and renovation, the procurement of land, and the construction of a new building. Given the fluctuation of the market, and its unpredictability, only rough estimates are available. In this regard, and through the good offices of several committee members, we have been able to ascertain the estimated value of the current building (\$250,000-\$300,000). Moreover, since September, we have had the good fortune to benefit from the volunteer services of architect Jeff Brown, who has prepared an estimate of renovation costs (see attached), which could be phased in over a number of years. We are currently in the process of gathering information about the costs of modernizing the heating/cooling system, and the potential for a rent-to-purchase property which could be designed to meet our specifications .

Option 1: Modernizing the Heating/Cooling System

Previously obtained estimates for repairing the current system range from \$80,000-\$100,000, depending on the extensiveness of the work. For example, we can examine the possibility of heating only a portion of the building. The Committee is currently in the process of obtaining an audit from our energy suppliers, Yankee Gas and Eversource, to determine the costs/savings of replacing and modernizing the entire system. Additionally, we will investigate the availability of state/federal incentive grants for the installation of energy efficient equipment.

Costs/Benefits

If the decision is made to remain in the building and do nothing else but repair the current system, an expenditure of at least \$80,000-\$100,000 should be expected, based on previous estimates. This option could be incorporated into option 2, renovating the current space. The decision to rent the lower floor might impact the decision.

Option 2: Renovating the Current Space

Initial discussions were based on two documents: "Visioning Implementation Plan Report" and "Current Building Needs & Desires", developed by Judy Stein (see attachment). Community and flexibility of community and worship space were major themes; discussion included reimagining the outdoor space to create 'sacred space' for quiet reflection/contemplation. Use of the downstairs space was also discussed, and included converting it to an art gallery/performance venue, establishing a pre-school on the premises (a market study assessing community need would be required), and sharing space with another faith community (no interest discerned).

Jeff Brown's work brought more specificity to the design and costs associated with renovation, and centered on the upstairs space. Ideas include reconfiguring the worship space (eg moving the bima to floor level, providing for flexible seating arrangement), replacing windows, remodeling the kitchen, bringing the restrooms into compliance with ADA requirements, replacing the floor in the social hall and removing the stage, erecting office space, classrooms, a library, and a new entrance (see attachments). The work would include modernizing the heating/cooling system, and the possibility of installing solar panels.

The work could be completed in phases over a several year period. There was some discussion about the possibility of utilizing 'homegrown' talent for aspects of the work. Costs are estimated to be \$300-\$350/sq. ft. The upstairs area is approximately 6,640 square feet.

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Costs/Benefits

In addition to the estimated costs, renovations would disrupt use of the upstairs space for approximately one year. It is unclear what effect renovations would have on increasing participation and enhancing membership.

The benefits of remaining in the building include familiarity and continuity of the synagogue's integration into the Willimantic community. There is ample outdoor space for parking, and for creating areas for quiet reflection and contemplation. Additional usage of the building would be made possible (eg more robust interfaith activities, art displays). The downstairs space could also be converted into sanctuary living space for refugees or supportive housing.

Option 3: Purchasing Land and Building Anew

It is difficult to estimate the costs associated with this option, due to fluctuations in market conditions and choice of location. Utilizing a website designed to project expenses associated with building a church, the committee estimates it would cost approximately the same to construct a new building as it would to renovate the current space, \$300-350/sq.ft. Much of the design work for the renovation could be utilized in a new building, with modifications as appropriate. The Storrs/Mansfield area has been identified as the most ideal locale.

As mentioned above, there has also been some discussion about the possibility of razing the current building and constructing on the site a new structure more appropriate to current and future needs of the community. This choice would require more detailed analysis.

*Not
counting
cost of
land.*

Costs/Benefits

Both renovation of the existing building and building anew have the potential to generate enthusiasm and a sense of renewal, creating an environment most congruent with the outcomes envisioned by the Visioning Committee. While it is hoped that a move closer to Storrs/Mansfield would increase participation and enhance membership, this assumption remains untested.

The overall population of most of the area is diminishing. Mansfield is consolidating its schools. The Jewish population in northeastern Connecticut is small, and overall participation in most formal religious organizations in the United States is shrinking.

(see attached document authored by Rav Jeremy, "Some thoughts about benefits of various building options from the perspective of national trends").

Option 4: Buying and Renovating a New Space

There may be a number of new buildings in the community, currently unoccupied, which could be purchased and then designed to suit our needs. Elements of the renovation designs developed by architect Jeff Brown could be adapted as desired. This option eliminates the need for exterior construction.

Option 5: Renting a New Space/Renting to Purchase

The Committee considered renting space, which could save money, especially if shared with another organization. There is, however, concern that such an option might lead people to believe that the viability of the congregation is in jeopardy.

A brief discussion of renting from Hillel on the campus of UCONN included concern that such an option could diminish the integrity of the congregation. On the other hand, a presence on the campus might attract additional participants from among UCONN employees and their families.

The committee also considered the possibility of a rent to purchase option. In this regard, several members visited a property on Stafford Rd. in Mansfield, at the junction of Rte. 32 and Rte. 275.

This two-story 10,000 sq. ft. unfinished shed is currently being used as a storage space for large construction equipment. The interior needs total development, and parking is an issue, yet the site itself is lovely. The cost of the property, and the possibility of a rent to purchase agreement, are currently being explored.