

# THE BUILDING FEASIBILITY STUDY GROUP'S FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Building Feasibility Study Group, Deb Merrick, Kathy Bloomberg, Paul Robinson, Dave Michelsen, Brian Miskinis, and Drew Sunstein, worked thru the summer of 2008 to put together the Program of Needs. It is our guideline for looking at all of our options to help us determine which option is the right option for us.

The purpose of this Program of Needs is to describe the proposed building project, to outline significant conditions that must be met, and to provide general direction for the overall design. Keep in mind that the numbers we have given are just guidelines. An architect will have the latest codes and the experience to best design and size the needed space to fit our needs. The document will also introduce to a potential architect the evolution of Unitarian Universalism, as well as FUUSE, to help describe who we are. You can find the Program of Needs on the FUUSE web page.

PART I is our Vision Statement: Who we are, where we want to go, and what we want to achieve. An example is our being designated a Green Sanctuary and being sustainable.

PART II contains recommended qualitative and quantitative guidelines for the spaces that we need in our building.

PART III describes the building site and how we would like to use that land.

The Appendices contain related data: project cost analysis; some abbreviations frequently used in our congregation and their meaning, which might be helpful to someone unfamiliar with our denomination; and summaries of the tables along with graphic illustrations of areas needed. Also included is a brief history of FUUSE.

In Part II we reached some of the estimated areas using guidelines for space needs of a church. For example, 35 sq. ft. per child are recommended for a nursery. In a sanctuary the recommendation is 10-15 sq. ft. per person. And it is recommended that office spaces should be a minimum of 120 sq. ft. with a recommendation of 300 sq ft for the minister so that he or she will have room for consultations.

Based on the Strategic Planning Group, the goal was to grow to a 500-member church. Our group decided, however, that after looking at our history and other research that it would not be feasible to have a church with a sanctuary that fits 500 people and had enough classrooms to accommodate all the children. We recommend that it is best to build a sanctuary half that size with the ability to open up to the gathering room to accommodate a larger group when needed.

In order to minimize the building's size, most rooms are intended for multiple uses. The sanctuary will have comfortable, movable, stackable chairs that can be arranged as required for the variety of functions to be held there. The classrooms can be used on Sundays by the children and during the week by the adults. The proposed chapel can be used for children's chapel, smaller ceremonies, and a quiet place for those who wish to meditate. Again, this room will have the chairs that can be arranged as needed or stacked and stored away and cushions brought in.

Many people find it hard to picture what we need by looking at the numbers in the tables so we have printed out the floor plans of our existing buildings with some dimensions and areas along with the number of children allowed in that size space according to the recommendations. The second plan is NOT a proposed layout for our church. It is ONLY a visual representation of the areas required for each element in the Program of Needs. A few things are missing but again it is just to provide an idea on the space sizes. An architect would be hired to best layout and design our building.

Once we finished our Program of Needs, we started right away gathering information about all the options we have.

The first option is to sell our existing property and buy a church in the area that is for sale. Robert Gilman of Gilman Real Estate came to a couple of meetings and the information he gave us boils down to these facts: Based on comparable sales and current listings, the suggested listing price of our property is \$895,000, which he says is on the high end and we probably would not get that price. It has been a long time since a church sold in this area, making an estimate difficult. Also the type of property will have a small group of buyers.

The Baptist church at 43 Front Street was on the market for \$750,000. It's building has a little more area than ours, needs a lot of repairs, and has no land since the building fills the lot. So there is no space for a garden, for the children to play, or for off-street parking. There are no other churches or buildings with the areas needed on the market at this time, except a car dealership in the 2 million dollar price range. We would have plenty of parking...but not much green space. And then there is the additional cost of renovating the building. Saint Michael's Church is not on the market yet and probably won't be for quite a few years. It is rumored that they are looking at a \$2 million price, and it may not include the area we are looking for.

Our Second option is to sell, buy land, and build new. After doing a demographic study of where our members and friends live, we found that the majority live right here in Exeter so staying in town would be the best choice. We do have members and friends who walk and ride their bikes to church so we would like to keep that. But there is no land available in the downtown area that we can buy and build on. There is land on the outskirts of town near Rte 101 off exits 9 and 10 and property just over the town line. Most of the land requires private septic and well, which is not a bad thing. We would need to put in a well for the proposed geothermal heating and cooling. The nature of the land will determine the cost for site work such as trees that require removal. Prices range from \$200 – 400K per lot with some as high as \$900K. We would not be ready to buy any land or a building right now if that were the route we choose. But looking at what is out there gives a rough idea of the costs to help us decide which option to choose.

The option of buying property and building new could cost us anywhere between \$200K and nearly \$1 million for the land and then the added \$3.5-7M for the building. We would have to buy land big enough to have the right size parking lot and it would be on the outskirts of town or over the town line in a neighboring town. Would we keep our name as the First UU Society of Exeter if we no longer are in Exeter?

Options 3, 4 deal with staying right where we are.

3. Renovate and add on to our existing building. This option is the one that could go a million ways but an architect could design the best layout within our budget and best fitting our needs.
4. Tear down the existing buildings and build new on our current site.

Building new either on our existing property or on a new site would cost between \$3.5 – \$7 million dollars basing on a cost per square footage of \$150-\$300. The square footage is based on the numbers shown in the tables plus the 35% to give us the gross square footage.

These costs include the architect, site work, furniture, equipment, etc., so why pay for land on top of the new building when we already have a great location and have a good-sized lot that is big enough to build the size we need while retaining our memorial garden and a play space for the youth. We won't have all the parking we want but maybe an architect will be able to figure in a few more spaces and we can hire a shuttle bus to the parking lots a block or two away.

Option 5 is do nothing for now. This could leave us in between a program and pastoral church and just making do as we have done for so long. The comments made during the strategic planning workshop and the formation of our group suggests this is not what we want to do. A program church is one that offers more than just Sunday

services. ie Adult RE, Small Group Ministry, Coffee house, Contra dances, pot lucks. We are having some difficulty with scheduling space right now with all that is going on here all week long.

- The option to sell and buy an existing building is not possible because there are no buildings big enough to fit our needs in town, the price would be the same for our property or higher in addition to the cost of renovations.
- The same would go for buying land and building new. There would new building cost, the cost of the land, and the cost of the site work. We would be on the outskirts of town if any land is available when we are ready or in a neighboring town.
- Staying where we are and renovating our existing building can be done in phases and can be the least expensive of all the options. The existing building is of sound build and green to renovate rather than take down and build new. Plus we keep our prime location with a good size lot.
- For these reasons, the BFSG highly recommends that we stay in our current location and renovate.