

Bethesda Episcopal Church Vestry Meeting
July 21, 2021
Beacon Hill Drive, Saratoga Springs

Attendance: Fr. Charles Wallace, Priest in Charge
Darren Miller, Senior Warden
Kate Berheide, Junior Warden
Pam Houde
Field Horne
Laura Kszan
Marcia MacDonald
Steven Rucker
John Van der Veer
David Wilder
Ann Bullock, Clerk

Absent: Karen Finkbeiner, Treasurer
Sara Manny

Opening Prayer

The regular meeting of the Bethesda Episcopal Church Vestry was called to order at 7:10pm on July 21, 2021, at the home of Marcia MacDonald, by Fr. Wallace

Devotions:

Fr. Wallace offered devotions.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of June 16, 2021, were unanimously approved as corrected. (D Wilder, movant; J Vander Veer, second)

Priest-in-Charge Remarks:

He is encouraged to see some new faces in church—some returning after COVID absence and some newcomers. Requests for baptisms are up too. Vestry is asked to be sure to speak with new people and welcome visitors. Evangelism is everyone's job.

Holy Roller group meets Friday July 23 to work out covering the pews during the roof repairs. This time allows some further housekeeping and reorganization of space. He recommends removal of the seat cushions which are old and in poor shape. Consider whether the wooden pews are comfortable in themselves. The dumpsters from the roof repair will offer opportunity to discard unused/worn out items.

Outside fellowship time: Will need to think about how to use the space to allow for fellowship in cooler weather. Could the rear pews adjacent to the former children's area be removed

temporarily to allow for cold-weather fellowship. The pews could be replaced when another option or different need arises.

It will be difficult to be in the church during the roof repair which will make mid-day service inconvenient. Fr Wallace will pause mid-day service during the repair especially during August.

Holidays: He will take last week of August and first week of September holiday and has arranged for coverage (Fr Beck) during the weeks he is gone.

D Wilder asked about the necessary tower repair. D Miller reports that there will be a change order to include this work once we have an estimate. K Berheide observes that the work will be more efficiently done now and D Miller indicates that it may not be as expensive as we may have thought.

Treasurer's Financial Report: J Van der Veer

K Finkbeiner absent; J Van der Veer reports that the current expenses are in good shape versus budget. K Berheide reports that the PPP was forgiven and asks how that affects the budget and our expenses long term.

Churchwardens' Report:

Senior Warden: D. Miller

Nothing on new parish house at present. Donor still working on sale of the business. Railing to be done during roof work; roof to be completed by November, 2021. Received bid for new boiler from On-Call (current servicer) they proposed a high efficiency boiler at \$40,000. Also looking for a bid from another servicer and will need to compare the two bids to make sure they are for the same thing. Both servicers have determined that the expansion tank has been damaged and needs to be replaced. Repair may not be a long-term solution: the boiler could fail at any time. The boiler cannot be turned off: the blowers can be turned off, but the boiler must be operating all the time.

Junior Warden: C. Berheide

Craig Walton is investigating the endowment accounts and the funds available. Questions about the Rectory and the use of funds for this purpose. Several questions about the restrictions and use of each fund. The roof and bell tower repair will take over half of the funds in the account from the sale of the parish house.

The Griffith Fund, eg., cannot be touched: When we spend money on choir singers, for instance, we can't spend it on anything else. We did get court approval to spend the income to purchase hymnals. Fr Wallace reports that the account generates \$18k annually and we have been spending over \$25k which has used up any accrued surplus in the account. He recommends that the singers be evaluated, as we can only pay four scholars. Choir director has been asked to reconsider choir expenses. Griffith Fund was set up to support a boys' choir and had to be amended to allow female singers, including those from Skidmore. The fund is intended to support undergraduate music scholars.

Farrell does not play at 8am the first week of each month—with exceptions during months when he has many weddings when he may play fewer weeks.

Commission Reports:

Rectory: L Kszan

We have potential of \$500k to purchase a new rectory. L Kszan has looked at several homes in this range and there are none which would be suitable. The best available was no Outlook (similar to the current rectory in Wilton) for over \$500k—and not within walking distance. The listing is process is on hold during the Track season. The realtor suggests that we need about \$300k more to find a suitable home. D Wilder and A Bullock suggest that this is an unattainable amount. We will need to keep our eyes open and look for options within our price range.

Determine absolute needs versus wants versus “nice to have.” Standing Committee does not have requirements for a rectory: except that we need to keep funds on account from the sale. D Wilder asks about the use of the funds for support of an apartment. We could use the funds for that. Upon the sale of the former rectory, we were advised to keep \$450k toward a new rectory (which was spent on the Wilton home) and the balance was invested for the new parish house.

P Houde asked if we can rent an apartment for some time to allow for the market to cool, after selling the current rectory. The funds from the sale of the rectory could be used for the rental. K Berheide asks if it is worse to move to an apartment or to stay in Wilton –pending finding a reasonable rectory when the current housing market eases. Preferable to purchase a home that suits Fr Wallace rather than try to figure out what a future clergy member will want and purchase accordingly. Seek rental options as well, but we don’t want to uproot Fr Wallace without having a long-term home for him.

Parish house (Plan B) S Rucker:

Discussion committee: Kate, Field, Pam, Laura and Fr Wallace: Propose an option: Need space for Sunday School; music; coffee hour; vesting room and storage; spacious modern bathroom; office and meeting space; church hall and kitchen; income generation. We could do this with some creative use of the undercroft—which would also allow for remediation of crumbling foundation and water damage. Find parking, etc.

But—where is Mercy House in this? It is everywhere

Open the west side wall to an outdoor terrace. Excavate the floor to add height. Redesign the stairs and find space for a lift. Update mechanicals. This would address drainage and mold issues.

Where do we put parking? In the lot next to the church on the west.

Look at offices at 53 Spring Street which is on the market. Currently a dental office. Very visible and accessible with parking. Overlooks Congress Park. Would need renovations, but could offer some rental space for income generation. Could even potentially allow for a rectory. Listing now \$1.6M, but could be available for \$1.4M. Time of the essence since there may be other interest in the building.

Proposal:

Explore turning undercroft into usable space.

Consider purchase of 53 Spring Street.

Determine future of the current proposed new parish house: the likelihood that this will not be attainable stands in the way of seeking other options.

S Rucker suggests that Bethesda is better for our having considered Mercy House—but maybe the direction is for us to seek another plan.

D Wilder asked about the zoning: it is T-5 which allows for living space in the office building.

F Horne reminds us that if Mercy House were going forward, we might not want to look to the undercroft. In the absence of construction of Mercy House, we need to address the basement issues and remediation and renovation of the undercroft is one way to provide needs of the church infrastructure, as well as use needs.

D Wilder asks about funding issues for Spring Street. How much have we paid on Mercy House to date? D Miller advised that we have spent about \$1m—this will be a challenge since the parish is very divided about Mercy House. Some of this will be dependent on the donation – which will be less than necessary for Mercy House, but might allow sufficient funding to do the work on the church building and acquire other space as well. Issue is the timing for the donation. Donor is not likely to be able to co-sign for financing, so we need to move forward.

M MacDonald observes that if we are not going forward, we are not going anywhere. We need to move ahead on a plan.

P Houde reminds us that we do not want anyone hurt by a change in direction. Fr Wallace suggests that this does not foreclose Mercy House in the future—but it allows us to move forward now. This new plan might allow for some extra money for endowment if the donation exceeds the cost of the renovations, repairs, etc.

Discussion of options and alternatives based on timing of the donation and the work required.

Unanimous consensus that the committee explore with deliberate speed the feasibility of turning the undercroft into usable space.

Unanimous consensus that the committee explore the purchase of the Spring Street property.

Discussion of decision concerning proceeding with Mercy House: agreed that we will take more time and consideration of this to allow for all stakeholders to weigh in. Must consider ramifications of ending (and how best to communicate) closing out the Mercy House project- and to whom communication must be made.

Sound System:

S Rucker reports that Tom Moeller is still working on the sound system.

Next meeting: Augst 18 unless sooner with due notice.

Blessing and Adjournment

Blessing by Fr. Wallace

Meeting was adjourned at 9:14pm.

Respectfully submitted by:

Ann C. Bullock, Clerk