

ision TEAM

Chair, Charles Eastham, Members: Ruth Bonfiglio, Charles Eastham, Amanda Owings, Tom Rocklin, Virginia Stämler, Peter Thorne, Mike Van Meter, Claire Whitman, Nancy Haley, and Deb Schoelerman *ex officio*

The role of the **Vision** team is to lead the congregation in a planning process as it considers it options for growth, programming and building expansion. The team works closely with Martha Easter-Wells, UUA Fundraising Consultant. **Vision** has one goal. That is to emerge from this process with a consensus, far beyond a simple majority, on how we as the UUSIC should address programming and our facility in order to achieve our vision and goals as articulated in the *Decisions for Growth* effort:

Our Mission Statement

Unitarian Universalist Society of Iowa City is an inclusive and free religious community nurturing intellectual and spiritual growth and fostering social and ethical responsibility.

Our Goals

Develop an intergenerational lifespan religious education program to support intellectual and spiritual growth for members and to reach out into the community.

Expand service and action by creating a significant, unique community program for our congregation, in addition to collaborating in service and action projects with others.

Expand our efforts to create an inclusive sense of community and connection to all members, friends and visitors.
- voted on Nov. 15, 1998, Congregational Meeting

The **Vision** Group has been meeting every two weeks since August developing the background information needed to understand our programmatic goals, facility needs, growth and financial options. We led forums and after service discussions in November, January, February, March and April. In the context of our mission and goals, in December the Vision team met with various UUSIC Committees and program leaders. In addition to basic information about the purpose, activities, numbers of people involved, meeting times and frequency, we asked several questions to help us in our process of discerning our programs and facility needs. In January we compiled our information on a matrix which is posted in Channing Hall. Over the last eight months our team has gathered information from many people in our congregation during forums, focus groups with committees, individual conversations and from written comments. Some major themes that have emerged as we have gathered input on program and congregational space-related needs.

Space

The amount and type of space available for activities and meetings is the most pervasive issue that has been raised. This issue cuts across virtually every program area. The ways in which this issue is important is illustrated by several examples. The sanctuary size and shape result in crowding during Sunday worship services and a configuration that requires speakers to respond to two separate congregational areas. Our religious education program is facing classroom space issues with a number of classes having regular classes with attendance of 10-15 children. Successfully executing art projects and group activities in tight space with this many children has become a challenge. The suggestion to initiate adult religious education classes on Sundays is inhibited by lack of space. With the growth in our congregation, Channing Hall is no longer large

enough for certain activities such as potluck dinners for the entire congregation which support our lifespan religious education goal. Many committees noted the need for additional or reconfigured space in which to meet, work and store materials. An indoor recreation space that could be used by the children has been noted as desirable by Religious Education teachers and Children and Youth Committee members. Solutions to these identified needs could involve reorganizing activities, reconfiguring space or creating more space.

Accessibility

Accessibility has been a priority for the congregation, particularly during the past several years during which several important steps have been taken to eliminate barriers in our building. These have included installation of the elevator, wheelchair lift in Channing Hall, and outside ramp. However, these interim solutions are marginal at present. The chair lift in Channing Hall and the elevator are limited in the size and weight of wheelchair they can support and have had mechanical problems that cause some users to question their reliability. There are significant barriers that remain, including narrow hallways, and an inaccessible pulpit and bathrooms.

Utilities

A variety of issues related to utilities have been raised. The most frequent has been the desire by committees and congregational members to have air-conditioning. This issue has greatest implications for worship, committee meetings, and religious education during the summer months, but also affects a range of committee activities and congregational events during the warm days of the spring and fall, especially in Worthley building, which is heated easily by the morning sun. The installation of window screens and ceiling fans represents a partial, although not uncomplicated solution. The current level of electrical service in the building is not adequate for installation of additional window air-conditioners. Increased audio/video and internet capabilities throughout the building would enhance Religious Education activities and committee functioning. Issues related to plumbing include a need for better placement of bathrooms (e.g., a bathroom for children on the top floor of the Worthley Building where six classrooms are located), more space (e.g., the bathroom under the stairs), inadequate size, installation of diaper changing facilities. Properly functioning sinks are needed in all Religious Education classrooms. At present the sinks in the two lower level classrooms are functioning poorly and the six classrooms (in which painting, planting, building, gluing, and looking projects are common) on the top floor share one sink in the hallway. A kitchenette located near meetings rooms and classrooms would be helpful to support classroom activities and committee meetings.

Aesthetics

Many suggestions about how our space could be more attractive, inviting and comfortable have been offered. Accomplishing that would enhance all of our programs.

Green Space

Outdoor green space has been identified as important in several ways. This would provide for an outdoor play space for children, which could include an enclosed play space for younger children and an open area for the play and nature activities of the older children. It could create inspiring views from inside the church and could include a memorial and/or meditation garden.

Parking

Staff would benefit from closer parking to perform routine tasks which involve carrying supplies (current staff parking is at the synagogue). Volunteers sometimes have difficulty finding nearby

parking during weekday or evening meetings. A covered, accessible entrance to the church has been identified by several groups as desirable.

In order to have the facilities needed to achieve our goals, **Vision** has developed four options for the Society to consider over the coming months. When we are ready, these will be discussed in a meeting of the whole society after which we hope to arrive at a consensus of some 80% or more on which of our four options is best. The four options and information we have learned to date include:

1. Remain at our current location and make only minor renovations to our present facilities.

The current building code requirements may not be a major cost issue, if we do minor renovation.

2. Remain at our current location but make major renovations or additions to our facilities.

If we make major renovations, then we must meet current building code.

Our current footprint is not consistent with zoning building regulations (the Fireside Room). Further extension toward Iowa Ave. may not be permitted.

Mike Van Meter and Dee Norton met with City Manager Steve Atkins. In a discussion about the footprint of the building, Steve Atkins indicated that we could consider asking in writing whether the city would sell us enough land from the parking lot to extend the current building 15 to 20 feet to the east.

At a forum, a member asked if we would consider additional space in the new building across the street. There is still space available in Tower Place across the street from the church. A 3,000 sq. ft. space is \$300,000 for unfinished space.

3. Purchase and move to another building and make renovations as necessary.

Steve Atkins indicated that in Iowa City, there is no restriction to prohibit a church being built in a residential area. He suggested that we look into purchasing some sub-prime property, demolishing the buildings and building a church, thereby improving the existing neighborhood.

We have learned that to buy 1/4 block of a near downtown area of older quality rental property would range from \$550,000 to \$650,000 for acquisition alone. We are still looking in to the costs of demolition.

4. Buy land and build a new building, in phases if necessary.

An area realtor indicated that the cost of new construction would be \$100-150 per sq. ft.

An area realtor recommended considering spaces along Oakdale Rd. A 2 to 3 acre lot would cost about \$500,000.

Charlie Eastham reviewed with the **Vision** committee the process that First Christian Church used to decide on a lot to purchase. This involved touring Iowa City and electing desirable sites to investigate. They made offers on several sites, including some that were not listed for sale.

They ended up purchasing a 10-acre lot for \$350,000.

Mike Van Meter and Dee Norton met with Steve Atkins. Mike reported that he prefaced his conversation with Atkins with an explanation of our process. Atkins indicated the city would have interest in our building for two possible uses. One might be as a site for social service agencies and another might be as additional parking space.

Steve Atkins suggested the peninsula area that is available would be too small and would not provide enough space for parking or off street parking for congregational needs.

Additional information on these options and costs will be presented at the annual meeting in May and discussions will continue in small group gatherings in members' homes throughout the summer and early fall.