

UUSIC Open Forum

December 8, 2010

Approximately 15 members and friends attended the fourth in a series of open forums to be held in 2010 to discuss UUSIC facility issues. Rev. Benjamin Maucere laid the ground rules, asking every participant to use “I” statements, treat everyone equally, listen with open ears and an open heart, and that participants respect each other—assuming goodwill. Everyone was invited to speak as long as they needed, but then to only speak a second time after everyone who wanted to speak had spoken once.

The following are Notetaker Susan Salterberg’s summations of people’s comments—paraphrased as best as she could. If you identify an error in this document or wish to clarify your statement, please contact Susan Salterberg at Salterberg@msn.com.

Jill Stevenson: I think UUSIC needs to continue to be a significant part of this community, and be a leader. My idea for the facility is to temporarily move out of this building and find another place to meet. Then we would demolish this building and build an approximately 4-story building with an underground garage for around 10-20 cars. The first floor could be commercial, the second could be rented out offices, and the third and fourth floors would be our church with the main sanctuary (without permanent pews) and office spaces and possibly classrooms on the third floor with a fellowship hall similar to Channing Hall on the fourth. We would also have a terrace on the roof for outdoor receptions. This would give kids a place to go outside on beautiful days and we could have a portion be a playground.

We’d gain income from the two floors below us. I have read a lot from UUA, and also had experience with a Ft. Dodge UU regarding facility issues.

The logistics and the bonding would be complicated, but it would make our building multi-purpose. It’s a bizarre idea...

Maureen Patterson: I don’t think that is a bizarre idea at all. There is just no room at this facility for meetings. Many times I have been involved in groups where we have to meet someplace else because there is no room here to meet. Either you build new at a different site or you can environmentally responsibly implode this building. Flexibility is a good thing. Also we need more capacity and multi-use of the space.

Celia Bingham: This is valuable property. It might make a difference on getting people to join if we had a nicer facility.

Pat Hayak: I’ve been a member for over 40 years. I value the urban setting, I think this is a very special building, I think there is ageism with this building. I happen to love old buildings. I could part with the Worthley building...

I don’t think parking is a problem.

I am concerned about cost issues. We can't pay our way as it is and this has been the case for a long time. But every year we hear grandious ideas, and we can't afford them. I feel strongly about pay as you go.

If I had my druthers, I would like a survey, such as: If we were to do a new building, how much money do you think you could contribute to that? If we were to renovate this building, how much money do you think you could contribute?

We need a capital campaign before a solid plan.

My philosophy is to be happy with what we have. My philosophy is to take care of what we have.

I also strongly oppose buying land.

Peggy Houston in abstentia through Pat Hayek: Her first idea was similar to Jill Stephenson's, so I will not repeat it. The second point was that, if we consider ourselves a green sanctuary, we need to think carefully about this. The most green thing is to stay here.

She is strongly opposed to buying Iowa land, particularly farm land.

Tom McMurray: I don't have strong feelings about this, but I know we need to make decisions. I went to the website and discovered that a lot of work has been done on this issue. I am not in favor of putting a lot of money in remodeling. It is certainly worth exploring staying here, but we also could take the money this site would bring and use it at a new site.

Jill Stephenson: Has anyone explored the cost of land in the Iowa City area?

Russ Lenth: A UUSIC real estate committee has explored this some, but at an appropriate time, it would be explored more if that was the direction UUSIC's congregation wanted to go. Money is going to be a big problem, so maybe we do want to start with your survey, but I'd like to say something about faith. We are a collection of bright, creative people in a faith community and we can come up with some really innovative ideas. I just have faith we can do that. We need to put a big foot forward in terms of making a better facility. Fixing up is not an option. I think we need to do something major.

I'm not sure about the idea of surveying who would give to "x" option. I believe that we can come up with an idea that we can all stand behind. The idea of empowering people to vote with their pocketbooks as opposed to the idea we are creating...[I don't like it].

Sue Kann: It feels like a hostage situation to put out plans (new building, remodel, do nothing, etc.) and see which one gets enough money to fly. [Sue later clarified: It feels like the part of the congregation who has the ability to give money holds the other part of the congregation hostage to get their plans approved.] For years I have pledged to a facility that doesn't suit my needs or my family's needs. I don't think this decision should be made by withholding money.

I want to be a part of a generation that looks out for the future UUs in Iowa City. I think a better facility can do this. I want a facility that is respectful of being green. Even my seventh grader says we are not doing what we say [in that regard].

I think we would attract and have new growth if we had a more comfortable facility. I want to do this in a historical and fiscally responsible way. By being part of a group, it's our responsibility to not limit the future.

My college age daughter probably won't come back here [for a wedding or other celebration] because the facility doesn't work for her.

I'm here for my kids. When they are done, I'll leave as soon as I can if we don't make a facility decision that meets my needs. I think we can do this with responsible growth.

Tim Wilson: I'm a relative newcomer to this area. I live in Mt. Vernon and came from NY, and I don't have a lot invested in this building. I do have a great deal invested in our larger community. I have been a member of three other UU churches, president of a congregation a little larger than this..., been a staff member at a much larger church... The most important things that have drawn me to get more involved have been a sense of community. The people, not the place—but the form must meet the function. Secondly, some are more grounded in their community, and others are more global and interconnected. I happen to believe that we need to “evangelize” to bring people in. For my wife and I, the decision about whether we join the People's Church in Cedar Rapids or the UUSIC will be what the congregations decide to do with facilities. I have great faith in our UUA to help churches with this undertaking (capital campaigns, etc.) I have also seen the downtown church in Louisville honor a space, architecturally, even when they tore it down.

Susan Salterberg directed at Tim: At some point, I'd be interested in hearing what's going on with the People's Church related to facility issues.

Bill Nowysz: Over the years I have seen the church go from a very exciting, young church that was inspiring and electric. Maybe it's my age, but it seems the church is not as electric as it used to be. The facility has served us well, but it has aged and for some reason we haven't kept the repairs up.

The existing building, I've always felt, has been warm. But the addition was ill-conceived and it doesn't fit. If we were to stay here, I would like to see us do something about it. If we did something, I think we could get some enthusiasm back into this place. I think if we razed that building, we could get a lot for not really a lot of money. This is a really difficult, difficult question.

Gail McLure: I've come to every one of the meetings, and I've appreciated the interesting ideas that came up, especially tonight.

Maureen Patterson: I want to dispel the notion that remodeling is always the greenest thing to do. I used to work for an architectural magazine, and specialized in green building issues. I think the green option can be a part of any decision we make.

Phil Beck: I came to listen. I've been involved in this community for a couple of years and I know this is an important issue, but I don't really have a strong opinion.

Pat Hayek: I'm curious of whether you think it would be a good idea to do a survey where we find out approximately what people would contribute to different ideas.

Benjamin Maucere: People give to vision, not need.

Tom McMurray: I think that's the conclusion we came to several years ago.

Gail McLure: The idea of tearing down the RE building...a lot of us have found that building to be uncomfortable. If it were totally torn down, what implications are there to do, say, geothermal heating?

Bill Nowysz: I have been involved in geothermal that was in a very small area, drilling holes vertically rather than horizontally. In this case, if we razed the Worthley building, we could install geothermal, but I would not recommend building on top of the geothermal. There are solutions if we think about the space available where the Worthley building is located.

Jill Stephenson: Could you [Tim] tell us what's happening at People's Church?

Tim Wilson: Cedar Rapids made a decision to sell their property. They had two buyers who backed out. They have thought about buying two different places. They are prepared to sit tight, waiting to entertain offers. They seem to look at this as an adventure. They are not talking at all about building new.

Benjamin Maucere thanked everyone for coming.