



CEDAR LANE

WHERE **LOVE** WORKS

Capital Assets Planning Committee Notes from Congregational Listening Sessions July, 2017

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To kick off the work of Ritter Norton Architects, the CAPC held two open meetings with the congregation both before and after service on Sunday, July 9, and followed up with six focus group sessions on July 11 and 12. All were intended to learn from members what their concerns were about the physical facilities at CLUUC and how they can be improved to further our mission. Jim Ritter and Derek Norton of Ritter Norton, AIA attended the July 9 service, experienced coffee time, and attended the two open meetings. Jim was at the Tuesday focus groups, Derek did the Wednesday ones. Approximately 45 members and friends participated in the Sunday meetings; focus groups ranged in size from 3 to 6 members, in addition to representatives from CAPC. Representation included folks who know the buildings in different ways: ushers, greeters, yoga users/teachers, RE teachers, parents, choir, worship associates, grounds, environmental advocates, social justice leaders, etc. Several had been involved in the 2003 Kerns study.

Staff also met with Derek and Jim on Friday, July 14.

For the focus meetings, the groups gathered around floor plans of the existing buildings to have a conversation. The level of detail in these conversations ranged from lofty (what makes a space spiritually sacred?), to specific (do something about storage!). The following is a summary of insights gained from both the Sunday sessions and the focus groups.

What do you love about the buildings and grounds?

- The site itself, wooded and connected to nature.
- Sanctuary windows. Nearly everyone noted them.
- Chapel space.
- Building is faithful to Pietro Belluschi's original vision; even though dedicated sanctuary was never built, this member believes space works as is and is opposed to building a separate sanctuary.

What makes a space feel sacred?

- Windows, light streaming in, closeness of nature, cycles of nature

- Seating arrangements
- Beauty. Art incorporated creatively in the space.
- Sound. Good acoustics. No distractions.
- Memory garden, viewed from main room of Chalice House, is space that also feels sacred.

What are challenges to the space in general?

- Most other congregations have two large gathering spaces; we really only have one. Much labor involved in constantly changing sanctuary from worship mode to banquet or workshop mode and back again.
- “A VFW hall with pretty windows.” Sanctuary feels cold, sterile -- more like a gymnasium or cafeteria space. Though some really like its mid-century simplicity.
- Hard to be welcoming when entry is cramped, circulation is confusing.
- Incremental degradation of aesthetic space; used to have “gatekeeper” for changes, such as new audio speakers in sanctuary, signage, but now there is no overall guidance. Spaces are cluttered.
- When most of the wing that is now library and offices was used as Lounge, gathering space was beautiful and worked well for fellowship. When subdivided for offices, we lost a lot of this space, not fully recaptured in current Lounge.
- Lounge is quite dysfunctional: for gathering, for passage, for most everything.
- Need more spaces sized similar to current library.
- Don’t forget to include Chalice House in thinking of space.

How do you experience arrival?

- Easily missed when passing by on Cedar Lane. Commonly hear “I’ve lived around here for years and never knew you were here.”
- Awkward drop-off for parking; grading too steep for handicap parking,
- No easy path for persons using wheelchairs or other assistance from any of the parking areas into building. Exception is Chalice House.
- Can’t tell where to enter building.

Entering the Building

- There is no good welcoming space. Foyer is cramped, very cold in winter. Greeters have to be too close to the door -- feels like accosting, stalking people.
- “When we have to have the words ‘Main Entrance’ over our front door... something is wrong.
- Signage and circulation in general are poor; not very welcoming.
- Need larger space upon entering building, improved circulation to reduce congestion.

Circulation:

- Bottlenecks at main entrance on Sunday and for big events like memorials, speakers.
- Lounge space very crowded; lots of tables for specific ministries, book sales, etc. cut into space. Especially crowded during coffee time.
- Hallway outside the chapel gets crowded.
- Five internal stairways but only two are used regularly.

- For newcomers, the path to RE area is unclear. Greeter often has to escort them there. Impression: RE is not as important here as they say. Separateness contributes to “upstairs/downstairs” culture.
- When sanctuary is in use, can’t go to office area unless through library, which during worship serves as quiet space for members. A sense of disturbing them by passing through.
- Downstairs wheelchair experience: difficult to find elevator if one is even able to haul in through the rear ramp, which is very steep. Outside groups use downstairs level, people coming to meetings are not familiar with the building.

Sanctuary:

- Physical setup doesn’t fit our mission; something like “theatre in the round” more conducive to community building; others pointed out that our space is flexible and we could choose to set up chairs in a circular style without architectural changes. However, that pattern means fewer seats possible in the space.
- Lots of wasted space behind shoji screens.
- Acoustics are poor, and terrible under the balcony. Controls for the audio speakers don’t seem to always be in sync.
- Floor is linoleum, utilitarian, detracts from spiritual feel.
- Contemplative nature of the setting is important; don’t lose those spaces!
- Building a dedicated sanctuary would sacrifice part of forest.
- Scale of the shoji screen too overwhelming; need to break up, possibly with colors.
- Stage not accessible.
- Don’t forget flowers in both sanctuary and chapel. Both have dedicated spaces with spotlights for visibility.
- Rear, under loft, is used for overflow seating. It can be closed off with folding wooden doors. Unless closed off, can be noisy as ushers and others stand around, people pass through to get to/from office area. When closed off, our seating is greatly reduced. When this area is used for seating, the acoustics in it are terrible, especially when choir is in loft.
- Build a new sanctuary purposefully; make current one our fellowship hall.

Choir:

- Much discussion re: merits of choir performing from front of sanctuary rather than balcony. While most seemed to agree that they’d prefer choir to perform from front to be better integrated into service and build community, there was concern from several choir members re: need to avoid sitting through two whole services.
- When choir is on the floor, seating in the sanctuary is reduced by 25%. Ditto if bell choir is performing. Seldom do both perform at once, if so, usually one of them is on risers on stage.
- Would love to have separate music wing with rehearsal space.
- Think of other music events we host; how can they be served by our space?
- Some think our acoustics were designed to hear sound from the loft.

Lounge:

- Lots of discussion re: lounge being unsuitable, too small and chopped up, a connecting passageway runs through the middle, overall not comfortable.
- Crowded, chaotic after Sunday services. Can get so crowded that some avoid it, leave after service rather than taking part.
- Some congregations (ex. Arlington UU) have larger lounge that includes “discussion tables” to allow deeper conversations after service.
- Noisy, no elbow room. Awful acoustics make conversation impossible.
- Create “Starbucks” atmosphere for lounge to invite lingering?

Lower Level:

- Get rid of “upstairs/downstairs” cultural divide. Some of this is reinforced by building.
- Creating meeting lounge on lower level could accommodate parents in different ways.
- Consider providing space for alternative methods of worship, such as a dedicated meditation space.
- Lots of meetings during the week that are rentals; is there an opportunity to encourage some attendees to come upstairs to learn more about CLUUC? (responses included that Membership Team is stationing outreach materials downstairs to help visitors learn more about us; also many of these groups are AA, NA and prefer anonymity).
- We should determine what the nursery school, as a long-term tenant, needs. (CAPC met with them subsequently).

Religious Education

- How is the field of religious education changing? What are implications for our spaces? DRE candidates would prefer some non-didactic opportunities. Though we’re likely to remain largely classroom based.
- Plan on some growth from current numbers of RE children, youth once we have stable staffing, more welcoming building in general.
- Need larger space so can have greater number of folks together at once. Though some spaces can be combined to make larger, we’re not doing that. Classrooms under the sanctuary -- sound penetrates above, so restricts some uses.
- Need teen space. If we lose some of the space dedicated to teens in the Chalice House, should we consider several of the windowless rooms on lower level?
- Cedar Lane is unusual in having high school age kids meeting on Sunday.

Outdoor courtyard:

- Beautiful space that’s underutilized. When the library area served as the Lounge, kids could play there while their parents enjoyed coffee and conversation within view.
- Can some kind of roofing be installed that would make part of this a year-round atrium space that could blend outdoors with indoors and create new paths for circulation?
- Remember, some trees are memorials.

Office Space

- Minister offices need more privacy, so persons seeking pastoral care can enter discretely.

- Reception desk is far from any exterior entrance to the building. Confusing to visitors, and a security issue.
- Some offices are cramped and too small (Exec Director), others are also passages, making for interruptions.
- There is no break room. No space to gather informally.
- Not all staff have to be in same general area, but desirable.
- Properly designed, cubicles in shared space could work for most staff.

Adjacencies

- Inadequate storage, especially since HVAC installation used some of the already tight supply. Consider providing storage so items can be near where they are used.
- Kitchen location dictates certain adjacencies. What if we went back to having the “lounge” in the library wing? What if we moved the offices out, took down the walls -- and made all or most of this wing into the social hall? It would be bigger than now and the fireplace is wonderful. But the kitchen is on the opposite side of the sanctuary, a real impediment for food events, -- especially for rental events. Kitchens are tough to move.

Accessibility

- Our “elevator” -- really more of a lift -- is an embarrassment. If we do nothing else, we must change this, including locating it in a more obvious place as part of becoming welcoming.
- Getting from handicapped parking into building is challenging for users of wheelchairs due to grade changes and condition of paved surfaces.

Overarching Issues / Insights

- CLUUC does not have a “culture of authority;” hard to develop consensus between the “dreamers” and the “naysayers.”
- We need to be welcoming in a multi-cultural way, mindful of subtleties of white supremacy and how they are reflected in our building. See notes from the white supremacy workshop, particularly when people individually walked around in the shoes of a person of color new to CLUUC. Many, many examples were noted.
- Consider specific programming... what’s growing vs. what’s shrinking? What do we want to grow and how do we create space that encourages that?
- How will Religious Education be delivered in ten years? Classrooms vs more flexible space.
- Make sure entire campus has excellent wireless service -- to enable us to incorporate streamed materials into RE, worship; to be attractive to revenue-generating users.
- Security. We need to pay a lot more attention to it. Lots of entry doors that are not locked except late night. Reception desk is deeply buried in the building, no obvious path. People can wander around. With children in nursery school, this is a big problem. Lighting outdoors is poor, sometimes timer turns off exterior lights while people are still in the building.

- Need to screen outdoor components of new HVAC system (Grounds Team rep responded that this is still in process and will be addressed).
- CLUUC has dedication to social justice; important to build in flexibility to our space to include new opportunities (such as sanctuary space).
- Need “quilting room” type space going forward; if not specifically quilting, there needs to be some small workshop-type space that can be locked and secure for storage of supplies for future projects.
- Are there potential revenue-generating uses if we had spaces that accommodated their requirements while also accommodating our needs?
- We’re asking questions we’ve not asked before, which is good.

Ideas Floated

- Recapture area behind shoji screen. Remove stage, add space to sanctuary. If we did this, could punch out some of rear wall and replace it with glass similar to windows.
- Punch out Lounge space, maybe add a deck for use in good weather.
- How about a “coffee house” / performing space? Most Islamic Centers have something like this, about creating a place for gathering in times that are not worship, a hip space, may have rental value, too.
- How can we make it “our congregation” rather than “upstairs / downstairs?”