

SEATTLE UNITY: NEW FACILITY FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION

Most recent update: Sept 2014

1. Q Why are we planning to redevelop Seattle Unity?

A: There are two primary reasons the Board of Trustees and membership have decided to proceed with the redevelopment project.

First, our building is currently in need of millions of dollars of deferred maintenance, repairs and upgrades - including a new HVAC system, new windows, electrical upgrades, new lighting in sanctuary, a new roof, and a redesign of the interior and sanctuary. As a result, we find ourselves spending a lot of time and staff energy patching and fixing when what is really required is a major overhaul. While we have a significant reserve fund, it is not large enough to continually patch and fix our building, and we certainly do not have the millions of dollars that would be required for the upgrades noted above.

Second, we would like to build a much more substantial reserve fund that would provide additional income to the church on an on-going basis. We believe that the sale of a portion of the property could provide the funds needed to build both a new facility - without incurring debt - and a larger reserve fund that will allow us to maintain our new facility over time and provide additional resources to support and expand the work of Seattle Unity in our community.

2. Q How was the decision made to sell or lease the north portion of the lot?

A: At several meetings in the fall of 2012, the congregation strongly expressed its desire to stay on our current site and to rebuild the building rather than move or renovate. Given the fact that the real estate market conditions in South Lake Union at this time are highly favorable, the Seattle Unity Visioning [SUV] Team, the primary planning group, determined that the best way to build on our current site without incurring debt would be to redevelop the property with another owner who would control the north portion of our lot. The Board approved this recommendation, and the congregation overwhelmingly approved this approach at the 2014 Annual Meeting.

Furthermore, current city zoning rules favor the development of residential space in our neighborhood. Therefore, the sale or lease of the north portion to a co-developer who would create residential units will help Seattle Unity garner city approval for its plans. Such a sale or lease will also generate the funds we need to build a state-of-the art, mortgage-free facility, as well as the cash reserves to support future building maintenance.

3. Q Why are we doing this now? Wouldn't we be better off preserving all of our property for the future, taking into consideration the 7th generation philosophy?

A: We cannot count on continued increases in property valuation over generations. The SUV Team studied the South Lake Union market and real estate trends nationally and locally. Once the South Lake Union neighborhood is built out, our property may retain its value, but it will become yesterday's news. Accordingly, the SUV Team and the Board concluded that we have a market window of opportunity that is optimal and may be fleeting.

4. Q Rather than sell the north portion, why don't we fully develop our property on our own with commercial and residential spaces to bring revenue for the church's future?

A: We are currently considering several options for how our new space could be used to increase revenues to the church. These ideas include continuing to have a spiritual bookstore, attracting a weekday pre-school tenant, possibly a coffee shop, and renting our parking during the week. However, the Board has determined that it is not in our best interest to divide our focus/mission by attempting to be in the property management business.

5. Q Are we planning for our church as it is now or something different for the future?

A: Seattle Unity, like many urban churches, has been a "commuter" church drawing congregants from many communities of Seattle. In addition to our commuters, we would like attract congregants from the many single people, couples and families moving into the South Lake Union neighborhood. We would also like to be an attractive venue for weddings, lectures, classes and other special events in the neighborhood, thereby increasing our visibility and interactions in the community.

6. Q How were the architects chosen?

A: The SUV Team made inquiries to people such as developers, realtors and a retired professor of architecture at the U of W about architects who would be appropriate candidates for the two phases of our project - the feasibility study phase and the design phase. A list of eight prospective candidates was developed, and members of the Team made phone calls to them and reported to the Team those who were interested. From the several proposals submitted for the feasibility phase, the Team chose Hewitt and Associates [Hewitt] based on their interest, knowledge of land use regulations, and experience with redevelopment and reputation for reliable results. Hewitt reported to the congregation on the feasibility study at the 2014 Annual Meeting and was well received.

For the design phase of the project, requests for proposals were again circulated to those architects who had previously shown interest. Three firms made presentations to the SUV Team in May, and the SUV Team recommended to the Board that it contract with Hewitt for the next phase. At its June 2014 meeting, the Board approved this recommendation.

7. Q How will we be working with the architects on the design?

A: A Design Team selected by the Senior Minister and Chair of the Board will work with the architects and guide the design process. This Team will draw on many sources as it seeks to provide the architects with a composite view of what we want in a new facility. These sources include congregational input that has been provided through the Visioning Sessions that Reverend Karen has been convening over the past several months; the values incorporated in our Mission and Vision Statements; and notes of several discussions that have occurred regarding our facility over the past 10 years at Board retreats and in strategic planning sessions.

8. Q Who will make final decisions about the design of the church?

A: Hewitt will provide preliminary design options for the Design Team and the Board to consider. The Board will then bring these options to the voting membership, who will choose among the options. Once we know the final costs of the chosen design, the membership will need to approve the expenditure of funds.

9. Q How "green" will our new building be? To what degree are we going to build an environmentally friendly facility?

A: To begin with, one of the many reasons we decided to build a new facility was a growing concern about the maintenance and energy inefficiencies and other environmental issues related to our current building. So, from the outset, the Board, staff, and the SUV Team set as a vision to design and build a facility that would be as green and environmentally conscious as our budget will allow.

Our architects - Hewitt - understand this vision, and it is worth noting that several of their professional staff have what are known as LEED credentials. LEED stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, a set of rigorous and nationally-recognized standards in the field of green building design. So, our architects are bringing that environmental sensibility and awareness to their design process.

We also know that simply by building a facility that is more efficiently sized to meet our needs is an environmental improvement by itself. But beyond that, our budget will drive our decisions about how "green" we can go - and our budget will be determined by the amount of the proceeds we can realize from the sale of

the north portion of our property. Green buildings are very expensive to build. Notable green buildings in Seattle, such as the Bullitt Foundation and the Gates Foundation, had large financial resources behind them. We will not have that same level of financial support, but our new facility will be a vast improvement over our current building in terms of green-ness and environmental efficiencies.

10. Q How will we be marketing the north portion of our property?

A: The SUV Team will draft the requirements that we have for a developer of the north parcel. The Team has researched likely developers and will reach out to them with our requirements. Other candidates from the development community may also wish to be considered. Negotiations will be spearheaded by the SUV Team, which will make recommendations to the Board. The Board will make its own decision and then submit it to the voting membership for final approval.

11. Q Who will choose the contractor?

A: The Board of Trustees will choose the contractor based on recommendations from the SUV Team and in consultation with our architect.

12. Q Where will the church be located during construction?

A: The Board will appoint a Relocation Team to consider options for temporary housing, ensure membership engagement and retention, and address other issues that will likely arise during our time between buildings.

13. Q How long will this process take?

A: It is the goal of the Board and SUV that we will have a grand re-opening of Seattle Unity church in June of 2017. As anyone who has ever built a house or done remodeling knows, timelines and projections in these things can change dramatically as the project unfolds. We should expect the same to be true about the redevelopment of our property.

14. Q What are other ways I can get my questions answered?

A: If you have further questions, you can use one or more of the following options:

Email: Send your questions to suvision@seattleunity.org. This e-mailbox is checked weekly.

Q+A Sessions: The Board hosts monthly face-to-face updates where you can get your questions answered. These are currently held the 3rd Sunday of each month. Check the weekly email newsletter or the website calendar for exact dates and times.

Website: Check our Website under [New Facility News](#) regularly.