

Q & A - Specific questions and responses

The following are questions submitted by members and friends of the congregation via the online comment form and the ***Building Our Future*** Team's responses:

Questions received 3/31/2021

1. How far (how much farther) will the average church member be driving? I'm concerned about the environmental impact of potential increased transit time & distance.
2. What about the existing Memorial Garden? What will happen to it?

Responses

1. As the Building Our Future Team has explored various properties, 19 to date, we have carefully tracked the distance to each using the intersection of N. Broadway and Second Street SW as a constant point of reference. Our current building is 2.4 miles from that point. The Building Our Future webpage on the church website includes a map denoting the mailing address locations for current members. You will note that we have members in all quadrants of the city.

<https://uurochmn.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Decade-Progression-Member-locations-1.jpg>

2. For over 30 years the Memorial Garden has been a tranquil location on our property with deep sacred meaning for the entire congregation and especially for those who have loved ones interred in this holy ground. As the Building Our Future Team has considered possible locations, we have reviewed each site knowing any future property **must** include appropriate space for a new Memorial Garden. Our current operating policy clearly outlines what would need to happen should a move occur. Our Minister, the Memorial Garden Team, and members of the congregation will ensure that this process is carried out with deep respect.

“The First Unitarian Universalist Church of Rochester, Minnesota will maintain the Memorial Garden, the *In Loving Memory* memorial plaque in the church lobby, and the *Garden Panel of Names* as long as the church exists in its present location. If the church should move, a representative sample from the Memorial Garden will be also be moved to the new location, a new Memorial Garden will be established, and both memorial plaques will be installed in appropriate places in the new church.”

Question from 3/30/2021

Has any thought been given to a multi-use project? Since the building project is named Beyond Ourselves, I wonder if affordable housing AND a church collaboration could be considered. See this article: <https://salud-america.org/can-churches-help-with-the-affordable-housing-crisis/>

Response

Our *Building the Future – Beyond Ourselves Program Statement* offers an ever growing list of potential ideas that might be incorporated into a new building at a different location so that nothing is forgotten. I have added a bullet to the list which reads: “Possible multi-use projects in partnership with community partners such as but not limited to affordable housing” so that we do not lose your suggestion.

When the subtitle – Beyond Ourselves – was added to our team charge, it was in response to information shared by an Autumn Ridge representative, who reminded us to work for today and the future. That we should want a building that even when all of us have departed, 50 or more years from now, congregants will ask “Who were these people who built a building that meets our needs today?” We were thinking about future generations of UUs but, you are correct, the phrase, “beyond ourselves” can also speak to our mission within the broader community.

As we continue this initial discernment process, the Building Our Future Team (BOT) will continue to focus on a variety of immediate questions and suggestions. The congregation will need to determine whether our current building or a new location is better suited to fulfilling our mission. Our Team would like to stay focused on this question while still keeping in mind the wonderful possibilities which the right location and necessary space could enable.

Follow up question from 3/31/2021

Sorry I wasn't clearer. What's the market value of the proposed property?

Response

While the Board has acknowledged the possibility of this very generous gift, neither the Board nor the Building Our Future Team knows the specific value of the potential 10 acres of land in NE Rochester. Our Team remains focused on the broader question facing the congregation – whether our current building or a new location is better suited to fulfilling our mission – especially since the anonymous donors have indicated a willingness to consider other parcels should the congregation vote to move. At this time the Team has investigated 19 potential available properties, with boots-on-the-ground at 10 sites. These 19 range in price from \$15 per acre to \$652 per acre.

Question received from 3/29/2021

If this has been asked before, I apologize, but what is the market value of the property?

Response

Representatives of the Building Our Future Team met with Realtors Merl and Dan Groteboer in January 2020. Based on a walk-through of the building and a review of documents, they estimated our building and property with a market value of \$3-4 million. In their opinion, our building and grounds were "very salable to potential buyers". As time has lapsed since this initial assessment, the Building Our Future Team plans to secure updated information once small groups can once again visit the building.

We are contesting being designated as a landmark status by the City of Rochester / Heritage Preservation Commission. The valuation of our property and the pool of potential buyers would likely be significantly reduced if we become landmark status.

Question received from 3/29/2021

I am curious why the location of the proposed site is not made available to the congregation.

Response

We know there is considerable interest in receiving more information about the parcel of land being considered as a potential gift. As reported at the two recent building forums, the Building Our Future Team will be planning virtual site visits and possibly on site walks as well. Once details have been arranged with the owners, more information will be shared with the congregation.

The Building Our Future Team continues to explore potential locations and other parcels of land. While we were extremely grateful to learn of the generous offer of land in NE Rochester, we continue to focus on a variety of questions and issues raised during this discernment process. The congregation will need to determine whether our current building or a new location is better suited to fulfilling our mission. Our Team does not want the focus to shift to a specific parcel of land especially since the anonymous donors have indicated a willingness to consider other parcels should the congregation vote to move.

Questions received from 3/17/2021

Is the site walkable? Bikable? On a bus line? What is its walk score?

Responses

Is the site walkable? The site is within a residential neighborhood which has sidewalk infrastructure in place.

What is its walk score? Walkscore.com rates the walk score as 1, which is 'car-dependent, all errands require a car'. Our current church walkscore is 26, which is 'most errands require a car'.

Bikeable? Walkscore.com rates the bike score as 41, which is 'somewhat bikeable with minimal bike infrastructure'. We interpret the minimal bike infrastructure to mean there is a lack of dedicated bike pathways. Walkscore.com does not list a bike score for our current church, but our assessment is that it would have a similar rating to the 41 based on 'somewhat bikeable with minimal bike infrastructure'.

On a bus line? The nearest bus line (runs both weekday and weekend) is approximately 2 miles from the property. The nearest bus line to our current church is approximately 1 mile (either St. Mary's hospital or T.J. Maxx)

Correction: It was noted that there's a bus route that goes down the west frontage road, which puts the current site within 1/4 mile of a bus stop.

Questions from 2/27/2021

1. Is this property already zoned for commercial building? How many of the sites listed currently have the required zoning? Doesn't a church require commercial zoning?

Responses:

[Doesn't a church require commercial zoning?](#) The City of Rochester Zoning Ordinance and Land Development Manual (link below) defines land usage and zoning codes. For example, there are different zoning codes for land developed for use as residential, commercial, industrial, education / public service, agriculture, etc.

Churches are defined as an 'Area Accessory Development' (AAD) per section 62.149. An AAD is defined as a 'development which provides facilities to meet the area needs of a social or technical nature'. Public parks and schools (nursery, elementary, secondary) are other examples of an AAD.

The potential gift property is located in an area zoned as residential. The manual states an AAD can be built / developed in areas zoned as residential, subject to regulations and restrictions as defined in the tables. A good example to look at is the Section 62.221 (page 156) table for property zoned R-1.

Please note the above is our understanding after reading the applicable sections of the manual, but is subject to change based on misinterpretation of the manual, or zoning regulations we are not aware of.

The City of Rochester Zoning Ordinance and Land Development Manual <https://www.rochestermn.gov/Home/ShowDocument?id=18085>

[Is this property already zoned for commercial building?](#) The property is within a residential zoned area, which allows AAD properties per above.

[How many of the sites listed currently have the required zoning?](#) The properties we have looked at have been located within residential or agricultural zoning types. AAD's are allowed in agricultural as well as residential zoned areas.

2. [What is the terrain of this land and what is the existing vegetation/trees? Does property hold troublesome varieties like elm or ash, buckthorn, other invasives?](#)

Response: Regarding the terrain, see detailed in responses (below). Invasives have not been documented at this time. More info can come later.

3. How many years are the donors willing to pay taxes on these 10 acres while the church deliberates the acceptance of this gift or tries to acquire enough funding in a capital fund campaign?

Response: The property owners will be responsible for all taxes, assessments, insurance, etc. pending the outcome of the discernment process, congregational votes, and the selection of a building site, if the vote is to build new, and until such time as the Board accepts the gift of land.

4. Do we know the results in relation to age ranges of members or length of years of membership?

Response: The 2019 congregation survey did not capture demographic data from the 204 respondents.

5. How many would be comfortable making that commitment in the next few months?

Response: More information will be available after Stewardship 4 Us conducts a congregational assessment in May 2021.

6. How will you ensure that a balance of our membership makes appointments to meet with the consultant?

Response: We are contracting with a reputable consulting firm, recommended by the UUA. *Stewardship 4 Us* will implement proven methodologies for selecting church leaders and congregants to interview. This initial assessment by an outside individual familiar with UU values will provide the Board and the Financial Stewardship Team with an unbiased assessment of our organizational and financial health, especially in these unprecedented times.

7. What are people thinking now?

Response: More information will be available after Stewardship 4 Us conducts a congregational assessment in May 2021.

8. Can we possibly see some data on our total operating budgets & membership over the last decade, number of pledging units/age range and range of pledges?

Response: More information will be available after Stewardship 4 Us conducts a congregational assessment in May 2021.

Questions from 2/17/2021

We have a few questions about the potentially donated land. We haven't seen a physical description of the land. Is it flat or hilly? Open or wooded? Is it all available for the building and for parking spaces, or is only a part of it available for those functions? Does it already have city water, sewer and power? Could a church building be situated so solar power would be an option?

Responses:

1. Is it flat or hilly? A ballpark estimate based on aerial maps and walking the site is that approximately 2/3 to 3/4 of the property is flat or has a mild slope which could be developed. There is a drop off on the remaining 1/4 to 1/3 of the property which could be utilized for wooded walking paths, etc. This estimate is subject to future architectural and civil engineering assessments which would take place if the congregation votes to build new instead of stay.

Our current church is located on a 3.11 acre parcel. The building, upper driveway, and parking lots total footprint is about half of the 3.11 acres when viewed on an aerial map. The other half is not usable due to the steep terrain. Therefore we are limited to the approximate 1.5 acre usable footprint on the current site, and we roughly estimate there likely would be 6 to 7 acres of usable footprint in the 10 acre property that could be developed for a building, parking, roads, etc.

(Note- the adjacent parcel we sold to the Jehovah's Witness church is 1.88 acres).

2. Open or wooded? It has both open areas and woods. There's mature old-growth hardwoods, lower height cedars (similar to Eastern red cedar), and the omnipresent buckthorn. A significant quantity of the old-growth trees on the property perimeter could likely be retained. Some trees on the property interior would have to be removed dependent on siting of the buildings, drive, and parking. The view lines from the property offer a sense of privacy and connection to the natural world.

3. Is it all available for the building and for parking spaces, or is only a part of it available for those functions? We ballpark 2/3 to 3/4 of the property could be developed for these functions per the above flat vs hilly response. There appears to be enough space to accommodate a private memorial garden, community gardens, RE / youth projects, and also develop the land to include plants and habitat which support biodiversity such as bees, butterflies, a variety of birds, etc.

4. Does it already have city water, sewer and power? Yes, the property is in the Rochester city limits, and we can connect to these services. No septic or well is needed, but it is likely a sewage lift pump would be required due to the elevation of where the sewage system would be connected. There are no overhead power lines in this general area which would detract from the feeling of connection to nature.

5. **Could a church building be situated so solar power would be an option?** Yes! The site has excellent southern exposure and it appears to be ideal for solar power / passive energy conservation. The property elevation decreases going south, so there is little chance if new structures were built on the south side they would block access to solar energy.