

Northwest Unitarian Universalist Congregation (NWUUC)

Report on Long-Term Expansion Options for NWUUC

LTO Committee



April 2014

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Overview

The Long-term Options Committee (LTOC) was charged with a mission of determining a path toward answering questions around the long-term membership direction for NWUUC. Questions such as:

How can we open our community to more people? How can we deal with the physical limitations of our present facilities in all four dimensions: fellowship space, parking space, RE space and sanctuary space?

The goal was not to change the direction of NWUUC, but to understand how we can balance growth along with the physical, spiritual and fellowship needs of our congregation. Though our focus here is on longer-term options, it is important to recognize that each one of the options discussed below could involve different shorter-term paths to shorter-term solutions.

Guiding Principles and Tenets

In order to focus the investigation our long-term options, the LTOC took into account a few tenets as guiding principles:

- The NWUUC Mission - Our congregation creates a loving community, inspires joy and spiritual growth, and supports courageous action.
- Our congregation has grown since Terry's arrival and appears poised to grow further. ([NWUUC Growth Statistics](#))
- There is a desire for our community to remain open to further growth.
- The growth of our congregation should encourage spiritual growth and fellowship, facilitate community, and minimize financial and environmental costs.

We recognized that some of these principles can conflict with one another. To that end, we have investigated options that would attempt to balance each of our principles, but may favor one over another. We agreed that our job was to present as many analyzed options to the congregation as we could, rather than make recommendations.

In order to focus the potential options, we did discuss an "ideal congregation size." We moved forward assuming that a reasonable congregation target size was around 250-275 members. In the end, the congregation needs to agree on the right path, but we used that number to allow our options to have a bit more context. The number of 250-275 members came about based on previous conversations that included some of the topics below:

- 275 members would be about 50% growth.
- It has been discussed that 250 members would be a sweet spot which would add members and resources without losing our sense of community.
- It is a little more than the peak size we reached temporarily 15 years ago.

- The second-service experiment suggests that our sanctuary and parking lot would support growth to about 250-275 members with two services. We now have 115 parking spaces; during the experiment, maximum use has run between 60 and 70 spaces.

The LTOC recommends that further discussion take place around an “ideal congregation size” so that the long-term direction options can be better honed. Additionally, should we achieve growth to 250-275 members, we would again need to consider some of the same options laid out below. ([Options at Greater than 250-275 Members](#))

What We Considered

When investigating the options for growth, the LTOC attempted to include all possible scenarios. Below is a list of the options that we considered:

- Internal Options
 - 1 vs 2 services
 - Various models for multiple services
 - Growth with no expansion of the NWUUC facilities
 - Growth with varying degrees of expansion of our facilities
 - Electronic options
- External Options
 - Search for another property
 - Purchase land and build new facilities
 - Spawn a new UU fellowship

Options for Growth

None of our options led this committee to a perfect solution. This section will summarize the options considered by the LTOC. Further details of each option are available in the [Appendix](#).

50-40 Option: 50% Growth with 40% Sanctuary Expansion

This option would seek to grow membership by 50% supported by a 40% increase in the sanctuary size and an increase in the size of the chalice house. It would include:

- Expanding our sanctuary space by 40% (cost of \$127k to \$176k) ([Note 1 – 40% Expansion](#))
- Allowing for 50% membership growth while maintaining one service
- Expanding our parking by 50 spaces or ½ acre (cost of \$225k to \$300k) ([Note 2 – Expanded Parking](#))
- Extending the Chalice House to provide RE and other space (cost of \$280k) ([Note 3 – Expand Chalice House](#))
- Adding fellowship space with one of three sub-options (cost of \$75k to \$160k) ([Note 4 – Add Fellowship Space](#))

Total Projected Cost: \$707k to \$916k¹

50-20 Option: 50% Growth with 20% Sanctuary Expansion

This option would seek to grow membership by 50% supported by a 20% increase in the sanctuary size and an increase in the size of the Chalice House. It would include:

- Expanding our sanctuary space by 20% (cost of \$64k to \$88k) ([Note 5 – Expand Sanctuary by 20%](#))
- Allowing for 50% membership growth while maintaining one service most of the time
- At a 250-member congregation, there would be times that the sanctuary would not hold all members of the congregation. NWUUC would therefore provide for a live feed from the service for overflow seating ([Note 6 – Live Feed](#))
- Expanding our parking by 50 spaces or ½ acre (cost of \$225k to \$300k) ([Note 2 – Expanded Parking](#))
- Extending the Chalice House to provide RE and other space (cost of \$280k) ([Note 3 – Expand Chalice House](#))
- Adding fellowship space with one of three sub-options (cost of \$75k to \$160k) ([Note 4 – Add Fellowship Space](#))

Total Projected Cost: \$644k to \$828k¹

While the LTOC wanted to present this option as part of our report, we want to note that we do not feel that this option would make the most sense for our congregation. There would be a significant outlay of financial resources without a corresponding gain in space for our services.

50-0 Option: 50% Growth with 0% Sanctuary Expansion

This option would seek to grow membership by 50% with no increase in size of the sanctuary space. An increase in the size of the chalice house would still be required to support the RE program and other needs. It would include:

- Two services to support the 50% membership growth in the congregation while not increasing the size of the sanctuary or parking
- Extending the Chalice House to provide space for the RE program and other needs (\$280k) ([Note 3 – Expand Chalice House](#))
- Adding fellowship space with one of three sub-options (\$75 to \$160k) ([Note 4 – Add Fellowship Space](#))
- No expansion of sanctuary space or parking space

Total Projected Cost: \$355k to \$440k¹

¹Most of the cost estimates herein were provided recently by Tanya Richard, the architect who developed expansion plans for us in 2009. Dave Zenner provided estimates for additional parking spaces and for the fellowship hall modification. These costs do not include any increase in required funds for maintenance and utilities.

Please note that the additional cost of 2 services is estimated at \$7,500 per fiscal year.

Move our Congregation to Another Location

Another option we considered was to sell our current property and either purchase another church property with larger facilities or purchase land and build the facilities we require.

We asked a residential developer to approximate the value of our land, as its greatest value would be to a builder. We gave him a plat, and he walked the property. His estimated value of our property ranged from \$2.5 - \$3.5 million, depending on how many homes would fit. In this scenario, most every tree on our property would be cut down.

As to where we would move, we spoke with a realtor who specializes in churches about one location, St. Andrews at Riverside Drive and 285. However, we learned that is not expected to go on the market for a very long time, if ever. We also learned that there appears to be no other suitable properties currently for sale on the north side of Atlanta. (Note 7 – Reason to Buy Property).

One option could be to expand our search to other areas of Atlanta. This may enable us to sell our current property, purchase a new property for less money, and use extra funds for programs and community outreach. Of consideration would be the effect a change in geography would have on our congregation.

The other option for moving would be to buy land and build new facilities. Building our current space elsewhere would cost at least \$1 million, plus land. Again, the cost of the land is variable based on where we purchase it.

Other Options

The only other option discussed by the LTOC was to try and constrain our growth to perhaps 10%. This option may or may not require two services and could negatively impact our ability to continue as a welcoming community.

Option Comparison

The table below compares the different options based on the criteria discussed up front:

	Financial Cost	Environmental Impact	# of Services	Community/ Fellowship
50-40 Option	Medium	High	1	High
50-20 Option	Medium	Medium	1 or 2	Medium
50-0 Option	Low	Low	2	Medium
Move Congregation	Variable	High	1 (assumed)	High
Constrain Growth	None	None	1 or 2	Negative Impact

Note that in this table, the columns are meant to highlight the options based on the following definitions. The LTOC recognizes that some of the ratings are subjective, but we wanted to give a perspective for a starting point:

- Financial Cost – This is the financial cost of the option relative to the others.
- Environmental Impact – This focuses on the potential environmental impact of the different options such as cutting down trees or removal of “green space”. We did not consider the carbon footprint of the new facilities or the construction work.
- # of Services – This highlights the assumed number of services that would be required to provide seating for the members in attendance.
- Community/Fellowship – This represents the perceived sense of community and fellowship of NWUUC after the details of the option are carried out.

Appendix

Note 1 – 40% Expansion

Our sanctuary is 40’ by 44’, with five 8’ bays. This option would add two more bays by pushing the window wall out into the garden. Available space would add about 704 feet (16’ X 44’) to the sanctuary. Cost estimates provided are based on the per square foot estimate for this work of about \$180 to \$250 per square foot. Construction would take about three months.

We considered other possibilities. Adding a single 8’ bay would give only half the expansion with much more than half the cost. Either building a larger sanctuary (as envisioned by Tanya Richard in 2009) or adding three 8’ bays would increase our sanctuary capacity well beyond what we would need for 50% membership growth, would require more HVAC equipment, and would require additional parking, RE and fellowship space. Expanding the sanctuary into the storage rooms at the back would be difficult structurally, because that wall is load-bearing.

Note that in this option the garden and trees outside the windows would be removed.

Note 2 – Expanded Parking

The details would depend on where the spaces were added and whether an additional entrance would be necessary. We currently have 115 spaces. Adding 50 spaces (about ½ acre) would cost about \$225k, mainly because of provision for handling water runoff.

Adding 50 spaces by double-decking would cost about \$300k because higher construction costs. However, it would only increase the total parking estimate by \$75k because construction would not need to provide for water runoff.

Note, additional surface parking and/or parking flow would be visible from the sanctuary windows.

Note 3 – Expand Chalice House

As part of the “minimal plan” proposed by architect Tanya Richard in 2009, the west end of the Chalice House would be extended by 20’, adding two rooms or about 750 square feet on each floor. Only one tree would have to be cut.

Note 4 – Add Fellowship Space

The three sub-options would be:

- 1) Expand the lobby by enclosing the porch (\$75k to \$99k)
- 2) Expand our fellowship space into the back patio, adding about 800 square feet (\$160k)
- 3) Multi-phase expansion (net of the 3 components below would be about 650 square feet)
 - a) Remodel the chapel end of the top floor of the Chalice House into offices for the minister and the administrator (\$65k to \$80k)
 - b) Move the bookstore into the current minister’s office and the nursery into the current administrator’s office
 - c) Adapt the space current used by the bookstore, the hall, and the nursery for additional fellowship space (about \$25k).

Note 5 – Expand Sanctuary by 20%

Our sanctuary is 40’ by 44’, with five 8’ bays. This option would add one more bay by pushing out the window wall into the garden. Available space would add about 352 feet (8’ X 44’) to the sanctuary. Cost estimates provided are based on the per square foot estimate for this work of about \$180 to \$250 per square foot. Construction would take about three months.

Note 6 – Live Feed

There are several possible ways that a "live feed" by webcam could be utilized to expand the audience for our Sunday services beyond the sanctuary:

1. Provide a closed circuit feed (hard wired or streamed) from the sanctuary to the chapel, the art gallery, or some other church area. Such an arrangement might serve in the short term as a way of retaining a single service until a facilities expansion plan could be implemented.
2. Provide a live webcast feed that would be available for consumption in the Chalice House as well as, potentially, other locations (e.g. the homes, retirement facilities, dorm rooms, etc. of our members and friends)

Further investigation is required into the cost and viability of this option, but could not be completed in time for this draft.

Note 7 – Reason to Buy Property

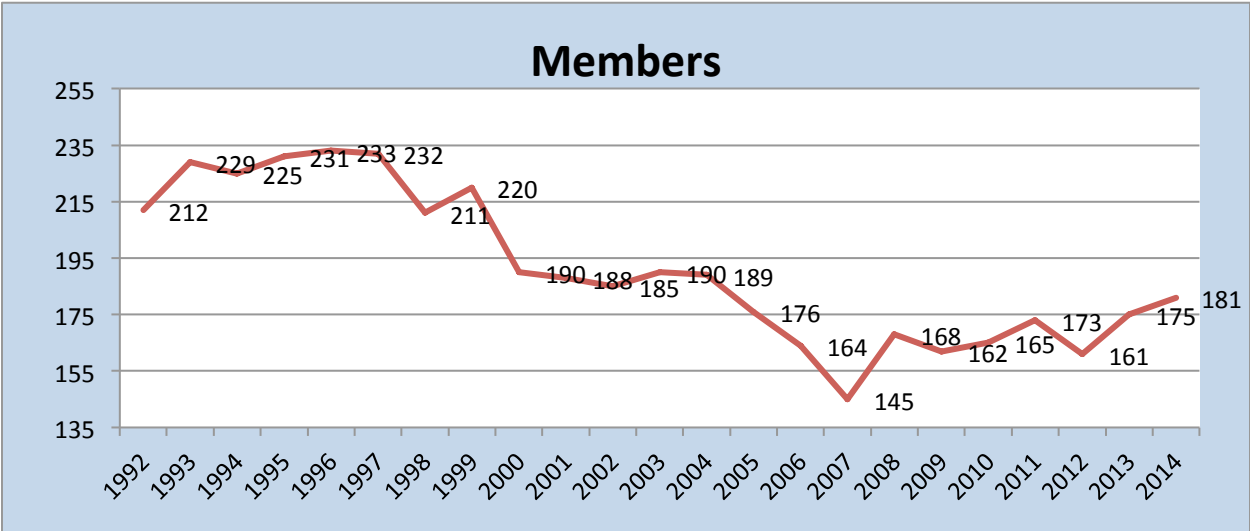
Lynne Dale and Susan Burnore have worked with a realtor who specializes in churches. No suitable properties are currently available. She tells us that very few churches on the north side of Atlanta come up for sale and that our best option, if we wanted to move, would be to buy land and build new structures or to look for a property in an area with lower land costs.

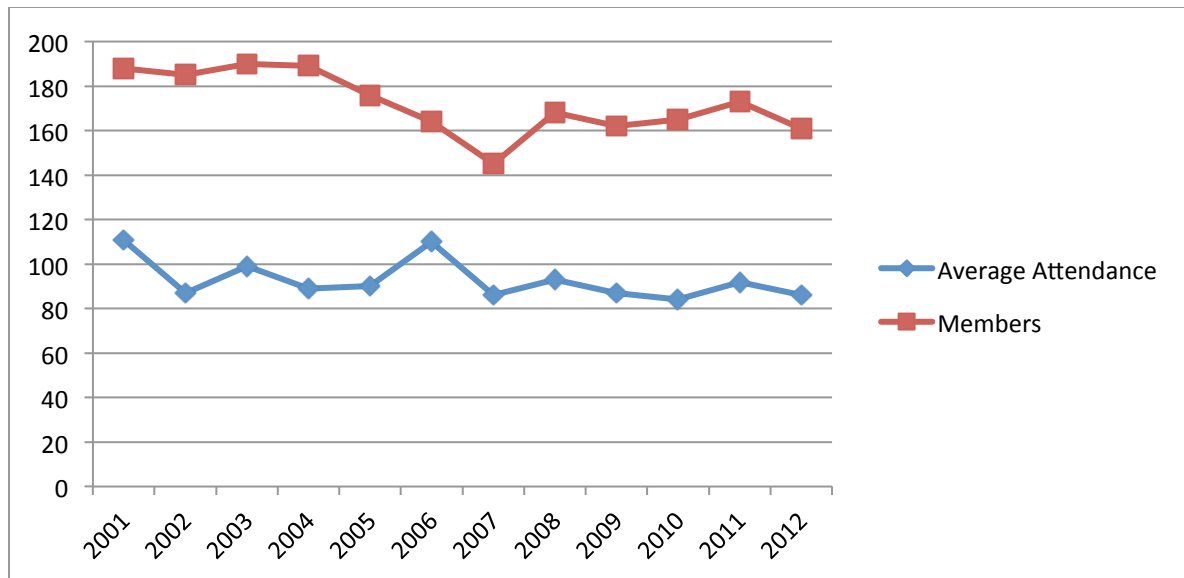
Tanya Richard tells us that today's minimum construction costs would be \$180 per square foot plus the cost of the land to build on. Dave Zenner agrees.

NWUUC Growth Statistics

Recently our membership has grown in a number of ways. The details of that growth are listed below:

- Total Members in database on 04/16/2014: 177
 - It is estimated that there may be a few updated to the database that have not been accounted for that would take our total membership to 181-184 members
- Since 08/01/2012 (158 on 8/1/2012)
 - New Members Joining: 31
 - Members Resigning: 10
 - Members Deceased : 2
- Our RE program has grown slightly over the past 2 years averaging 18-20 children in the RE classrooms each week





Options at Greater than 250-275 Members

If, down the road, our congregation reached 250-275 members with one of the 50% growth options above, there would then be at least three further options to handle additional growth:

- Holding our membership at about 250-275 without moving, perhaps by joining with other congregations to spawn a new UU fellowship as a safety valve.
- Moving to another location. (Note: Selling our property would not recoup whatever money we had spent for near-term expansion in the options above.)
- Expanding our facilities further at that point.

The Long-Term Options Committee

Thanks to the tireless efforts of many, this report was generated on behalf of NWUUC. We would like to recognize those people:

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