

Report on the Congregational meeting held on March 20, 2011

Topic: Proposal for partnership to construct a Seniors' Residence

Convenor: the Reverend Brian Kauk

This report describes the proceedings of the meeting for consideration by Parish Council in determining next steps. It does not capture all the comments or concerns or questions as no one was appointed to act as a recorder.

The meeting was originally scheduled to take place on Sunday, March 6, 2011. This proved impossible, so the meeting was postponed to March 20, 2011. Participation at the meeting was a concern. Despite losing a few key members of the congregation because of the shift in dates, 43 parishioners were present at the meeting. This is a very good turnout. In my opinion, we can trust the results of this meeting as an expression of the congregation's willingness to pursue this ministry opportunity.

The meeting began with an overview of the structure of the meeting, including a framework for dialogue based on the consensus model described below. There was general agreement to the structure of the meeting.

Review of the proposal

Our neighbour, Mr. John McFarlane, presented key elements of the proposal, which has not changed substantially since the Vestry meeting held on February 21, 2010, where approval in principle was granted. Since that meeting, Mr. McFarlane has consulted with the planning department of the City of Ottawa. He reports that they have given their support for the project, and noted that this was a very positive development. Other groups consulted include the Fisher Heights Community Association, the General Burns Community Association and the City Counsellor at the time, Gord Hunter.

As the Exploratory Committee's report to Vestry 2011 states, Unitarian House indicated interest in being considered as a potential developer for the property. The architectural drawings and a FAQ document are available at <http://www.stmarksottawa.ca/residence.html>.

Questions of clarification

The meeting then moved into an opportunity to ask questions for clarification. The building would be three stories high, with between 27-29 units. City regulations require that seven parking spaces be available for a residence of this size. It seemed clear to most of the participants that many more spaces than this would be used on a regular basis. As questions arose, concerns were also expressed. Most of these concerns centred on loss of the use of our parking spaces, and perceived drawbacks to granting shared access across our existing lot. The viability of emergency and service vehicles entering through our lot was questioned. Concerns expressed included how this would affect the future of the church, hindrances on potential growth and use of our property, what legal agreement would need to be in place, and what St Mark's could expect to as a benefit of participating in the project.

Dialogue

The meeting moved into dialogue mode, with the opportunity to more clearly voice opinions. As individuals spoke, they were invited to categorize their comment based on the following:

- RED: I have a principled objection to the proposal at hand
- YELLOW: I wish to stand aside, state a reservation, or seek more information before a decision is made
- GREEN: I am ready to give my consent to proceed to the next step (a more detailed proposal)

At one point, it became clear that building a new parking lot on the side of the church was a contentious issue. The meeting was asked to provide, by a show of hands, whether they would call themselves red, yellow or green on just the issue of turning the side lawn into a parking lot. The overwhelming response was red. That part of the proposal was removed as a possibility, and the meeting continued on the understanding that building a side parking lot was no longer under consideration.

Over the course of a substantial dialogue, many people spoke with concerns, and categorized themselves as red or yellow. By the end of the meeting, when a summative show of hands was asked for, the following results were obtained:

Green: 1
Yellow: 8
Red: 27

One individual called themselves orange (i.e. between red and yellow), and this is noted without prejudice to the above results. There was some discussion after this point aimed at offering constructive ideas to Mr. McFarlane. There were very positive comments about the process, and thanks for all involved for their hard work.

Conclusions

Consequently, I would offer the following information to members of Parish Council as a result of this meeting.

1) There does not appear to be enough support from members of the congregation to proceed further with this proposal.

Not everyone showed their hands in the final summation. 75% of those who did objected to proposal, which works out to 63% of those present. This is a very clear indication, in my opinion.

2) The consensus-based model we used was very productive, and we should explore this as a way of building consensus in future deliberations.

The feedback I have received since the meeting is that people felt heard, and that the congregation was given a voice. I would like to see this continue, and would like to see us learn more about how to use consensus-based models of deliberation.

Respectfully submitted,
The Reverend Brian Kauk