

All,

This is one in a series of updates on “leaning in” to co-location with First Universalist at 3400 Dupont Avenue South. The phrase “leaning in” is intended to convey the congregation’s commitment to an honest and thorough exploration of the possibilities of co-location at First Universalist. We are addressing our facilities needs by focusing on this option, co-location, to the exclusion of others. **We are working with the intention to minimize or solve the concerns and obstacles while embracing the potential advantages of co-location for both congregations.** We might succeed at this work and, as a congregation, decide to embrace co-location. We might not succeed, in which case we will go back to the drawing board, so to speak, to continue our efforts to resolve the meaningful shortcomings of our current facility.

(You can find my November 2018 congregational letter [here](#), the October 2018 congregational presentation summary [here](#), my remarks from the High Holy Days 2018 [here](#), and the August 2017 facilities report [here](#).)

At the October congregational meetings (attended by over 100 members), MJ Gilbert and Gayle Zoffer collected your thoughts and also invited you to send questions, comments, concerns and sparks of enthusiasm to [sthopesanddreams@gmail.com](mailto:sthopesanddreams@gmail.com) (this email address is actively monitored- you won’t necessarily get a personalized response but signed notes will be part of the discussion). The board has reviewed those hopes and dreams we have received so far and we are sharing them among those doing the work so they may be considered and incorporated.

Among other things, we heard excitement and gratitude about:

- The promises of an accessible building
- An urban, transit-friendly location
- A custom sanctuary space
- The potential for collaboration on racial and social justice issues
- An expectation of a cost-effective and environmentally sound use of resources
- A potentially fiscally sound solution

As one congregant wrote, “The concept of two different religion communities sharing space gives me hope for the world.”

We also heard questions like

- How will youth religious education work?
- Will the space feel jewish?
- How will schedules be coordinated?
- What will be the legal and financial arrangements?
- How will potential conflicts be addressed?
- Can we improve our cost estimates?
- How long can this arrangement work and what will happen if it doesn’t?
- How do we feel like we are at home in a place that is shared?

One congregant instructed, “Do a lot of work (Board and staff) on how the joint venture will work. Assumptions, potential hot buttons. Learn from everyone who has done this before.”

These are profound and resonant challenges. The board by and large anticipated them before we voted to “lean in” in September but we could not and did not resolve them, and hearing them from the

congregation has helped provide depth and details we didn't have. It also confirmed for us one of the **next steps**, as follows.

To learn about, develop, and wrestle with resolutions for the concerns we have heard, the board has set up working groups. These are (1) legal and financial, (2) identity and spirituality, (3) costs/savings of operating co-located space, (4) calendar/space usage, (5) architectural program, and (6) communications/community engagement. As mentioned last month, we have also set up a group to work on strengthening the synagogue's financial position. Rabbi Rappaport and Forrest Yesnes will be leading a group to think about the optimal way to deliver rich Jewish education for kids and families (I separated out these last two groups because they are not strictly related to co-location).

Each of these 8 groups will be working with guidance from senior staff, a smaller steering group, the executive committee of the board and the board. I expect that there will be congregational input in many of these groups and additional board members and congregants will be involved in these working groups too; I'm telling you what I know now. I invite you to keep your eyes, ears, and inboxes open for opportunities to be heard and contribute. I do want to thank the folks who, so far, have agreed to lead some of these working groups: Ray Anshel, Jane Binder, Ho-youl Chang, Jeff Danovksy, Amy Funk, Tamar Ghidalia, MJ Gilbert, Judy Hollander, Howard Orenstein, Jeremy Pierotti, Michael Simon, Anne Trockman, John Walthour, Sara Rothholz Weiner, Luke Weisberg and Gayle Zoffer. We have and will receive tremendous support and guidance from the staff and the rabbis, and for that I am deeply grateful.

I think we are in a period of uncertainty, but one of creativity, reflection and discernment: Will co-location work well for us in all the dimensions we need it to? Will it work for First Universalist? And underneath those questions are dozens and dozens of sub-questions, many of which the congregation has already named in its responses to the October presentations. Through the working groups and the board, we will keep working and keep talking and keep listening, and trust that, adhering to the board's mission of steward leadership of this community, we will end up with a thoughtful understanding of co-location. As Gayle and MJ wrote you on October 16 ([here](#)), "The work will be ongoing; some of you will be asked to engage in that work, and the entire congregation will be involved in the ultimate decision-making."

The *Mishna*, in *Pirkei Avot* 4:27, instructs us: "Do not look at the container, rather at what is inside of it." We will be looking at the container, but we are already blessed by the holy community, the Shir Tikvah, that is inside. Thank you for the work you do to create this world.

In hope,  
Bruce