

12/20/24

Dear First Pres family,

Over a year ago the Master Planning Committee of the Diaconate presented the results of a multi-year study of the physical plant space needs of First Pres. This study focused on the specific needs of each ministry of the church, considering opportunities to expand, enhance and optimize the existing campus for these ministries. This work was completed a little over a year ago. A major underlying assumption of all this work was that the buildings, particularly the Tower and the Connector were structurally sound and could be remodeled.

Shortly after this, several structural issues in the Tower came to light, which caused the Diaconate, with the support of the Session, to undertake a thorough review and analysis of the infrastructure of the entire campus. This work revealed material issues in the operating infrastructure (HVAC, electrical, water supply, etc.) of the campus as well as the long-term structural integrity of our buildings, particularly the Tower. As the study progressed it became clear that the church leadership needed to consider and examine the cost alternatives for a full repair of the Tower and Connector (the superstructures of these buildings were fully integrated when the connector was built in the early 80's) versus the impact of constructing new facilities to replace these aging buildings.

The original estimates focused on the costs to bring all current space up to code and remodel/expand existing facilities. Subsequently, the Diaconate and the Building Committee worked with architects and general contractors who produced estimates and conceptual plans for building new space and optimizing our existing space to replace the Tower and Connector. Additionally, the Committees produced financial estimates that compared the expected future operating expenses for the campus (utility, insurance, maintenance, etc. costs) for both a "renovation" and "build new" approach.

It is broadly recognized that this project has appeared to have several starts and stops, that communication hasn't always been as transparent as desired and that in the whole the process has been "clunky." There aren't any good excuses for this but there is an explanation.

The scope of the examination required for the infrastructure has taken much more time than originally expected. The effort on the part of dozens of Committee Members, outside professional partners, and members of church staff has been significant. The details of these studies have been discussed, debated, and prayed over many times, in multiple Diaconate and Session meetings over the last several months. Again, this is offered not as an excuse, only as an explanation.



Ultimately the Diaconate and Session have jointly approved moving forward with a plan that calls for razing the Tower and Connector buildings and replacing them with new construction largely on the site of the current Connector. The primary rationale for this is several-fold:

- The construction costs associated with either option are not materially different.
- The primary goal of leadership has been to deliver an improved physical plant for the next 25-50 years, as opposed to a series of short-term fixes.
- The on-going operating expense of a new, modern, and somewhat smaller physical footprint is dramatically lower in the short-term and exponentially lower over the long term.
- An older facility (the Tower building is approaching 100 years old) even once modernized will continue to have much higher operating costs and greater risks of mechanical and structural challenges as opposed to new construction.
- The opportunity to more efficiently use existing spaces in the Education Wing allows for the reduction of the overall square footage of the campus while improving the condition of those spaces for ministry.

We believe that this decision combined with the many changes proposed by the Master Plan (improvements to the Sanctuary, Fellowship Hall, the Parking Deck behind the building with increased capacity, etc.) will result in an improved, more efficient campus that will benefit future congregations well into the middle and perhaps the end of this century.

The full details of this plan will be available shortly, and a “Town Hall” meeting for all interested is being planned for February.

Thank you for your prayers for all working on this project: the committee members, the Diaconate, Session and our professional partners. Please continue to pray as we are seeking the Lord’s blessing and wisdom on this project and that His Spirit will guide us through every phase.

You’ll find more information and our email address at 1stPresbyterian.com/Build.

With praise to Immanuel (God with us),

Your Capital Campaign Committee