



**Unitarian Universalist Church of Bloomington  
Feasibility Study Report – Executive Summary**

**Spring 2010**

**INTRODUCTION**

In December of 2009, the Unitarian Universalist Church of Bloomington commissioned the firm of Jessica White Associates (JWA) to conduct a feasibility study with respect to a major fund-raising effort. If successful, this fund-raising effort would provide sufficient resources to address a number of maintenance issues as well as certain enhancements to the property.

Beginning in 2005, Unitarian Universalist Church (UUC) formed a Green Spaces committee to review the outdoor and indoor spaces, with the aim of increasing accessibility and multigenerational use, attending to infrastructure degradation, and greening the church through lowering energy usage and instituting sustainable indoor and outdoor practices. After consulting with leaders and experts inside and outside of the church, the Green Spaces committee presented the plans at the June 2009 congregational meeting. The committee received a positive vote contingent upon the results of a feasibility study. The following is an description of the components of the proposed project.

**Courtyard Improvements** – elimination of drainage problems; creation of an outdoor meeting space; improved handicap accessibility; enhanced energy efficiency at the entryway

**Fellowship Hall and Library Renovations** – rework window wall in fellowship hall; replace arched window in library; quilted shades in both areas; new flooring and energy efficient light fixtures

**Green Building Maintenance Reserve** – implementation of the “to do” list from a recent energy audit

**Sound and Electrical Improvements** – improved the sound quality and accessibility in the Meeting Room

**FINDINGS**

JWA conducted confidential interviews with 39 individuals with the following findings:

- An active laity is the number one most frequently identified strength with a passion for social justice a close second.
- The physical facility was most frequently mentioned as needing improvement. Parking was a close second tied with challenges in the lay leadership structure.
- A large percentage (roughly 64%) of those interviewed had personal experience with UUC in excess of 25 years. All interviewees who are members or attend the church regularly take great pride in what they perceive to be the unique qualities of UUC – its





- people, friendliness, and willingness to help the community through the social action committees.
- Interviewees are consistently positive about their ministers, the clear mission of the church, the diversity and degree of inclusiveness.
  - With respect to fund raising the respondents are divided in their opinion of whether or not the leadership will be able to raise the necessary funds. It was suggested that the old guard will need to be more instrumentally involved to guarantee success and that a committee would need to be built outside of the board.
  - Regarding the change in church structure – everyone mentioned the reorganization – about 35% expressed concern over the fact that they perceived confusion in the processes. While only a small number of individuals expressed concern over the staff assuming the management decisions for the church, there is enough concern to indicate that with an upcoming capital campaign and building project there could be unanticipated consequences from that decision.
  - The level of communication around the project was initially described as adequate, but later appeared to be questionable. They had heard a number of presentations about the project and looked at the model. A number of individuals seemed somewhat surprised by the scope of the project but acknowledged receiving some level of communication.
  - All respondents agreed that the church must do what is necessary to maintain and preserve the building from further deterioration.
  - There is more homework to be done in the area of defining each facet of the project with exacting plans and costs. The courtyard piece especially seems to be more shrouded with questions and concerns around the necessity of specific parts of the plan, with much of it being viewed as not important. The questions demanding attention with the green building fund seem to center around return on investment issues. The fellowship hall and library piece is by all accounts the number one priority and demands immediate attention followed by the meeting room acoustic and electrical renovations. A clear majority of 67% of the respondents believe UUC can raise the money for the project. Overall, most respondents see no real reason why the campaign should not happen. We can estimate a minimum total of \$170,000 from those interviewed.
  - A good many people believe that each project area of the campaign should be prioritized and each suggested improvement or enhancement be evaluated independently before engaging in a campaign.
  - A number of individuals are concerned about the mortgage and would like to see that paid down before taking on more debt.





- The discussion of the Belcher Property resulted in two-thirds of the respondents agreeing it was important to secure the property when it becomes available with the remaining one-third opting against purchasing the property at any time. At first blush that may seem like the majority would be in favor of the purchase. However, after reviewing the order in which the respondents prioritized the purchase we see a more definitive response than the initial question revealed. In fact, 50% identified the purchase of the property as the number one priority – above all facets of the project. With almost 34% voicing a resounding no and another 16% listing it as the number 5 priority, clearly the church is split evenly on the discussion.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. JWA recommends that UUC move ahead with the project.
2. JWA recommends that more information regarding the various aspects of the courtyard be discussed among members of the church.
3. JWA recommends that the capital campaign committee be made up of newer members and members from past campaigns to leverage campaign knowledge and major gift training.
4. JWA recommends that the committee engage in ROI studies for all “green” projects.
5. The committee will need to provide very specific descriptions and quotes for all aspects of the project and in some cases justification for expenditures.
6. Financial and facility issues are fueled by passion. Due to a lack of clarity around concerns for staff ability and desire to assume management responsibilities, JWA recommends UUC revisit the thinking behind the restructuring before embarking on a capital campaign and building project. It is crucial to ensure that UUC has the right people with the right expertise making decisions based on established policies and procedures.

Respectfully submitted,  
Jessica White  
President  
Jessica White Associates, Inc.

