

## **UUCSS Planning Committee report to congregation Sunday, October 29th, 2017**

On October 15th, for about one hour, 63 people participated in a Planning Committee Coffee Chat after UUCSS services. The Planning Committee asked participants, “How do you think our spirituality and our vision for the congregation should be reflected in our physical space?” The conversation was facilitated by the Chair of the Planning Committee, Louise Gava and supported by the other members of the committee: Hal Bigelow, Rev. Joe Cleveland, Pam Collins, Judy Halstead, Jim Mihuta and Nedra Stimpfle (with thanks to committee member Kris Dallas for providing childcare).

As a follow-up and summary of the Coffee Chat, after services on October 22nd, the Planning Committee distributed hard copies of a document which included:

- the charge to the Committee from the Board of Trustees,
- the type of activities that the committee has undertaken to date,
- a summary of the congregation’s answers to date to the question, “How do you think our spirituality and our vision for the congregation should be reflected in our physical space?”
- a list of questions that the congregation asked the Committee during the Coffee Chat and which the Committee agreed to address.

Today’s report is the response to those questions asked by participants of the October 29th Planning Committee Coffee Chat. As a reminder, the charge from the Board of Trustees to the Planning Committee is to “investigate multiple avenues for increasing our physical space for services, for Religious exploration, and for related staff and congregational needs.”

### **Questions #1: How far from our current location are possible new spaces?**

In an effort to begin by being expansive in our exploration of opportunities, we have considered Glens Falls as the northern boundary for our search and Clifton Park as the southern boundary. These limits have been chosen in part due to the existing UU activity in both of these areas.

Properties in Wilton and Saratoga Springs have been more actively investigated than areas farther from our current location. At this point, we aren’t limiting the geographic bounds to a specific distance. However, it is important to recognize that there are properties in Wilton and Greenfield that are physically closer to 624 N Broadway than are locations in the southern part of the City of Saratoga Springs. If we were to define some maximum distance from our current location we were willing to consider, much of the area included would be in Wilton or Greenfield, not necessarily just Saratoga Springs.

### **Questions #2: What cohabitation opportunities exist?**

Initially, our external conversations were primarily directed to other congregations in an attempt to gather data about their choices, experiences, and advice related to a growing congregation. A number of years ago, we explored sharing space with the Baptist Church on Washington Street but it became clear that both parties had serious concerns with cohabitation. During the recent Coffee Chat, two possible opportunities were suggested: a) sharing space (as yet undetermined) with area Muslims (the closest mosque is in Latham) and b) talking to Pitney Farm about their plans for a building. Another recent proposal includes partnering with Shelters of Saratoga. These ideas are worth investigating and we are asking for additional suggestions from the congregation. While cohabitation fits extremely well with several of our UU values, sharing a physical space with another organization may put limits on how we use our own space as we were reminded in our conversations with local congregations.

**Questions #3: What are the zoning restrictions/planning considerations for our current location?**

Changing our current building at 624 N Broadway, regardless of the plan, would probably require filling out and submitting applications for variances to three City boards (Planning Board, Zoning Board and, because of our location in a historic district, the Design Review Commission). Modifications would also be required of us to bring the building and parking lot up to current codes including changes for handicap accessibility and storm water runoff. This board approval process can take a fair amount of time, be complicated and require some professional assistance. Generally, religious institutions are given variances more easily than other types of permit applicants, i.e. more flexibility is often applied when boards consider the needs of a religious institution.

Public input is valuable to land use boards and that input has to address each boards criteria for deliberation. What isn't clear right now is how much our neighbors' opinions about a project can affect potential requests. Parking is a definite concern. The City formula for parking is one space for every ten seats in the congregation (e.g. 200 seats requires 20 parking spaces or a variance). A parking study by a traffic engineer may be required. There appear to exist many opportunities for parking along Broadway and connecting streets, but the impact of that availability on a request for a parking variance is unclear. The Planning Committee commissioned a property survey. This survey is attached as Appendix A.

**Questions #4: What is the value of our existing building (discounted for mortgage)?**

Discussions with three different knowledgeable local real estate agents yielded a range of responses between roughly \$600,000 and \$750,000. Our existing debt is \$108,000, our remaining mortgage. Accounting for that debt, our equity in the property is at a minimum between \$500,000 to \$650,000. One conversation yielded an immediate cash offer of \$600,000. Current forces of scarcity and competition create a seller's market and the combination of our building location and market conditions make it possible, and perhaps likely, that a sale price could exceed even the upper end of the estimates we were given. Evidence of this possible higher value is that a property a few blocks off North Broadway was recently purchased for \$900,000. The house on that property was torn down after purchase, suggesting the buyers valued the lot in our neighborhood at \$900,000.

**Questions #5: What additions or modifications are possible at our current site?**

Our current building is a total of 3,800 sq. ft. Approximately 200 sq. ft. are entry space with a sanctuary around 1,600 sq. ft. An architect volunteered time with members of the Committee to help make the following estimates:

Option a) For a very modest 2-story addition with an expansion sited over the existing playground:

- we estimate a gain of 600 to 1,000 sq. ft. per level (1,200 to 2,000 total sq. ft.) could be achieved, depending on the footprint used (or allowed by city boards),
- we estimate costs would be approximately \$300,000 - \$500,000,
- variances for parking and construction would be needed,
- the playground would be re-located to the south side of the property (along Rock Street).

We expect we would also consider a new façade for the existing building as an upgrade would appeal to the congregation, the neighbors, and the city review boards. The costs could widely vary by design and would ultimately be determined by a currently unknown and nonexistent budget.

Option b) For an addition of a level to the existing footprint (a floor above our current sanctuary):

- we estimate a gain of 1,200 net usable sq. ft.,
- an elevator and two fire safe exits would be required (these would use up about 500 to 600 sq. ft. of the new space, leaving 1,200 for the sanctuary),
- substantial, expensive structural work, perhaps including upgraded foundations to carry the added loads would be needed,
- a new façade for the existing building would be needed.

Given the structural upgrades, this option is far more expensive than the option to expand over the existing playground. The expense of the structural work and space reductions from the elevator/exits result in a very modest gain of space relative to the expense and thus limits the desirability of this option.

In general, cost estimates for modest additions to our existing building are around \$200/sq. ft. Any other additions over the parking lot or any other new construction on site would be estimated at \$250/sq. ft. These estimates are, of course, dependent on design. Costs to renovate an existing property elsewhere or purchase land and build are not as well-known and vary widely with each specific situation. More investigation is being done on these options now. Any modification of 624 N Broadway would not benefit from the equity realized from the sale of the property (minus the remaining cost of our mortgage).

**Question #6: What is the estimated cost of moving to a new location and building?**

- cost to purchase land ranges from \$200,000 to \$500,000, as with all properties location drives the price
- cost to build a building is estimated at \$800,000-\$1million or more
- additional conversations and research on the value of our existing building suggest that \$800,000 is closer to a reasonable sale value, that there is a possibility of a higher price, and that our previous estimates ranging from \$600,000 to \$750,000 were conservative

**Issue #7: The Planning Committee also asks the congregation to also consider:**

- Are we growing? What factors have contributed to growth in the past? Is growth desirable?
- How reliable has our income been in the past? How reliable do we expect it to be in the future?
- How is our current pledge drive going?

Appendix B to this report address the first two questions above.



## Appendix B. Is the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Saratoga Springs (UUCSS) growing?

What do we mean when we ask “Is UUCSS growing?” This question could be defined in a variety of ways. This brief report from the Planning Committee on 10-29-17 presents data on total attendance as recorded in our congregational records book over the last 20 years. Data on changes in total pledge income was obtained from the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) and is based on information previously supplied to UUA by UUCSS.

### How many of us are there? Records of UUCSS attendance

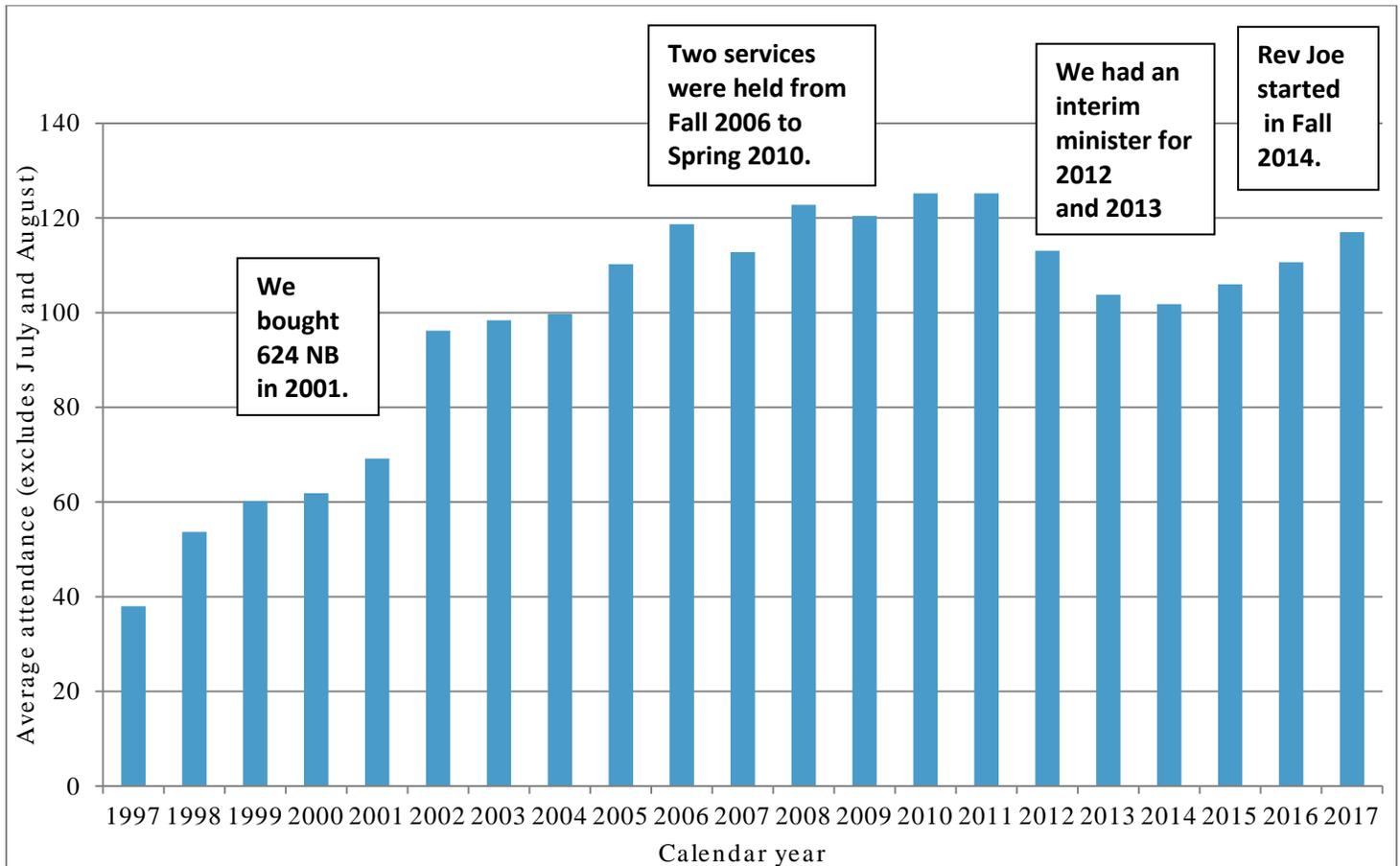


Figure 1. Changes in average annual 10-month total attendance per calendar year since our congregation began. These numbers include both children and adults. Data for July and August was not included in these annual averages but is available on request.

Figure 1 suggests that changes in average annual 10-month total attendance over the last 19 years can be viewed in a series of phases. Specifically:

- In our first few years as a congregation, 1997 to 2001, we grew at about 20% per year (38 to 69).
- In 2001, we purchased our building at 624 North Broadway, Saratoga Springs NY and between 2001 and 2002 our average annual 10-month total attendance jumped to 39% for that one year (69 to 96).
- From 2002 to 2008 we grew at about 5% per year (96 to 123).
- From 2008 to 2011 there was no statistically significant growth (123 to 125). Note that this period includes four years during which we had two services on most Sundays from September to June and one service on Sundays in July and August.
- From 2011 to 2014, our average annual 10-month total attendance decreased by about 6% per year (125 to 102). During this period our founding minister retired and we had an interim minister for two years.
- From 2014 to 2017, we began growing again, now at about 5% per year (102 to 117). Reverend Joe joined us in the fall of 2014.

The months of July and August are not included in the above analysis. We have not always met over the summers and summer attendance is quite variable. Information on summer attendance is available on request. Information on Religious Education attendance as reported to UUA is available on request. Our own congregational records indicate that attendance by children during the two and a half year period from January 2014 to July 2017 varies dramatically from week to week and does not currently show a statistically significant increase or decrease in attendance by children in recent years.

**Total pledge income report to UUA by UUCSS**

Overall pledge income as reported to UUA by UUCSS (figure 2) may be viewed as consisting of three phases described as follows:

- No pledge income was reported to UUA for 1997 and 1998.
- Pledge income in the early years, 1999 to 2003, increased by about 29% per year.
- Pledge income in the middle years, 2003 to 2011, increased by about 8% per year.
- Pledge income in recent years, 2011 to 2016, has not statistically significantly increased.
- Pledge income for 2017 has not been reported yet.

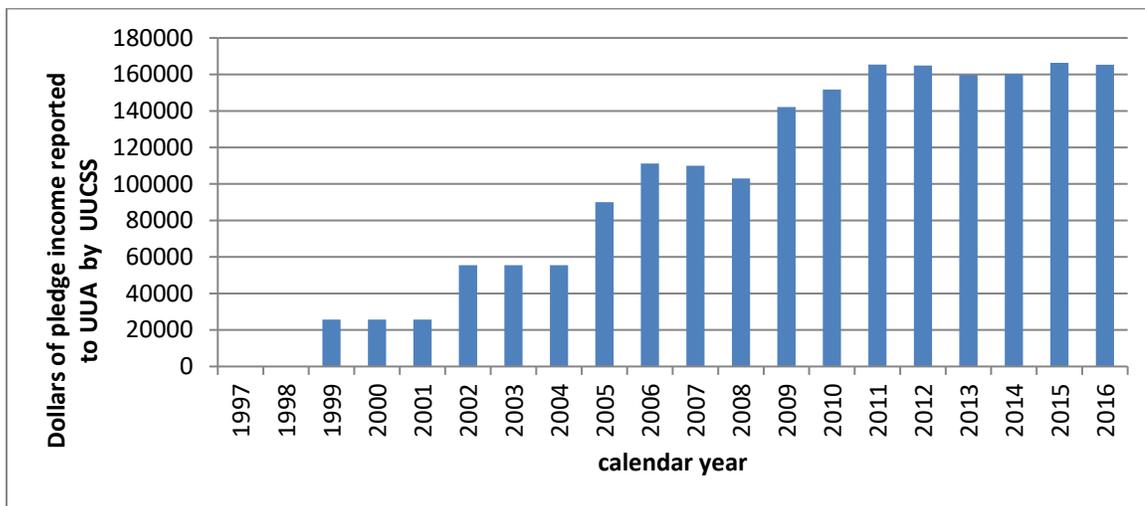


Figure 2. Changes in total pledge income in the last 18 years. Analysis of our total pledge income data for just the last six years suggests that there has not been any statistically significant changes in recent years.