

Phase 1B Renovations Are a “Go” on a New Schedule!

May 19, 2020

Dear Hills Church Members and Friends,

At its regular meeting on May 12, Church Council voted to move forward with the Phase 1B renovation this summer. This project includes replacing the oil-fired boiler, updating the HVAC systems in the Sanctuary and Wallace Chapel buildings, and installing modern fire safety equipment in both buildings including a sprinkler system.

Although the project had been approved by the congregation at this year’s January 26 Annual Meeting, we had planned to give ourselves this opportunity to make a final review of our situation and our readiness to proceed given uncertainties several months ago around the impact of COVID-19 on construction, permitting, the availability of sub-contractors and materials, the success of the Capital Campaign, and our internal preparations for a period of construction.

At last week’s meeting, Council heard from Jeff Lussier, our Owner’s Project Manager, who made a few key points addressing some of these uncertainties:

- Governor Baker announced on May 11 that construction in Massachusetts could resume as of May 18. Several municipalities have also announced the resumption of construction as of that date, including Boston and Newton. Wellesley is likely to follow suit and in fact re-opened the permitting process as of April 28. We submitted our permit application on that date and have been told by the Town of Wellesley that it is under review. We expect to receive the permit later this month.
- We have a hearing scheduled on June 1 with the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board to review our requests for several variances, most of which are minor and granted routinely. Even if one of the variances were not granted at the hearing, we could still carry out the project while appealing the decision.
- National Grid has obtained its permit from the Town of Wellesley to bring in a gas line to service the new gas boilers. The other bit of good news is that National Grid will be using its own teams to do this work.
- Since the signing of the Notice to Proceed last month, Consigli (our general contractor) has been able to line up the subcontractors we need and their bids have collectively come in just under budget. Consigli has also begun to acquire the equipment and materials needed for construction, thus alleviating concerns that supply issues, especially for materials coming from overseas, might delay construction.
- Consigli has its own set of worksite COVID-19 safety measures which they have been using successfully at several other construction projects in the Commonwealth.

In terms of project readiness from the Church’s end, Janeen Hansen reported that she has been working for the past few months with church members and staff to develop plans to pack and move those areas of the church that will be under construction this summer. A couple of key elements in this plan are that both organs will be wrapped during construction, and the four pianos (‘real’ and electronic) will be stored off-site. In addition, Janeen and Matt have been working closely with the Wellesley Food Pantry which will operate out of the Unitarian Church in Wellesley for the summer.

Steve Hansen (Stewards) reviewed our financial situation and plans for paying for the remaining expenses for these renovations. The Capital Campaign has brought in pledges which will come very close to covering the cost of both renovations (Phases 1A and 1B) despite the fact that the Campaign was placed on ‘Pause’ before the last phase of it could be launched. Note that the plan is to resume the

Campaign in the Fall. Because the construction bills for Phases 1A and 1B will be due before all the pledged funds are received, we will be using the line of credit established with Wellesley Bank to provide short term liquidity and will plan to pay it off as Capital Campaign funds are received through the end of 2022.

In summary, many of the uncertainties we faced when we decided to pursue Phase 1B have been or are close to being resolved favorably, and we are in a good position to proceed.

The original plan for Phase 1B called for doing the work in the Sanctuary building first, followed by the work needed in the Wallace Chapel building, with the goal of having access to one worship space or another throughout the period of construction. The work would have begun at the end of June and finished at the end of August or early September. Instead, the construction team has proposed that, we initiate construction on June 1, and work in both areas simultaneously. The disadvantage of this proposal is that there will be an eight to ten-week period during which we will not have a worship space available. However, there are other considerations which make this an appealing option. More specifically:

- Since it is very unlikely that we would gather in June anyway, we might as well start construction when the buildings are not being used.
- Many people, especially those at risk for severe disease from COVID-19 infection, might be reluctant to gather in person as early as this summer which could result in attendance at summer services being even sparser than usual, again making this an opportune time to do construction.
- We have been successful in crafting virtual worship services during this period of social distancing, so we have a good alternative to onsite worship already in place.
- The construction schedule (barring unforeseen circumstances) aims for a mid-August finish, which would work well if, in fact, we decide that the congregation is able to gather again safely for worship in anticipation of Rally Day, COVID-19 social distancing requirements permitting.
- Some work efficiencies would be achieved by having subcontractors come only once to work in both areas of the church.
- The reduced traffic of subcontractors might help compliance with COVID-19 worksite safety guidelines.

This revised 'simultaneous' construction plan proposal was reviewed by the Spiritual Care Support Board (Deacons) and the clergy. Both groups thought that it was preferable to the original 'sequential' construction plan. At its May 12 meeting, Council discussed the two options and also felt that the 'simultaneous' plan offered significant advantages.

Thus, Council voted to proceed with the Phase 1B renovation project this Spring, and endorsed the plan to begin work in both buildings on June 1.

So, the Summer of 2020 will once again be a busy one on Chapel Place. But just as we did last summer, we will continue "to be the Church" despite the disruption. This time around, the Parish House will not be an active construction site, although some places will be 'boarding' items usually stored in the Sanctuary and Chapel buildings. The reward for our flexibility and patience will be a facility with a reliable, high efficiency HVAC system and modern fire safety systems in place by this fall. But the even greater reward will come when we can once again gather together in these well-loved spaces to share our lives and our faith with one another.

Please feel free to contact any one of us if you have questions, comments or concerns.

In faith,

Rev. Matthew Wooster
Senior Minister

Rev. Judy Swahnberg
Associate Minister

Rev. Anne Marie Holloway
Associate Minister

Sarah Pedersen
Rising Moderator

Christopher Stowell
Moderator

Mary Hill Canavan
Moderator Emerita

Mimi D'Angelo
Co-Senior Deacon

Elaine Vildzius
Co-Senior Deacon