

The Labyrinth

UNIVERSITY DISTRICT
ECUMENICAL CAMPUS Coalition

June 2010

Being One

By Judy Lightfoot

“Because we are one, therefore we engage in common mission for the sake of the world.” - Dr. Michael Kinnamon, speaking at University Christian Church, January 2009.

Desiring to be, act, and work as One, churches of different denominations move from their separate buildings into a single environmentally and economically sustainable facility where they worship separately and together. They share their new home with social service agencies, supporting them with volunteers as well as with funds from the group's new economies of scale and from the lease or sale of facility spaces to compatible businesses. Public spaces in the facility are a vital neighborhood center of civic and cultural life.

A plan for this Ecumenical Campus is now complete, in the form of a detailed study that will enable each UDECC member church to determine whether further project participation is feasible for its congregation. Between now and November, what will you decide? Will we “Be One”?

Compromises were inevitable. The size of the facility site is smaller than the whole city block originally imagined, with the result that a public park and senior center cannot be included, and collocating congregations will share their Sunday sanctuary spaces by staggering worship times. Further, the economic downturn means that less of the facility's capitalization cost can be defrayed through sales and leases to commercial tenants, making strategic fundraising necessary, as well as borrowing in case of funding gaps.

But achievements have been huge. Olson Kundig Architects have created a beautiful conceptual design of a building filled with restful, inspirational, and practical spaces. Sellen Construction developed expert financial and construction projections. Principles of Commitment, Ownership, and Governance were formalized with the help of our Perkins Coie legal team. So now we have real data, we know where we stand (at least in the current market), and we can make reality-based decisions about how to “Be One” in the coming years of the 21st century. As a board member observed, “Reality has at least one tremendous virtue: it is real!”

In addition, the Coalition is bigger and more energetic than ever. Three worshipping communities have joined the original group, bringing total membership to nine. Newcomers have been impressed by the congenial relationships among UDECC members and the group's respectful inclusiveness. More than one congregation has newly discovered or rediscovered the potential of ecumenism, especially in

fostering social action, service, and advocacy projects.

Already work groups of people from different churches have begun meeting about human services, low-income housing and homelessness, childcare, education, and the viability of progressive churches in the future. Tangible ecumenical projects (someone has coined the term “Ultimate Projects”) will be initiated in the coming months – a way to practice ecumenism even if an ecumenical campus is yet to be built. Work done corporately through UDECC, such as COG development and writing down program needs, will allow member congregations to stay in open and honest communication with each other, so that no church needs to plan its future in a vacuum. Independent of constructing any building, our collaborations will be useful throughout the coming years.

So although the long-awaited Ecumenical Campus plan does not precisely mirror the ideas and imaginings of three years ago, the vision is still compelling, and still very much alive. Open hearts and a willingness to com-

promise individually for the good of the whole will help us see where God is leading us. Our ecumenical vision has developed a life of its own, and with everyone's full-hearted participation it will continue to seek the form it needs in order to become reality.



The UDECC Board of Trustees

Left-to-right: Darel Grothaus, Karen Ko, Tom Quigley, Donna Dockter, Joan Burton, Van Hutton, Judy Lightfoot, Wayne McCleskey, Ann Berner, Frank Shirbroun, Jack Olive, Clint Pehrson, Dale Hoff, Jon Olson, David Meekhof, John Gienapp, Sinan Demirel, Dan Peterson, Michael Shaw, Debbie Giles (Not Pictured: Marty Curry, Lee Jeronimo, Amy Wyatt)

An Exciting Architectural Concept

The Ecumenical Campus vision describes a new center of ministry and service that doubles as a lively community cultural center throughout each week. Olson Kundig Architects (OKA) have responded with a design concept that combines principles of environmental sustainability and hospitality to all.

The design begins with an understanding of the great opportunity afforded by the project site at the intersection of NE 45th Street and 15th Avenue NE. This prominent gateway is designated as such in the U District neighborhood plan. The OKA concept provides a gracious arrival courtyard near the intersection, facing toward the University of Washington campus directly across the street. A graceful, sweeping roof shelters the courtyard and adjacent sidewalks, where hundreds of pedestrians pass every day.

Two short blocks to the west is the site of the upcoming Link Light Rail station where 45th Street intersects Brooklyn Avenue. Once subway trains start serving the neighborhood, pedestrian traffic at this site will likely increase even more. In the meantime, several Metro Transit routes stop at the site or very nearby.

The welcoming courtyard opens up a visual connection to the existing University Congregational United Church of Christ (UCUCC) building, which frames one side of the plaza. The main entrance to the new building brings visitors into a multi-story atrium, with a sweeping stair connect-

ing four levels. This atrium lobby serves as a highly visible arrival point for both the existing and the new church buildings. Rising one floor to the main level, a direct route connects the new atrium with a wide, light-filled bridge to the UCUCC narthex and sanctuary.

Also accessed directly from the new building's main entry lobby is over 13,000 square feet of secure program space for human service providers, including emergency shelter, feeding programs, hygiene facilities, and other basic needs. Across the street, The Ecumenical Campus plan includes acquisition of the beautiful 4-story Alumni House facility, where nearly 9,000 square feet of light-filled program space would also be dedicated to social service agencies providing other essential programs and services.

Arriving in the lobby of the Ecumenical Campus, visitors will be greeted at a staffed welcome station, an important expression of UDECC's determination to extend hospitality to all who enter. This station is also a key element in the churches' desire for the new facility to provide superior security for church members, guests and church staff. Just



beyond the welcome station, the ground level also houses a gathering of classrooms and meeting rooms, essential to church education programs and also useful throughout the week for use by community groups. Walking along a west-facing window wall, visitors arrive at the church administration center, where clergy and church staff of several congregations work together in a collegial environment, sharing resources efficiently while conducting their ministries in a uniquely ecumenical way.

Rising again to the main level, the large atrium space provides a sunlight-filled setting for a “rolling coffee hour” extending throughout the Sunday morning worship schedule, as church members cycle through their worship services, Sunday school schedules and forum discussions. Adjacent to the atrium is a large library, filled with the combined library resources of several congregations, and providing a relaxing place to meet a friend or huddle with a book. Across the atrium from the library is a sublime, contemplative space, surrounded by diffuse glass and dedicated for use as a meditation chapel. At the far end of the atrium reception area, a large dining hall looks out above 15th Avenue, affording the churches and many other users a lovely facility for banquets, wedding receptions, and charity galas. Complete with a large kitchen, it provides dinner seating for 300, or lecture seating for 450.



Staffed nursery facilities and a couple of choir rehearsal rooms also occupy this level, convenient to each other and to the worship spaces above.

Ascending to the top floor, we arrive at the worship level, where two splendid sanctuaries and a striking chapel are bathed in light from above and all around. This topmost level of the entry atrium includes a broad outdoor terrace, with a south-facing view over the UW campus to Mount Rainier. In the midst of the lobby space, a shared baptismal pool is fed by a baptismal font, beneath a rooftop oculus that creates a direct connection between the water and the sky above. High clerestory windows in the sanctuaries provide daylight throughout.

Outside, the building is surrounded by great pedestrian spaces. The existing alley has been widened by several feet and turned into a pleasant pedestrian walkway between the church buildings. Wider, too, are the sidewalks along both streets, as the building has been held back from its property lines to provide more room for broad tree-lined walkways.

This highly-sustainable 21st Century building includes a sheltering green roof, advanced water and energy management systems, and extensive use of natural daylight and ventilation throughout. As we strive for the best ways to model wise use of limited resources, this vision promises a new way for urban churches to practice faithful stewardship.

A Difficult Economic Model

Recession-fueled erosion in the real estate market has transformed expectations of equity value, leading to significant adjustments in our understanding of “the bottom line.”

UDECC’s development consultants, the Seneca Real Estate Group, have advised UDECC in assessing the market value of existing church real estate assets, as well as the prognosis for improvement in the local market.

Development projects must achieve a balance between “sources” (the assets that can be used to pay project costs) and “uses” (the costs that must be met in order to successfully complete a project). Sadly, the aggregate value of the sources available to our congregations has been deeply eroded by the

economic downturn that began in late 2008, in the midst of the Ecumenical Campus study. Economists do not anticipate a rapid recovery, and the development community sees few signs that significant improvement in commercial property values will take hold for several years.

On the other side of the equation, fewer new building projects have resulted in increased competition in the construction industry. Coupled with some reductions in building material prices, this has resulted in modestly

lower construction costs, after years of rapid inflation. Unfortunately, these reductions are not nearly as substantial as the reductions in asset values.

The Seneca Group estimates that the total value of saleable real estate held by the UDECC congregations has now declined to a total of \$33.7 million, and that development costs for the Ecumenical Campus as presented would total \$65 million. While additional sources might be identified and pursued in an effort to close that gap, the shortfall is certainly daunting.

Shared Ownership and Governance

The Commitment, Ownership & Governance Principles (known as the “COG Principles”) are the result of nearly three years of development and refinement. This proposed legal structure is based solidly in established law, while also representing a new approach to the business side of being church.

Working in concert with its attorneys at Perkins Coie, UDECC has developed the COG Principles to address a broad range of practical matters; matters that must be resolved if an association of multiple faith communities is to share assets. In the case of the Ecumenical Campus, the UDECC Board concurs with the advice of its attorneys that a tax-exempt Limited Liability Company (“LLC”) is the most advantageous form of partnership for the UDECC congregations and campus ministries.

The proposed organizational structure affords complete autonomy for every member organization, with each maintaining its separate identity, as well as its existing corporate status, denominational ties, and worship traditions. At the same time, each member organization would own an interest in the LLC (and all of its assets), in direct proportion to its investment in the LLC. The LLC would be wholly-owned by the member organizations, and would provide valuable liability protection for them, largely relieving them of

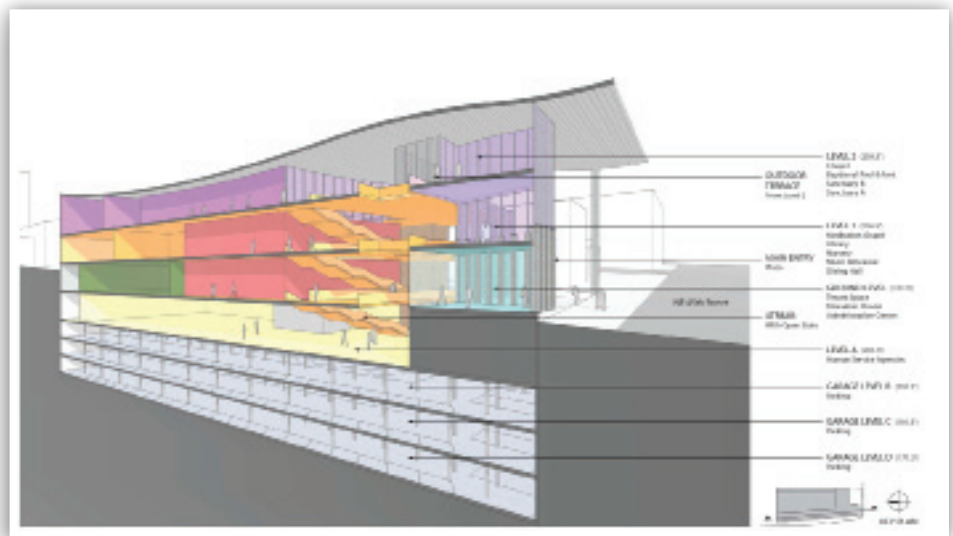
the risks and exposures that arise from owning and operating places of public assembly.

The COG Principles’ final section is an outline of the legal LLC Agreement, the details of which would be negotiated between member organizations that elect to form an LLC.

UDECC received hundreds of questions and comments from church members in response to an earlier draft of the COG Principles at the

end of 2008. Subsequent development and refinement of the COG Principles has resulted in a document that is now in final form, and can be downloaded from the UDECC website at www.ecumenicalcampus.org. There it can be studied in detail.

Further questions can be sent to questions@ecumenicalcampus.org. Responses to new questions will be posted in a new FAQ section on the website.



What's Next?

UDECC congregations and campus ministries will now assess the feasibility of further pursuing a shared project. To that end, UDECC will publish a detailed report by the end of June 2010 that incorporates a great deal of information gathered in the study.

UDECC Board members believe that the three years spent developing and examining the Ecumenical Campus vision have been a valuable investment in ensuring a shared future for our

congregations. A project of this complexity and scale presents significant challenges, but the faith communities involved always knew that would be the case. What is needed next is an expanded conversation including membership, leadership and clergy. The UDECC Board recommends next steps that pursue two goals.

First, we propose convening the governance groups of all UDECC congregations and ministries for a

summit retreat, to occur no later than September 2010, to consider the implications of the UDECC study.

And, the time is now for a member-driven renewal and expansion of shared ministry and service efforts among our congregations. Efforts to further enrich the relationships between our congregations will expand our ability to contribute to public life in the University District and to serve needy neighbors.

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