

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS FROM THE JANUARY TOWN HALL

The information below is based on 133 responses to the “Town Hall Meeting Form” that were submitted following the January 21, 2024, town hall meeting:

Question 1: *The earliest we could occupy a new building would be 2.5 years from now. With that in mind, do you believe that the time for next steps is:*

- Now (92.5% of the responses)
- Sometime in the future (3.5% of the responses)
- Not something we need to consider at this time (1.5% of the responses)
- I’m not sure (1% of the responses)
- No answer was selected (1.5% of the responses)

Question 2: *Do you believe that the people of SUMC are ready to support a capital campaign to fund the facility improvements?*

- Yes (72% of the responses)
- No (1.5% of the responses)
- I’m not sure (25.5% of the responses)
- No answer was selected (1% of the responses)

Question 3: *Based on the churchwide survey and input from church leadership, additional parking and educational space at all levels discussed today will be priorities for the proposed program. In addition, addressing space constraints/safety issues for the choir, infrastructure improvements (tbd) and maintenance needs (e.g. new roof) will be considered. With this in mind, do you believe such a program would meet our current needs and allow space to accommodate those in the future who wish to call Strawbridge their church home?*

- Yes (81% of the responses)
- No (6% of the responses)
- I’m not sure (10% of the responses)
- No answer was selected (3% of the responses)

Responses to the additional questions submitted via the Town Hall Form are provided below. In some cases, similar questions have been combined to avoid repetition.

Questions regarding future growth/size of congregation:

Are we sure the “dust has settled” regarding membership/attendance for the next few years? Is the current level of energy sustainable?

- Those members who have come after a recent tumultuous journey and recent visitors alike highly value SUMC’s warmth, inclusivity, and faithfulness to the traditional core beliefs of the UMC. Weekly attendance continues to grow, and many new members are taking on leadership roles. All signs point to sustainable energy at SUMC.

Do we believe more growth is a priority? Can we realistically expect more growth?

- The majority of the proposed building program is necessary to accommodate our current membership. Because we believe it is essential to our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ it is also necessary to provide additional space for new members. Our growth opportunities primarily are among the unchurched people in our community and those who have drifted away after being hurt in various ways by a church.

Do General Conference uncertainties give cause for concern about negative fallout for our church in the future?

- While the UMC will continue to work through its issues regarding human sexuality over the next several years, we believe that the majority of members who either cannot accommodate future change or insist on immediate change have already left the UMC.

Is there a time in the foreseeable future when the United Methodist Church will begin filling in the UMC “deserts” left by disaffiliating congregations in the Lake Houston area? Would this reduce SUMC attendance?

- We have discussed this issue with the Texas Annual Conference’s leadership and have been assured that there are no plans to plant churches in our area – there are many more significant needs, and a sense that a medium-size church such as SUMC will better serve the needs of Atascocita and Kingwood United Methodists.

With so much hurt and suffering in the world, why spend so much on a building when we could be spending more on missions? Will the Lifeline fund and other mission opportunities suffer?

- One of the most powerful ways we can respond to hurt and suffering in the world is to make sure we have space for all those in search of God's love, grace, and mercy. By creating more room for those who suffer to find peace and spiritual direction through discipleship, we are at the same time preparing more apostles to send into the world to be the hands and feet of Christ. Enlarging our church plant also enlarges our missional footprint in the community and beyond.
- Missions work has always been a priority to our congregation. We have no reason to believe that the congregation will not continue to give high priority to missions when planning their future financial support to the church.

Suggestions for alternate approaches to serve our needs:

Why couldn't we devise a more creative use of space by changing worship times and adding other times for Sunday School classes to meet?

- We could split our Sunday School time and accommodate our current needs without spending a dime. However, the overwhelming majority of voices we have heard are opposed to such a decision, which has been observed in other churches to lead to less participation of children in worship, lower adult Sunday School attendance, and less interaction among the congregation.

Wouldn't a better allocation of the space that we have be a more cost-effective way to respond to our church's growth? Multi-purpose space for: Sunday School, Missions, Youth, Social, Educational, Group Activities

- During peak usage for Sunday School, all but one small pre-K is being used. Apart from this time, the majority of spaces are planned for multiple uses during the week.

Why don't we proceed step-by-step with renovations, then parking lot, then new building? Repairs and maintenance first. If we do this in phases it should work. Why do this all at once?

- The need for parking and educational spaces is great now, as are capital maintenance projects. Note that contributions to the capital campaign will be spread over three years.

Could we extend the REC to the Great Hall as a contiguous building providing additional space?

- Small additions such as this were considered by our architecture team and rejected due to the high costs per square foot (due to incompatible rooflines/structural systems/triggering of code requirements in existing buildings) and insufficient immediately adjoining land to meet our needs.

Could we use temporary spaces for the immediate need?

- Temporary classrooms were considered and rejected by a committee last year due to limited available space (at most we could provide two rooms without taking parking spaces) and the cost, none of which is applicable to permanent solutions.

Questions regarding the scope of building additions and renovations:

Does the proposed plan include dedicated space for missions?

- The stated need of dedicated space for Missions is primarily for storage for various projects/activities which can be conducted in the REC and adult classrooms. Dedicated storage will be increased.

More handicap-accessible restrooms

- At least two new handicap-accessible family/unisex bathrooms will be provided.

Upgraded nursery and small kid area

- The infant and pre-K nurseries will be enlarged, upgraded and served by a new, larger, handicap-accessible bathroom.

Playground upgrades/gym-type room for kids and others

- Trustees have included annual budget funds for upgrade of existing playgrounds, which would likely be undertaken in cooperation with BBLC. Indoor playground space has been considered, but we are unlikely to have sufficient funding for this purpose at this time and the REC meets this need in a general sense.

Connection/Resource Center for small home groups

- Should such a ministry be started in the future, it would have shared access to library shelves for hard-copy resources to be moved from the current library, and easy access to adult classrooms for meetings apart from the Sunday School hour.

Signage at Kingwood Drive and Willow Terrace for church name and announcements, add large UMC cross and flame outside

- Improved exterior signage will be considered.

Widen narrow hallway from the Sanctuary to the REC area

- This has been considered and could be done but is likely expensive because the walls are load bearing and there is HVAC equipment above the ceiling. Our architect assures us that it is adequate for emergency exit purposes. This is not likely to be a priority as a result.

Fellowship Area/Hall

- Building a larger Fellowship Hall will be deferred to future phases due to cost. Expansion of the current space is impractical from a cost standpoint due to its structural system and limited contiguous land.

Expanded gathering space near the sanctuary

- This is best considered in conjunction with a future Fellowship Hall which would be near the Sanctuary and will be deferred to future phases due to cost.

Kitchen remodel

- Any revisions would trigger very costly City of Houston code requirements, and the most appropriate location for a larger, more capable kitchen would be adjacent to a future, larger Fellowship Hall.

With the addition of new parking and building space, do we anticipate the need for sanctuary expansion?

- The Sanctuary has sufficient capacity to match the proposed parking and educational space expansions.

Garage for church buses, move storage shed to new parking lot

- Considered and deferred to future phases due to anticipated funding constraints.

Questions regarding adjacent land and parking lot:

Handicap spaces/walking distance from new lot

- We anticipate providing additional handicap spaces in the existing lot, and the bridge to the new parking lot at a minimum will accommodate golf carts as a backup.

Will a vehicular bridge be included?

- Providing a bridge for cars and trucks will be considered in conceptual design and may be included depending on cost and available funding.

Would the new land be a potential site for a new and improved REC gathering center in the future?

- The 2018 Master Plan considered this option and a decision was made to keep all buildings together on the current campus. This will allow for easy access from the Sanctuary to a reception, access to the nursery for parents during an event, etc.

Why would we sell any of the newly acquired land?

- The 5.9 acres is likely more than sufficient for both our parking needs (2 acres for 200 cars including stormwater detention) and currently conceived expansion needs (an additional two acres would remain even if lots were sold off). Proceeds would be applied to construction of the parking lot. Alternatively, there may be future needs we cannot see today. No decision will be made without broad involvement of the congregation.

Do the plans allow for trees in the new parking lot (for shade and environmental responsibility)?

- We are currently considering trees around the entire perimeter and also some islands.

Questions regarding capital maintenance and infrastructure upgrades:

Do we have reserves for any larger capital maintenance items like the roof? Is money allocated to growing maintenance costs with the age of our campus? There are many locations throughout the campus that show evidence of water damage and/or foundation problems. Is there a plan to make these repairs?

- While SUMC does not set aside funds in advance of major maintenance needs via a formal reserve account, we do have general reserve funds for any unforeseen expenses and have been increasing the Trustee's annual budget in recent years to accommodate needs such as replacing air conditioning units.
- We anticipate that this planned capital budget will include funds for major maintenance items such as re-roofing the existing buildings, and rectifying foundation issues as necessary following evaluations that are currently in progress.

Security, IT, Sanctuary audio-visual infrastructure

- We are evaluating needs and plan to propose upgrades as part of the project as priorities allow within our capability to raise funds.

Other questions:

Will the preschool be able to continue to function during construction?

- Yes – renovations to the children's classroom areas are planned to be completed during the summer period. All other construction will be remote from these areas except for the playground near Kingwood Drive, which may not be continuously available.

Was the current usage of the Bride's room and the Great Hall for adult Sunday School classes included in the count of existing classrooms shown in the table at the Town Hall?

- Yes

Will the congregation support debt?

- Once we have a better definition of the scope/cost and our ability to raise funds, we will consider whether there is need for debt and the congregation will make a decision prior to project approval.