

Capital Campaign Planning

Document 7 - Financial Feasibility Study Summary

For the past several years The Unitarian Church in Westport (TUCW), led by the Board of Trustees (BOT) and Reverend John Morehouse, has been focusing on the need to prepare a new strategic plan and to address long deferred capital improvements and repairs that will help facilitate the implementation of that plan. The two efforts go hand in hand: pursuing the goals of a refreshed strategic plan created and approved by the current congregation requires sound infrastructure, facilities and space. A Capital Campaign would aim to raise the funds to pay for this much-needed 'fix our home now for a more sustainable future' effort. The BOT and Rev. John engaged Liz Coit of Stewardship for Us to complete a Financial Feasibility Study (FFS) to estimate how much money our congregation could likely raise in the proposed Capital Campaign. This study also summarized other important feedback about TUCW from a sample of its membership. The study results are largely based on data collected during January 2019 in one-on-one confidential interviews with 57 people.

Findings

The results of the financial feasibility study are generally positive:

- 76% of those interviewed would be willing to support the Capital Campaign, 17% stated they were unsure of their giving and required more specific information.
- 33% of those interviewed indicated they would make a total gift of \$10,000 or more, to be paid over three years.
- Estimates indicate TUCW should be able to raise \$1,278,500 from the congregation over a three-year campaign period and a stretch goal would be \$1,406,349 (10% increase over the original goal, and 2.27 times the total 2017-201 giving of \$618,605).
- Typically in Capital Campaigns one gift should represent 10% of your goal, or \$200,000 for a \$2 million campaign. No such gift was committed from those interviewed.

The Study

The FFS began with invitations sent to 75 prospective interviewee households (29% of TUCW's 258 pledging households). 57 people comprising 42 pledge units (16.3 % of the 258 FY 2017-18 giving units) responded to the invitation within the time frame we had to conduct the FFS and were interviewed. Those interviewed contributed 32.17% of the total gifts for the 2017-18 Annual Pledge drive. Several criteria were used in order to get a cross-section of the congregation (some people matched multiple criteria). Those interviewed represented portions of small to large donors, new to long-time members,

varying cultural and racial backgrounds and active volunteers. The interviews covered various topics including what has inspired them, TUCW's key strengths, and their visions for the future of TUCW. In addition, they were asked about their familiarity with and the importance of the proposed Capital Campaign and their likely potential range of financial contribution.

Feedback about TUCW

By far, the most valued strength of TUCW is the community itself – the people who come together for worship, action, fun, learning, and caring for each other. Participants emphasized the kindred spirits they found at TUCW, the openness, accepting, and respectful relationships and communications they have with fellow congregants. The following elements combine much of what Study participants voiced as their vision of TUCW five years from now:

- **Families and faith formation.** Nearly 40% of those interviewed referenced the desire to see many more young families in the congregation and a strong faith formation program attracting them to TUCW.
- **Buildings and grounds.** Many participants focused specifically on TUCW's buildings and grounds. A majority of those who mentioned the property envision a 'less shabby' looking and more structurally sound building.
- **Culture and community.** About a third of interviewees highlighted their hopes about TUCW's culture and community to be a thriving multi-generational congregation.

Regarding the familiarity of the proposed campaign, one frequently cited comment was the lack of clarity in how the deferred maintenance items will be prioritized in terms of importance and when they would be addressed. About half of all interviewees wanted clearer information on what will be done first, second, third, etc. Those who ranked the campaign as important most frequently cited roof and window repairs as the most compelling because they directly affect peoples' safety and health. Also high on the list was the preservation of the Sanctuary. The most common concern about proceeding with a Capital Campaign was whether TUCW could raise enough money to pay for the project, with about 16% of survey participants directly raising the issue. A few participants highlighted a lack of attention to greening the buildings and grounds and creating green energy sources. Most congregants want to stay put and preserve the building.

In closing Liz Coit found TUCW to be a vibrant, creative community with active leadership and ministry. She suggested continuing to take the time to listen and care for one another as we all go forward together through these next stages of the church's life: a new Strategic Plan, this special campaign to undertake deferred maintenance, improvements and upgrades, and to sustain those aspects of congregational life most valued by its members and friends.