

Property Support Guidelines #2

TITLE: HOW TO PROCEED WITH YOUR PROPOSED PROJECT.

The congregation is the steward of the buildings it needs for its ministries. This stewardship is a necessary part of its overall ministry. The Book of Order G-10.0102o defines this session responsibility: To provide for the management of the property of the church, including determination of the appropriate use of church buildings and facilities, and to obtain property and liability insurance coverage to protect the facilities, programs, and officers, including member of the session, staff, board of trustees, and deacons.

PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

Few church members start with a broad experience of facility management or construction. Property Support believes that a general introduction to the process and components of building projects, though familiar to some, may be of interest and use to members wishing to be of service on session, building committees, special project teams and trustees. What follows in outline form is not meant to drain the well, rather to prime the pump and to invite inquiries. Please refer also to PS Guide #1: [Introduction to Roles and Responsibilities](#)

START WITH QUESTIONS:

1) ARE THE RIGHT MEMBERS AND STAFF INVOLVED IN THE DISCUSSION?

- a) Is there an established group charged with the care of the facilities (e.g. Buildings & Grounds Committee, Properties Committee, Trustees or other)? PS believes that such a group is essential, should feel called to the work of sheltering the mission of the church, that others should support, occasionally volunteer when asked but not overly engage in the property planning and that session and others of the congregation might thereby be and feel freed for and undistracted from developing the congregation's life and ministry.
- b) If not, convene an appropriate representative group of at least 3-5 persons with appropriate talents and experience (where possible) along with church staff with related duties. When ready, proceed.

2) WHY *THIS PROJECT NOW* (A question of priority)?

- a) **Emergency?** A matter of public safety (for example: flammable materials hazard, blocked exit ways, exit and emergency lighting malfunction; security system malfunction? A leak in a roof or a pipe? A sudden change in the structure (a new crack in a beam or brick masonry, falling plaster, etc.)? Vandalism? Flickering lights or frequent losses of power? Building department notice?
- b) **Deterioration?** On-going deterioration, deferred maintenance?
- c) **Next Project on the List of Property Needs?** Is this list current? In addition to projects for general upkeep and repairs, this list should also include projects affecting the usability and efficiency of the buildings such as: ease of maintenance, energy efficiency, accessibility, welcoming appearance, physical comfort.
- d) **Expanded or Changing Program Needs?**

3) WHAT KIND OF HELP DO WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND OR ADDRESS THESE PROJECTS?

Emergency or Deterioration: Is the cause of the problem clear or is the apparent problem a symptom of a less obvious cause (for example: a hidden leak, a building settlement)? For a "Problem", a qualified referred contractor (roofer, plumbing, electrical, masonry repair, etc.) can usually provide a reliable recommendation and estimate for such work; if the church does not have a relationship with a satisfactory contractor, a first step will be to seek a recommendation from a nearby church of the Presbytery or local community or the Presbytery (See GUIDE #3:

Hiring a Contractor). However, with structural emergencies, it is recommended to schedule an inspection by a New York licensed structural engineer: a first step should be to seek a recommendation along with a specification for remedial work required which can be used for pricing and selecting a contractor as needed.

List of Property Needs: How can we prepare this list and understand its implication? A List should be prepared methodically by a small committee (e.g. Buildings & Grounds Committee, Trustee members) whose tasks should include to tour and inspect the church no less than once a year, to consult with the principal ministries (worship, Christian education, social ministries) to find out their current difficulties, hopes for improvements and specific needs, and to work with the appropriate governing body(session) to prioritize the “list: and to receive guidance on how to proceed.

Expanding or Changing Program Needs: If we do not have a long-range program/facility plan how can we prepare one? A “Plan” begins with the “List”, but can best be defined with the help of an architect/space planner, because of the benefits to be provided by someone who can provide alternate ways to meet needs and develop preliminary budgets. Again, a first step is to seek recommendations for architects used by other churches to interview candidates and to establish or continue the List Committee to work with a selected firm (See Guide #4: Hiring An Architect). Fees spent for this process, if well completed, will save themselves many times over in any design and construction process they may follow.

If you believe that the time has come to embark on a design and construction process or that you need to improve the appearance of your current spaces, what process should you consider? A “Design” must meet practical, legal and aesthetic objectives. For a substantial remodeling or construction of a facility, a team composed of a lead architect with engineers is the usual and tested way to proceed. Again, the seeking of recommendations, the interviewing and negotiation process is important. The architect will also guide the appropriate governing body and congregation through the technical and legal process of selecting contractors and meeting public and legal requirements. (See GUIDE #4: Hiring an Architect.)

The above description of HOW TO START (identify and address) a project is intended to provide a vocabulary to discuss this challenge and to seek guidance either from known contractors and professionals or from sister churches or the Presbytery.